

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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Editor: Judy Cannon - 07 3358 2623

Email: judycnn@yahoo.com.au

Contributing Editor: Ian Mathews - 02 6281 4025

Email: ian.mathews7@bigpond.com

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

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A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

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BAN TRIES TO TALK BURMA'S CHIEF INTO ALLOWING BETTER ACCESS

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon tried this week to talk to Burma's Senior General Than Shwe to urge him to facilitate access. This followed the limited progress allowing aid organisations to get into Myanmar where the situation was reported to becoming "increasingly desperate." (8/5/08). (Burma is also known as Myanmar).

The BBC reported (10/5/08) that UN humanitarian chief John Holmes had urged Burma to reconsider its attitude towards allowing aid teams into the country to help cyclone victims. Announcing a \$187m (£96m) flash appeal, he said it was time to act fast or risk more lives being lost.

He thanked the international community for their solidarity and generosity. Burma says 22,980 people died, but the UN fears the toll could reach 100,000 and that as many as 1.5 million people could have been affected. Cyclone Nargis, which made landfall in the Irrawaddy delta region on May 3, left tens of thousands of people dead in its wake and hundreds of thousands without shelter. The storm, which also hit Myanmar's largest city Yangon (Burma's capital Rangoon) later that same night, tore down trees and power lines and caused widespread flooding.

"There's a real danger that an even worse tragedy may unfold if we cannot get the aid that's desperately needed in quickly," said John Holmes, who is Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

"Frustrations have been growing that this humanitarian response is being held back because of difficulties of access in different ways," he said, noting that many visas were still pending. Mr Holmes reported that two members of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination ([UNDAC](#)) team to coordinate relief efforts together with the national authorities were now in Yangon but two other members were not allowed in "for reasons which we are still trying to establish."

On Saturday the ABC reported that the UN World Food Program (WFP) said overnight it would resume aid flights to cyclone-struck Burma, despite the military government's seizure of deliveries at Rangoon airport. The shipments of 38 tonnes of high-energy biscuits, enough to feed 95,000 people, were intended to be loaded on trucks and sent to the inundated Irrawaddy delta where most of the estimated 1.5 million victims of Cyclone Nargis need food, water and shelter.

Mr Ban earlier noted the Burma Government's decision to proceed with the constitutional referendum scheduled for Saturday, May 10, although postponing it in some of the areas most affected by the cyclone. SEE: [statement](#).

The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) had prepared to send 3 million water purification tablets – enough to provide clean water to 200,000 people for a week – and pre-positioned emergency supplies, including enough family health kits for 155,000 people. The UN Development Program ([UNDP](#)) – the only UN agency located in the Irrawaddy Delta – has sent rotating teams of national staff to four affected townships to make disaster assessments, deliver small relief items and provide support to the population UNDP serves.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26602&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=>

FACING INTERNATIONAL CONCERN OVER RELUCTANCE

Burma's leaders were facing growing international concern over their reluctance to accept foreign aid, days after the devastating cyclone, the BBC reported (8/5/08).

On Saturday it reported that governments around the world had been pressing Burma's ruling generals to open the country's borders to desperately needed assistance, but the military government stated its preference through the state-run media to accept "relief in cash and kind" but not foreign aid workers.

The regional ASEAN group earlier urged the military regime to allow in aid flights "before it's too late". A US diplomat said conditions were "horrendous" and warned the death toll could top 100,000. Teams reaching some of the worst-hit areas have described harrowing scenes.

Some aid workers reported bodies rotting in the fields and desperate survivors fighting over food and water. Buildings have been swept away, leaving up to a million people homeless. Burmese troops were pushing into the affected areas but BBC correspondents say their resources are

inadequate to deal with a disaster of this magnitude. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7389263.stm>

There were 260 Australians inside Burma; the diplomatic mission in Rangoon on Wednesday had contacted approximately half of them. REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/08/2238449.htm>

RESPONSES FROM AUSTRALIA

Australia has promised \$3 million to help the cyclone victims in Burma. Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith said \$1 million of the new aid money would go to Australian aid agencies; another \$1m would be sent to the UN World Food Program and the rest to UNICEF to provide water purification equipment, shelter and mosquito nets. He left the door open for more money to be allocated. World Vision head Tim Costello said more private and government aid from Australia was desperately needed. World Vision has 600 workers making their way to the worst areas.

In Perth on Wednesday Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said, "If you look at climate change, the intensity of natural disasters is increasing ... in relation to the terrible loss of human life, through the cyclone in Burma. This is an appalling tragedy, an appalling tragedy, when you look at such a huge loss of life.

"And I would call directly on the regime in Burma to provide complete and unfettered access to all international aid agencies trying to deliver assistance on the ground in Burma now. Forget politics, forget the military dictatorship, let's just get aid and assistance through to people who are suffering and dying as we speak through a lack of support on the ground. That's a direct appeal to the government in Burma."

DETENTION REQUEST TO ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plans to deliver aid to various places of detention affected by the devastation of cyclone Nargis. At the request of the Myanmar authorities, the ICRC is to provide temporary shelter, emergency household items, and enough food, drinking water and essential drugs to last two weeks. In addition, it will support efforts to restore water and sanitation systems to working order, the ICRC Sydney office reported (8/5/08).

The ICRC is also considering how best to help family members re-establish contact and to help with the recovery, identification and dignified management of the dead. Four ICRC vehicles with drivers for Myanmar Red Cross were available to assess needs in the worst-hit areas. DETAILS: Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, on 61 (0) 2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120; F 61 (0) 2 9388 9042; sydney.syd@icrc.org.

MORE SOURCES OF HELP

UNHCR supplies were to be distributed through a Disaster Management Committee established by the Myanmar Government. It included emergency tarpaulins, plastic sheeting and canned food. UNHCR already had some 70 staff in Myanmar.

The World Health Organisation, with an office in Myanmar, was working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other partners to provide emergency help. Critical needs included water purification tablets, drinking water, essential medicines and emergency health kits.

In London, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim called on the authorities in Myanmar to fully cooperate with the international community and the UN so that much needed emergency assistance could be deployed as effectively as possible. A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination ([UNDAC](#)) team was standing by in the region awaiting required visas.

PUSH FOR WARNING SYSTEMS

The head of the secretariat of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction ([ISDR](#)) stressed the importance of having life-saving early warning systems and preparedness programs in place when cyclones strike. Sálvano Briceño said many cyclone-prone countries, such as Cuba,

Japan, and Bangladesh, have implemented efficient early warning systems that have reduced the death toll caused by cyclones.

Mozambique has been chosen to take part in a pilot UN program to identify risks and enhance early warning systems in disaster-prone countries, a UN official said on Wednesday, according to the AFP (8/5/08).

Carlos Villacis, program coordinator of the Global Risk Identification Program (GRIP), said 20 countries would take part in the project, also including Nepal and Mexico. He said \$20 million would be used to train officials from the three countries, who would in turn train other officials.

Floods, droughts, cyclones, landslides and earthquakes are among the natural disasters that have affected Mozambique in the last five years. The program there would be used to boost early warning disaster systems in high risk areas, which have been accredited with the reduction in deaths from this year's flooding.

UN ANTI-NARCOTICS ARM AND OPEC PARTNER TO CURB HIV AMONG DRUG USERS

The UN anti-narcotics agency has joined forces with the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) in a bid to rein in the spread of HIV among drug users. In a program, called Treatnet II, OFID will provide \$3 million to scale up drug prevention and treatment for those vulnerable to the spread of HIV (5/5/08).

"It will enable us to reach those who are marginalised because of their illness and provide them with proper treatment," said Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

This phase of the program will target Latin America: Colombia, Haiti, Nicaragua and Peru. It will also target sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zambia.

Through Treatnet, which seeks to enhance both quality and access to drug treatment, medical and social service providers will be better able to understand the ties between drug dependence and HIV, thus allowing them to better treat patients.

"Addiction and HIV are health problems with social consequences. Treatment is often a low priority in developing countries, and yet lack of treatment hurts development," Mr Costa said.

UNODC is currently seeking funds for expanding the program in South-East Asia.

PLANS PROGRESS FOR UNAA MAKING A DIFFERENCE CONFERENCE

'*Making a Difference*' will be the theme of the United Nations Association of Australia national conference to be held at Parliament House, Brisbane, over August 21/23. Representatives are expected from overseas, including those from UN associations in the Asia Pacific, UNESCO, UNIFEM, UNICEF as well as Australian NGO delegates.

The conference is supported by Queensland Parliament, UNIFEM, Earth Charter Australia, Bond University, Soroptimist International and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

A pre-conference reception at Brisbane City Hall, hosted by Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman, is planned for Wednesday August 20 and a conference welcome by Queensland Premier Anna Bligh on August 21. Conference sessions will debate themes on Sustainability, Life Long Education, Global Compact, Human Rights, Governance, Climate Change and Peace & Conflict Resolution.

The Governor of Queensland, Ms Quentin Bryce, who is to be the next Governor-General of Australia, has been invited to attend the Conference Dinner. DETAILS: unaabalmain@optusnet.com.au; Ph/F on 61-7 3254 1096.

ASIA-PACIFIC MODEL UN CONFERENCE 2008

Over July 6/11 around university 600 students from Australia and the Asia-Pacific region will converge at the University of Adelaide for the Asia-Pacific Model UN Conference (AMUNC). AMUNC brings together the region's top students and future leaders and during the six days, they will debate issues of global importance and work towards achieving innovative outcomes through a simulation of the United Nations. Issues will include nuclear disarmament, doping in sport, HIV/AIDS, climate change and others.

Speakers are expected to include the Premier of South Australia Mike Rann, Indigenous youth leader Tim Goodwin, youth activist and senator-elect Sarah Hanson-Young, and former foreign minister Alexander Downer. The event will culminate in a Finale Ball. DETAILS: www.amunc.net; contact@amunc.net.

UNity, UN AND UNAA CONTACTS

To access major United Nations websites, go to:

[United Nations](http://www.un.org).

[Secretary-General](http://www.un.org/secretary-general/).

[UN News Centre](http://www.un.org/news/press/docs/2008/db080506.doc.htm).

[Key UN Bodies, Agencies, Funds and Programs](http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/2008/db080506.doc.htm).

[United Nations Information Centre for Australia,](http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/2008/db080506.doc.htm)

[New Zealand and the Pacific](http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/2008/db080506.doc.htm), Level 1, 7 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600, Canberra or PO Box 5366, Kingston ACT 2604, and on 61 (2) 6273 8200.

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

<http://www.wfuna.org/who/> ; newsletter at <http://www.wfuna.org/news/newsletter/index.cfm>.

Daily Press briefings by spokesperson for UN Secretary General:

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2008/db080506.doc.htm>

For more information about the United Nations Association of Australia in your state or if you want to join UNAA, access <http://www.unaa.org.au/> or contact:

UNAA ACT unaaact@cyberone.com.au on 02 6247 4499.

UNAA NSW office@unaansw.org.au 02 9212 0998; f 02 9280 0137.

UNAA Qld unaabalmain@optusnet.com.au on ph/fax 07 32541096.

UNAA SA unaasa@picknowl.com.au on 08 8226 4141.

UNAA Tas. secretary@UNAATasmania.org on 03 6229 4269 <http://www.unaatasmania.org/>.

UNAA Vic info@unaavictoria.org.au on (03) 9670 7878 Website: <http://www.unaavictoria.org.au/>.

UNAA WA unaawa@tpg.com.au on 08 9221 9455 <http://www.unaa-wa.org.au/>.

UNAA NT (Darwin) <http://au.f313.mail.yahoo.com/ym/Compose?To=fletch44@bigpond.net.au> or on 0419 829509.

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B. CLIMATE CHANGE

PM 'WE MUST BE READY AND FULLY PREPARED'

In Perth on Wednesday Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said, "If you look at climate change, the intensity of natural disasters is increasing. If you look at the pattern of cyclonic activity in and around the world, as well as the huge human impact of that as well. We therefore, must be ready and fully prepared, I believe the ASPI report is timely and a reminder that we need to review all of our preparation efforts. The government has been working with state and territory governments as late as March on this, and we will have further to say on this in the future."

ASPI REPORTS: <http://www.aspi.org.au/whatsnew/publications.aspx>

CLEAN COAL 'CON TO JUSTIFY COAL INDUSTRY EXPANSION'

The NSW Government's proposed Clean Coal Fund, currently before parliament, has been criticised by Greens MP and mining spokesperson Lee Rhiannon as "a con job and delaying tactic designed to justify expansion of the coal mining industry."

"Clean Coal is a dangerous industry con designed to delay Australia's transition to a new low carbon economy", said Ms Rhiannon. "Clean coal is unproven technology that cannot deliver drastic cuts in greenhouse emissions in time to avoid dangerous climate change.

"The government's Clean Coal Administration Bill, currently before (NSW) parliament, will set up the Clean Coal Fund. The government should not be allocating scarce public money for high risk technology when there is an urgent need to fund research into energy systems that produce minimal or no greenhouse gas emissions.

"A CSIRO and Victoria University report released this week underlines the need for research money to be ear marked for renewables and energy efficiency technologies.

"This report predicts that if the present high emissions continue, the most likely global warming was up to 7.2 degrees by the end of this century. If severe emissions cuts are not implemented until 2030, they predict global temperature rises of up to 4.7 degrees.

"The coal industry admits that clean coal won't be viable before 2030. It will be too late. Carbon capture and storage technology has been around for years and despite the industry spending big money, it is still not commercially viable. It is extremely energy and water intensive, expensive and risky," she said. DETAILS: Lee Rhiannon on 9230 3551/ 0427 861 568.

GREENPEACE CARBON CAPTURE REPORT WELCOMED

Australian Greens climate change spokesperson, Senator Christine Milne, welcomed Greenpeace International's comprehensive report into carbon capture and storage, and said that the report "confirms our view that we must act now to reduce emissions fast with the renewable energy and efficiency technologies which do exist" (5/5/08).

The Greenpeace report sets out clearly and with detailed references all the key problems with carbon capture and storage from coal, showing that it is far from the reality that its advocates claim, that there were very real risks of leakage, particularly given the scale of storage that would be needed, and would negate the cost advantage that coal currently claimed.

REPORT: www.greenpeace.org/ccs. DETAILS: Tim Hollo on 0437 587 562 and <http://greensblog.org>.

EMISSIONS FLIGHT PATH SOUNDS WARNING SIGNS: ACADEMICS

Only a major global economic slowdown, international conflict or the emergence of new emission-saving technology can prevent worldwide aviation emissions rising up to 144 per cent higher than current levels within 20 years, according to the authors of an ANU report.

The working paper, *International aviation emissions to 2025: Can emissions be stabilised without restricting demand?* has been put together by Andrew Macintosh and Lailey Wallace from the ANU Centre for Climate Law and Policy. They project civil aviation emissions to 2025 and look at the reductions necessary to offset rising international demand.

The findings suggest that international aviation carbon dioxide emissions will increase by more than 110 per cent between 2005 and 2025 and it was highly unlikely emissions could be stabilised at the levels required to meet climate targets without restricting demand.

Associate Director of the ANU Centre for Climate Law and Policy Andrew Macintosh said that urgent action was required from the international community if it wanted to keep aviation emissions within current projected safe levels.

“Under current policy settings, emissions are likely to increase significantly unless there is a major global economic downturn or other shock to the aviation market,” he said. “Projections based on the International Civil Aviation Organisation’s 2007 traffic forecast suggest international aviation carbon dioxide emissions will increase by between 111 and 144 per cent between 2005 and 2025.” To combat that increase, said Mr Macintosh, drastic action would need to be taken.

“To prevent emissions from increasing by more than 100 per cent between 2005 and 2025, fuel efficiency would need to improve by 32 per cent, requiring an average annual improvement of 1.9 per cent. To stabilise emissions at 2005 levels, fuel efficiency would need to improve by 65 per cent - 5.2 per cent a year. With current technology, improvements of this magnitude appear unlikely,” he said.

He said while aviation was a relatively small carbon polluter, the projected growth in aviation traffic put it at odds with the global push to tackle emissions.

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

REPORT ALSO LOOKS AT AIRCRAFT EMISSIONS

Stepping up to Change, a report by Greg Russell, CEO, Airservices Australia, which includes items on Asia-Pacific economic growth, the environment and emissions, has been released by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (7/5/08).

REPORT <http://www.apsc.gov.au/media/russell150408.pdf>

PUBLIC HEARING INTO COASTAL SHIPPING

The House of Representatives Infrastructure and Transport Committee is currently conducting a series of public hearings as part of a review of coastal shipping policy and regulation. Hearings this week were at Perth and Adelaide.

DETAILS: Committee secretariat on 02 6277 2352; itrdlg.reps@aph.gov.au

\$3.45M TO BOOST LOCAL CAPACITY TO ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

A total of \$3.45 million to help local government and professionals, such as engineers and architects, better manage the effects of climate change, was announced on Wednesday at Queensland Media Club by the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong (6/5/08).

“As well as reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change, the Rudd Government recognises the need for us to adapt to the climate change we can’t avoid,” she said.

“The government is providing \$1.55m to assist councils to learn more about the local impact of climate and plan ahead. Another \$1.9m has gone to tertiary institutions and professional associations to integrate climate change into their education and training courses through the Climate Change Adaptation Skills for Professionals small grants program.” Senator Wong said infrastructure including roads, bridges and buildings were highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including increased frequency and intensity of storms and drought.

“This funding will help fill gaps in current education and training programs in fields including engineering, architecture, urban planning, and water resource management.” Fourteen organisations received grants of up to \$150,000 under the program.

DETAILS: <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/impacts/index.html>; Ilsa Colson on 0418 368 639.

TROPICAL INSECTS LIKELY TO BE FIRST TO GO

US scientists said tropical insects are likely to be among the very first species to disappear because of climate change. Butterfly species and other insects in the tropics already live at the edge of their temperature range and if the climate gets just a couple of degrees warmer on average it will kill many of them off, the scientists reported in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. [The Independent \(London\)](#) (6/5/08).

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

TREATY CLOSES GAP IN PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

There are seven landmark UN human rights treaties that protect the rights of women, children, migrant workers and others, but until the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force on May 3 2008, there has been no specific global treaty addressing the needs of people with disabilities, the world's largest minority, a new UN background paper sets out.

While many contended that existing treaties covered persons with disabilities along with everybody else, it was clear that without a legally binding treaty that spelled out their rights, persons with disabilities faced being legally "invisible" in their societies and even in the international arena. The result has been that people with disabilities continue to face major hurdles and discriminatory practices in their daily lives.

About 650 million people in the world – or about 10 per cent of the total world population – experience various forms of disabilities, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Eighty per cent – more than 400 million people – live in poor countries, the least equipped to address their needs. All over the world, people with disabilities continue to face barriers in their participation in society and lower standards of living. DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/disabilities>; UN Department of Public Information; mediainfo@un.org.

In a message from Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, entitled *Connecting Persons with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All*, said it was vital that, "must find creative solutions, including the development of new assistive technologies, and facilitate a broader access to ICT. I urge policy-makers and industry leaders to accelerate scientific and technical research aimed at developing technologies that will be inclusive and accessible to all."

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES EMPOWERED

For countries ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention, a body of experts will be able to consider complaints from individuals or groups on inadequate implementation of the treaty, once all national recourse procedures have been exhausted.

The convention gives persons with disabilities a powerful tool. "The mere existence of the convention gives persons with disabilities and their organisations the ability to say to their governments, 'You have accepted these obligations', and insist that they be met;" said Don MacKay, committee treaty draft chairman. But to realise the rights enshrined in the convention, a fundamental change of attitude was necessary
DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/disabilities>; UN Public Information Department: mediainfo@un.org.

CONVENTION WELCOMED BY AUSTRALIA

The Federal Government welcomed the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was part of its commitment to ensure people with disabilities are not subject to treatment like they are second class citizens, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services Bill Shorten said. DETAILS: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/billshorten.nsf/content/convention_disab_03may08.htm

The Federal Government is to commit one billion dollars to fund disability services and increase support for carers, which includes an extra \$100 million in capital funding to build more supported

accommodation for people with a disability. DETAILS:

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/billion_support_disab_04may08.htm

DISABILITY CONVENTION COMES INTO FORCE

Australia's Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes welcomed the coming into force of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (5/5/08). The convention was ratified by 20 UN members on April 3 2008, and came into force 30 days after that date.

"This is an important day for the 650 million people with disabilities throughout the world," Commissioner Innes said. "Around two-thirds of UN member states do not have any legal protection for people with disabilities, so this convention provides an international framework for such protection."

The convention sets out existing human rights as they apply specifically to people with disabilities. These include rights to non-discrimination in all areas of life, such as employment, education, health services, transportation and access to justice.

"Australia has signed the Convention, but not yet ratified it," Commissioner Innes said. "I encourage prompt ratification by the Australian Government, so that we can participate in the election of the treaty body, to take place in the next few months."

TEXT/related papers: www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/convention.htm

DETAILS: Brinsley Marlay on 02 9284 9656/ 0430 366 529.

FECCA PRAISES DISABILITIES CONVENTION

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) have welcomed the commitment of the Rudd Government to support the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (7/5/08).

FECCA Chairperson Voula Messimeri said that ratification of the convention by Australia was a vital step in the drive towards social inclusion of all Australians.

"Approximately one in four Australians with a disability are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, representing around one million people," she said. "Ratification of the convention is particularly important for this group of Australians who often experience significant barriers to employment, education and services."

NEDA Executive Officer Dr Dinesh Wadiwel said, "Once ratified, the convention provides a golden opportunity to take a look at policy reform in areas such as migration, which currently disadvantage migrants and humanitarian entrants with disability."

"Ratifying the Optional Protocol will create additional protections, and send a signal that Australia takes seriously the rights of people with disability. It is vital that international human rights conventions underpin Australia's human rights legislation so that everyone, no matter what their background, is given a fair go," Ms Messimeri said.

NEDA submission: http://www.neda.org.au/files/neda_submission_nis_2.doc

FECCA submission: http://www.fecca.org.au/Submissions/2008/submissions_2008009.pdf

DETAILS: Voula Messimeri, FECCA Chairperson on 0414 532 529;

Dr Dinesh Wadiwel, NEDA EO on: 0407 878 933.

MINISTER'S 'DISCRETION REJECTS 97.6% OF ASYLUM SEEKERS'

An analysis of the exercise of ministerial discretion has shown that the new Minister for Immigration, Senator Chris Evans, has rejected 97.6 per cent of applications since he took over - the highest rate of rejection since 2001, says [Asylum Seekers' Resource Centre](#). The handling of applications for ministerial discretion had been speeded up, with 41 rejections issued in five weeks and other applicants told their cases have been "escalated", regarded as probably not good news. Most of those rejected fear for their safety if returned to their countries of origin.

Many have mental health problems and spouses and children in Australia from whom they would be separated if deported. The analysis was written by [ASRC](#) CEO Kon Karapanagiotidis. ANALYSIS: [Asylum Seekers' Resource Centre](#) (<http://www.asrc.org.au/>); and: [here](#). DETAILS: Pamela Curr, Campaign Coordinator, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre on 03 93266066; F 03 93265199 and www.asrc.org.au

D. PEACE & SECURITY

MIDDLE EAST

POLITICAL DIALOGUE AMONG LEBANESE PARTIES 'THE ONLY WAY'

The stalled political process in Lebanon, combined with the current violence on the streets and the "defiant manoeuvres of militias," is leaving the country struggling to function as a sovereign, democratic state, UN Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen told the Security Council (8/5/08).

"The riots that started yesterday in Lebanon show tragically that the country today confronts challenges of a magnitude unseen since the end of the civil war," [said](#) Mr Roed-Larsen. "The electoral void combined with the stalled functions of parliament and the defiant manoeuvres of militias are all threats to Lebanon's ability to function as a sovereign, democratic and independent State," he said. He was speaking as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559.

Adopted by the council in 2004, resolution [1559](#) calls for free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon without any foreign interference or influence, and for the disbandment of all militia groups. The UN Secretary-General "calls for all parties now to show restraint, to find a solution to the current impasse and the current violence, through peaceful dialogue," and that the Security Council had unanimously called for "calm and restraint."

Since last November the country has been deadlocked over the election of a new president, with the position remaining vacant. For the past two days pro- and anti-government militias had been battling on the streets of Beirut. Mr Roed-Larsen urged that political dialogue among the Lebanese parties was the only way to resolve all outstanding issues.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26603&Cr=lebanon&Cr1=>

AID WORKERS FACE DIFFICULTIES IN BAGHDAD

It is increasingly hard for Iraqi aid workers to help tens of thousands of people caught up in fighting in Baghdad, according to UNICEF. The BBC reported (6/5/08) that the Sadr City had seen the worst clashes between government forces and Shia militia.

Over 150,000 people were having difficulty accessing clean water, food and other essential services. The Iraqi Government said almost 1,000 people died in recent fighting. Most were civilians, and aid agencies said around 60 per cent were women and children. For seven weeks now Iraqi forces, backed up by US troops, have been trying to disarm Shia militiamen, but had faced stiff resistance.

HEZBOLLAH 'TRAINING IRAQI FIGHTERS'

Hezbollah militants have been training Iraqi militia fighters at a camp near Tehran, according to US interrogation reports that the US has supplied to the Iraqi Government. A US official said the account of Hezbollah's role was provided by four Shiite militia members who were captured in Iraq late last year, according to the Sydney Morning Herald (6/5/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/05/1209839549718.html>

MIDEAST QUARTET PUSHES FOR PEACE BY END OF YEAR

The Mideast Quartet has pressed for a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians to be hammered out by the end of the year. The Quartet consists of the UN, the US, Russia and the European Union. Headed by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, the group expressed concern

over Israel's West Bank settlements as well as Palestinian rocket attacks on Israeli towns. [CNN/ http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/02/mideast.quartet/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/05/02/mideast.quartet/index.html) (2/5/08).

ARAB NATIONS URGED TO FULFILL AID PLEDGES TO PALESTINIANS

The Mideast Quartet called on Arab nations to honor their pledges for Palestinian aid. Only one-fifth of the \$717 million in promised aid has been delivered. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Algeria have all honoured their commitments in full. [BBC](#) (2/5/08).

RUSSIA SIGNS FOR SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN

Russia said Thursday it has signed into law new economic sanctions against Iran that were agreed to in March by the United Nations Security Council. Russia's law, which Vladimir Putin signed before he stepped down as president Wednesday, imposes new travel and financial restrictions because of Iran's refusal to halt its controversial nuclear program. [Reuters](#) (5/5/08).

AUSTRALIA PACIFIC

THREAT TO ENVOY IN FIJI

A death threat against James Batley, Australian High Commissioner in Fiji, appeared to be politically motivated but would not deter the government from its criticisms of the military regime, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said, according to the Sydney Morning Herald (9/5/08).

The high commission in Suva said it had been placed on alert after two copies of an anonymous death threat were delivered by a taxi driver on Wednesday night.

Mr Smith said the threat was outrageous and was being treated "very, very seriously", but it would not affect Australia's policy; the Fijian Government and police had been co-operative. REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/08/1210131164696.html>

NORTH ASIA

PAKISTANI TALKS WITH TRIBES FALTER

Talks between Pakistani authorities and militant leaders in the troubled South Waziristan tribal area collapsed because militant leader Baitullah Mehsud objected to the government's unwillingness to withdraw its troops from the region. The new Pakistani Government is trying to reach a deal with militants. [The Washington Times](#) (6/5/08).

BHUTANESE REFUGEES ATTACKED

The UN refugee agency and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) condemned an attack on a bus transporting 15 Bhutanese refugees near the Khudunabari camp, in eastern Nepal. Two refugees and the driver of the bus were injured in the attack by nine masked men with heavy stones and sticks. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is calling for the arrest of those responsible. Some 108,000 Bhutanese refugees have lived in seven camps in eastern Nepal since the early 1990s.

AFRICA

BAN DISCUSSES UN HELP FOR ZIMBABWE RE-RUN

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon held discussions with African leaders on how the world body could help ensure that the run-off election that appears likely for volatile Zimbabwe was free and fair. He also said he is "deeply concerned" about reports of widespread violence perpetrated by supporters of President Robert Mugabe against political opponents. [Reuters](#) (6/5/08) or <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKL0555436120080505>

KENYA LOOKS TO HEAL POST-ELECTION WOUNDS

Kenyan authorities on Monday began a massive project to return the many people who were displaced by the recent post-election bloodshed to their homes. Kenya descended into chaos

after the December elections, with ethnically motivated violence claiming more than 1,000 lives and driving hundreds of thousands out of their homes. [The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/africa/06kenya.html?ref=world) (6/5/08) or <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/06/world/africa/06kenya.html?ref=world>.

DARFUR CONTINUES TO CAUSE DEEP CONCERN

Voicing her deep concern about the reported attacks on villages in North Darfur, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan has called for immediate access to the affected areas to provide assistance and medical evacuation for the injured (6/5/08).

In Oslo for the Sudan Consortium, which is evaluating progress in implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South Sudan, Ameerah Haq joined delegate after delegate in calling for an immediate end to the attacks in North Darfur, which have left three dead and at least eight injured recently.

"I am deeply perturbed by the reported bombings of a school, water installations and a market where civilians, especially women and children are present. It is essential that we have immediate humanitarian access to the affected populations in order to provide humanitarian assistance and medical evacuation," she said. DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/missions/unamid/>

The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](http://www.unicef.org)) said it is also deeply concerned at reports that a number of children have been killed during the attacks, and called on the government forces and the other parties to the ongoing conflict to take every necessary action to prevent future deaths or injuries among children.

EUROPE

GEORGIAN AND RUSSIA FACE OFF

Georgian officials said on Tuesday rising tensions with Russia over the separatist aspirations of Abkhazia province had brought the two countries "very close" to war. [Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/newsMaps/idUSL0616183020080506) (5/5/08) or <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsMaps/idUSL0616183020080506>

E. HEALTH & MEANS

FOOD

THAILAND DROPS RICE CARTEL IDEA

Thailand is dropping plans to create a South East Asian rice cartel that would have fixed the price of the skyrocketing commodity over food security concerns, the country's foreign minister said Tuesday (6/5/08).

The proposal to create an OPEC-like cartel was first floated last week by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej to give rice producers greater control over rice prices, which have tripled since December. But the idea was heavily criticised by senators in the Philippines, a major importer, as well as some Thai rice exporters.

"We are not talking about setting up a rice cartel," Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama said after a meeting with ambassadors from six rice exporting countries in Asia. "If Thailand sets up a rice cartel and fixes a price, that will make matters worse and worsen food security."

Instead, Mr. Noppadon said Thailand proposed holding a meeting on rice in the next month or two that would work with top Asian exporters including India, China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Pakistan to improve productivity. He also said exporting countries would discuss sharing of technology, market information and price information. REPORT: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080506.wthairice0506/BNSStory/International/home>

INVESTMENTS SET TO GROW IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

Skyrocketing food prices have prompted several international companies to consider investing more in African farming, the Financial Times reports. The Common Fund for Commodities, a UN branch, said it received inquiries from multinational corporations interested in developing new African agriculture projects. [Financial Times](#) (7/5/08).

ETHIOPIA FOOD GAINS RECEDE

Gains in recent years in tackling poverty and hunger in Ethiopia are eroding from rising global food prices. Government programs that helped Ethiopian rural dwellers work and purchase food from local farmers are now suffering as the government turns back to accepting foreign food aid and banning foreign entities from buying local products. [The Christian Science Monitor](#) (6/5/08).

HEALTH

HELPING EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL

The Minister for Employment Participation, Brendan O'Connor, met with disability groups this week to discuss ways to increase employment of people with a disability and/or mental illness in New South Wales. Mr O'Connor held consultations in Sydney for the Rudd Government's National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy. Mr O'Connor and Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Children's Services, Bill Shorten, earlier this month released a discussion paper on the issue, and are now calling for submissions. DETAILS:

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/oconnor/releases/disabilityemploymentstrategyconsultsinsydney.htm>

PREVENTION, CONTROL OF PNEUMONIA: A GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

An unintended consequence of the current focus on the control of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria has been a relative neglect of some other infectious diseases. A new action plan will raise the profile of childhood pneumonia as a public health priority, reports the May edition of the *WHO Bulletin*. DETAILS: [Bulletin editorial on pneumonia](#)

TRIBUTE TO MIDWIVES: UN OFFICIAL

Paying tribute to the work of midwives in saving the lives of women around the world, the head of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has called for greater investments to train these critical health workers and get them into the communities that need them (5/5/08).

"Every day, midwives are saving women's lives by making delivery safe. Their essential care before, during and after delivery ensures that no woman dies giving life," UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid said in a message marking the International Day of the Midwife, observed on May 5.

Noting an urgent need for 334,000 midwives worldwide, she said UNFPA and its partners are starting a new program to promote midwifery. When properly trained, empowered and supported, midwives offered "the most cost-effective and high-quality path to maternal and newborn health."

While Australia's overall low maternal death rate has fallen, the mortality rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is still unacceptably high. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) this week released *Maternal deaths in Australia 2003-2005*, which showed that overall there was a considerable drop in the number of maternal deaths, but the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was far higher - 21.5 deaths per 100,000 women; more than two and half times the non-Indigenous rate of 7.9. The Federal Government has allocated \$261.4 million over five years to tackle Indigenous maternal and infant health through *New Directions - An equal start in life for Indigenous Children*. DETAILS:

http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/maternal_deaths_2may08.htm

F. MEDIA MATTERS

NINE PAKISTAN JOURNALISTS KILLED

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) marked World Press Freedom Day by issuing a report highlighting that none of the nine journalists killed while working in Pakistan in the year to April had received specialist training for reporting in dangerous environments. Nor were they provided with insurance cover (2/5/08).

"Reporting on conflicts remained highly risky, and reporters as well as those working inside the media houses remained under threat from the authorities as well as from non-state actors," the PFUJ said.

The PFUJ has called for media bosses to support safety training courses and provide life insurance, safety equipment and improved working conditions for their employees. Its report said the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and Karachi were the most dangerous places for media personnel in Pakistan .

In many parts of Baluchistan and Sindh province, risks for journalists commonly arose from their reporting on insecurity, tribal assemblies and social issues, such as forced marriages. Aside from those killed, at least 75 journalists were injured in violence involving police or para-military groups, while more than 200 journalists were detained during journalists' protests against anti-media laws imposed under emergency rule in November 2007.

A reported 78 journalists in interior Sindh are still facing anti-terrorism allegations which were registered shortly after the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in December. Ten were reportedly arrested but later released on bail. At least 21 of these journalists work for the Kawaish Television Network (KTN).

The PFUJ calls on power-holders also to assess the need for constitutional amendment to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Article 19 of the Constitution, covering press freedom issues, is currently too vague, it said.

After a year in which press freedom declined sharply, the IFJ and PFUJ welcomed commitments by Pakistan's new government to withdraw anti-media laws, implement the long-delayed Seventh Wage Award and support measures to protect journalists and media workers, according to IFJ Asia -Pacific. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

TV DISPUTE CROSSES BORDERS

A dispute arising from a putative ban on Pakistani television channels broadcasting into Jammu and Kashmir in India has been resolved for now, IFJ reported (1/5/08).

"We nevertheless urge India's government to explain the circumstances under which it decreed what seemed a ban to much of the world," said IFJ Asia -Pacific Director Jacqueline Park.

The restrictions snowballed into a political controversy as cable television operators retaliated by blocking all Indian and international channels in the Kashmir Valley on April 25. Political authorities in Jammu and Kashmir distanced themselves from the restrictions.

While the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India's Union Government said local authorities have responsibility for enforcement of the cable TV regulatory regime, it said it did issue a directive to curb the broadcast of "unauthorised" channels. These instructions were reportedly sent to the Jammu and Kashmir state government and the states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The head of the association of cable TV operators in Jammu and Kashmir challenged this explanation and said the "ban" on Pakistani channels was decreed exclusively for the Kashmir Valley. Operators in the Jammu region, a distinct cultural zone within the same state, were spared the rigours of its enforcement.

India's government has said that all channels that broadcast into Indian territory needed to be registered in accordance with cable TV regulatory law. The Pakistani channels had reportedly disregarded requests to register. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

SRI LANKA: EDITOR HELD FOR TWO MONTHS WITHOUT CHARGE

Tissainayagam, the editor of www.outreach.sl, has been detained since March 7 along with N. Jasiharan, an outreach writer and the owner of E-Kwality Printers, and Jasiharan's partner, Valarmathi, after Sri Lanka's Terrorist Information Department (TID) arrested seven media personnel from March 6 to 8, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reports (7/5/08).

TID officers said the seven were taken in for questioning in relation to the outreach website, according to the Free Media Movement (FMM), an IFJ affiliate. The E-Kwality printing press and outreach website office have been sealed and closed without recourse to legal procedures, it was claimed. TID has since released reporter K. Wijesingha, visual editor Udayanan and cameraman Ranga (all associated with outreach) and the editor of the Tamil language Sarinihar magazine, S. Sivakumar.

The IFJ reports it has demanded authorities in Sri Lanka take immediate action to resolve the arbitrary two-month detention, without charge, of Jayaprakash Sittampalam Tissainayagam and two colleagues. In the case of Mr Tissainayagam, a 90-day detention order was issued on March 27, 20 days after his arrest, following his submission of a fundamental rights petition to demand his release. He has a serious eye condition and is at risk of blindness if he does not receive specialist attention. N. Valarmathi is reported also to need urgent medical attention.

The Sri Lanka Government also has been asked to explain statements by its Defence Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, suggesting that an independent media should be prevented from running reports allegedly detrimental to the security forces. The IFJ, with the Free Media Movement (FMM), said they "unequivocally condemn the Defence Secretary's statements" and the government's "naming and shaming" of journalists who report in the public interest. The Defence Secretary is the brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

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

CHINA: ANOTHER WRITER ARRESTED

Zhou Yuanzhi, a freelance writer and social commentator, was detained in Zhongxiang City, Hubei Province, in central China, on May 3 and charged with "inciting subversion of state power". According to the Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC), Mr Zhou's wife was also detained by representatives of the National Security Bureau and later released into house arrest. Mr Zhou has written for the Voice of America news service and for Chinese and international websites. His articles have been critical of China's Government on social and economic issues.

The charge brought against Mr Zhou is the same used to convict Hu Jia in a Beijing court on April 3, who was sentenced to three-and-a-half years' jail for posting articles on the US-based website *Boxun* critical of the Chinese Government's policy toward people with HIV/AIDS. His lawyer, Li Fangping, said in a written submission to a seminar organised by the Hong Kong Journalists' Association (HKJA) that the law on "inciting subversion of state power" was vague and could be used to trap people merely for exercising their constitutional right to freedom of expression

Boxun also reported this week that the deputy editor of the daily Nanfang Dushi Bao (Southern Metropolis Weekly), Chang Ping, had been removed from his position after publishing editorials critical of the government's actions toward Tibetan protesters in recent months.

Co-organisers of 'One Dream: Free Expression in China' – the Hong Kong Journalists' Association (HKJA), the IFJ, Reporters Without Borders, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and several International PEN centres – sent a protest to Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) after several press freedom activists were prevented from

joining a global event on free expression in Hong Kong (1/5/08). The letter asks the IOC to call on China's authorities not to restrict movement of individuals ahead of the August Beijing Olympics.

Earlier, Zhang Yu, Secretary General of the International PEN Centre, based in Sweden, was detained upon his arrival in Hong Kong. An activist for the Writers in Prison Committee (WIPC) and the Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC), he was questioned for several hours and deported, according to the HKJA. Zhao Dagong and Wen Kejian, both of ICPC, were also prevented on April 29 from leaving mainland China to visit the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. All were to participate in the One Dream event from April 30 to May 3.
DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

CAMBODIAN JOURNALIST ATTACKED: Accounts that Cambodian authorities had attacked and detained a newspaper journalist in Kampong Seila commune, Cambodia, on April 29, have been reported by the International Federation of Journalists (5/5/08). According to the Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPJ), Meas Asi, a reporter for *Panhavorn Khmer* (Khmer Intellectual), based in Koh Kong province, was allegedly stopped by police and beaten unconscious before being taken to Koh Kong prison. He was on his way to cover a protest by members of Chhouk village regarding land ownership issues. His wife, Sles Mass, has not been allowed to visit her husband, CAPJ said. The IFJ supports CAPJ in its appeal to the authorities to release Mr Asi or provide access to legal representation and family members, and reasons for his detention. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

G. OTHER NEWS

TIME TO GIVE FAIR TRADE A FAIR GO: ACADEMIC

With Fair Trade Fortnight underway an ANU academic is asking the Federal Government to give Fair Trade a fair go by investing part of the country's aid budget in the Fair Trade market to harness its contribution to regional capacity building and development (8/5/08).

Dr Anna Hutchens says that in a time of high prices for staple commodities such as rice, the Australian Government has an excellent opportunity to help support rural communities and agricultural economies in our region by encouraging equitable trading relationships and market access.

"Supporting Fair Trade partnerships in the Asia Pacific region – where the bulk of the world's poor live – would enable our neighbours to break free from aid-based support and instead engage more meaningfully in the global trade system," she said.

Fair Trade is a trading relationship that aims to ensure better conditions and rights for producers in developing countries. Dr Hutchens has spent four years researching the Fair Trade movement, the results of which will be published in her book *Entrepreneurship, Power and Defiance: The Globalisation of the Fair Trade Movement* later this year.

"Last year the market in Australia and New Zealand was worth \$12 million and the value of Fair Trade sales have risen by 440 per cent since 2004. In New Zealand the government has been very enthusiastic about Fair Trade, providing ongoing financial support for a leading Fair Trade business, Trade Aid, as well as a national Fair Trade education campaign for consumers. Some government departments are also procuring Fair Trade products.

"The Rudd Government is focused on building partnerships with the Pacific. Supporting Fair Trade in our region would demonstrate its commitment to this new style of engagement by ensuring our neighbours benefit directly from the developmental potential of international trade," she said. DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245; www.anu.edu.au/media.

FINANCE MINISTERS IN ASIA PACIFIC TALKS

Senator Nick Sherry, Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, has met with key finance ministers from across Asia and the Pacific in a series of bilateral meetings at the annual meetings of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Madrid, Spain.

He held discussions with Indian Finance Minister, Mr Palaniappan Chidambaram, Chinese Finance Minister Mr Xie Xuren, Singaporean Finance Minister, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Japanese Vice Minister for Finance and International Affairs, Mr Naoyuki Shinohara, ADB President, Mr Haruhiko Kuroda, and senior officials from Indonesia and New Zealand.

Senator Sherry also convened a reception of Pacific Island ministers at which he held discussions with the Prime Minister of Tonga, Feleti Sevele, Deputy Prime Minister of Cook Islands, Terepai Maoate, Treasury and Finance Minister of Papua New Guinea, Patrick Pruaitch, Finance Minister of Solomon Islands, Snyder Rini, the Finance Ministers of Samoa. DETAILS:

<http://minscl.treasurer.gov.au/displaydocs.aspx?doc=pressreleases/2008/017.htm&pageID=003&min=njs&Year=&DocType=0>

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION KEY TO FUTURE REFORM

Federal-state relations, a constitutional preamble and issues of citizenship were on the agenda at a roundtable on constitutional reform held this week by the Federal Parliament's Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee at Parliament House, Canberra.

The roundtable on constitutional reform heard from some of Australia's leading constitutional law experts on possible options for the reform of Australia's Constitution. Committee chairman Mark Dreyfus QC, MP, said the purpose that day was not to arrive at the definitive 'last word' but rather to explore each topic, identifying the key issues and whether reform was necessary and feasible. Discussion covered alteration of the constitution; four-year fixed terms and qualifications of members; federal-state relations; recognition of Indigenous peoples and a new preamble; and citizenship and human rights.

Mr Dreyfus said later, "It's clear that any future reforms of the constitution need not just the approval of the Australian people, but their participation and engagement as well. The input from the participants has provided the committee, and the wider public, with a better insight into some of the options and challenges for constitutional reform in the future. The committee will be releasing a report into the proceedings later in the year." This report provided by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. DETAILS: Committee Secretariat on 02 6277 2358 and at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/laca/reformcon.htm>.

PLANNING ANTI-POVERTY WEEK

Anti-Poverty Week, scheduled for October 12/18, this year aims to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship and to encourage people to take action to address these problems.

National Coordinator Nicola McGuire said this week, "To achieve this, we try to encourage individuals or groups to organise or participate in activities during the week. We aim to reach as broad a range of people as possible.

Professor Julian Disney is the National Chairman for Anti-Poverty Week, and many organisations well known for promoting social justice are acting as state or territory facilitators. DETAILS: Nicola McGuire, Anti-Poverty Week 2008, on 02 9385 2850.

The UN International Anti-Poverty Day is 17 October 17. The week focusses on poverty around the world, especially in the poorest countries but also in wealthier countries, such as Australia. Its main aims are to: strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and within Australia; and to encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

Nicola McGuire says official opening activities will be organised for Sunday, October 12, and October 13 and that Wednesday, October 15, could be a good day for forums with local MPs and mayors participating. Organisers are asked to provide details of plans for posting on the special website, www.antipovertyweek.org.au. The website includes fact sheets, promotional material and links to sources of information and ideas about ways of reducing poverty and hardship. DETAILS to: 1-300-797-290 or apw@antipovertyweek.org.au

EAST TIMOR LOOKS AT ITS NATIONAL PRIORITIES

East Timor's national priorities following the recent Timor Leste and Development Partners meeting in March will be discussed while Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, visits East Timor from May 7 to 11. He is calling on President Jose Ramos-Horta and is meeting with Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao and other ministers and senior officials to discuss the Australian development cooperation program.

It will also be an opportunity to meet with other major donors and partners and to examine the progress of Australian aid activities. DETAILS: Sabina Curatolo (Mr McMullan's Office) on 0400 318 205 and AusAID Public Affairs on 0417 680 590; http://www.ausaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=1085_15_6857_4474_8185.

PRACTICAL MEASURES 'NEEDED FOR SOCIAL COHESION'

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services. An understanding of social cohesion is essential for the wellbeing of all Australians, our communities and our future as a nation, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, said at a roundtable discussion in Melbourne. It confirms a consensus that practical measures are needed to build social cohesion and our nation,' he said.

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2008/lf08034.htm>

GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONGRESS FOR WOMEN IN PHILIPPINES

The Third Global Congress of Women in Politics and Governance will be held on October 19/22 at Dusit Hotel, Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines, with the theme 'Gender and Climate Change', hosted by the Centre for Asia Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP) and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN-ISDR)!

Women and environment experts have raised concern over the absence of women in the discourse and debate on climate change, a global mainstream issue that is currently impacting the entire world. Invited to this congress are women parliamentarians, women in decision-making and governance, environment organisations, youth leaders and media practitioners.

DETAILS: <http://www.capwip.org/>; CAPWIP on 632 8516934; F 632 8522112; mob +639184596603; globalcongress2008@gmail.com; <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org>

AUSTRALIANS WHO VOLUNTEER

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than 4.4 million Australians aged 18 years and over did voluntary work in 2000. These volunteers contributed a total of 704 million hours of unpaid work to the Australian economy.

To examine a range of issues relating to the challenges facing community and welfare volunteers and volunteering organisations in Australia, the House of Representatives Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee organised a roundtable forum chaired by Annette Ellis (Member for Canberra, ACT), on May 7 in Sydney.

Roundtable participants invited represented a range of stakeholders, including from the national peak body, Volunteering Australia. Emerging trends in volunteering in Australia, challenges for individual volunteers, and the operational and administrative/legislative challenges faced by volunteering organisations were selected themes.

DETAILS: Committee Chairperson Annette Ellis, on 02 6277 4372 (Parliament House)/02 6293 1344 (electorate office); Inquiry secretary on 02 6277 4566; committee website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/index.htm>

TREATIES WITH UAE AND FILM CO-PRODUCTIONS: CHINA AND SINGAPORE

The Federal Parliament's Treaties Committee will hear evidence on seven treaties tabled on March 12 2008. These treaties include two proposed agreements with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). One treaty is concerned with extradition arrangements, the other provides for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters between Australia and the UAE.

The proposed extradition treaty with the UAE will add to Australia's existing network of bilateral extradition treaties and follows the international trend towards a 'no evidence' standard. This means that the information required for extradition does not need to include evidence of the alleged offence. Mutual legal assistance treaties allow Australia to obtain information and evidence for the investigation or prosecution of a crime.

Also proposed are two treaties with China and Singapore concerning the co-production of films which will open new markets for Australian film makers, foster cultural and technological exchange and strengthen existing diplomatic ties. An important aspect of these agreements is that each country must treat co-production as local content.

The public hearing program began on May 8 2008 at Parliament House, Canberra.
DETAILS: Committee's website at: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/reports.htm
Background: James Rees (Committee secretary) on 02 6277 4642.

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

GENERALS SHOW THEY ARE UNFIT TO GOVERN

Burma's ruling generals have defended the military's iron grip on power as vital to keeping the country intact and on the road to prosperity, writes Aung Hla Tun, of Rangoon, in the Sydney Morning Herald (7/5/08). The cyclone has exposed the fragility of that myth with potentially huge long-term implications for the ruling junta, analysts say. Many survivors of Cyclone Nargis's 190kmh winds have criticised the army for a sluggish response, especially when compared with its willingness to flood Rangoon's streets with troops to crush last September's protests led by thousands of monks. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/06/1209839648158.html>

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The sequence of events that produced the current deadlock in Zimbabwe began on March 11 last year when Morgan Tsvangirai and a number of other members of the Movement for Democratic Change were arrested, tortured and beaten, R.W.Johnson writes in the London Review of Books (8/5/08). Robert Mugabe had banned all MDC meetings and rallies in the hope of suppressing the MDC completely before this year's elections. The local churches entered the fray and organised a prayer meeting in Highfield, a suburb of Harare. Tsvangirai drove to the meeting ... Informed a little later that a large number of civic leaders and MDC activists had been arrested and were being held at Machipisa police station in Highfield, he drove there straightaway. As soon as he arrived, he was pulled from his car and his head repeatedly slammed against the wall by police ... He passed out three times and was revived with buckets of cold water so that the beatings could continue. ARTICLE: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n09/john01_.html

A FRIENDSHIP FORGED IN TRAGEDY

Like me, Gill Hicks was a young professional woman in her 30s. Like me she lost her legs after surviving a major catastrophe. In Gill's case, it was the 2005 London bombings. Mine was the Garuda plane crash in Indonesia, 20 months later, Cynthia Banham wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald (3/4/08). "I met Gill for the first time a week ago, in a cafe in Yarralumla, under a great spreading plane tree in Canberra's crisp golden autumn sunshine. Before the meeting, I was

nervous. Would we get on? Would she like me? Would we be able to talk easily about the horrible experiences we had in common but which I found so difficult to discuss with anybody else?"
ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/02/1209235155731.html>

AS GAS COSTS SOAR, BUYERS ARE FLOCKING TO SMALL CARS

In what analysts call a first, about one in five vehicles sold in the US in April was a compact or subcompact car, while sales of pickups and SUV's fell sharply.

ARTICLE: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/02/business/02auto.html?th&emc=th>

WASTE THE FLIPSIDE OF CORRUPTION

International donor organisations should stop accusing the developing world of corruption and look instead at the way they waste their massive funds, Valerie Browning says in the Sydney Morning Herald (3/5/08). "These international NGOs are massive corporations with massive money at the top and where's it going? I want to know! Ethiopia over the past 30 years has received huge money but the development doesn't balance that huge money by any means," she says. Ms. Browning says the most effective thing international donors could do would be to empower local communities and leave them alone to get on with it.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/02/1209235156065.html>

I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

LACK OF INVESTMENT AND BIO-FUEL PRODUCTION ADDS TO FOOD CRISIS

A lack of investment in agriculture over a long period, as well as the use of precious natural resources for bio-fuel production, have contributed to the current global food crisis, according to two United Nations experts (6/5/08).

Kathleen Abdalla, of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs ([DESA](#)), told a news conference in New York that while populations have grown and diets have changed, "We've had a lack of investment in agriculture for quite a long time now and a lack of aid for agriculture. Certainly it's not been a high priority for development assistance and basically the productivity growth hasn't kept pace with the increase in demand."

Ms. Abdalla, officer-in-charge of the Division for Sustainable Development, was speaking at a session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development ([CSD](#)) which is tackling topics that are key to boosting the world's food supply while addressing problems pertaining to poverty, hunger and the environment. These include agriculture, land use, rural development, desertification and drought.

Aslam Chaudhry, who is chief of the water and natural resources branch of DESA, said that crops used for bio-fuel production had also contributed to the current worldwide rise in food prices, since "they depend quite heavily on land and water resources – so we are using our precious natural resources for the production of these crops."

"At the same time, poor people in developing countries do not have food and had those natural resources been managed for the production of cereal crops, we might not have seen this crisis," he added.

Ms Abdalla said that the aim of the CSD was to look at the linkages between rural development, desertification and drought and to tackle the global food crisis in a "very holistic way."

The CSD's [session](#) is taking place in New York and is scheduled to last two weeks.

CLERICS USE KORAN TO SPREAD ENVIRONMENT WORD

Muslim clerics in Indonesia are using dictates from the Koran that call on Muslims to protect the earth to spread the word about environmentalism. [International Herald Tribune](#) (6/5/08).

CHINESE MARCH AGAINST PETROCHEMICAL PLANT

Sichuan province residents took to the streets in protest plans to build a petrochemical plant they believe will damage the local environment which signals a growing environmental awareness among the Chinese population. [The New York Times](#) (6/5/08).

MURRAY 'NO SIGN OF IMPROVEMENT' IN WATER AVAILABLE

There are no signs of improvement in water availability in the Murray system over the next few Months, according to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's latest Drought Update (9/5/08).

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik said rainfall during March and April had been below average and system inflows were very low.

"This is disappointing as historical records show that after a dry autumn, inflows into the upper Murray are not likely to be high," she said. "While storages are slightly higher than this time last year, they are still well below long term averages and the prospects for irrigation over the coming year will have to depend entirely on rainfall over winter and spring." She said lower water availability would impact on all users and the environment. Critical urban, stock and domestic water needs for 2008-09 were reasonably assured.

"Opening allocations for Murray irrigators are again expected to be very low or zero, though carry-over water is reasonably assured," Dr Craik said. "The condition of the Coorong and Lower Lakes in South Australia is grave and deteriorating. There has been no flow through the barrages since 2006 and last week we started pumping water into Lake Albert to prevent any further exposure of sulfidic sediments."

UPDATE REPORT: www.mdbc.gov.au. DETAILS: Sam Leone on 0407 006 332.

SAVING CRITICAL PLANT AND ANIMAL HABITATS

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) announced on Thursday it would partially refill the Ramsar listed Banrock Station Wetland in South Australia's Riverland to prevent potentially irreversible damage from increasing salinity and to save critical plant and animal habitats.

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik said 617 megalitres (ML) of Living Murray environmental water would be made available. Banrock Station would contribute an additional 215ML to the site. The watering will start in late May. She said the water being used was an environmental entitlement, set aside to protect rivers and wetlands, and would not affect anyone else's water allocations.

DETAILS: Sam Leone on 02 6279 0141/ 0407 006 332; sam.leone@mdbc.gov.au and www.mdbc.gov.au