

# 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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**550**

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## **A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES** (UNity, UN AND UNAA Contacts)

### **UNAA URGES GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON BURMA**

The United Nations Association of Australia is urging the Australian Government to encourage member states of the Security Council to adopt a responsibility to protect approach to the crisis in Burma.

The UNAA National President, Professor John Langmore, said this week that the resolution on responsibility to protect adopted by the UN Global Summit in September 2005 authorises the international community to take whatever action is appropriate to prevent crimes against humanity.

“Preventing transport and distribution of food and water to the people who will die without it in the regions of Burma stricken by the cyclone is surely clearly a crime against humanity,” said Professor Langmore. “Swift action is essential. Allowing a dribble of relief to trickle through guarantees further death and disease,” he said. “Stronger international assertiveness as well as maximum generosity is required.” DETAILS: Prof. Langmore on 03 9329 2216/ 0419 897 489.

### **BURMA/MYANMAR AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT**

Gareth Evans writes that if the intransigence of the Burmese generals continues, it is a very real issue whether in the name of humanity some international action should be taken against their will – like military air drops, or supplies being landed from ships offshore - to get aid to the huge numbers who desperately need it right now, in the inaccessible coastal area in particular (11/12/5/08).

Gareth Evans is President, International Crisis Group, Co-Chairman, International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and a member of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide.

Mr Evans said French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner opened up a hornet’s nest when he argued last Thursday, as others are now doing, that this is a proper case for coercive intervention under the “responsibility to protect” principle unanimously endorsed by 150 heads of state and government at the 2005 UN World Summit. His proposal that the Security Council pass a resolution which “authorises the delivery and imposes this on the Burmese government” met with immediate rejection not only from China and Russia, which are always sensitive about external intervention into internal affairs, but from many other quarters as well.

It generated concern from the UK and others, including senior UN officials, that such an “incendiary” approach would be wholly counterproductive in winning any still-possible cooperation from the generals. It also provoked the argument from humanitarian relief agencies - who know what they are talking about - that simply as a practical matter any effort to drop supplies without an effective supporting relief on the ground would be hopelessly inefficient, and maybe even dangerous with the prospect of misuse of medical supplies.

These are strong arguments, and they weigh heavily in the policy balance. But as the days go by, with relief efforts impossibly hindered, only a trickle of the government’s own aid getting through, and the prospect of an enormously greater death toll looming acutely within just a few more days, they are sounding less compelling, and at least need revisiting.

My own initial concern, and it remains a serious one, with Bernard Kouchner’s invocation of the “responsibility to protect” was that, while wholly understandable as a political rallying cry - and God knows the world needs them in these situations - it had the potential to dramatically undercut international support for another great cause, to which he among others is also passionately committed, that of ending mass atrocity crimes once and for all.

The point about “the responsibility to protect” as it was originally conceived, and eventually embraced at the World Summit - as I well know, as one of the original architects of the doctrine, having co-chaired the international commission that gave it birth - is that it is not about human security generally, or protecting people from the impact of natural disasters, or the ravages of HIV-AIDS or anything of that kind.

Rather, ‘R2P’ is about protecting vulnerable populations from “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” in ways that we have all too miserably often failed to do in the past. That is the language of the 2005 UN General Assembly resolution, and Security Council resolutions that have followed it, and it is only in that context that the question should even arise of coercively intervening in a country against the express will of its government. And even then, the responsibility to protect norm allows the use of military force only with Security Council endorsement, and only as a last resort, after prevention has failed, when it is clear that no less extreme form of reaction could possibly halt or avert the harm in question, that the response is proportional to that harm, and that on balance more good than damage will be done by the intervention.

If it comes to be thought that ‘R2P’, and in particular the sharp military end of the doctrine, is capable of being invoked in anything other than a context of mass atrocity crimes, then such consensus as there is in favour of the new norm will simply evaporate in the global South. And that means that when the next case of genocide or ethnic cleansing comes along we will be back to the same old depressing arguments about the primacy of sovereignty that led us into the horrors of inaction in Rwanda and Srebrenica in the 1990s.

But here’s the rub. If what the generals are now doing, in effectively denying relief to hundreds of thousands of people at real and immediate risk of death, can itself be characterised as a crime against humanity, then the responsibility to protect principle does indeed cut in. The Canadian-sponsored commission report that initiated the R2P concept in fact anticipated just this situation, in identifying one possible case for the application of military force as “overwhelming natural or environmental catastrophes, where the state concerned is either unwilling or unable to cope, or call for assistance, and significant loss of life is occurring or threatened”.

The UN resolution does not pick up this specific language, but it does refer to “crimes against humanity”, and the definition of such crimes (in the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, as well as in customary international law) embraces, along with widespread or systematic murder, torture, persecution and the like, “Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing greater suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health”.

There is, as always, lots for the lawyers to argue about in all of this, not least on the question of intent. And there will be lots for the Security Council to quarrel about as to whether air drops and the like are justified, legally, morally and practically. But when a government default is as grave as the course on which the Burmese generals now seem to be set, there is at least a prima facie case to answer for their intransigence being a crime against humanity -- of a kind which would attract the responsibility to protect principle. And that bears thinking about, fast, both by the Security Council, and the generals. – **Gareth Evans.**

### **IS R2P AN OPTION?**

In a letter to Gareth Evans earlier this week UNAA National President John Langmore asked whether the resolution, R2P, could legitimately be applied to Burma if countries took that proposal to the Security Council. He said this was in view of the fact that the Global Summit had agreed unanimously that when a government failed to take whatever action was required to protect its people from “crimes against humanity” that the international community had a responsibility to intervene.

“Blocking delivery and distribution of water and food essential to the survival of who knows how many tens of thousands of Burmese seems to arguably fall into the category of a crime against

humanity," Professor Langmore wrote. "I wonder if the ICG could say something about this quickly?"

### **UN 'TO CALL EMERGENCY MEETING ON BURMA'**

Burma's military regime has dug in its heels two weeks after a deadly cyclone, saying it would not bow to pressure to let in foreign aid workers as the UN called an emergency summit, the ABC reported (16/5/08).

It reported that the generals had again rebuffed calls to accept (most) foreign relief workers needed to quickly deliver food, water, shelter and medicine. As anger boiled over in the international community over the delays, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced the UN would convene a summit somewhere in Asia to address the crisis.

"We will stop at nothing in trying to pressure the regime into doing what any regime should have done long ago," Mr Brown said in London. Mark Malloch-Brown, a British diplomat and former top UN official, said: "I cannot recall a relief operation where, at least the international response has been subjected to such delays."

### **BAN LIKELY TO SEND TOP AID OFFICIAL TO MYANMAR**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is considering sending the UN's highest ranking aid official to Myanmar to boost efforts to tackle the crisis caused by Cyclone Nargis (15/5/08).

Mr Ban said there was "a sense of great urgency," and that much more needed to be done in Myanmar. In New York he said, [speaking to reporters](#) he was considering sending Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs [John Holmes](#) to Myanmar in the coming days.

Following meeting with members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Mr Ban said they discussed appointing a joint UN/ASEAN humanitarian coordinator, as well as establishing a regional hub for aid supplies outside Myanmar and holding a high-level pledging conference.

He had assured ASEAN members that aid for Myanmar would not be politicised and that he would lead the effort in "a purely, genuinely humanitarian" way. He was encouraged that the government of Myanmar had shown flexibility.

Up to 2.5 million people are estimated to have been severely affected by the cyclone. The UN says the death toll could rise as high as 100,000 or even higher. More than half a million people are reported to have gathered in improvised camps scattered across the delta region and there is growing concern about outbreaks of disease.

UN agencies, including the World Food Program ([WFP](#)), the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)), the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) have mounted a major effort to ferry in relief supplies, including tarpaulins and plastic sheeting, water purification tablets and water treatment equipment, 700 tons of rice, high energy biscuits and beans, as well as emergency health kits reaching at least 100,000 people.

Mobile clinics and open hospitals are treating people for diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections and injuries. UNICEF and the Myanmar Health Minister are also carrying out measles and tetanus vaccinations, and giving Vitamin A supplements to young children.

### **UN RAISES BURMA CYCLONE ESTIMATE**

The UN has sharply increased its estimate of those severely affected by Burma's cyclone to 2.5m people, the BBC reported (14/5/08). The figure was revised up from the 1.5m previously thought to be in need, following the storm 12 days ago. Latest Burmese official figures put the death toll at almost 38,500 with 27,838 more missing. The Red Cross warned the actual figure could be as high as 128,000 dead.

### **STENCH OF DEATH 'NOT FAR OUT OF RANGOON'**

You do not have to travel too far out of Rangoon to smell the stench of death, a BBC reporter in Burma wrote on Friday (16/5/08).

"Rotting animals lie bloated in the paddy fields, but there are human corpses here too, lying under the wreckage of trees and buildings flattened by last Saturday's storm.

"In those areas closest to the capital there are also signs that a little aid is getting through: a few Burmese army vehicles could be seen distributing food on Friday. Locals said the military had arrived a day earlier to help clear the bodies away.

"We saw a lone helicopter in the sky overhead, but the aid is meagre, sporadic and completely inadequate for the scale of this disaster. Thousands of people in this area have received nothing. One man told how he had escaped to higher ground with his family as the waters started to rise. He had survived, but lost all his belongings ... no food other than the rice he could carry that night, scooped up into the bowl of his hat.

REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7393371.stm>

In a separate account, the BBC reported that the UN intended to send a top official to Burma to persuade the military rulers to accept foreign assistance. The official death toll stands at almost 38,500. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7402018.stm>.

## CHINA

### **CHINA ESTIMATES 50, 000 DEAD**

More than 50,000 people may have died in the earthquake that devastated parts of China on Monday, according to state media, the BBC reported (16/5/08)

The warning came after the government confirmed the death toll had risen to 19,500, as rescue efforts continue to search for thousands still trapped. About 10 million people across Sichuan province have been directly affected by the 7.9 quake, the Chinese media said. The country is sending 30,000 extra troops to Sichuan to help the 50,000 already involved in rescue efforts.

Beijing said it will accept foreign aid and has agreed to help from rescue teams from Japan and its rival Taiwan. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7402460.stm>

### **UN READY TO SEND EMERGENCY TEAMS AFTER CHINA'S EARTHQUAKE**

The UN stood ready to assist the Chinese Government help the victims of the earthquake in the southwest of the country (13/5/08)

A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination ([UNDAC](#)) Team alert was sent to alert China that the UN was ready to help if needed, Elizabeth Byrs of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said in Geneva. OCHA has also sent information to Chinese authorities detailing how UN emergency expert teams were on standby to provide assistance.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) [expressed](#) its deep concern over the large number of children affected by the massive quake. According to UNICEF, Sichuan is one of China's poorest and most populous provinces, with a total population of some 90 million.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26652&Cr=china&Cr1=earthquake>

Nearly 15,000 people died in the earthquake that hit China's Sichuan province, the official Xinhua news agency reported. More than 25,000 are still trapped in the rubble two days after the 7.9 quake struck, flattening homes, schools and entire villages and cutting roads, the BBC reported (14/5/08). Soldiers have begun to reach the isolated epicentre by helicopter and on foot, bringing much needed supplies.

The death toll from China's earthquake has climbed to nearly 15,000 overnight, the ABC reported (15/5/08). Troops, firefighters and civilians raced to save more than 25,000 people buried across south-west Sichuan province under collapsed schools, factories and hospitals after Monday's 7.9 magnitude quake. In Mianzhu, where thousands have been confirmed dead, about 500 people were pulled out alive from crushed buildings.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/15/2245071.htm>

### **AUSTRALIA ASKS CHINA IF IT CAN HELP**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said after news of the earthquake, he had cabled the Chinese prime minister saying Australia was happy to provide Emergency Management Australia, an emergency response team to go in and quickly identify people in rubble and in buildings.

"This is an appalling loss of life in Sichuan Province," he said. The province had a population of about 90 or 100 million people.

### **FULL HORROR OF CHINESE DEVASTATION**

The full horror of the devastating earthquake in China began to emerge yesterday as rescuers discovered whole towns all but wiped off the map, pushing the death toll beyond 20,000 (15/5/08).

Military and police teams pushed into the heart of the disaster zone, with 100 troops parachuting into areas previously cut off, while planes and helicopters dropped emergency supplies. "The losses have been severe," said Wang Yi, who heads an armed police unit sent into the epicentre. "Some towns basically have no houses left. They have all been razed."

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/14/1210444529953.html>

## **GENERAL**

### **ALTERNATIVE TO INVASION - A COURT FOR OUR TIMES**

Australia almost never runs late in paying its dues to international institutions - it is not another United States, which regularly fails to pay its United Nations fees on time, writes Cynthia Banham (12/5/08). However, in the final 12 months of the Howard government, it did forget to pay its annual contribution to the International Criminal Court. It wasn't deliberate - merely an administrative oversight - but it does say a lot about the ambivalence with which the previous government viewed the world's first permanent war crimes tribunal.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade handles Australia's day-to-day involvement with the court, the Attorney-General's Department handles the budget. The former foreign affairs minister Alexander Downer was a big supporter of the court, and fought hard against a divided Coalition for Australia to ratify it in 2002. However, Philip Ruddock, the former attorney-general, was not as keen, and it showed.

The Rudd Government is demonstrating greater interest in the court - and so it should. If the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, wants Australia to become an activist middle power, which embraces multilateralism and backs international institutions, it could do no better than throw its support behind a body established to end impunity for politically motivated crimes.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/11/1210444235328.html>

### **DECOLONISATION NOT YET COMPLETE: BAN**

Although decolonisation has been one of the UN's great success stories, the fact that 16 non-self-governing territories remain meant that the task has yet to be completed, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said (14/5/08).

"It falls to the United Nations, and to all of us as members of the international community, to help bring this process to a successful conclusion," he said in a [message](#) to the opening of the Pacific Regional Seminar on Decolonisation and the observance of the week of solidarity with the peoples of the non-self-governing territories.

When the UN was created in 1945, there were 72 such territories on its decolonisation list. "Colonialism has no place in today's world," Mr Ban said in his address, delivered by Freda Mackay, chief of the Decolonisation Unit of the Department of Political Affairs ([DPA](#)).

The three-day [gathering](#), known as the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples or as the Special Committee of 24 on Decolonisation, was held in Bandung, Indonesia. This year it focussed on the Pacific region and how to move the decolonisation process forward.

Last year, after a UN-supervised referendum fell 16 votes short of attaining self-government, it was decided that Tokelau – three small and isolated atolls in the Pacific Ocean – would remain a territory of New Zealand.

### **AUSTRALIAN EXPECTED TO HEAD UN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AGENCY**

The UN agency with the task of protecting ownership of intellectual property [announced](#) that an Australian national with extensive experience in the field has been nominated to become its next Director General (13/5/08). Francis Gurry will now have to be appointed by the General Assembly of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) at its next meeting, scheduled for September 22 in Geneva, before he can formally take up the post on October 1. He is currently deputy director general.

### **FROM CANBERRA TO THE UN, VIA THE WHOLE OF AUSTRALIA**

Over the next four months an ANU student aims to meet more than 4,000 young people in around 400 towns throughout Australia before taking their concerns to the UN General Assembly in New York (12/5/08).

ANU College of Law student Melanie Poole, 23, is one of two Australians selected as this year's Youth Representatives to the UN, and will address the General Assembly. Since leaving school she has worked as a volunteer in Kenya caring for HIV / AIDS affected children and at a refugee camp on the border of Kenya and Sudan. She also undertook a project in Pakistan consulting with hundreds of young women.

Each year the representatives have to find around \$30,000 to tour and pay their way to New York. She hopes to attract sponsors quickly so she can concentrate on the consultations.

DETAILS: <http://www.youthrep.org.au/2008/> ; Melanie Poole on 0412 517 627; or Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575/0416 249 245.

To access major United Nations websites, go to:

[United Nations](#).

[Secretary-General](#).

[UN News Centre](#).

[Key UN Bodies, Agencies, Funds and Programs](#).

[United Nations Information Centre for Australia](#),

[New Zealand and the Pacific](#), 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](#) in over 100 UN member states. Website available at <http://www.wfuna.org/who/> ; newsletter at <http://www.wfuna.org/news/newsletter/index.cfm>.

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

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Daily Press briefings by spokesperson for UN Secretary General:  
<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2008/db080507.doc.htm>

## **B. CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **NEW STUDY ADDS TO CLIMATE CHANGE WARNING**

A wide-scale study has strengthened warnings, spelt out last year by UN scientists that climate change is already on the march, the Sydney Morning Herald reports (14/5/08). The study goes beyond the scope taken by a landmark report issued by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in February 2007.

In that document, the IPCC said man-made global warming was "likely" - within a probability of 66-90 per cent - to have had a "discernible" effect on many physical and biological systems. The new study, published in the British journal *Nature*, is written by many of the people who wrote the so-called Working Group I report, the first of a trio of major assessments by the IPCC last year.

"Humans are influencing climate through increasing greenhouse gas emissions," said lead author Cynthia Rosenzweig, of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and the Columbia Centre for Climate Systems Research. "The warming world is causing impacts on physical and biological systems attributable at the global scale." REPORT:

<http://news.smh.com.au/world/new-study-adds-to-climate-change-warning-20080515-2eej.html>

### **AUSTRALIA COULD 'HELP REDUCE GLOBAL GHG EMISSIONS'**

Victoria University's Professor Peter Sheehan says Australia must work with rapidly developing nations, such as China, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (12/5/08).

Professor Sheehan said: "Australia is in a unique position to help those countries experiencing rapid industrial growth to improve energy efficiency by moving to more knowledge based economies that provide greater incentives to reduce emissions."

"Australia has access to most of the world's leading technologies and we do not pose a significant economic threat to China as we are not a global important competitor in key industries. That means we can gain rather than lose by sharing our best expertise and knowledge, which may not be the case for large American, European or Japanese corporations.

"The Chinese Government wants to change course, and the central government is well aware of the environmental issues and of damaging effects widespread pollution is having. Already they are taking quite a lot of positive action but the country is so vast and the population so great that the challenges are difficult to underestimate," he said.

Victoria University has been working closely with colleagues in China to see what measures can be put in place to accelerate the transition from an energy intensive, industrial economy to one that makes better use of energy efficient technology and knowledge-based skills.

DETAILS: Andy Gash, Marketing & Communications Department, Victoria University on 03 9919 4950/ 0411 255 900.

### **KYOTO START 'WITH NO END YET IN VIEW'**

Kyoto Protocol represents the starting line for a critical assessment of climate change from which the finishing line cannot be seen, Dr Roger Jones told a Kyoto Policy in Practice conference in Sydney (7/5/08).

"The good news is that we can make a start on cutting greenhouse emissions now, and the more we cut emissions in the future, the more we will value these first important steps," he said. "The best way to ensure that costs and benefits balance each other is to ensure that cuts to greenhouse gas emissions are also economical, equitable and environmentally beneficial. Dr Roger Jones is a climate risk analyst with CSIRO's Energy Transformed Flagship.

According to research conducted jointly by CSIRO and Victoria University, Melbourne, the major benefits of the Kyoto Protocol would not be the reductions in climate change themselves but the lessons we need to learn in order to mitigate the increasing risks.

The research is to be published in the journal; *Global Environmental Change* – provides five key conclusions, saying the current policy mix cannot adequately manage these risks, which could be reduced but not eliminated by early global action over the period 2010–2015.

DETAILS: <http://www.csiro.au/news/KyotoProtocolConference-CETF.html>

### **CAMPAIGN TO PLANT 7 BILLION TREES AROUND GLOBE**

A grassroots campaign to plant trees around the globe has announced that it is raising its target from one billion trees to seven billion trees, the United Nations [announced](#) (13/5/08).

The campaign, which is under the patronage of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Kenyan Green Belt Movement founder Professor Wangari Maathai and Prince Albert II of Monaco, also announced that in 18 months it has seen two billion trees planted, double its original target.

The campaign was launched by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) in 2006 as a response to the threat of global warming.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said, "Having exceeded every target that has been set for the campaign, we are now calling on individuals, communities, business and industry, civil society organisations and governments to evolve this initiative on to a new and even higher level by the crucial climate change conference in Copenhagen in late 2009."

Tree planting remains one of the most cost-effective ways to address climate change. Trees and forests play a vital role in regulating the climate since they absorb carbon dioxide. Deforestation, in turn, accounts for over 20 per cent of the carbon dioxide humans generate, rivalling the emissions from other sources.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26650&Cr=climate&Cr1=change>

### **POLAR BEAR TO BE PROTECTED SPECIES**

The Interior Department declared the polar bear a threatened species, saying it must be protected because of the decline in Arctic sea ice from global warming.

REPORT: <http://www.nytimes.com/?emc=na>

### **GetUp LAUNCHES CLIMATE ACTION FUND**

GetUp says it has launched its Climate Action Fund to match the might and muscle of the well-resourced polluter lobby to demand real political action right now on climate change.

DETAILS: [www.getup.org.au/campaign/ClimateActionFund](http://www.getup.org.au/campaign/ClimateActionFund)

## AUSTRALIAN 2008 BUDGET ITEMS

### **\$2.8 BILLION FOR EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME**

Just over \$37 million has been allocated to the Australian Department of Climate Change to develop an emissions trading scheme, as part of \$2.3 billion over four years to tackle climate change, the ABC said, reporting the May 2008 Budget (13/5/08).

Climate Change Minister Penny Wong said this was in addition to the \$31.6 million previously allocated across government for work on emissions trading. There was \$1.7 billion across the four years to support scientists, researchers and industry to develop clean energy options.

ABC [Related Story: Solar power rebate to be means tested](#)

### **PLANS FOR GREAT BARRIER REEF**

Threats to the Great Barrier Reef, including the effects of climate change and declining water quality will be tackled by the Australian Government's \$200 million reef rescue plan announced in Tuesday's Budget. It will support land management grants to farmers and community groups and fund vital research. May 2008 Budget. DETAILS:

[http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/may\\_2008/\\$200m\\_to\\_rescue\\_the\\_great\\_barrier\\_reef](http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/may_2008/$200m_to_rescue_the_great_barrier_reef)

The establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Ocean Observing System by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) in Townsville was also announced. It is a collaborative project led by AIMS on behalf of a consortium, including James Cook University, Great Barrier Reef Island Research Stations, University of Melbourne and CSIRO. May 2008 Budget. DETAILS:

<http://www.minister.industry.gov.au/senatorthehonkimcarr/pages/newmonitoringsystemforthegreatbarrierreef.aspx>

### **TO LOOK AT EFFECTS ON COASTAL AREAS**

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, announced \$1.2 million would fund investigation into the effects of climate change on key coastal areas, including the Central and Hunter Coasts region of NSW. May 2008 Budget. DETAILS:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080508.pdf>

### **ASSISTING FOREST INDUSTRIES**

A total of \$20.0 million over three years will help Australia's forest industries prepare for the future, including the impact of climate change and skills shortage. Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Tony Burke said initial funding in the 2008-09 Budget would begin the new initiative Preparing Australia's Forestry Industry for the Future. May 2008 Budget. DETAILS:

[http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/may\\_2008/preparing\\_australias\\_forestry\\_industry\\_for\\_the\\_future](http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/may_2008/preparing_australias_forestry_industry_for_the_future)

## **C. HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **CLOSING THE 17-YEAR-GAP FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

The Australian Government's aim to close the gap between Indigenous and other Australians' lifespan is the overriding theme for Indigenous funding for 2008-09, the ABC said, reporting the May 2008 Budget (13/5/08).

The government said it has a 'comprehensive plan' for tackling Indigenous disadvantage, involving \$1.2 billion over five years (\$718 million is additional funding).

The Northern Territory Emergency Response is set to continue in 2008-09. More than half of Indigenous funding (\$426 million) is targeted at the Northern Territory, with \$320 million to be spent in the coming financial year. This included early childhood development services,

Indigenous boarding facilities, help with literacy and numeracy for NT Indigenous students, teacher development and school equipment.

Income management and welfare reform in the Territory is expected to cost \$75 million over the five years (\$49 million is additional), and \$168 million has been set aside for employment, including Community Employment brokers in the NT.

It was reported there was no firm commitment to continuing the NT emergency response; the budget included in the Contingency Reserve for 2009-10 and continued funding would depend on a review due by the end of 2008. SEE also Health & Means page.

ABC [Related Story: \\$718m extra for 'closing the gap' plan](#)

### **QUEENSLAND PRISONERS BILL CAUSES CONCERN**

Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, said this week that the Corrective Services Amendment Bill to be introduced into Queensland Parliament next week, which curtails the rights of prisoners to make complaints, raises significant human rights concerns. DETAILS: [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media\\_releases/2008/54\\_08.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/54_08.html)

### **NATIONAL FAMILIES WEEK 2008: A TIME TO TREAT ALL FAMILIES EQUALLY**

"National Families Week 2008 is an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the Australia of today, in which families come in a vast array of shapes and sizes from the traditional nuclear family through to many families in which there is only one parent," Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, said this week. He is Ambassador for National Families Week 2008.

"It is also an opportunity to remind ourselves that there are many children, who have same sex parents, who are consequently disadvantaged in financial and other very real ways because of current federal laws that actively discriminate against their same sex parents," Mr Innes said. "If the federal government's Same Sex Relationships (Provision of Equal Entitlements) Bill (No. 1) is passed in Parliament, it will go a long way to removing discrimination against these families."

National Families Week, which runs from May 11 to 17, highlights the critical role of families in Australian society and coincides with the UN International Day of Families on May 15.

DETAILS: [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media\\_releases/2008/52\\_08.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/52_08.html)

### **TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISA GOES**

Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes has welcomed the announcement in last night's Federal Budget of the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) system for refugees (14/5/08),

"The Temporary Protection Visa policy has created an unjust two-tiered system for refugees and has caused undue suffering and distress for many people trying to escape persecution," said Commissioner Innes. "I congratulate the government for ending this heartless policy and giving refugees and their families permanent protection at last."

Under the TPV system, which was introduced by the Howard Government in 1999, refugees who arrive in Australia without a visa are only granted a three-year TPV in the first instance. This contrasts with the permanent protection visas granted to refugees who have applied from outside Australia.

The temporary nature of the visa condemns refugees and their families to an uncertain future. This compounds the impact of trauma and suffering which has already been experienced by many TPV holders prior to their arrival in Australia.

"TPV holders have no rights to family reunion and are effectively unable to leave the country for the duration of their visa," said Commissioner Innes. "This has meant that many refugees have

been separated from their families for indefinite periods of time.”

The budget also contained the announcement that existing and former holders of a TPV who are still in Australia will have access to a non protection permanent visa, with the same benefits and entitlements of the Permanent Protection visa, and without the need for a reassessment of protection obligations.

“It is only right that these individuals and families will now be given permanent visas,” said Commissioner Innes. “I hope that they can make a new life for themselves in Australia without fear for their safety and future hanging over their heads.”

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, A last resort? in 2004, highlighted the terrible impact of TPVs on refugee children. HREOC found that the lack of family reunion rights combined with inability to leave the country breached the human rights of refugee children.

DETAILS: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/>

#### **‘HARSH TP VISA’ TO BE ABOLISHED**

But Democrat Senator Andrew Bartlett praised Budget measures to expand migration and humanitarian programs and confirmation that the harsh and ineffective Temporary Protection Visa would be abolished.

"The nation building role that migration plays is often overlooked in political debate, but it is more crucial than ever at this time, given some of the major economic pressures Australia currently faces," Senator Bartlett said. "The increase in the family and humanitarian intakes, alongside more permanent places for skilled migrants makes the migration program more balanced. "However, there still needs to be more settlement support provided to all new arrivals," he said.

Senator Bartlett gave special praise to the scrapping of Temporary Protection Visas: "It should never be forgotten that Labor supported John Howard to introduce this visa, which history has proved to have been cruel, counter-productive and ineffective, as the Democrats warned it would be when we attempted to stop its passage through the Senate in November 1999. It was specifically designed to inflict hardship on genuine refugees and keep families separated."

He said the TP Visa scrapping would enable many refugees to fully contribute to the Australian community and economy, as so many had done in the past to the great benefit of the nation. DETAILS: Senator Andrew Bartlett on 0418 743 789.

#### **D. PEACE & SECURITY**

##### **FEARS OF A NEW NUCLEAR ARMS RACE GROW**

Nuclear proliferation experts say they are concerned that a new global arms race may be building as at least 40 developing countries in recent years have expressed interest to the International Atomic Energy Agency about starting a nuclear power program. IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei said recently that most of those countries were not pursuing nuclear weapons but desire to have an atomic capability as "insurance, a deterrence." [The Washington Post](#) (12/5/08).

##### **AUSTRALIA BACKS BAN ON NUCLEAR TESTING**

The Australian Government is urging countries to bring the ban on nuclear testing into force, said the Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith. The government has renewed calls for universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The Australian Government strongly supports efforts to bring the CTBT into force, and to see the completion of its verification system. DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s073\\_08.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s073_08.html)

##### **ICRC URGES STATES TO ADOPT STRONG TREATY ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS**

States preparing to negotiate a new treaty banning cluster munitions that cause unacceptable

harm to civilians must act decisively to address the scourge of these weapons, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said this week.

More than 100 states will meet at a diplomatic conference in Dublin from May 19/30, a key step in a process that started in Oslo in February 2007 and has been growing in momentum ever since.

"Cluster munitions are weapons that never stop killing," said ICRC president Jakob Kellenberger, who is due to speak at the conference. "In the course of its work for people affected by armed conflict, the ICRC has often witnessed horrific impact of these weapons on civilians. States should now conclude a treaty that will prohibit inaccurate and unreliable cluster munitions, provide for their clearance and ensure assistance to their victims," he said.

In more than 20 countries, unexploded cluster sub-munitions have effectively rendered vast areas as dangerous as minefields. Their deadly legacy can continue for generations. Laos, for example, the world's worst affected country, is still struggling to deal with the deadly legacy of an estimated 270 million sub-munitions dropped there in the 1960s and 1970s. Tens of millions failed to explode on impact and go on killing people today.

"We can act now to prevent human suffering on a potentially massive scale," said Mr Kellenberger. "States must seize this important opportunity to prevent cluster munitions from killing and maiming countless other civilians."

DETAILS: Pauline Wall on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120; sydney.syd@icrc.org

#### **PM: IRANIAN REMARKS 'INCITEMENT TO INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE'**

Asked in a radio interview whether he was planning to take the Iranian President Ahmedinejad to the International Court of Justice for inciting genocide and denying the holocaust, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd replied that the Iranian president's "repeated extraordinary statements, which are anti-Semitic, and expressing a determination to eliminate the modern state of Israel from the map are appalling by any standards of current international relations. They are an incitement to international violence." (14/5/08).

"Now what we have said in the past is that we will take legal advice - which the attorney general is currently doing - in terms of whether there is a (inaudible) way forward here through the appropriate international legal mechanisms and we will study that advice carefully.

"I think the important thing is for the world community right now, to be absolutely united in their condemnation of the regime in Tehran for these sorts of remarks. It is not just, you know, hyperbole, from the bully pulpit of Tehran. It is the roll on effect across the Islamic world to those who listen to Iran for their guidance. I think this is dangerous stuff. The world community should unite against it, and as I said, on the matter you specifically raise, we will take careful and considered advice in terms of whether it is possible on an international legal front."

#### **MIDDLE EAST**

#### **UN ASSEMBLY CHIEF TALKS SETTLEMENT TO ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN LEADERS**

[General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim](#) met with Israeli and Palestinian leaders on the last leg of his official visit to the Middle East, stressing the need for a comprehensive peace settlement in the region (13/5/08).

Mr Kerim held talks in Jerusalem with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and senior members of the Knesset, the country's parliament, including the Speaker, Dalia Itzik. Accompanied by an official with the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ([UNSCO](#)), he also held discussions in Ramallah with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, according to a UN statement.

The statement said Mr Kerim had emphasised that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lay in the two states living side by side in peace and security and condemned terrorism in all of its forms, voicing concern about the deaths of civilians.

On this official tour, which has also included stops in the United Kingdom, Turkey and Egypt, Mr Kerim stressed that the UN Assembly had repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to two states within recognised borders as the most viable solution. "However, our mission has not yet been accomplished," he said. "After more than 60 years we still need a fully viable, secure and independent Palestinian state."

#### **DEAL SEEKS TO END LEBANON STRIFE**

Arab League mediators in Lebanon say they have clinched an agreement to end the recent fighting which raised fears of a second civil war breaking out, the BBC reported (15/5/08). They said the opposition would end sit-in protests in Beirut and allow the city's airport and port to reopen.

Fighting between pro-government groups and the Hezbollah-led opposition broke out last week leaving at least 65 dead. In what correspondents called a climb-down, ministers rescinded decisions to shut down of Hezbollah's private phone system and to remove a head of airport security. These moves last week had triggered the worst violence since Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7403508.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7403508.stm)

#### **ICRC CALLS ON FIGHTERS TO RESPECT HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has called on all those involved in the current armed violence in Lebanon to spare the lives of innocents and facilitate evacuation of the wounded (12/5/08)

Fighting broke out in Beirut on Wednesday and on Thursday, armed clashes between supporters of various political groups spread from the capital to other parts of the country, leaving at least 10 people dead in Beirut and a number injured. In the village of Saadnayel, in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, stray bullets injured five civilians, including a 12-year-old child.

The ICRC also appealed to those engaged in fighting to allow medical and humanitarian personnel to carry out their tasks and have unimpeded access to wounded people. DETAILS: Virginia de la Guardia, ICRC Beirut, on +961 1 739 297/8/9/+961 70 12 98 69; Anna Schaaf, ICRC Geneva, on +41 79 217 32 17; [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) ; ICRC Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific, Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, (61 2) 9388 9039/ 61 (0)2 418 485 120; [gva@icrc.org](mailto:gva@icrc.org) ; <http://www.icrc.org> ; [sydney.syd@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.syd@icrc.org)

#### **YEMEN: ICRC SCALES UP AID FOR INCREASING NEEDS IN NORTH**

Renewed fighting in northern Yemen's Sa'ada Governorate has resulted in a further deterioration in living conditions, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said (15/5/08). The ICRC has asked donors for an additional 8.5 million Swiss francs for its Yemen budget to respond to the increasing needs caused by the fighting. The increase more than doubles the original 2008 budget for operations in Yemen, bringing it to 14 million Swiss francs.

After the latest confrontations in the north, thousands of civilians were currently fleeing their homes to seek refuge where they can be cared for, said Marcus Dolder, ICRC head of delegation in Yemen. "Our teams are working closely with the Yemen Red Crescent Society to provide these people with shelter and emergency assistance".

An ICRC team, accompanied by members of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society, reached Omdurman hospital on Sunday, thanks to cooperation from the authorities (13/5/08). The team delivered medical supplies to treat some 100 wounded patients. ICRC staff were preparing to deliver further medical supplies on Monday to two hospitals in western and northern Omdurman. DETAILS: ICRC Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific: Pauline Wall on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120; [sydney.syd@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.syd@icrc.org); [Yemen: ICRC activities September 2007 to March 2008](#).

## **IS ONE STATE THE ANSWER FOR ISRAEL/PALESTINE IMPASSE?**

Ali Abunimah, the author of a provocative new book proposing a single-state answer to the issues between Israel and Palestine, spoke at the ANU on Monday (12/5/08). A research fellow with the Palestine Centre in Washington and editor of *Electronic Intifada*, a leading website of news from a Palestinian perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict, Ali Abunimah lives in Chicago and writes regularly for *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

He took as his subject issues raised in his book, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli/Palestine Impasse*, arguing that the so-called 'two-state solution' lies in tatters and that a new approach was needed.

"Sixty years after Israel was founded, the cruel reality is that the effort to establish an exclusively 'Jewish state' on the ruins of the pre-existing Palestinian society has failed," he said earlier.

"Israelis and Palestinians both numbering five million are locked in a seemingly endless struggle.

"But while equal in numbers, they are not equal in power. Palestinians live in conditions increasingly compared to blacks in apartheid South Africa, walled into ghettos in their own land as Israeli settlers seize more and more territory. With prospects for a Palestinian state disappearing, we have to choose between a future of endless bloodshed and apartheid, or start to think of alternatives along the lines of the solutions in South Africa or Northern Ireland where all people have equal rights and guarantees.

"A radical change of policy is needed where first it is recognised that equality, justice and fundamental human rights for Palestinians lie at the core of any solution," he said. "Second it must be recognised that Palestinians have the right to choose their own leaders and that political conditions imposed on one side only can never lead to successful negotiations. Finally, a successful peace process must restore the rights and representation of Palestinian citizens of Israel who have been left out of peace talks," he said.

DETAILS: Kathryn Kelly on 0417 269 984; or Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575/0416 249 245.

## **ASIA**

### **UN CLOSES REFUGEE CENTRE IN AFGHANISTAN**

Unrest in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad has forced the UN to temporarily close its refugee centre in the area. The centre so far this year has processed more than 60,000 Afghan refugees coming from Pakistan. The UN High Commission for Refugees stated the centre would reopen, according to the [BBC](#) (12/5/08). REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7395611.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7395611.stm).

### **BAN CONDEMNS JAIPUR BOMBING**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced his outrage at a series of bombings in the historic old city in Jaipur, which killed at least 60 people and injured about 200 others (14/5/08). He strongly condemned such terrorist attacks, and sent his heartfelt sympathies to the government of India and to victims' families, according to a [statement](#) issued by a spokesperson. Known as the 'pink city' because of the colour of the buildings that dominate the old city, Jaipur is the capital of Rajasthan state and a popular tourist destination in India. Seven blasts were recorded, with many occurring close to some of Jaipur's most famous or historic monuments.

## **AFRICA**

### **GUNMEN KILL WFP HEAD IN KENYA**

The UN World Food Program (WFP) said that unidentified gunmen shot dead the head of WFP's office in the north-western Kenyan town of Lokichoggio, in the first killing of a WFP aid worker in what has been a major relief hub for southern Sudan (9/5/08).

Silence Chirara, coordinator of WFP's logistics operation for southern Sudan, was ambushed late on Wednesday by unidentified gunmen who fired AK-47 assault rifles 100 metres from the main gate of the UN camp.

After coming under attack, Chirara, 37, drove on and his clearly marked UN vehicle hit a shipping container near the gate. His vehicle was hit by seven AK-47 bullets. The gunmen escaped.

"We are all shocked at this savage killing of Silence Chirara and condemn it in the strongest terms. UN Security and the Kenyan police are investigating this terrible crime," said Kenro Oshidari, WFP Representative in Sudan.

"In all the places that Silence served, he was an incredible source of comfort and help to his colleagues. He was a valued logistics officer known to never step away from a challenge," said WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran. Chirara, who joined WFP in 1996, had worked in Iraq, Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe and Indonesia. He started working in Lokichoggio in March 2006.

During the civil war between North and South Sudan, WFP planes operating from Lokichoggio airdropped food to millions of people in desperate need across southern Sudan. Since the war ended in 2005, WFP reduced its air operations as roads were repaired but Lokichoggio remained an important relief hub and access route for aircraft and trucks delivering assistance into Sudan. DETAILS: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

### **REBEL ATTACK NEAR KHARTOUM DEPLORED**

The UN Security Council [deplored](#) weekend attacks by a Darfurian rebel group against the Sudanese Government on the outskirts of the country's capital, Khartoum, but urged restraint and warned that no retaliatory action should be taken against civilians (13/5/08).

In a presidential statement read out by Ambassador John Sawers of the UK, which holds the rotating presidency this month, council members strongly condemned Saturday's attacks, reported to have been carried out by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Omdurman. DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26661&Cr=darfur&Cr1=>

### **RISING VIOLENCE WORRIES UN TEAM IN ZIMBABWE**

The United Nations expressed its concern over rising political violence in Zimbabwe, allegedly perpetrated by security forces, youth militias, war veterans and gangs of supporters of both the ruling ZANU-PF party and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (13/5/08).

UN top official in the Southern African nation, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Agustino Zacarias said the UN country team had received an increasing number of reports calling for humanitarian aid for those impacted by this violence in recent weeks. Unrest and violence had been widespread in Zimbabwe following the March 29 presidential election, in which the incumbent Robert Mugabe was challenged by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai. "These incidences of violence are occurring in the communal, farming and urban areas and there are indications that the level of violence is escalating in all these areas and could reach crisis levels," a UN spokesperson said in New York, adding that the organisation's country team has received some evidence to substantiate these reports.

The UN team was concerned for those who fled their homes out of fear of reprisals. The UN has called on authorities to address the humanitarian situation. Last week, Mr Ban called for the next phases of Zimbabwe's elections to be free and fair. REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26658&Cr=zimbabwe&Cr1=>

### **UN PEACE PANEL VISITS STRIFE-TORN BURUNDI**

A UN follow-up peace commission arrived in Burundi Sunday to study efforts towards peace following civil war in this central African state where sporadic violence continues (11/5/08). The UN Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (CCP) will spend five days gaining first hand information about the situation in Burundi and talk with the government and others on the current state of implementation of a strategic framework for consolidating peace, a press statement said.

## E. HEALTH & MEANS

### FOOD

#### **BAN OPENS FIRST MEETING OF WORLD FOOD CRISIS TASKFORCE**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today convened the inaugural meeting of a high-level task force of senior UN officials aimed at addressing the food crisis, noting that there was an urgent need to help the millions of people already suffering (12/5/08).

In a [statement](#) issued by his spokesperson, Mr Ban said that he recognised that skyrocketing prices of basic food commodities “is essentially linked to the global demand for food exceeding supply,” but cautioned “the drivers of the crisis are complex and the consequences are varied.”

The task force – which brings together the heads of many of members of the UN family, as well as leaders of the [World Bank](#) and the [International Monetary Fund](#) – seeks to “promote a unified response to the global food price challenge in support of governments and affected populations.

The gathering centred on creating a comprehensive plan to tackle the soaring food prices. This strategy will encompass both short and longer-term measures – including food aid and social protection – to alleviate the impact of the crisis on the hardest hit.

The elements of the task force’s plan will be presented at next month’s high-level meeting in Rome hosted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO](#)) on global food security. Task force members urged countries not to take actions that would aggravate food prices ([WFP](#)).  
DETAILS: <http://www.wfp.org/english/>, for humanitarian purposes without obstructions.

#### **NUTRITION AMONG SOMALI CHILDREN COULD WORSEN**

Against a backdrop of drought, soaring food prices and large numbers of people being driven out of home by armed conflict, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has provided food to 44,000 displaced children in war-ravaged Somalia (14/5/08).

The agency [warned](#) that more than 2.6 million Somalis are currently considered ‘food insecure,’ and this number could climb to 3.5 million by the end of the year. “We are extremely concerned about the most vulnerable among this group,” said Unni Silkoset, a UNICEF nutrition officer in Somalia. REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26669&Cr=somali&Cr1=>

#### **UN HELPS EAST TIMOR TO KEEP FOOD PRICES LOW**

The [United Nations](#) is assisting Timor-Leste’s Government to keep the price of rice as low as possible as part of its efforts to minimise the impact of the global food crisis on the young and impoverished country (14/5/08)

Worldwide, the price of rice has skyrocketed by 200 per cent in the past 12 months, surging from around 40 cents for one kilogram six months ago to about \$1.20 to \$1.30 today. To date, Timor-Leste has 7,500 tons of rice in stock, while it will import an additional 16,000 tons.

“We estimate that these food stocks will last for the immediate foreseeable future,” said Finn Reske-Nielsen, Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. “This short-term solution will provide time for the government to work on medium and long-term solutions.” The government’s rice reserves and imports on the market have helped dampen price surges, with the current price hovering at around 50 to 60 cents per kilogram.

“We do not see a danger of starvation in Timor-Leste,” Mr. Reske-Nielsen said in Dili. “The Timorese have access to rice and other foods.” Nearly one-third of the rice consumed in the young nation is grown in Timor-Leste, and it also produces maize and cassava.

### HEALTH

### **HELP TO IMPROVE HEALTH IN EAST TIMOR**

Australia is to provide \$23 million over four years to help East Timor to implement its national health plan and improve basic health and hospital services across the country. The national health plan focuses on improving basic health and hospital services and aims to build capacity across the health sector to help East Timor achieve its Millennium Development Goals for health. DETAILS: [http://www.usaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=4105\\_4055\\_8568\\_8008\\_2538](http://www.usaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=4105_4055_8568_8008_2538)

### **SAFE WATER AND SANITATION 'CRITICAL' TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation worldwide will be critical to resolving many other challenges relating to sustainable development, such as desertification, rural health and ensuring that agriculture in poor countries is more effective, a UN official said (13/5/08).

Aslam Chaudhry, chief of the water and natural resources, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), said in New York that water in particular was central to the current deliberations of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The CSD – a subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – is this year assessing the progress made in 72 areas outlined in its water and sanitation agenda in 2005.

He said that dozens of countries had reported that they were making significant progress on this front, particularly in their efforts to better regulate and manage their often limited water resources. A water, sanitation and hygiene program in some 70 countries across Asia and Africa was also reducing the burden of diseases in many nations. A lack of funding, infrastructure and capacity in poor countries were the main obstacles to further improvements, he said, calling for assistance in all three areas as well as better coordination at the country level.

### **HEALTH IN THE MAY 2008 BUDGET**

The May 2008 Budget has allocated \$10 billion for a Health and Hospitals Fund to support investment in Australian health facilities, equipment and research, the ABC reported. More than \$334 million will go towards closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Over \$101 million of that will be used to address maternal and child health issues in Indigenous communities and \$21.5 million will boost health services in the Northern Territory. Welfare groups gave a cautious tick of approval to social measures announced.

ABC [Related Story: Health Budget targets hospitals, Indigenous gap](#)

ABC [Related Story: Welfare groups pleased with Budget reforms](#)

The Department of Health is expected to spend \$29 million in 2008-09 on programs aimed at reducing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and other Australians. This includes \$4 million for Indigenous drug and alcohol services, \$9.9 million for child and maternal health services and \$1.6 million for tackling rheumatic fever in Indigenous children. There will be \$4.4m this year for 'Bringing Them Home' counsellors and link-up services (\$5.9m forecast for 2009-10). ABC [Related Story: \\$718m extra for 'closing the gap' plan](#)

Thirty-one planned GP super clinics, which aim to bring together GPs and other health care providers, have been given \$275.2 million as part of a commitment to rural and regional Australia.

### **NEW RESPITE CENTRE FOR SOUTH EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY:**

Minister for Ageing Justine Elliot and Federal Member for Lowe John Murphy opened a respite care service for those with a South East Asian background. "The So Wai Lifestyle Activity Centre located in Burwood - will provide day respite services for dementia sufferers and their carers," Mrs Elliot said. Mr Murphy said the So Wai Lifestyle Activity Centre will cater particularly for people of a South East Asian and Korean background.

DETAILS: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/ministers/publishing.nsf/Content/mr-yr08-je->

[je047.htm?OpenDocument&yr=2008&mh=5](#)

### **GUIDELINE FOR WATER RECYCLING**

Water Recycling Augmentation of Drinking Water Supplies: Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling Augmentation of Drinking Water Supplies report (May 2008) has been released  
REPORT: [http://www.ephc.gov.au/pdf/water/200805\\_WQ\\_GL\\_Final\\_AGWR\\_ADWS.pdf](http://www.ephc.gov.au/pdf/water/200805_WQ_GL_Final_AGWR_ADWS.pdf) May

### **GENERAL**

#### **OBESITY IN AUSTRALIA UNDER REVIEW**

The House of Representatives Health Committee will hear from some of the leading community health experts on obesity when it began public hearings on May 12 for its inquiry into obesity in Australia. DETAILS: Secretary on 02 6277 4145; [www.aph.gov.au/haa](http://www.aph.gov.au/haa).

#### **BETTER CARE FOR OUR CARERS - NEW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY**

The House of Representatives Family and Community Committee will conduct an inquiry to determine how to better meet the needs of carers who look after those with chronic illness, disability or frailty. The committee invites interested organisations and individuals to make written submissions to the inquiry addressing the terms of reference by July 4. The committee will report in early 2009. DETAILS: Inquiry Secretary on 02 6277 4566; [fchy.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:fchy.reps@aph.gov.au) ; <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/index.htm>

#### **SIXTY-FIRST WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

The 61<sup>st</sup> World Health Assembly (WHA) will be held from May 19 to 24 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The Health Assembly is the annual meeting of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 193 member states and it is the supreme decision-making body of WHO. The Health Assembly sets the policy for the organisation and approves the budget.

REPORTS: Assembly agenda, daily journal and other documents (in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish): [http://www.who.int/gb/e/e\\_wha61.html](http://www.who.int/gb/e/e_wha61.html).

### **F. MEDIA MATTERS**

#### **PM PROMISES GREATER ACCESS TO SECRET DOCUMENTS**

Government agencies will be encouraged to adopt a pro-disclosure culture under changes aimed at giving the public - and journalists - greater access to secret documents, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has pledged (9/5/08).

Speaking at the official opening of Fairfax Media's new headquarters in Pyrmont, Kevin Rudd said he was committed to reforming the much-derided Freedom of Information Act. Under the changes, which were pushed by an alliance of media organisations including Fairfax, ministers would no longer be able to overrule FOI laws.

Fairfax Media's chief executive, David Kirk, had delivered a stinging attack against recent curbs on press freedom.

"Last week was a bad week for the freedom of the press in Australia," Mr Kirk said. "Police raided a newspaper office in Perth to try to find the source of a story on what the state government might spend on advertising in an election year. Some crime."

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/08/1210131165877.html>

#### **BROADBAND IN THE BUDGET**

In a media release, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, announced an extension of the Australian Broadband Guarantee program "to safeguard the broadband opportunities for all Australians, while the government continues to implement its broader broadband policy agenda." The Australian Broadband Guarantee program

receives additional funding in the 2008–09 Budget which will bring total funding to \$270.7 million over four years. DETAILS: [http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/2008/032](http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2008/032)

### **CHINA JAILS MORE JOURNALISTS**

The IFJ has condemned a new wave of jailing and detention of journalists in China (14/5/08):

Qi Chonghuai, a journalist working for China Legal News, and He Yanjie, a fellow journalist who co-wrote reports with Qi, were sentenced to jail by a court in Shandong yesterday. Qi was sentenced to four years and He to two years.

Mr Qi, 42, has been in detention since June 25, 2007, on charges of blackmail. Qi has worked in the industry for more than 13 years and is known for his reporting on the alleged corruption of Shandong officials. China Legal News is a national newspaper owned and controlled by the Ministry of Justice.

His lawyer, Li Xiongbing, told the IFJ that the court hearing was unusually brief, indicating a lack of due process and consideration of the facts. Li also accused local police of beating Mr Qi repeatedly during his detention and barring him from speaking with his wife, Jiao Xia. Ms Li has visited Mr Qi and said he was determined to appeal.

Environmental activist and freelance journalist Chen Daojun was detained on May 9 on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power”. Press freedom organisation PEN reported that Mr Chen was detained during a protest over chemical plants in Pengzhou, Sichuan Province, the site of this week’s earthquake.

Writer and activist Hu Jia was jailed on April 3 in Beijing on the same charge of “inciting subversion of state power”. On May 3, Zhou Yuanzhi, a freelance writer and social commentator, was detained in Zhongxiang City, Hubei Province, in central China.

“The jailing of Qi and He and the new charges against other journalists in China reveal an apparently increasing clampdown against journalists and writers in China in the lead-up to the Olympics in August,” said IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park.

### **1518 SIGNATURES FOR HONG KONG HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST**

The IFJ and the Hong Kong Journalists’ Association (HKJA) has submitted a petition with 1518 signatures to China’s Minister of Justice, Wu Aiyong, with copies to Premier Wen Jia Bao and the Liaison Office of the Central Government in Hong Kong, demanding the release of Hu Jia (12/5/08). Mr Hu was sentenced on April 3 to three-and-a-half years’ jail and one year’s denial of political rights on charges of “inciting subversion to state power”, for articles and interviews critical of the Chinese Government.

Mr Hu, a long-time human rights activist, suffers poor health and his family said his condition was deteriorating. His family has been denied prison visits since early May, and has not been told where he is since a transfer to a new prison.

The petition, calling for the immediate release of Mr Hu, was launched on the internet on April 18. The petition has been signed by 1518 people and 17 organisations. Signatories came Hong Kong and mainland China with 16 Chinese provinces, autonomies and municipalities represented, amounting to half the administrative regions of China, and from 26 countries, as well as organisations around the world. Petition and signatories: [www.hkja.org.hk](http://www.hkja.org.hk).

**NEPAL:** Alleged physical attack and death threats against a radio journalist by members of a political party in Harre, Nepal, were reported by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on May 10. According to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Tila Bhandari, a correspondent for Nepal FM 91.8, was harassed by a group of about 50 people. He was there to cover news of a ‘bandh’ (strike) called by the Nepali Congress. The FNJ’s Nepal FM chapter

president said the group, which pressured Bhandari not to report their activities, confiscated the memory card from her camera. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +61 (0)2 9333 0919.

**PAKISTAN:** Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) is concerned over the Pakistan Supreme Court's order on May 12 to restrain the media from reporting anything that may be deemed "derogatory" of judges (13/5/08). The order was an over-zealous protection of judicial privileges and provided wide scope for arbitrary interpretation, the IFJ said. According to the PFUJ, the GEO News TV channel and the *Daily Jang*, a newspaper of the same media group, put out reports on May 8 of a supposed meeting between Pakistan's Federal Secretary of the Interior and three judges of the Supreme Court. One of the judges issued a notice on May 9 to the chief of GEO's Islamabad bureau and a reporter of the *Daily Jang* asking them to answer prima facie charges of seeking to "exploit the court" and "scandalise" its judges. The judge ordered the journalists to reveal their sources and said the media should not publish any reports involving a judge without prior clearance by court officials.

The court amended its earlier order in certain respects after an intervention by representatives of the PFUJ and GEO but the GEO and *Daily Jang* were ordered to produce transcripts of all news items published or broadcast since November 3, 2007, the day a nationwide state of emergency was declared by President Musharraf. The IFJ is concerned at the court's effort to invoke the powers of monitoring and coercion that PEMRA was assigned under President Musharraf as the action was contrary to assurances given by the new civilian government that PEMRA would be stripped of these powers.

**SRI LANKA:** The Sri Lankan Government's reported efforts to deny media personnel access to report on council elections in its Eastern Province undermined democratic election processes, said the IFJ (9/5/08). According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), two Associated Press (AP) media personnel were stopped at a checkpoint in Valaichchenai and ordered to return to Colombo immediately. Military authorities allegedly told journalist Ravi Nesman and photographer Gemunu Amarasinghe that they required special permission to cover the elections on May 10.

The FMM reports that the Ministry of Defence reversed its decision after journalists' rights groups and election monitoring groups demanded an explanation of why no government authority had provided information on the new restriction or how to obtain permission to cover the elections. The journalists have since been allowed to re-enter the province. The IFJ was concerned that authorities had arbitrarily harassed and intimidated media personnel.

**INDIA:** The IFJ was saddened and shocked to learn of the death of photojournalist Ashok Sodhi from bullet injuries sustained while covering an armed encounter in the Jammu region on May 11. Sodhi, a 25-year veteran of the newspaper industry, was employed by the leading newspaper *Daily Excelsior*. He was reporting on an armed encounter in Kashmir's Samba district, 45km south of Jammu, between security forces and militants who had allegedly infiltrated from Pakistan-controlled territory. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +61 (0)2 9333 0919.

## G. OTHER NEWS

### 2008 BUDGET

#### **AUSTRALIAN BUDGET FOR 'MASSIVE MODERNISATION'**

Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan said on Tuesday his Federal Budget was about the "massive modernisation" of the Australian economy through three nation-building funds, the ABC reported (13/5/08). In a Budget which includes spending cuts totalling \$7.3 billion in 2008-09, the Federal Government is set to use \$40 billion to focus on infrastructure, education and health.

SEE Budget pointers on Human Rights, Health & Means, Climate Change and Energy & Environment pages. Other links:

ABC [Related Link: Federal Budget: official site](#)

ABC [Related Link: Transcript: Swan's Budget speech](#)

ABC [Related Link: Major initiatives](#)

### **FUNDS FOR DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

The new package of measures contained in the 2008 Budget was expected to sharpen the focus of Australia's development assistance program on practical development outcomes and improved quality of life, Simon Crean, Trade Minister, and Stephen Smith, Foreign Minister, said.

They said the 2008-09 Budget demonstrated the government's commitment to making faster progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and meeting the needs of most vulnerable people. The Budget was expected to boost global efforts to fight poverty through strengthened partnerships with key UN development agencies: additional Australian core funding of \$200 million over four years would support agencies' leadership of efforts to realise the MDGs.

The Budget would also confront climate change through a three year, \$150 million program to help meet the climate adaptation needs of vulnerable communities, they said. To ensure the benefits of development reach the most vulnerable, other major new programs would promote improved access to clean water and sanitation (\$300 million over three years) for poor people, expand humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Iraq (\$140 million over three years) and support practical efforts to fight avoidable blindness (\$45 million over two years).

New Pacific Partnerships for Development were to target faster progress towards the MDGs in the Pacific, including through new programs focussing on infrastructure development, land administration and public sector capacity building.

As part of the government's election commitment of a sustained Australian contribution to the international effort to stabilise Afghanistan, the government would provide additional funding of \$25.6 million to enhance Australia's engagement with Afghanistan, bringing the total contribution to this measure to \$39.3 million over two years.

The 2008-09 Budget would boost global efforts to fight poverty through strengthened partnerships with key UN development agencies: additional Australian core funding of \$200 million over four years would support agencies' leadership of efforts to realise the MDGs. The government is to conduct a functional review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure its resources and structure were consistent with the government's foreign and trade policy priorities. DETAILS: [http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2008/sc\\_080513\\_budget1.html](http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2008/sc_080513_budget1.html)

### **AUSTRALIA MOVES TO STRENGTHEN UN PARTNERSHIPS:**

The 2008-09 Budget was expected to boost global efforts to fight poverty through strengthened partnerships with key UN development agencies, the Federal Government said. Additional Australian core funding of \$200 million over four years will support agencies' leadership of efforts to realise the MDGs. In 2008-09 the government will also conduct a functional review of the Foreign Affairs Department to ensure its resources and structure are consistent with the government's foreign and trade policy priorities.

DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513\\_budget1.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513_budget1.html)

**OVERSEAS AID TO INCREASE TO 0.32 PER CENT:** The first step in delivering on the Australian Government's long-term commitment to increase Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015-16 ODA will total \$3.7 billion in 2008-09, increasing Australia's ratio of ODA to GNI to 0.32 per cent - higher than at any stage since 1995-96, according to 2008-09 Budget details. The government is also ending the previous government's 'Pacific Solution' policy.

DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513\\_budget2.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513_budget2.html)

**FUNDS FOR SHANGHAI WORLD EXPO 2010:** The Australian Government has provided \$61 million over three years towards Australia's participation in World Expo 2010 in Shanghai.

DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513\\_budget3.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s080513_budget3.html)

**OPPORTUNITY TO START A NEW LIFE:** "The offshore component of the 2008-09 Humanitarian Program will focus on refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East," Immigration Minister Senator Evans said. "Due to the personal security situation these people will face as Australia withdraws its combat forces from southern Iraq, this policy will give them the opportunity to start a new life in Australia."

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce02-buget-08.htm>

**TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS SCRAPPED:** The abolition of "the unjust Temporary Protection visa (TPV) regime for asylum seekers" was announced. Immigration Minister Senator Evans said any existing Temporary Protection visa or Temporary Humanitarian visa holder would be processed for permanent residency in Australia.

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce05-buget-08.htm>

**ACQUIRING LANGUAGE LANGUAGES:** The Budget boosts languages funding by \$62.4 million over three years to help Australian school students acquire language skills. REPORT: <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/gillard/releases/ruddgovernmentcommitstoasianlanguagesinschools.htm>

#### **REACTION TO THE MAY 2008 BUDGET - DEMOCRATS**

"After 17 years of growth and big surpluses, we should increase our overseas aid budget to the promised 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2008/9 rather than in five years' time. This is one sure inflation-free measure," said Senator Lyn Allison, Australian Democrats leader (13/5/08). She said the budget was slow to spend on urgent problems like climate change and water, and lacked structural reform.

The spending on climate change had been pushed out four to six years as if there was no need for immediate action and was littered with pilot programs and small grant projects, she said. On the Murray Darling – where major investment in water saving infrastructure was urgently needed - \$400m was announced, but half the spending was next year and to purchase water entitlements from willing sellers. Money was being poured into new water sources like desalination, despite the high cost and high energy use, while spending on water licence buy-backs and conservation of water was minimal.

Funds for Indigenous health were welcome but did little more than address what the NT Intervention found. It was deeply disappointing there was no budget for Indigenous eye health and other endemic diseases. DETAILS: David Collyer on 0417 613 610.

#### **REACTION TO THE MAY 2008 BUDGET – GREENS**

The first Rudd/Swan Budget failed miserably to meet the urgent challenge of climate change, Australians Greens leader Bob Brown said (13/5/08). "It squibs on building the carbon-constrained Australia needed to tackle global warming," Senator Brown said.

"Labor is spending 40 times as much on Defence (\$22 billion) as it is on tackling climate change - to around half a billion in the coming year. The Department of Environment's internal funds are down by \$50 million from last year, with only \$14 million diverted to the new Department of Climate Change.

"On transport, 75 per cent of major infrastructure funding is still going to climate-change worsening road transport, and of the 25 per cent for rail and other non-road transport, a big slab will still go to coal export infrastructure.

"In implementing, commercialising and demonstrating new energy forms in the coming year, \$35 million goes to 'clean coal', which does not exist, and nothing at all for commercialising large-scale renewable energy technologies, which are ready to roll out now. Over the next three

years, \$250 million goes to 'clean coal', while renewable energy commercialisation gets half as much, or \$125 million.

"Foreign Aid languishes way below 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income, let alone the international target of 0.7 per cent or the Dutch achievement of over one per cent," he said.  
DETAILS: Ebony Bennett 0409 164 603.

## GENERAL

### **NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK 2008**

The theme for National Volunteers Week this year is 'Volunteers Change our World'. The week was launched by Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion, in Adelaide (12/5/08).

"I think it's very important we take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank our volunteers and so, on behalf of the Australian Government, I would to sincerely thank you for your contributions," she said. "And, as part of launching National Volunteer Week, I am very pleased to officially launch Volunteer Australia's National Survey of Volunteering for 2008. DETAILS: <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/stephens/releases/nationalvolunteerweek2008.htm>

### **ACT UNAA TO HEAR ABOUT INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

The annual meeting of the United Nations Association Australia (ACT) Inc is to be held on May 20 at ACT Legislative Assembly in the Exhibition Room when the speaker will be Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance.  
DETAILS: Margaret Moreton on 02 6161 3868/ 0416 283 195; [Margaret13@homemail.com.au](mailto:Margaret13@homemail.com.au)

### **TREATIES BODY ACTS ON PESTICIDE AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTIES**

The Federal Parliament's Treaties Committee has tabled a report giving the go ahead to the withdrawal of Australia's exemption for the use of the termite pesticide Mirex under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

Mirex, available as the product Mirant, was formerly used in northern Australia to control giant termites. Australia was one of two countries that registered an exemption for the use of Mirex upon ratifying the Stockholm Convention in 2004. Mirex is one of 12 persistent organic pollutants listed for action under the convention.

According to Treaties Report 90, withdrawal of this exemption for Mirex will demonstrate Australia's commitment to protecting human health and the environment through the elimination of toxic and persistent chemicals.

The committee also recommends that Australia take binding treaty action in relation to three intellectual property agreements. The Patent Law Treaty will harmonise and simplify patent administration procedures on a world wide basis and establish legal certainty and safeguards for patent applicants. Similarly, the Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks will establish consistent procedures for registering trademarks, including non-traditional marks such as holograms, three-dimensional marks, colour, and taste and feel marks. The committee also supports proposed constitutional reform to the UN's World Intellectual Property Organisation.

Report 90 also contains the committee's discussion on an air services agreement with Tonga. Almost 27,000 people travelled between Australia and Tonga in the year ending in June 2007. This agreement establishes a binding legal framework to support direct air services between the two countries, providing reciprocal arrangements for safety, customs, regulation and commercial operation. Report 90: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/12march2008/report.htm>; Committee secretariat is on 02 6277 4002; Background information: James Rees (Committee secretary) on 02 6277 4642.

## GLOBAL PEACE INDEX PLANS

Founder of the [Global Peace Index](#), Steve Killelea, has announced that a number of notable people have joined a group of endorsers, including Malcolm Fraser, former Australian prime minister; Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Special Envoy on Climate Change for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former prime minister of Norway and former WHO director-general, and Pär Stenbäck, former foreign minister of Finland and former secretary general of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Steve Killelea writes that the 2008 Global Peace Index will be released at a press conference on May 20 at the Foreign Press Association, London. To present the results, he expects to be joined by Martin Bell, former BBC war correspondent and UNICEF UK ambassador for Humanitarian Emergencies; and Robin Bew, editorial director and chief economist, Economist Intelligence Unit.

A release event is also planned for Washington, hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Rick Barton, senior advisor, International Security Program, CSIS will moderate a conversation with President Harriet Fulbright, of J. William and Harriet Fulbright Center; Clyde McConaghy, president, Global Peace Index; and Leo Abruzzese, editorial director, North America, Economist Intelligence Unit.

On May 22, the Global Peace Index will be presented at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with the UN Global Compact. Representatives of UN Member States, accredited NGOs and UN staff have been invited to join this open debate about the index and its results.

He said *Soldiers of Peace*, a Global Peace Index documentary film on peace and reconciliation, will be released in the second half of 2008, narrated by UN Messenger of Peace and Academy award-winning actor Michael Douglas. The film features Sir Bob Geldof, Hans Blix, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sir Richard Branson and others. It showcases the alternatives to conflict, revealing countless inspiring examples to prove that peace can be achieved through greater equality, emancipation, tolerance and understanding. DETAILS: [www.visionofhumanity.org](http://www.visionofhumanity.org); [www.strategicforesight.com/otherprojects.htm#mumbaibro](http://www.strategicforesight.com/otherprojects.htm#mumbaibro)

## WIN A TRIP TO GENEVA

WFUNA president Dr Han Blix is seeking answers to the question: What do you think can lead governments away from, or do away with, nuclear weapons? The prize is a trip to participate in the 'Students for a Nuclear Weapons-free World' Conference, in the Palais de Nations, Geneva, July 13/16 2008. Entrants can write an essay of 1500 words, or produce a two-minute video or design a poster. Deadline for submissions: **May 31**. DETAILS: <http://www.disarmament.org/>

## H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

### IN BURMA, A UN PROMISE NOT KEPT

When a parent abuses or neglects a child, government steps in to offer protection. But who steps in when government abuses or neglects its people? asks Fred Hiatt in the Washington Post (12/5/08). He writes that nearly three years ago, the [United Nations](#) announced an answer ... (on) the organisation's 60th birthday, 171 nations agreed that they would intervene, forcefully if necessary, if a state failed to protect its own people ... Since then the UN has averted its gaze as Sudan's government continues to ravage the people of Darfur. It has turned away as Zimbabwe's rulers terrorise their own people. Now it is bowing to Burma's sovereignty as that nation's junta allows more than a million victims of [Cyclone Nargis](#) to face starvation, dehydration, cholera and other miseries. ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/11/AR2008051101782.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### HORROR STORIES UNFAIRLY BEDEVIL CHARTER OF RIGHTS

In recent weeks the charter of rights "debate" has been heading largely in one direction – against, writes Richard Ackland in the Sydney Morning Herald (9/5/08). "The antagonists have had longer at the megaphone than usual and have cranked up the volume ... Having culled through both the flourishes and the rhetoric against a charter, the arguments come down to two core complaints. It is undemocratic because it would transfer power from elected politicians to unelected judges, and God knows what they will do. A sub-branch of this is that a charter will be a lawyers' picnic. Second, our rights are well protected enough, by Parliament and the common law, so stop worrying and enjoy the splendid freedoms you have. Both these arguments need serious attention to detail and quite a bit of reworking if they have any hope of carrying the day." REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/08/1210131163034.html>

### **THINK AGAIN: THE PEACE CORPS**

In the eyes of Americans, no government agency better exemplifies the optimism, can-do spirit, and selfless nature of the United States than the Peace Corps. But according to this former Peace Corps country director, in the current Foreign Policy Magazine, it has never lived up to its purpose or principles. ARTICLE: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4295](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4295)

### **THE RIGHT WAY TO PRESSURE BEIJING**

Human rights groups are rightly outraged by China's abysmal record, says an article in the current Foreign Policy Magazine. But it is foolhardy to treat a rising superpower like a tin-pot dictatorship. Sometimes, a little pragmatism goes a long way. ARTICLE: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4299](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4299)

### **ANOTHER DISASTER LOOMS IN NORTH KOREA**

Again the world is dithering while innocent people starve, writes Tessa Morris-Suzuki in the Sydney Morning Herald (12/5/08). My friend in Japan can tell you what it feels like. First the bowls of gritty corn mixed with a few grains of rice get smaller and smaller. To satisfy your aching stomach, you boil the grains in water, making a grey watery gruel. This silences your hunger - for a while. Then the grain diminishes until the gruel is little more than water. You get cold and tired. Any effort seems too difficult. In the street the bodies lie like bundles of rags beside the road. No one does much about them. Everyone is too exhausted by the struggle to survive. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/11/1210444244361.html>

### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE SIGNALS A MORE OPEN REGIME**

In its zigzagging pursuit of a more nimble and effective form of authoritarian rule, China may be having a defining moment, writes Andrew Jacobs in Beijing (Sydney Morning Herald, 15/5/08).

Its crackdown on discontented Tibetans bore the hallmarks of Beijing's hardline impulses. But its aggressive earthquake rescue effort followed by its decision to scale back the domestic leg of the Olympic torch relay - after a flood of internet protests calling it insensitive - is a sign officials are not deaf to public sentiment.

Shi Anbin, a professor of media studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing, said he thought the international uproar after the crackdown in Tibet was having an effect on Communist Party leaders. "My judgment is that the Government has drawn some lessons from negative feedback," he said. "I think it reflects a trend of Chinese openness and reform." ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/14/1210444529960.html>

### **SAVED BY CHINA**

A massive earthquake in central China appears to have prompted a quick and aggressive response from the Chinese Government. Tens of thousands of troops have been deployed to the stricken region, and Premier [Wen Jiabao](#) is personally directing rescue efforts at the quake's epicentre, the Washington Post comments (13/5/08). The highly publicised operation is a dramatic change from Beijing's reaction to previous disasters ... It also starkly contrasts with the

rapidly worsening situation in neighbouring Burma, where up to two million people have been imperiled by the criminal failure of the country's military regime to provide relief in the 12 days since [Cyclone Nargis](#) struck the country. Yet China is contributing to the mounting man-made disaster in Burma even as it rescues its own citizens. The communist government has adopted the position that it will welcome international aid for earthquake victims, but not foreign aid workers - the same xenophobic stance that Burma's military junta has taken.

WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/13/AR2008051302735.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### **A SHARED LAND AS ONE STATE THE WAY TO PEACE**

This month Israel marks the 60th anniversary of its founding. But amid the festivities, including visits by international celebrities and politicians, there is deep unease - Israel has skeletons in its closet and anxieties about an uncertain future which make many Israelis question whether the state will celebrate an 80th birthday, Ali Abunimah writes in the New York Times (13/5/08). Ali Abunimah is currently speaking in Australia.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/12/1210444334547.html>

### **WONG'S DOSE OF SHOCK THERAPY**

The Climate Change Minister faces fierce lobbying from fossil fuel companies as she draws up detailed plans to reduce carbon emissions, write Marian Wilkinson and Ben Cubby in the Sydney Morning Herald (10/5/08) ...The government's plans for greenhouse gas reductions, the latest scientific predictions on global warming and the forceful arguments of Australia's fossil fuel industry are on a collision course. Some of the most powerful men in Australia, the leaders of the nation's booming coal, gas and oil companies, have decided to put the heat on her.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/09/1210131264070.html>

## **I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

### **BAN: AGRICULTURE NEEDS 'REINVIGORATING' TO PRODUCE ENOUGH FOOD**

As the world faces a food crisis, agriculture requires "reinvigorating" to produce enough food to feed the burgeoning global population, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said (14/5/08).

"After a quarter century of relative neglect, agriculture is back on the international agenda, sadly with a vengeance," Mr Ban said in an [address](#) at the start of the three-day high-level segment of the annual meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD).

"The onset of the current food crisis has highlighted the fragility of our success in feeding the world's growing population with the technologies of the first green revolution and subsequent agricultural improvements," he added.

Mr Ban pointed out that productivity growth had fallen, soils have become depleted and less fertile, water shortages have become commonplace and farmland has been used for other purposes or has been degraded.

Furthermore, public investments and donor support for agriculture have been declining. To breathe new life into agriculture, Mr Ban said that a fresh generation of technologies and farming methods would be essential to usher in a second green revolution, "one which permits sustainable yield improvements with minimal environmental damage and contributes to sustainable development goals." Agriculture must also be prepared to meet the challenge posed by climate change, which is already hurting productivity in many tropical areas, particularly in Africa, South Asia and small island developing states.

Noting that water stress will become more serious in the near future, Mr Ban called for better water conservation and use along with increased investments to slow or reverse desertification. This year's [session](#) of the CSD – a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council

(ECOSOC) – is focusing on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. REPORT:  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26670&Cr=sustainable&Cr1=development>

### **POLLINATION RESEARCH MAY PROTECT HONEYBEE**

New research released will help protect Australia's pollination-dependent plant industries and provide a pathway for the honeybee industry to deal with potentially devastating pest outbreaks.

Three new research reports have been produced as part of the establishment of Pollination Australia, an industry alliance with funding support from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) and Horticulture Australia Ltd.

Pollination services to industries such as almonds, apples, avocados and cherries are conservatively estimated to be worth at least \$1.7 billion a year. Pollination is critical for dozens of horticultural crops, and is also important for pastures, fodder and some broad acre crops.

However they are threatened by the potential incursion of the honeybee parasite, Varroa destructor which could wipe out feral populations of honeybees and significantly harm commercial hives, with flow on effects to pollination of valuable crops. Australia is currently one of the last remaining honey producing countries in the world free of the Varroa mite.

REPORTS: *Biosecurity Risk Management, Research and Development Priorities and Education and Training*: [http://www.rirdc.gov.au/pub/media\\_releases/9may08.html](http://www.rirdc.gov.au/pub/media_releases/9may08.html)

14 May 2008 – Boosting demand for tea is crucial to ensure price stability and returns to developing country producers, according to new report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“Expanding consumption in producing countries could ease supply pressure at the world level and improve tea prices in the long run,” said the study, prepared for the Intergovernmental Group on Tea whose three-day meeting kicks off today in Hangzhou, China.

Global tea production has continued to surge, rising 3 per cent in 2006, mainly due to record crops in China, Viet Nam and India.

Meanwhile, demand has not matched supply, with consumption only increasing 1 per cent, marking a slowdown from the 2.7 per cent growth rate from the previous decade.

Despite the vigorous economic growth in major tea producing countries, their per capita consumption lags behind. While Russians consume 1.26 kg and the British 2.2 kg annually, Indians take in 0.65 kg and Chinese only 0.53 kg per year.

The FAO report also stressed that enforcing minimum quality standards for tea – though reaching agreement on such benchmarks is complicated – will spur demand.

### **ENSURING SAFE USE OF MODERN BIOTECHNOLOGY**

More than 3000 participants from 147 countries assembled in Bonn for a week-long [meeting](#) on how to improve their commitments to ensuring the safe use of modern biotechnology as outlined under a UN-backed treaty (12/5/08).

The fourth meeting of the parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, itself a supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity, was held in Bonn, a [news release](#) issued by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) stated.

The agency said one of its priorities was to reach agreement on international rules on liability and redress for potential damages caused by the movements of living modified organisms (LMOs), often known as genetically modified organisms. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Convention Executive Secretary, urged delegates to “seize the moment” and reach agreement.

“You are mandated to fulfill the requirement, set out in Article 27 in 2000, when the Protocol was signed,” he said. “In doing this, you will ensure the effective implementation of the Protocol.”

Participants were also discussing other issues, including ways to finance the continued work of the Protocol and assessing the socio-economic impact that LMOs have on biodiversity.

### **SOLAR POWER REBATE TO BE MEANS-TESTED**

The Australian Government is to restrict the availability of rebates for households installing solar power, under measures in the May 2008 Budget, the ABC reported (13/5/08).

Access to the rebates are now restricted to households with an annual taxable income of less than \$100,000, which is in line with the means test on solar hot water rebates. The government is bringing forward \$25.6 million to pay for the increased use of the Solar Homes and Communities Plan, formerly known as the Photovoltaic Rebate Program.

A sum of \$3 million has been set aside for a 'One Stop Green Shop' website to provide a single window to all federal, state and local government environmental programs for sustainability at home.

### **FUNDS FOR WATER HARVESTING**

Under the \$12.9 billion long-term 'Water for the Future' plan, cities and towns of 50,000 people or more will be eligible for funding to establish new sources of water supply through the use of desalination, recycling and storm-water harvesting. Access to the \$254.8 million will be conditional on state, territory and local governments achieving agreed reforms through COAG. Another \$400 million has been brought forward to speed up water buybacks and infrastructure projects in the Murray-Darling Basin. ABC [Related Story: Solar power rebate to be means tested](#)

### **OLD MAKES WAY FOR NEW IN REGIONAL BUDGET MEASURES**

The Australian Government May 2008 Budget allocated \$176 million for its Better Regions initiative and up to \$74 million for the Regional Development Australia (RDA) network, the ABC reported (13/5/08). The Growing Regions Program was cut by \$30 million and the Regional Partnerships scheme lost nearly \$23 million. Both would continue to shrink in coming years. A total of \$760.9 million was allocated to continue Exceptional Circumstances (EC) assistance in 2008-09. A new, \$14.5 million program to help farmers coming off EC assistance with daily living expenses would provide up to 12 months' income support.

ABC [Related Story: Old makes way for new in regional Budget measures](#)

### **FARMERS' SHORT-TERM SUPPORT**

Australian farmers facing financial difficulty will be assisted by a new \$14.5 million short-term support program in the 2008-09 Budget. "This short-term income support is designed to help farmers in financial difficulty in areas that are no longer EC-declared," Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Tony Burke said. "The \$14.5 million Transitional Income Support program will provide up to 12 months' income support for farmers who are still under financial strain.

DETAILS: [http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/may\\_2008/new\\_short-term\\_income\\_support\\_for\\_farming\\_families](http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/may_2008/new_short-term_income_support_for_farming_families)

### **BROADBAND SERVICES**

The government has also allocated \$271 million over four years to bring regional and rural broadband services up to metropolitan standards. The forestry industry has been allocated \$20 million, including \$8 million over three years for research into the impacts of climate change on the industry. The \$20 million also includes \$1 million to address the skills shortage, \$9 million to boost investment and export, and \$1 million to tackle illegal logging.

### **HELP FOR FOOD-PRODUCING INDUSTRIES**

"The government is focused on ensuring our primary industries remain globally competitive and prepared for the increased risk of pests and disease resulting from climate change," Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Tony Burke said. Mr Burke said that \$35 million in the May 2008 Budget was for a new regional food producers program. "The assistance will include dollar-for-dollar grants to regionally based food processors and \$10 million for innovation and productivity in the seafood industry," he said.

**PLASTIC BAGS REPORT: 25C CHARGE WOULD MAKE CUSTOMERS HESITATE**

An Investigation of options to reduce the impacts of plastic bags report released in April by the National Environment Protection Council Service Corporation in SA, says in a conclusion that if a mandatory retailer charge were selected as the preferred mechanism (to discourage plastic bag use) 25c had been modelled as being cheaper for the economy rather than the 10 or 20c options.

There was a greater chance of reducing plastic bag litter if consumers had to think before purchasing otherwise 'free' plastic bags. Any form of implementation would require regular review to ensure continuing effectiveness and to minimise any unintended adverse impacts.

DETAILS: [www.ephc.gov.au](http://www.ephc.gov.au) or from Level 5, 81 Flinders Street, Adelaide., on 08 8419 1200; F 08 8224 0912; [exec@ephc.gov.au](mailto:exec@ephc.gov.au)