

# 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

### **BAN VISITS MOSCOW**

Ban Ki-moon arrived in Moscow on Thursday for his first visit to Russia as head of the United Nations. He met with president-elect Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday, discussing UN-Russia relations and other issues, and later met with President Vladimir Putin, who said the UN "is the key element of the whole system of international relations." Read an [interview](#) that Mr Ban conducted with RIA Novosti on the eve of his trip. [Reuters](#) (9/4/08).

Ban Ki-moon has begun his first visit to Russia as secretary-general of the United Nations, with meetings on the agenda with outgoing President Vladimir Putin and President-elect Dmitry Medvedev.

### **KOSOVO AND UN REFORM UNDER DISCUSSION?**

Talks during the three-day visit are likely to include a number of issues that are of mutual concern to Russia and the UN, including the status of Kosovo, reforms within the UN Security Council - of which Russia is a permanent member - and peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa, RadioFreeEurope reported (9/4/08).

Foremost among those is the situation in Kosovo, which earlier this year declared independence from Serbia. (The UN plans to have over to Kosovo as an entity in June). The tiny Balkan state now wants full UN membership, but its inclusion in the organisation is strongly opposed by Russia, which has not recognised its independence.

The issue of Kosovo has raised questions in Moscow about the role of the Security Council, which hands immense decision-making - and decision-blocking - powers to just a handful of countries, including Russia.

"Naturally, Russia is interested in increasing the powers of the Security Council in order to use its power of veto or the threat of this power of veto to make clear its position," says Yevgeny Volk, director of the Moscow office of the Washington-based Heritage Foundation.

Mr Volk said Russia feels it has been sidelined in international matters, with other Security Council members, including the US and Britain, bypassing the council to make important decisions on, say, Kosovo and the invasion of Iraq.

REPORT: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/4/48a5c9f2-a46a-4acb-8dda-4da10051075d.html>

### **UN HUMAN RIGHTS BODY BEGINS FIRST-EVER EXAMINATION OF ALL NATIONS**

The Universal Periodic Review, a new mechanism to examine the human rights record of every United Nations Member State, was launched at the Human Rights Council in Geneva (7/4/08).

SEE Human Rights page.

### **JAPAN, INDIA BELONG ON UN SECURITY COUNCIL: AUSTRALIA**

Japan and India deserve permanent seats on the UN Security Council, Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said on Sunday, stressing that Canberra should also play a greater role in world affairs, AFP reported (8/4/08) .

He said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd wanted to see the UN modernise by broadening the council's permanent membership beyond Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

"We think the permanent membership should be changed to reflect the modern reality, having on the permanent membership Japan, for example, and India," he said. "That much more reflects the modern world than the current institution," he said.

REPORT: <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5igO10w0vV1I5pSeNT793LxV4nRJg>

## **BAN VOWS STRONGER ACTION TO PREVENT GENOCIDE**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Monday he was determined to step up the international community's efforts to prevent genocide in future. He spoke at a ceremony at the UN headquarters to mark the 14th anniversary of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda where some 500,000 people were killed over three months. [Chicago Tribune/Associated Press](#) (7/4/08).

## **SOUTH AFRICA COULD LEAD ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

Much of the international spotlight is on South Africa this month, as it both heads the United Nations Security Council's rotating presidency and is among the first countries subject to a review by the Human Rights Council. South Africa, which has a unique moral authority because it overcame apartheid, should use this opportunity to be a stronger advocate for human rights around the world, including supporting a treaty to ban cluster munitions, writes Jorge Castaneda, a former foreign minister of Mexico who is now a professor and a board member of Human Rights Watch. [Mail & Guardian \(South Africa\)](#) (8/4/08).

## **UN DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN SPARKS CRITICISM**

The appointment of a Spanish sociology professor to head the UN Development Fund for Women sparked criticism from women's rights activists who had campaigned for a candidate from the developing world, Associated Press reported ((8/4/08).

Ines Alberdi, a former member of the Madrid Assembly who served as an expert in the European Union's Equal Opportunities Unit and has done extensive research on gender issues, was selected on Monday by UN Development Fund Administrator Kemal Dervis in consultation with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNIFEM's consultative committee.

UNDP called the selection process "comprehensive and extensive, taking into account both the challenges facing UNIFEM as such and the broader requirements of strengthening gender-focused work throughout the UN system, something to which the secretary-general attaches great importance."

UNIFEM provides financial and technical assistance to programs in countries around the world to promote women's rights and gender equality. It focuses particularly on efforts to reduce poverty affecting women, ending violence against women, reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among girls and women, and promoting women in the political arena in peacetime and war. REPORT: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/04/08/news/UN-GEN-UN-Women-Appointment.php>

## **URBANISATION 'NOT ALWAYS KEY TO REVERSING POVERTY'**

The historical resilience of poverty - its many faces, the slums and shantytowns it created, the relative ease with which it moved from rural to urban areas, and how urbanisation did not always hold the key to reversing it - dominated discussion as the Commission on Population and Development considered the impact of urbanization on the world population at its sixth meeting of the 41st session (9/4/08)..

Delivering the keynote address, Eduardo Moreno, chief of the Global Urban Observatory in the Monitoring System Branch of the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), emphasised the need for "good articulation" between national policies and implementation by cities to hasten the benefits of urbanisation. There was a very strong correlation between the two, but benefiting the population required good governance on the part of both central and local governments.

By some estimates, the number of slum-dwellers worldwide was keeping pace with overall urbanisation rates, exceeding 800 million, he said, adding that the proportion of the urban slum-dwelling population in developing countries was approaching 40 per cent.

The number of slums was highest in Africa, at 57 per cent, while the incidence in Asia amounted to 39 per cent. Latin America was the only region in the world, which, with some exceptions, had

not recently achieved any reduction in the number of slum-dwellers, with one third of the urban population living in slums.

To solve urban poverty, the first step was to acknowledge it, he stressed. It was also important to rethink the principle of urban governance decentralisation in order to strengthen local government because municipal responses were weak in many cases. The search for a solution should start with counting the slum-dwellers and finding out their level of deprivation. Then, central governments should scale up their remedial actions in cooperation with provincial and local authorities and with the participation of the private sector.

As the commission concluded its general discussion on national experience in population matters, it took up program implementation and the secretariat's future work program in the field of population, with members hearing from UN regional commissions.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/pop963.doc.htm>

### **AUSTRALIA PROMISES TO WORK WITH HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

In a statement by Australia to the Human Rights Council's seventh session in Geneva (5/4/08) Australia's representative reported that February 13 2008 had been a defining moment in Australia's history when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologised on behalf of the Australian Parliament for the laws and policies of past governments which resulted in profound grief, suffering and loss for Indigenous Australians.

"The apology was broadcast live and watched across the nation in schools, communities, work places and on screens erected in public places. In so doing, Australians showed their support to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, now known as the 'Stolen Generations', who, as children, were removed from their families and communities," the statement said.

"The National Apology heralds a new partnership with Indigenous peoples based on respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility. These principles are also core principles underlying the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Australia recognises the importance of the Declaration for Indigenous peoples globally.

"The new Australian Government was elected on a platform highlighting its commitment to human rights, and with an explicit mandate to strengthen Australia's engagement with the United Nations system. In this context, we will work constructively and actively with the Human Rights Council to ensure this body is able to respond effectively to human rights situations that demand its attention. The international community needs the council to play a strong, positive role in promoting and protecting human rights around the world. This body's credibility will hinge on its ability to act decisively and quickly on the most pressing human rights situations around the globe.

"Australia also commends the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its valuable contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights around the world, including through its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.

"Unfortunately, serious human rights abuses continue throughout the world, and we expect these to be addressed during this session. At the UN World Summit in 2005, the international community recognised the basic principle that governments have a 'responsibility to protect' their citizens. The council, as the UN's principal human rights organ, has a critical role to play as a forum for early warning and prevention of gross and systematic human rights violations. There is no excuse for inaction in this forum, and Australia looks forward to helping the council achieve its objectives. The lives of countless people depend on it."

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500; department on 02 6261 1555.

### **NGOS AND ACADEMICS LOOK AT LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

A process of consultation with non-governmental organisations and academics was initiated in 2008 in Melbourne, Canberra, and Sydney by the Academic Council for the United Nations System (ACUNS).

It was decided to hold a further brainstorming session in Brisbane, with participants from Bond University, Griffith University, University of Melbourne, University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, University of Sydney, Amnesty International, Greencross Australia, Inter-country Adoptee Support Network, Rights Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Queensland Department of Main Roads, and the UNAA.

This all-day colloquium, held on March 7, was hosted by the Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law (IEGL) of Griffith University at its Mt Gravatt Campus. It was chaired by Professor John Langmore, President of the UNAA. It was decided to concentrate in this colloquium on the rule of law, human rights and the movement of people.

Summary of colloquium recommendations:

### 1. *Obligations*

Rule of law proposals

Human Rights (see above)

Peacekeeping and recognition of Australia's good record

Increasing aid, and increasing the proportion going to multilateral organizations

Asylum seekers and refugees – fulfilling our treaty and convention obligations

Strengthening Indigenous rights

Ratifying protocols such as those relating to the rights of women, children and people with disabilities

Being an active participant in the UN

### 2. *Priorities for Australian advocacy and leadership in UN fora*

To be intimately involved in the climate change debate

Advocating improved resourcing of the UN; ending ZNG policy

Contributing more actively to development, concentrating on the MDGs

Strong commitment to R2P

Commitment to disarmament; try to find ways to strengthen the NPT and avoid collapse of negotiations and to working for nuclear disarmament

Strengthening regional structures (ESCAP)

Agreement on a convention relating to terrorism

Contribute to debate about the reform of the UN

### 3. *Process/partnerships and community roles*

Establishing a Centre for UN Studies

Funding for the UNAA

The role of civil society in policy making and engaging on such issues:

Standing study group of NGO and academics

Report to parliament; NGO representation on delegations

Generating public debate/discussion, conferences, networking through ACUNS, UNAA, and upcoming events

Conference of NGOs – 23/27 November 2009, Sydney

Parliament of World Religions – December 2009, Melbourne

High level representation at UN events

Increasing ODA – 0.5% of GDP by 2015

DETAILS Colloquium outcomes: Donnell Davis at [donnell@envirobusiness.org](mailto:donnell@envirobusiness.org) and [www.envirobusiness.org](http://www.envirobusiness.org); Donnell Davis on 07 3345 1800/ 0407 744 976; UNAA Queensland on 3254 1069; Alessandra Pecci on 0405 263 499; Michael Platzer on 43 6991 941 3379.

### **IMF TO SHED STAFF AND SELL GOLD**

The board of the International Monetary Fund voted on Monday to cut 15 per cent of its staff and sell about \$11bn (€7bn, £5.5bn) in gold reserves in one of the biggest shake-ups of its funding since it was founded, the Financial Times reported (8/4/08).

The IMF plan to cut 380 jobs and sell 403.3 tonnes of gold. The IMF is seeking to stabilise its finances amid a sharp fall-off in lending to nations in financial crisis, which was its main source of income, after a period of greater global financial stability. The drying up of loans had set the organisation up for a \$400m funding shortfall by 2010. REPORT:

[http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/89e013cc-04fa-11dd-a2f0-000077b07658.html?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/89e013cc-04fa-11dd-a2f0-000077b07658.html?nclick_check=1)

### **RAISE UN PROFILE IN AFGHANISTAN CALL**

The new UN special envoy to Afghanistan said the world body should step up its role in Afghanistan, including working more with NATO to stabilise the country. "There is a desire for a stronger UN and for more UN, and we will certainly try to live up to that," Kai Eide said during the NATO meeting in Bucharest. [Google/Associated Press](#) (3/4/08).

### **UN PROBE INTO HARIRI ASSASSINATION SEEKS MORE TIME**

The Canadian prosecutor who heads the UN' investigation into the 2005 Beirut bomb blast that killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and others told the Security Council Tuesday that the probe is making progress but that it needs more time. Daniel Bellemare asked the Council to extend the probe's mandate for six months after it expires on June 15. [Reuters](#) (8/4/08).

### **UN AUTHORISES PROBE INTO UN OFFICE BOMBING IN ALGERIA**

The United Nations Staff Union has authorised the use of \$150,000 to underwrite its own investigation into a December bombing of UN offices in Algeria. [The Washington Times](#) (4/4/08).

### **UNHCR AND GOOGLE UNVEIL HUMANITARIAN MAP**

UNHCR and Google have unveiled a new online mapping program that provides an up-close and multifaceted view of some of the world's major displacement crises and the humanitarian efforts aimed at helping the victims (9/4/08).

REPORT: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/47fb8b5b2.html>

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

### **WHO WARNS OF MORE POVERTY, DISEASE FROM CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change threatens to bring more disease and poverty around the globe, especially in Asia, the World Health Organisation warned on Monday as it marked this year's World Health Day.

WHO Director-General Margaret Chan - who said global warming will not only cause more natural disasters such as floods and droughts but also exacerbate such diseases as malaria - called for stronger actions against climate change. DETAILS: UN Wire [release](#). [USA TODAY/Associated Press](#) (7/4/08), [IOL \(South Africa\)/Agence France-Presse](#) (7/4/08). SEE also Health Page.

### **TIMETABLE SET FOR WORK UP TO COPENHAGEN SUMMIT**

A timetable was agreed for the negotiating process leading up to a long-term international climate change agreement to be concluded in Copenhagen in two years time, Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, announced at the conclusion of the Bangkok Climate Change talks.

He said that the two-year work program had been broken up the huge task of reaching agreement into "bite-sized, manageable chunks of work."

Parties would consider the themes - adaptation, mitigation, technology, finance and a shared vision for long-term cooperative action - in conjunction with each other at every session to make progress, and expressed his satisfaction that the critical issues were being discussed at an early stage.

Parties would consider the detail of these critical themes during the course of this year and three further meetings would be held in 2008, and at least four in 2009.

The UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan in December would be important for stocktaking, Mr de Boer said. One of the main issues would be research and development of technology, as well as risk management and risk reduction strategies.

With regard to the Ad hoc Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol, he said that a significant outcome had been in laying the foundation for the continuation of the protocol's market-based mechanisms, adding that this was a very important signal to businesses that the carbon market would continue beyond 2012. "Businesses have been asking for clarity on this, and now they have it," he said.

The Kyoto Protocol Working Group also agreed to include forest-related activities as a means to achieve emissions reductions in the second commitment period.

WEBSITE: <http://unfccc.int/meetings/items/4347.php>

### **ANGRY REACTION TO WORLD BAN CLIMATE FUNDS PLAN**

Developing countries and environmental groups expressed staunch opposition last week to a World Bank plan to assume administration of billions of dollars in climate change aid funding and called for the funds to be handled through the existing UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Opponents said they were disappointed about a lack of transparency and insufficient involvement of developing countries. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](http://AlertNet.org/Reuters) (4/4/08) and UNFCCC website: [http://unfccc.int/press/news\\_room/press\\_releases\\_and\\_advisories/items/4260.php](http://unfccc.int/press/news_room/press_releases_and_advisories/items/4260.php)

### **COST OF FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE**

As financial markets around the world are suffering and the US possibly sliding into a recession, how would the steep price tag for taking on climate change affect the fragile global economy? Experts are not united on this question, but many say that paying now to rein in greenhouse gas emissions is a wise long-term investment and possibly also good short-term one as it may promote a whole new industry. [BusinessWeek](http://BusinessWeek) (3/4/08).

### **RAJENDRA PACHAURI SEEKS TO CONTINUE AS IPCC HEAD**

India's Rajendra Pachauri, 67, said he would seek a new six-year term as head of the UN climate panel that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice President Al Gore, Reuters reported (5/4/08).

Elected in a controversial vote in 2002, Mr Pachauri has in the past said he was undecided about whether to seek a second term as chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in a vote due later this year.

UN officials believe that Mr Pachauri, who is head of Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) in New Delhi, is likely to win re-election after successfully guiding a giant 2007 IPCC report.

REPORT: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKL051043820080405>

### **NORWAY BUILDS CARBON CAPTURE PLANT FOR OVER 1M TONNES OF CO2 A YEAR**

The Norwegian Government will build a carbon capture and storage facility capable of capturing over one million tonnes of CO2 per year, making it potentially the world's largest to date.

The new facility will be built at a natural gas power plant in Norway. Four companies selected include HTC PurEnergy which developed its technology at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. The Asia-Pacific rights to the HTC technology are held by Brisbane-based EESTech Inc. DETAILS: [www.eestechinc.com](http://www.eestechinc.com); Dennis Rutzou on 02 9413 4244.

### **EMISSIONS FROM AIRCRAFT AND SHIPS TARGETTED**

Delegates from over 160 countries at the UN-led climate change summit in Bangkok agreed last week to tackle growing emissions from aircraft and ships. The agreement may be a key part of the pact to replace Kyoto Treaty in 2012. [Google](#) (4/4/08).

## AUSTRALIA

### **AUSTRALIA AND UK ANNOUNCE CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP**

Australia and the United Kingdom have announced an enhanced partnership to tackle the causes and impact of climate change (7/4/08). The new climate change partnership is aimed at building a global low carbon economy and bolstering effective adaptation measures to the combat increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

The features of the new climate change partnership include:

- Australia joining the UK as a member of the International Carbon Action Partnership – an association of governments working together on emissions trading.
- The governments of Australia and the UK working collaboratively on technological solutions to climate change in particular energy efficiency and carbon capture and storage.
- Heightened cooperation between UK and Australian climate scientists.

A media release from the Prime Minister's Office stated that building a global low carbon economy would provide new jobs, new industries and new growth for the future. This would require an ambitious long term global target, supported by carbon markets that help drive investment in clean technologies.

For Australia, finding a technological solution to carbon emissions from coal-fired power stations was critical. That was why Australia would work with the UK, the US, China and countries like Norway on translating this technology into an effective commercial reality.

DETAILS: [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media\\_release\\_0173.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0173.cfm).

### **ACF OFFERS SIX CHALLENGES FOR FEDERAL BUDGET**

Six measures towards meeting climate change challenges were put forward for Federal Government consideration in the lead up to the next Budget by Don Henry, executive director of the Australian Conservation Foundation, at the National Press Club, Canberra, on Wednesday.

Mr Henry proposed that the Federal Government remove the fringe benefits tax concession for personal use of company cars, end the Fuel Tax Credit scheme and tax breaks on aviation fuel.

He also called for the Federal Government to act to encourage households to become energy efficient and to switch from electric hot water heating to gas and solar, change to compact fluorescent lighting, to replace outdated equipment like old refrigerators and shower heads, and to install insulation.

He also recommended the Federal Government and Infrastructure Australia should take a national view of public transport, with a particular emphasis on rail. He said in 2005 a bi-partisan House of Representatives Environment committee's report on sustainable cities recommended that the Commonwealth Roads to Recovery program be broadened to include other modes of transport, such as rail

Finally he said that while Australia's car industry stagnated, the rest of the world was implementing mandatory standards to ensure fuel efficiency. The US, Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea all had mandatory fuel efficiency standards for new cars. He advocated a clean car program. DETAILS: ACF: [http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news\\_id=1711](http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news_id=1711)

### **GREENS: SHIFT FUNDING AWAY FROM COAL, OIL AND ROADS**

Australian Greens climate change spokesperson, Senator Christine Milne, called on the Rudd Government to stop paying polluters by subsidising projects (2/4/08).

Senator Milne mentioned a specific project "as yet another attempt to demonstrate the safety of carbon storage while bypassing the really difficult aspect of proving that carbon can be effectively and affordably captured at coal-fired power stations."

She said the storage of CO2 stripped from natural gas that would be done at the project was tiny in comparison to similar projects that were already being done overseas and would add little to understanding whether carbon could be stored permanently and nothing to the understanding of whether significant carbon capture was possible.

"The government should use its first Budget to shift funding away from coal, oil and roads across to renewable energy, energy efficiency and public transport," she said.

DETAILS: Tim Hollo on 0437 587 562.

### **HREOC PRODUCES PAPER ON SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Climate change will have significant impacts in both Australia and across the globe. However, in responding to climate change, governments have traditionally approached it as an ecological problem or more recently, as an economic one.

To date the social and human rights implications have received little attention, HREOC says (8/4/08). Yet the human costs of climate change directly threaten fundamental human rights; rights to life, to food, to a place to live and work, rights that governments have an obligation to protect. In response, it has produced a background paper entitled *Human Rights and Climate Change*.

Part I of this paper considers the human rights dimensions of climate change. Specifically, it looks at how the rights contained in the key international instruments are threatened by the impacts of climate change.

Part II considers what obligations are imposed on Australia, in both international and domestic law, to respond to these threats.

Part III outlines how Australia may fulfill its human rights obligations, in the context of climate change responses; arguing that a human rights-based approach is the most effective way to respond to climate change.

PAPER: [www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate\\_change.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate_change.html)

## **C. PEACE & SECURITY**

### **AFRICA**

#### **BAN WARNS DARFUR VIOLENCE MAY BE GETTING WORSE**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan may be growing more dire, with attacks on civilian populations continuing. The situation had produced more than 100,000 additional refugees just this year. Mr Ban urged member nations to offer contributions of troops and equipment to aid the peacekeeping effort. [Reuters](#) (5/4/08).

Russian President, Vladimir Putin, says there have been no major breakthroughs in talks with his US counterpart George W Bush, the ABC reported (7/4/08).

But the two presidents have signed an agreement to map out both countries' continuing relations.

The meeting in the southern Russian city of Sochi was the last for Mr Bush and Mr Putin as presidents of their countries.

While they have heaped praise on each other personally at their joint media conference, both presidents have acknowledged that on some major issues such as the United States' planned missile defence system in Eastern Europe, there is still a long way to go.

But Mr Bush says he believes through continuing talks there has been a significant breakthrough on the missile shield debate in finding a solution and easing Russia's concerns. Following Mr Putin's comment at the NATO summit that a return to the Cold War is impossible, George W Bush has said the Cold War is over.

### **ZAMBIA CALLS EMERGENCY MEETING OVER ZIMBABWE**

Zambia has called for an emergency meeting of southern African leaders on the Zimbabwean presidential poll delay, the BBC reported (9/4/08).

The announcement by the Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa marks the first move by Zimbabwe's neighbours to intervene since the elections.

South Africa's governing party leader Jacob Zuma has criticised the 11-day delay in announcing results. His approach contrasts with South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, who has urged patience. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held on March 29 but the presidential results still have not been released. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7338925.stm>

### **MOB BEATS MDC ACTIVIST**

The mob materialised quietly in the fading twilight. There were 50 youths hurrying along, armed with sticks, rawhide whips and knives. It was just over a week after Zimbabwe's disputed national elections, and even before the shouting began John Saramu knew what was going to happen, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (10/4/08).

Mr Saramu, an activist for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change in a farming district outside the town of Mutare, said, "They came into my house. They were shouting, 'We want to kill you!' They were saying, 'We want to go around and find all the MDC supporters one by one, and we want them to get out.'" Mr Saramu, 39, said he was beaten for two hours by the gang supporting President Mugabe.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/09/1207420485600.html>

### **ROBERT MUGABE LOST 'AND SHOULD STEP DOWN AS PRESIDENT'**

Violence is spreading in Zimbabwe in the wake of the still-unsettled election 10 days ago, with political opponents reporting attacks and the country's remaining white farmers being forced off their land. Meanwhile, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said Wednesday that it appeared that Robert Mugabe had lost and should step down as president. [The New York Times](#) (9/4/08). [Reuters](#) (9/4/08).

### **KENYAN OPPOSITION LEADER ASKS SUPPORTERS TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT**

Kenya's main opposition leader, Raila Odinga, has appealed to his supporters to exercise restraint after violence broke out in the capital, Nairobi, the BBC reported (9/4/08). Mr Odinga suspended talks on forming a power-sharing government on Tuesday.

"It is better to take slightly longer and get it right than to rush it and make mistakes which will lead to regrets," he said. Mr Odinga wants a 50-50 split in cabinet posts as promised by an accord to end post-poll violence. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7339225.stm>

A judge hearing an opposition petition demanding the immediate release of Zimbabwe's presidential election results said he will deliver his judgment on Monday, the Sydney Morning Herald/AFP reported (10/4/08). "Conscious of the urgency of the matter, I should be ready for a judgment on Monday afternoon," Judge Tendai Uchena told the High Court in Harare. "Judgment is therefore reserved until Monday at 14.30pm (2230 AEST)."

## **UNHCR SEEKS \$40.3M TO PROTECT DARFUR REFUGEES**

The UNHCR has issued an appeal for \$40.3 million to provide protection and assistance to refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Darfur region (4/4/08).

The funds will be used to help some 2.5 million displaced people in Darfur and those returning, as well as 47,500 refugees from Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) who have fled inter-ethnic clashes and other conflicts in their own countries, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“The challenges in Darfur have never been greater, with a pervasive conflict spreading across the region displacing more civilians and creating a very insecure environment for humanitarian workers,” UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond [said](#) in Geneva, quoting its Africa bureau director.

“Preventing sexual and gender-based violence also remains a key challenge,” he said, saying operations would focus on protection activities. Such efforts include monitoring the well-being of refugees, [IDPs](#) and returnees, strengthening camp management and providing community-based rehabilitation programs in rural areas along with other partners and UN agencies.

“UNHCR’s main goal remains to assist the Sudanese Government in fulfilling its responsibility to deliver an effective and coordinated humanitarian response to the needs of conflict-affected populations throughout Darfur,” he said.

## **SUDAN: RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN DARFUR AND ABYEI**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) teams carried out nearly 80 field missions in more than 60 rural areas throughout South, North and West Darfur during the first three months of the year, despite the prevailing insecurity and sporadic access to some areas.

Besides monitoring respect for international humanitarian law and maintaining its dialogue with all the parties to the conflict in Darfur, the ICRC provided health care and access to water.

It also continued to assist rural communities in maintaining or re-establishing traditional means of livelihood in areas where the local economy had been disrupted by lack of access to agricultural fields and markets, or to nomadic migration routes.

Working in cooperation with volunteers from the Sudanese Red Crescent Society, the ICRC was able to re-establish contacts among family members who had been separated from one another.

In response to the ongoing tensions in the region, the ICRC also strengthened its presence in central Sudan (South Kordofan, North Bahr El Gazal, Unity and Upper Nile states). It carried out its activities in behalf of victims of violence in close cooperation with the Sudanese Red Crescent.

ICRC reports cover:

Humanitarian consequences of hostilities in West Darfur

Responding to needs in South Darfur

Clashes in South Kordofan and North Bahr El Gazal

Aid for nomadic communities in Darfur

Providing access to clean water

Health assistance in Darfur and in southern Sudan

DETAILS: [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org); Sydney ICRC Support Office on 61 2 9388 9039; Fax on 61 2 9388 9042; [sydney.syd@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.syd@icrc.org)

## **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC SUFFERS REBEL GROUP VIOLENCE**

*Violence at the hands of rebel groups and bandits continues to plague the Central African Republic’s civilian population, worsening an already existing humanitarian crisis, Tony Lanzer, the*

UN humanitarian coordinator for CAR, says. He wants the international community to devote more effort to help this resource-rich country address its challenges. [IRINNews.org](http://www.irinnews.org) (3/4/08).

## SOUTH EAST ASIA

### **EAST TIMOR'S POLICE FORCE 'IS TRIBALISED, CORRUPT, INADEQUATELY TRAINED'**

A scathing UN report, obtained by The Australian, argues the police force is politically manipulated, chronically mismanaged and massively underfunded, the newspaper stated (8/4/08). It warned a long-term commitment was needed by East Timor's international backers to repair the damage exacerbated by deadly 2006 inter-communal violence. Australia - East Timor's principal national security guarantor - is expected to shoulder a significant part of the financial and training burden to rebuild the police force.

Of special concern, the report warned of a potential "lack of political will to approve the needed changes" to reform the police. The UN report - *PNTL (police) Organisation, Strategic Plan for Reform, Restructuring and Rebuilding* - argues the force's problems range from a lack of a strategic development plan to basic logistics.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23502222-25837,00.html>

### **REINADO 'HIGH ON ICE, BOOZE' DURING ATTACK**

The East Timorese rebel leader Alfredo Reinado was under the influence of alcohol and the drug methamphetamine when he led the attacks in Dili in February, East Timor's President, Jose Ramos-Horta, has disclosed (8/4/08).

The Sydney Morning Herald reported he rejected speculation in Dili that a powerful Timorese politician was behind the attacks, saying Reinado did not take orders from anyone.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/07/1207420302069.html>

### **RAMOS HORTA HINTS AT RESIGNATION**

Mr Ramos Horta, 58, later said he would address parliament when he returned "and I will not promise the country that I will serve the full term," he told The Australian (8/4/08).

His resignation would be a serious blow to East Timor. Ramos Horta has taken on the role ahead of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao as the country's most-loved citizen, "... I would like to be a common citizen and casually write my book. I will have to be sensitive to what the bishops and the common Timorese say," he said.

Shot twice on February 11, it has left him deeply traumatised. He said he does not need to be president, pointing to the success of his stand-in, National Parliament president Fernando Lasama de Araujo.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23502961-601,00.html>

### **AUSTRALIA TO HELP PEACE-BUILDING IN EAST TIMOR**

Australia will provide further support for peace-building efforts in East Timor and help improve long-term disaster management capacities. A total of \$3 million will go to the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to support key humanitarian priorities, a Federal Government media release stated this week.

Australia will help government ministries and local communities promote dialogue with internally displaced people in three districts in the east (Lautem, Baucau and Viqueque), three in the west (Ermera, Manufahi and Ailieu) as well as Dili. This project will be led by UNDP.

Australian assistance through the IOM will improve long-term disaster risk management and build institutional capacities. It includes the provision of a technical adviser to East Timor's national

disaster agency and engagement with district-level administrations and non-government organisations.

The UN estimates 100,000 East Timorese remain displaced following the political unrest and violence of April and May 2006. East Timor is also prone to natural disasters, including flooding, earthquakes and drought which can result in crop failure and widespread food shortages. DETAILS: Courtney Hoogen (Foreign Minister's office) on 0488 244 901 and AusAID Public Affairs on 0417 680 590.

### **BOMBER ATTACKS MUSLIM LEADER**

Death row Bali bomber Ali Ghufron has launched a scathing attack on his critics in the opinion pages of a major national newspaper, in which he derided the moderate leader of one of Indonesia's two major Muslim organisations, The Australian reported (8/4/08).

Ghufron accused senior Muslim scholar Syafii Maarif, the head of the millions-strong progressive group Muhammadiyah, of peddling in "lies" regarding his relationship with his family and his attitude to the Bali atrocities and other attacks. Dr Maarif wrote an opinion piece in the same Muslim-leaning Republika newspaper on Friday, which was critical of Ghufron's claims to piety.

The article was described last night by Jakarta-based terrorism analyst Sidney Jones as "an example of why there is nothing wrong with curtailing the free speech of people who are on death row and who have incited the deaths of others".

Ghufron, alias Mukhlas, his brother Amrozi bin Nurhasyim and fellow plotter Imam Samudra were sentenced to death for planning and carrying out the 2002 Bali nightclub attacks in which 202 people died, including 88 Australians.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23504485-2703,00.html>

## **MIDDLE EAST**

### **BAN CONDEMNS ATTACK ON ISRAELI DEPOT**

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the terrorist attack by Palestinian militants against the Nahal Oz depot in southern Israel, in which two Israeli civilian contractors working to supply fuel to the Gaza Strip were killed and others injured (9/4/08).

He was gravely concerned at the prospect of an escalation in violence, according to a [statement](#) issued on Thursday. He said the UN called for the protection of all civilians in the conflict.

The spokesperson stressed that, while the Secretary-General recognised Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, he deplored the reported civilian casualties among Palestinians during Israeli military operations later.

### **PROTECTING IRAQIS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED AUSTRALIAN TROOPS**

Iraqi employees, including translators and interpreters, who supported Australian troops in Iraq will be able to apply for resettlement in Australia in recognition of the personal security situation they will face as Australia withdraws its combat forces from southern Iraq, Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, and Minister for Defence Joel Fitzgibbon said (8/4/08).

Anti-Coalition forces have deliberately targeted individuals working with Australian troops and their partners in southern Iraq. In response, the Australian Government will adopt a new visa policy to enable the permanent resettlement in Australia of locally engaged employees (LEEs) and their families at risk because of their engagement with the Australian Government. It is anticipated that up to 600 visas will be granted.

DETAILS: <http://www.defence.gov.au/opcatalyst/default.htm>; Christian Taubenschlag (Joel Fitzgibbon) on 02 6277 7800/0438 595 567 and Simon Dowding (Senator Chris Evans) on

02 6277 7860/0411 138 541 and Defence Media Liaison on 02 6265 3343/0408 498 664.

### **IRAQ'S OIL MINISTER SAYS THE ASSAULT HELPED CURB OIL SMUGGLING**

The recent fight in Basra between Iraqi forces and Shiite militiamen was about more than a government bid to reassert itself in a city where Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army was digging in. It was also about oil – and smuggling, reports Sam Dagher, of the Christian Science Monitor (9/4/08).

Before the assault began on March 23, the Iraqi Government drew up a list of about 200 suspected oil smugglers it hoped to round up – including the brother of the governor of Basra Province and, according to Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani, several leaders linked to Mr Sadr's militia.

For the government, which relies on oil revenues to fund most of its budget, the financial stakes are immense. While there are no accurate figures, an Iraqi parliamentary committee says that losses from oil smuggling run \$5 billion a year.

"We have cleansed large swaths on both sides of Shatt al-Arab that were being used to smuggle oil products and other materials," Mr Shahristani was quoted as saying on Monday. "Many of the gangs are colluding with local officials, powerful parties, or militias; it's a web of interrelations," he claimed. REPORT: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0409/p01s03-wome.html>

### **MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD BEATS URANIUM DRUM AGAIN**

Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced plans to install 6,000 new uranium-enrichment centrifuges in its nuclear facility in Natanz, in defiance of UN sanctions. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner responded to the news, saying, "The worry is that behind enrichment lies a military program." [Bloomberg](#) (8/4/08).

## **NORTH ASIA**

### **UN CALL FOR MAOISTS IN NEPAL TO STOP INTIMIDATION**

The UN has called on the Maoist party in Nepal to stop intimidating members of other parties in the run-up to the nationwide elections on Thursday, the BBC reported (7/4/08).

Its peace mission in the country, UNMIN, says incidents of obstruction and violence have been increasing as polls draw nearer. The election is a major part of Nepal's peace process which started when Maoist rebels gave up their armed revolt.

Yet the UN peace mission says their activists, including their youth league, have been detaining rival party members and former rebels continue to assault, obstruct and spread fear among people - UNMIN listed eight episodes from around the country, including beatings.

Detonation of bombs by militant groups opposed to the polls has also been increasing, says the UNMIN report. SEE also Media Matters page.

Nepal is struggling with continuous violence, including two bombings on Monday, AFP reported. [UN warns of Nepal violence before landmark election/ Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (4/7)

### **NEPAL TOP UN OFFICIAL URGES RESTRAINT FOLLOWING PRE-POLL KILLINGS**

The top UN official in Nepal has called on all parties to exercise restraint after at least seven people died in two separate incidents on the eve of Constituent Assembly elections in the South Asian nation.

## **SIX ACTIVISTS DEAD SHOT**

At least six Maoist activists in Nepal have been shot dead by the security forces in the west of the country, local officials reported and Maoist sources said another 15 people were injured, in what was the worst single incident of violence related to the elections, the BBC reported (9/4/08). The incident happened after a scuffle between the Maoists and youths employed by a local candidate of a rival party. The king meanwhile has urged everyone to vote in the poll.  
REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7337918.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7337918.stm)

## **AUSTRALIAN OBSERVERS AT NEPAL'S ELECTIONS**

The Australian government has sent a team of election observers to help monitor the Nepalese elections (4/4/08). Led by Mr Mark Butler MP, the delegation includes Dr Andrew Laming MP, and Dr Christopher Drury from the Australian Electoral Commission.

The Australian delegation will complement the work of domestic election monitors and other observers from overseas, including from South Asia, the EU, Japan, Thailand, the International Crisis Group, and the Carter Centre.

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500; department on 02 6261 1555.

## **EUROPE**

### **UN TO HAND OVER POWER IN KOSOVO IN JUNE**

Newly independent Kosovo adopted a constitution Wednesday, a key step in its rocky journey to become a sovereign state. The constitution is set to start taking effect in mid-June when the UN finalises its handover of power to the new state. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](http://AlertNet.org/Reuters) (9/4/08).

## **D. HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **AFGHANISTAN: ICRC CHIEF SEES WORSENING SITUATION**

"We are extremely concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Jakob Kellenberger, said in Afghanistan this week (9/8/08). "There is growing insecurity and a clear intensification of the armed conflict, which is no longer limited to the south but has spread to the east and west," Mr Kellenberger said.

Intensification of the conflict has forced a growing number of people from their homes. While the ICRC has stepped up its humanitarian activities in recent years, dangerous conditions often prevent it from reaching groups such as displaced persons who need protection and assistance. The organisation engages in confidential dialogue with all parties to the conflict, including the armed opposition, in an effort to reach these particularly vulnerable communities.

"The harsh reality is that in large parts of Afghanistan, little development is taking place. Instead, the conflict is forcing more and more people to flee their homes. Their growing humanitarian needs and those of other vulnerable people must be met as a matter of urgency. The Afghan people deserve to live in a secure environment and have access to decent health care, safe drinking water and adequate food supplies," Mr Kellenberger said.

Afghanistan is the ICRC's fourth largest operation globally with more than 1,200 staff and a projected budget for 2008 of about 60 million Swiss Francs (60 million US Dollars).  
DETAILS: Graziella Leite Piccolo, ICRC Kabul, on +93700 282 719; Carla Haddad, ICRC Geneva, on +41 22 730 2405 or +41 79 217 32 26; [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) . ICRC Sydney Support Office, Suite 104A, Level 1, 55 Grafton Street, Woollahra, NSW 2025; on 61 2 9388 9039; F on 61 2 9388 9042; [sydney.syd@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.syd@icrc.org) .

### **UN HUMAN RIGHTS BODY BEGINS FIRST-EVER EXAMINATION OF ALL NATIONS**

The Universal Periodic Review, a new mechanism to examine the human rights record of every United Nations member state, was launched at the Human Rights Council in Geneva (7/4/08).

Over the next two weeks, a first group of 16 countries – starting with Bahrain and Ecuador – will have their records scrutinized, as part of the review, one of the reforms which differentiate the Council from the Commission on Human Rights, which it succeeded in 2006.

The review meetings will feature interactive discussions between the states in question and a working group comprises all of the council's 47 members, according to a UN spokesperson. The discussions will be based on national reports and information from a variety of sources, including treaty bodies, special rapporteurs – independent experts on specific topics that report to the council – non-governmental organisations, national human rights institutions and academics.

Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Czech Republic, Finland, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Tunisia and the United Kingdom are the other countries being reviewed over the next two weeks. Under the review's work plans, 48 countries are scheduled to be reviewed each year, so that the UN's complete membership of 192 countries will be reviewed once every four years.

Last month, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the council to assure that all countries were scrutinised equally. "The review must reaffirm that just as human rights are universal, so is our collective respect for them and our commitment to them," he said.

#### **WOMEN FACE BIAS WORLDWIDE - UN REPORT**

Women are discriminated against in almost every country around the world, a UN-commissioned report says. This was despite that 185 UN member states pledged to outlaw laws favouring men by 2005, the BBC reported (5/4/08). It adds that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women and they own just one per cent of the world's titled land.

Prepared for UN Human Right Commissioner Louise Arbour, says rape within marriage has still not been made a crime in 53 nations. The report was compiled by Fareda Banda, a law professor at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

Prof Banda said that other laws discriminating women included statutes on divorce, maternity benefits and pensions. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7331813.stm>

#### **NORTH ASIA**

##### **TIBETAN LEADERS STRUGGLE TO SPEAK FOR SPLIT POPULACE**

As a member of the Tibetan parliament in exile, Pema Jungney is increasingly finding himself caught in the middle, writes Mark Sappenfield in the Christian Science Monitor (9/4/08). "With rioting in Tibet and young radicals at home pushing for a harder line against Chinese rule, he's under pressure to explain his government's support for the Dalai Lama's 'Middle Path' of dialogue and reconciliation.

"Then again, the last time parliament tried to review the Dalai Lama's Tibet policy, protesters gathered at the steps and declared a hunger strike.

"In the past 20 years, the Dalai Lama has transformed the Tibetan government-in-exile from the semi-theocracy he brought from Tibet to a relatively independent democracy. In doing so, he has invested it with more responsibility.

"Now, the government must struggle with how to bridge the growing generation gap, finding its own voice while also paying due reverence to the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetans worship as a god." REPORT: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0409/p01s05-woap.html>

##### **TALKING TO PEKING STUDENTS ABOUT TIBET**

Speaking to students at Peking University Mr Rudd told them on Wednesday they were the representatives of China's tomorrow and would define how the world saw China.

"The idea of a harmonious world depends on China being a participant in the world order and, along with others, acting in accordance with the rules of that order," he said. Some people had called for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics because of recent problems in Tibet but he did not agree.

"Australia like most other countries recognises China's sovereignty over Tibet," he said. "But we also believe it is necessary to recognise there are significant human rights problem in Tibet. The current situation in Tibet is of concern to Australians.

"We recognise the need for all parties to avoid violence and find a solution through dialogue. As a long-standing friend of China I intend to have a straightforward discussion with China's leaders on this. We wish to see the year 2008 as one of harmony, and celebration – not one of conflict and contention." REPORT: <http://au.mg1.mail.yahoo.com/dc/launch?.rand=f0273t043nom9>

### **CHINA DEPORTS REFUGEES IN SECURITY SWEEP**

China has deported 15 refugees back to their countries of origin this year in what appears to be a security sweep ahead of the Beijing Olympics, the UN refugee agency said on Tuesday.

The 15 were sent back to Iraq, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, despite concerns that they might be persecuted and fear for their lives, a spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees this week in Geneva.

"We've asked for verification from the Chinese authorities what are the circumstances surrounding the deportation," she said. "We haven't heard back from them on that." The recent deportations had caused fear and intimidation among the 180 refugees who live in mainland China, she said. Nearly all of them come from south-west Asia, the Middle East and Africa. They live mostly in Beijing.

China has said no for now to a request by Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to visit Tibet this month.

### **SINGLE MOTHERS FACE TOUGH ROAD IN CHINA**

Single mothers are becoming more assertive and independent in China, although they still face many challenges. However, state-sanctioned population controls and cultural taboos on premarital sex are colliding with the reality of an increasingly prosperous, mobile and independent population. [The New York Times](#) (4/6)

### **SOUTH EAST/PERSIAN GULF**

#### **UN STARTS MISSION TO RECORD WEST BANK DAMAGE CLAIMS**

The head of the UN body charged with collecting Palestinian claims of damages resulting from Israel's West Bank barrier has begun his first fact-finding mission, UN officials said (7/4/08).

Vladimir Goryayev, executive director of the UN Register of Damage caused by the construction of the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory (UNRoD), is currently meeting "potential claimants".

Palestinians claim the West Bank barrier disrupts their economy and prejudices the borders of any future Palestinian state. Israel says it needs the barrier to keep out suicide bombers. The International Court of Justice in The Hague has ruled the barrier illegal, Reuters reported.

### **'HONOUR KILLING' VICTIM'S FAILED PLEA**

Two British police officers are to face disciplinary proceedings over their treatment of a young woman tortured and murdered in a so-called honour killing, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (4/4/08). The police watchdog concluded she had been "let down" by them.

The Iraqi Kurd father and uncle of Banaz Mahmud, 20, were jailed last year for her murder after she fell in love with a man they disapproved of. A third man pleaded guilty to murder and will spend at least 17 years in jail.

Ms Mahmud approached police for help four times, telling them of threats to her life, but the police were said to have dismissed her as manipulative and melodramatic. REPORT: Guardian News & Media, Reuters/ <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/03/1206851105848.html>

### **JUNTA PUBLISHES NEW CONSTITUTION**

Burma's military rulers have published their proposed new constitution, which critics say will cement their grip on power and weaken the opposition, the BBC reported (9/4/08). The 194-page document has gone on sale at government bookshops at a cost of 1,000 kyat (\$1; 50p) a copy.

The junta says it will put the document to a national referendum on May 10. The charter was drafted by the generals without input from the pro-democracy opposition, and bans opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding office.

The Irrawaddy website, which is critical of the junta, says the new rules enshrine the military's dominance of the political system.

### **MIDDLE EAST NATIONS CRACKING DOWN ON GAYS**

Police in Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco and elsewhere are visibly cracking down on gay behaviour in an effort to appease religious elements. "Meaningless crackdowns have become a regular thing. If not gays, devil worshippers. If not devil worshippers, apostates. The government needs to outbid Islamic opponents as guardian of morals," Hani Shukrallah, of the the Cairo-based Heikal Foundation for Arab Journalism. REPORT: [Bloomberg](#) (8/4/08).

## **AUSTRALIA**

### **CLIMATE CHANGE 'WILL IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS'**

Climate change will have significant impacts in both Australia and across the globe. However, in responding to climate change, governments have traditionally approached it as an ecological problem or more recently, as an economic one, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reported this week.

Yet the human costs of climate change directly threaten fundamental human rights; rights to life, to food, to a place to live and work, rights that governments have an obligation to protect, it said. To cover this area, the commission has produced a Background Paper entitled *Human Rights and Climate Change*.

Part I of this paper considers the human rights dimensions of climate change. Specifically, it looks at how the rights contained in the key international instruments are threatened by the impacts of climate change.

Part II then goes on to consider what obligations are imposed on Australia, in both international and domestic law, to respond to these threats.

Part III outlines how Australia may fulfil its human rights obligations, in the context of climate change responses; arguing that a human rights-based approach is the most effective way to respond to climate change.

PAPER: [www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate\\_change.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate_change.html)

## **NEW LOOK AT RACE DISCRIMINATION ACT?**

The HREOC Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tom Calma, said that fresh consideration of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) was warranted to ensure it remained relevant to contemporary Australian society, when releasing this week the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Background Paper No 1, *An International Comparison of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

"As the first anti-discrimination law in Australia, the RDA declared unambiguously to the Australian people that racism and discrimination were no longer acceptable in our society," the commissioner said.

"After 33 years it is important that the RDA continues to be reviewed against the goals it seeks to achieve, which are equality and non-discrimination," said Mr Calma. "Yet it is also important that the legislation evolves in response to the changing makeup and reality of Australian society, which is very different today to what it was in 1975."

"The Background Paper analyses the continuing usefulness and effectiveness of the RDA by placing it in context with contemporary race discrimination legislation in other parts of the world, including Canada, the UK the US and the European Union," he said.

PAPER: [www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/papers/) (from April 11).

## **CLOSING THE LIFE-TIME GAP**

Closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was a core priority of the Federal Government, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said (5/4/08).

He said on the first working day of every parliamentary year while prime minister, he would report to the Parliament on the progress the government had made closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Outlined would be: Progress in closing the life expectancy gap; progress in closing the gap on infant mortality and mortality of children up to five years of age; and progress on closing the literacy and numeracy gap.

DETAILS: [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media\\_release\\_0166.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0166.cfm)

## **JOINT FORCES SEEK MATERNITY LEAVE SCHEME**

HREOC Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick, ACTU President Sharan Burrow and Australian Industry Group Chief Executive Heather Ridout have joined forces to call for a national, taxpayer-funded paid maternity leave scheme for all Australian women (8/4/08)..

"In an extremely tight labour market Australia's continuing economic prosperity depends on encouraging more women back into the paid workforce after they've had children," said Sharan Burrow, president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

"At the moment, Australia has one of the lowest workforce participation rates in the OECD for women aged 25 to 44 - part of the problem is a lack of paid maternity leave and other measures to support primary carers."

Ms Burrow says employers offering paid maternity leave estimate up to 90 per cent of female employees return to their job, avoiding the cost of replacing lost staff.

Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick says the coming together of the three influential organisations is a watershed moment in the long campaign for Australia to catch up with the international community on paid maternity leave.

"Two-thirds of Australian women have no access to paid maternity leave. HREOC has long recommended a national government-funded 14 week paid maternity leave scheme as a basic minimum standard for Australian women," she said.

Australian Industry Group chief executive Heather Ridout said the Ai Group supports an

appropriate period of publicly funded paid maternity leave consistent with community and international standards and at the level of the federal minimum wage.

"There is no doubt that a national maternity leave scheme would deliver tangible benefits to business, employees and to the broader economy and society and, of course, for the children themselves," she said.

"In addition, such a scheme would help keep women linked to the workforce and demonstrate formal recognition of the opportunity costs facing women in terms of lost income and interrupted careers when they choose to have children. It would also demonstrate that the dual roles of working women as mothers and employees is recognised and valued."

The ACTU, AIG and HREOC will be making individual submissions to the Productivity Commission, currently examining the merits of a national scheme on behalf of the federal government. A joint opinion piece by all three organisations on paid maternity leave appears today in The Age newspaper.

CONTACTS: ACTU: Giulia Baggio 0409 141 038, HREOC: Paul Oliver 0408 469 347, AIG: Tony Melville 0419 190 347.

## AFRICA

### **NIGER SUED BY FORMER SLAVE**

A former slave in Niger has sued the government over cruelty, claiming it failed to protect her in violation of its own laws. If Hadijatou Mani - who was sold to a master when she was 12 and later sexually abused by him - wins the case, it could set a legal precedent for thousands of former slaves. Niger criminalised slavery in 2003. [The Times \(London\)](#) (9/4/08).

## E. HEALTH & MEANS

### **EU CALLS ON MEMBERS TO MEET MDG TARGETS**

The European Commission called on its member countries Wednesday to fulfill their pledges on foreign aid to help meet the UN goals on poverty and education. "Missing the Millennium Development Goals would be a disaster for developing countries, a failure for Europe, and a potential threat to global stability," the EU executive branch said. [Reuters](#) (9/4/08).

### **GOOGLE EARTH MAPS REFUGEE CRISES**

UNHCR has teamed up with Google to use the mapping program Google Earth to more effectively highlight the plights of refugees. The effort uses photos, satellite maps and, videos to focus on refugee crises in Darfur, Iraq, Chad and Colombia. [The Guardian \(London\)](#) or <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/08/unitednations.sudan?gusrc=rss&feed=networkfront> (8/4/08).

## FOOD

### **UN OFFICIAL SEEKS LEADERS' HELP OVER FOOD FOR IMPOVERISHED PEOPLE**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has expressed concern about the impact of global food shortages on the world's most impoverished people and urged world leaders to support a World Food Program call for critical funds to meet soaring food and fuel prices (7/4/08).

"I ask you to respond positively to the dramatic appeal of the UN World Food Program (WFP)," Guterres said at the Progressive Governance summit, hosted by UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown near London.

The meeting, gathering 12 centre-left world leaders and eight other key figures from the European Union and major international organizations, focused on how governments and global

bodies such as UNHCR can help to combine economic progress and world trade with social justice.

The threats posed by global climate change, rising energy prices and the related rise in food prices on impoverished communities worldwide were among the concerns of the leaders at the summit.

The High Commissioner's backing for WFP's appeal came just a day after rice prices rose more than 10 per cent to a record high after key importers bought up available supplies.

WFP issued an extraordinary emergency appeal to government donors on March 20, saying that due to soaring food and fuel prices it was facing a shortfall of some US\$500 million in its efforts to feed 70 million people this year. The organization is charged with meeting the urgent hunger needs of the world's most vulnerable people, including refugees and the internally displaced.

REPORT: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/47fa2a262.html>

### **UNFAO ADDS VOICE TO GROWING CONCERNS OVER FOOD CRISIS**

The developing world may see more protests and violence over food shortages and soaring prices, the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation said on Wednesday. "We have seen riots around the world and there's risk that these will spread because of rising prices in countries where 50-60 percent of incomes go to foods," Jacques Diouf said in New Delhi after meeting with India's farm minister. [Bloomberg](#) (9/4/08).

### **BRITAIN'S PM URGES G8 TO TACKLE FOOD CRISIS**

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown on Thursday said the upcoming Group of Eight summit in Japan should act against spiraling food costs that are spreading hunger and unrest around the world. Brown requested, in a letter to Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, that the industrial countries that make up G8 look at issues such as the role biofuel may play in pushing up food prices. [Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (10/4/08).

### **FOOD PRICES MAY 'SPARK GLOBAL UNREST'**

Skyrocketing food prices could cause political dissent and violent protests around the world, John Holmes, the UN's top humanitarian official, warned on Monday in Dubai. His comments came amid recent food-related violence in Egypt and Haiti and noted that average food prices globally had risen 40 per cent since mid-2007. REPORT: [USA TODAY/Associated Press](#) / [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-04-08-un-food-crisis\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-04-08-un-food-crisis_N.htm)

### **WFP SEEKS AID FOR HAITI AS FOOD RIOTS SPREAD**

The World Food Program asked donors Monday to give money to the agency's operations in Haiti, where riots over soaring food prices have turned deadly in recent days. "At this critical time, we need to stand with the people of Haiti and other countries hardest hit by rising food prices," WFP head Josette Sheeran said. [CNN](#) (8/4/08).

### **60 GOVERNMENTS MEET TO TACKLE SOARING FOOD PRICES**

Officials from some 60 governments met in Johannesburg, South Africa, this week to discuss what can be done to counter the soaring food prices that are threatening millions of people with hunger. Scientists and others at the conference, hosted by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, are expected to tout a more sustainable model for farming and development. [Inter Press Service](#) (6/4/08).

Additional reports: [Millions in danger as food crisis spreads](#) (Los Angeles Times)

[Why world's poor often pay most for drinking water](#) (Financial Times)

### **FOOD INSECURITY IN PAKISTAN**

Surging food prices have left half of Pakistan's 160 million people facing food shortages, the World Food Program said Friday. Food prices have risen by 35 per cent over the last year, nearly double the rate of the rise in the minimum wage. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (4/4/08).

### **POOREST 'PAY MOST FOR WATER'**

The world's poorest often pay significantly higher prices for safe, potable drinking water than do people in well-off areas. In this analysis, the Financial Times looks at why this is and ponders what the international community can do to correct this situation. [Financial Times](#) (3/4/08).

REPORT: [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3c12a800-0197-11dd-a323-000077b07658.html?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3c12a800-0197-11dd-a323-000077b07658.html?nclick_check=1)

### **UN CHIEF CALLS FOR REVIEW OF BIOFUELS POLICY**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called for a comprehensive review of the policy on bio-fuels as a crisis in global food prices - partly caused by the increasing use of crops for energy generation - threatens to trigger global instability, the London Guardian reported (5/4/08).

"We need to be concerned about the possibility of taking land or replacing arable land because of these bio-fuels," he said in Bucharest at the NATO summit. But he added: "While I am very much conscious and aware of these problems, at the same time you need to constantly look at having creative sources of energy, including bio-fuels. Therefore, at this time, just criticising bio-fuel may not be a good solution. I would urge we need to address these issues in a comprehensive manner."

Climate change has been a priority for Ban since he took over from Kofi Annan, and he has embraced the potential of bio-fuels, derived from plants, as a long-term substitute for fossil fuels. But as food prices have soared - driven by rising demand, high fuel costs, and climate change - the cultivation of bio-fuels has come under fire for diverting fertile land from food production.

Some of the loudest criticism has come from within UN food agencies, which are struggling to keep up with commodity prices. Last month the World Food Program issued an emergency \$500m appeal to donors to help it meet its existing commitments to the world's hungry. WFP officials say 33 countries in Asia and Africa face political instability as the urban poor struggle to feed their families.

There are also mounting concerns over the benefits of bio-fuels to the environment. They generally burn cleaner than fossil fuels, but fuels such as grain-based ethanol are energy-intensive to produce, and tropical rainforests have been cleared to produce palm oil for use as a fuel. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/apr/05/biofuels.food>.

### **UN HUMAN RIGHTS HEAD TOURS PERSIAN GULF**

The top United Nations relief official began a six-day, four-country visit this week to the Persian Gulf region by holding talks with senior officials in Saudi Arabia on how to improve partnerships between the world body and Gulf States on humanitarian issues.

John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Abdul Aziz Arrukban, the Secretary-General's Special Humanitarian Envoy, met with Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the President of the Saudi Red Crescent Society (SRCS).

Mr Holmes and Prince Faisal agreed on the need for improved coordination between the UN and the SRCS so that the appropriate assistance can be provided in relief situations, according to a press release issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"It is important to reinforce our cooperation as part of a wider long-term effort to strengthen [the] international humanitarian response," the Under-Secretary-General said. "Needs are increasing - both from the man-made disasters in so many countries, both in the Middle East region and the Muslim world as a whole, and new challenges such as climate change and the structural rise in food prices. Working together multilaterally gives us the best chance to address these needs in a transparent and coordinated way."

Mr Holmes and Mr Arrukban also held talks with Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister Ibrahim bin Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Assaf to discuss the country's ongoing support of humanitarian activities worldwide.

After visiting Saudi Arabia, Mr Holmes was scheduled to travel to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26218&Cr=Holmes&Cr1=>

## HEALTH

### **CLIMATE CHANGE 'ENDANGERS HUMAN HEALTH'**

Scientists tell us that the evidence the Earth is warming is "unequivocal." Increases in global average air and sea temperature, ice melting and rising global sea levels all help us understand and prepare for the coming challenges. In addition to these observed changes, climate-sensitive impacts on human health are occurring today. They are attacking the pillars of public health. And they are providing a glimpse of the challenges public health will have to confront on a large scale: Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), warned when speaking for World Health Day (7/4/08).

"The core concern is succinctly stated: climate change endangers human health," said Dr Chan. "The warming of the planet will be gradual, but the effects of extreme weather events - more storms, floods, droughts and heat waves - will be abrupt and acutely felt. Both trends can affect some of the most fundamental determinants of health: air, water, food, shelter and freedom from disease."

"Human beings are already exposed to the effects of climate-sensitive diseases and these diseases today kill millions. They include malnutrition, which causes over 3.5 million deaths per year, diarrhoeal diseases, which kill over 1.8 million, and malaria, which kills almost 1 million.

"Examples already provide us with images of the future:

- European heat wave 2003. Estimates suggest that approximately 70,000 more people died in that summer than would have been expected.
- Rift Valley Fever in Africa. Major outbreaks are usually associated with rains, which are expected to become more frequent as the climate changes.
- Hurricane Katrina, 2005. Over 1800 died and thousands more were displaced. Additionally, health facilities throughout the region were destroyed critically affecting health infrastructure.
- Malaria in the East African Highlands. In the last 30 years, warmer temperatures have also created more favourable conditions for mosquito populations in the region and therefore for transmission of malaria.
- Epidemics of cholera in Bangladesh. They are closely linked to flooding and unsafe water.

"These trends and events cannot be attributed solely to climate change but they are the types of challenges we expect to become more frequent and intense with climate changes. They will further strain health resources which, in many regions, are already under severe stress.

"Although climate change is a global phenomenon, its consequences will not be evenly distributed," said Dr Chan. "In short, climate change can affect problems that are already huge, largely concentrated in the developing world, and difficult to control."

To address the health effects of climate change, WHO is coordinating and supporting research and assessment on the most effective measures to protect health from climate change, particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children in developing countries, and is advising Member States on the necessary adaptive changes to their health systems to protect their populations.

WHO and its partners -- including the UN Environment Program, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the UN World Meteorological Organisation -- are devising a work plan and research agenda to get better estimates of the scale and nature of health vulnerability and to identify strategies and tools for health protection. WHO recognises the urgent need to support countries in devising ways to cope. Better systems for surveillance and forecasting, and stronger basic health services, can offer health protection. WHO will be working closely with its Member States in coming years to develop effective means of adapting to a changing climate and reducing its effects on human health.

"Through its own actions and its support to member states," said Dr Chan, "WHO is committed to do everything it can to ensure all is done to protect human health from climate change."

DETAILS: Website: <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/en/>; Sari Setiogi in Geneva on +4122 791 3576/ +4179 701 9467; [setiogis@who.int](mailto:setiogis@who.int), John Rainford in Geneva on +41 22 791 3982/ +41 79 516 3709; [rainfordj@who.int](mailto:rainfordj@who.int), or Nada Osseiran, +41 22 791 4475/ +41 79 445 1624; [OSSEIRANN@WHO.INT](mailto:OSSEIRANN@WHO.INT)

### **PROGRESS FOR CHILDREN WITH AIDS OR AT RISK OF INFECTION**

A UN report released this week shows progress in treating children with AIDS and preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV, but urges greater efforts to stem the tide of the global epidemic (3/4/08).

According to [Children and AIDS](#), there were some 2.1 million children under 15 living with HIV in 2007, most of whom were infected before birth, during delivery or while breastfeeding. And young people aged 15-24 still account for about 40 per cent of the new HIV infections among all people over 15 in 2007.

In addition, an estimated 290,000 children under 15 died from AIDS last year, and 12.1 million children in sub-Saharan Africa lost one or both parents to the disease.

"Today's children and young people have never known a world free of AIDS," said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), which along with the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)) and the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) produced the report.

The report examines progress and challenges in four key areas – preventing HIV transmission from mothers to children (PMTCT), providing paediatric treatment, preventing infection among adolescents and young people, and protecting and supporting children affected by AIDS.

Among other findings, the report says that by the end of 2006, 21 countries, including Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa and Thailand, were on track to meeting the target of 80 per cent coverage for PMTCT by 2010, up from only 11 countries in 2005.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26191&Cr=hiv&Cr1=aids>

### **UN SEES PROGRESS AGAINST AIDS**

Governments and donors are allocating more funds for HIV/AIDS-related issues and many African countries are making significant progress toward eradicating mother-to-infant transmissions, a new UN reported stated. While thousands of African children are infected, the report lauds real advancements, although it says much more needs to be done. DETAILS: UN News Centre's [release](#) and [Reuters](#) (3/4/08)/ [Inter Press Service](#) (3/4/08).

### **NEW GAME MARKS WORLD MALARIA DAY**

The UN Foundation has released a new interactive game, [Deliver the Net](#), for its campaign *Nothing But Nets* to educate people about malaria and its global impact. It will coincide with the first annual World Malaria Day on April 25. DETAILS: <http://www.unfoundation.org/>

### **FRENCH DEMAND BETANCOURT RELEASE AFTER SIX YEARS**

Marches have been held in France to call for the release of Ingrid Betancourt, a French-Colombian politician kidnapped six years ago. She is being held by Colombian Farc rebels and is said to be seriously ill, the BBC reported (6/4/08).

A joint French-Swiss-Spanish medical mission has been in Bogota since last week to treat the 46-year-old Betancourt, if Farc gives permission. The Colombian Government has promised to suspend military operations in the area.

Ms Betancourt - a former Colombian presidential candidate - was one of 39 high-profile hostages whom the Farc would like to exchange for 500 rebels currently in prison.  
REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7333460.stm>

### **VENEZUELA HEALTH SCHEME REPORTED IN CRISIS**

Venezuela's health care system is facing a growing crisis, with poorly paid doctors demanding back pay and better equipment, and many health workers leaving to work in Spain or elsewhere. More children are dying at birth and cases of malaria and dengue are up, the Los Angeles Times reports. [Los Angeles Times](#) (4/4/08).

### **INDIANS 'HELD CAPTIVE WHILE BLOOD WAS DRAINED' FOR MEDICAL CLINICS**

When Durga Prasad heard of the mysterious job with the hefty pay cheque, he jumped at it, no questions asked, the Toronto Globe and Mail/AP reported (4/4/08). Mr Prasad figured he'd be asked to smuggle drugs into Nepal - but for the itinerant labourer from Uttar Pradesh, one of the poorest states in India, the money was worth it: 250 rupees a day, about \$6.

"I knew it must be some illegal work because no one pays so much money to an illiterate person like me," Mr Prasad said. The pay turned out to be part of a trap that ensnared Mr. Prasad and 14 other poor labourers, who were held captive while their blood was drained for sale to private medical clinics.

The case has raised concerns about medical oversight in India, where thousands of Americans seek cheaper medical care each year. ARTICLE:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080404.windia04/BNStory/International/home>

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## **H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS**

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or PO Box 5366, Kingston ACT 2604, and on 61 (2) 6273 8200.

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