

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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Unity and Supplement can also be accessed at: <http://www.unityunaa.info/>

Earlier editions of UNity 2004-05, 2006 and 2007 are on the UNAA website: www.unaa.org.au or email the editor.

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

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BAN PERSUADES BURMA TO ALLOW IN ALL FOREIGN AID WORKERS

Burma's Senior General Than Shwe had agreed to let in all foreign aid workers to help the 2.4 million survivors of Cyclone Nargis, UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon said after meeting him.

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An FBI agent watched the Australian prisoner Mamdouh Habib repeatedly vomit during a marathon interrogation session at Guantanamo Bay in 2004.

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

LATE FRIDAY NEWS:

Burma's Senior General Than Shwe had agreed to let in all aid workers to help the 2.4 million survivors of Cyclone Nargis, UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon said after meeting him, the ABC/Reuters reported (23/5/08). Mr Ban was in Burma/Myanmar on a mission to convince the reclusive military government to permit more foreign relief expertise into the country.

SEE BELOW: UN SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS BURMA

NEW UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ELECTED

Fifteen countries from around the world have been elected to serve on the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) for three-year terms starting next month after one round of balloting among member states at the UN Headquarters in New York (21/5/08).

Zambia, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Gabon were chosen in that order to fill the four vacant African seats on the 47-member panel, according to a formula that allots seats among regions.

The three seats up for grabs in the Latin America and the Caribbean region – successful candidates in each category must obtain an absolute majority of valid votes cast by the 192 General Assembly members – went to Chile, Brazil and Argentina.

In the Eastern European category, Slovakia and Ukraine won the two available seats, while Serbia was unsuccessful.

Six countries contested the four positions distributed to Asian States, with Japan, Bahrain, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan winning the most votes to join the panel, and Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste (East Timor) missing out.

The closest contest occurred in the race for the two vacant seats in the Western European and Other States category. France scored 123 votes and the United Kingdom picked up 120, edging out Spain, which garnered 119 votes.

Some of the successful candidates had been due to retire on June 19 when their current term expired – they were Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Ukraine, Brazil, France and the United Kingdom.

UN RIGHTS COUNCIL URGED NOT TO RE-ELECT SRI LANKA

The UN should prevent Sri Lanka from being reelected to the Human Rights Council, Human Rights Watch has urged. Countries seeking to join or be reelected to the Council are facing a vote Wednesday by the UN General Assembly. Human Rights Watch said Sri Lanka should be turned down because it allegedly has engaged in widespread abductions and "disappearances."

[Yahoo!/Agence France-Presse](#) (20/5/08).

BAN ASKED TO ADVISE ON IMPROVING UN PEACE-BUILDING SYSTEM

Calling for the UN to play a lead role in coordinating international efforts to help countries recovering from conflict stabilise and eventually prosper, the Security Council has stressed the need for greater funding for peace-building and laying groundwork for longer-term reconstruction and development (2/5/08).

In a presidential statement after a day-long open [debate](#), Deputy Permanent Representative Karen Pierce, of the UK, said council members recognised that financing should be “available from the outset” for recovery and peace-building activities, and later for longer-term processes. She said the UN should lead coordination in the field in countries emerging from conflict, working closely with regional organisations, international bodies, individual member states, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector.

The efforts of the UN Peace-building Commission, set up in late 2005, were welcomed for providing advice and leadership. The Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was called on to advise within the next year how best to improve the UN system’s handling of peace-building. Earlier, Mr Ban had told the meeting that the UN must become more coherent in coordinating its activities, increase its capacity on the ground and build up its civilian expertise.

Ms Pierce noted that post-conflict countries faced a vast array of challenges, ranging from re-establishing the institutions of government, disarming, demobilising and reintegrating national armed forces, reforming the security sector, respecting human rights and revitalising the economy. “The Security Council underlines that civilian expertise in post-conflict peace-building is essential in helping to meet these needs,” she said.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS BURMA

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is visiting cyclone-devastated Burma (Myanmar), is meeting with the country’s Senior General Than Shwe in an effort to accelerate relief efforts for the estimated 2.4 million people in need of help.

[Speaking with reporters](#) at Bangkok, Mr Ban said, “I will meet with senior government officials in the Myanmar Government, including Senior General Than Shwe. It was essential to “expedite all arrangements for facilitating the free movement of international relief aid and workers.

“The government itself acknowledges that there has never been a disaster on this scale in the history of their country,” he said, stressing that it was a “critical moment” for Myanmar. He noted the relief program so far had reached only about 25 per cent of people in need. Up to 2.4 million people were severely affected and approximately 60 per cent of infrastructure in the delta destroyed or damaged, including three quarters of the area’s schools.

He said Myanmar’s government had estimated losses at more than \$10 billion. Announcing that the UN had established a logistics hub for aid in Thailand, Mr Ban said he hoped it would also be possible to set up forward logistics bases within Myanmar itself, in coordination with the government and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He commended ASEAN for helping the flow of relief aid and workers into Myanmar.

The secretary-general warned again that the international community needed to give thought to Myanmar’s longer-term needs, saying it may already be too late for farmers to plant the next harvest and that the economic impact of the disaster would be severe.

He will participate in a funding conference in Myanmar’s largest city, Yangon (Rangoon) and planned to “reinforce a partnership between Myanmar and the international community, including ASEAN and key neighbouring countries like India and China.” He stressed that aid and assistance should not be politicised. “Our focus now is on saving lives,” he said.

A major relief effort by UN agencies includes the World Food Program ([WFP](#)) use of nine helicopters to fly in food supplies. It has dispatched enough rice to feed 340,000 for two weeks but reports entire communities were still trying to survive without outside assistance. The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) are providing shelter, medical equipment and water purification tablets, and carrying out health surveillances. The Office of the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said that, of the 2.4 million cyclone victims, an estimated 1.4 million were in the most severely affected townships of the delta region, and relief efforts would need to continue for some time.

According to the World Food Program ([WFP](#)), Myanmar's authorities have now granted access for the agency to bring in 10 helicopters to carry three tons of food and other critically needed supplies to victims deep inside the delta.

Myanmar slowly relented to international pressure to accept more outside help, but state media said on Wednesday that the government would not allow US warships and helicopters poised off its shores to deliver aid to cyclone victims, msnbc reported (21/5/08).

The New Light of Myanmar newspaper said such military assistance "comes with strings attached" and cited a website article saying Washington wanted to overthrow the country's military regime and grab its oil deposits.

The US, as well as France and Great Britain, have naval vessels with humanitarian supplies off the Myanmar coast, waiting to deliver them. The item did not mention the French and UK navies. REPORT: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24731065/from/ET/>

NO FINANCIAL AID, SAYS WORLD BANK

A top World Bank official said the bank would not give financial aid or a loan to cyclone-hit Burma because of its outstanding debts, USA TODAY reported (21/5/08).

Managing Director Juan Jose Daboub was reported to have said that the bank was working with South East Asian countries by providing technical support to assess damage in Burma (Myanmar) and help them plan rehabilitation efforts.

But he said the bank was "not in a position to provide (financial) resources to Burma" because the military-ruled nation had been in arrears with the World Bank since 1998. His comments came ahead of an aid donors' conference in Rangoon to pledge funds for Burma.

REPORT: http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-20-burma-world-bank_N.htm

DISTRESS OVER 'SHAM REFERENDUM'

It was deeply distressing that the Burmese Regime saw fit to push ahead with its sham referendum instead of focusing its energies on the massive humanitarian Cyclone Nargis tragedy, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said (16/5/08). The international community was responding well to the immense needs and if the regime was prepared to fully open its doors to international experts, a substantial increase in delivery of humanitarian assistance would be possible.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s075a_08.html

SINS, AND MONEY, OF THEIR FATHERS

Last October, in the wake of the savage repression of peaceful demonstrations in Burma, the Reserve Bank of Australia announced it had been directed by the Federal Government to apply financial sanctions against leading figures, supporters and family members of Burma's military regime, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (21/5/08). Any transactions involving the transfer of funds or payments to, by the order of, or on behalf of any listed person were prohibited without prior approval by the central bank, it reported. (This could involve family members currently in Australia). ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/20/1211182794309.html>

CHINESE RALLY TO HELP FELLOW CITIZENS

Chinese citizens rallied to help victims of last week's massive earthquake in a spontaneous outpouring of emotional and material support. Meanwhile, officials announced on Tuesday more than 70,000 people are either dead or still missing. AlertNet.org/Reuters (20/5/08).

AUSTRALIA SENDS FURTHER \$1 MILLION

Australia will provide further \$1 million assistance to help rescue and recovery efforts in Sichuan Province following the earthquake and aftershocks in China. "On behalf of the Australian Government and the Australian people, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to China, and in particular to the families and friends of the victims of this terrible tragedy," Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said. DETAILS: <http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-aa0838.html>

NEED FOR BETTER SECURITY IN FIJI

Following the first threat, the Federal Government had taken urgent steps to fully revise security arrangements for Australian High Commission in Fiji, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said (15/5/08). DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s076_08.html

THREATS: FIJI MILITARY SUSPECTED

Australian officials believe the Fijian military was responsible for two "credible" death threats against High Commissioner James Batley in the past two weeks, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (17/5/08). It was reported as understood that the high commission had passed on suspicions to Fijian authorities.

The newspaper reported the Federal Government had been highly critical of the military-backed regime - which seized power in December 2006 - and had led international effort to pressure the rulers to hold elections. On Thursday Foreign Minister Stephen Smith had told parliament that the Fijians had failed to respond to earlier requests for additional security at the high commission.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/16/1210765174011.html>

UN TRADE LAW GROUP WELCOMES AUSTRALIAN MOVE ON INSOLVENCY

The UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) welcomed Australia's adoption of legislation – based on the commission's model – on cross-border insolvency (21/5/08). Australia becomes the fifteenth country or jurisdiction to adopt legislation based on the [UNCITRAL](http://www.uncitral.org) model on this subject, which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1997 to try to help states harmonise laws on insolvency.

The model law deals with cases where an insolvent debtor has assets in more than one state or where some creditors are not from the state where the insolvency proceedings are being held.

It aims to respect individual countries' national procedural laws, but at the same time include features to resolve problems, such as by granting access to courts to foreign representatives, enhancing cross-border cooperation and recognising foreign proceedings. Established in 1966, the Vienna-based UNCITRAL works to remove obstacles to international trade by progressively modernising and harmonising trade law.

CYBER TERRORIST WARNING: UN

Nuclear power plants, telecommunications networks and other sensitive facilities were potential targets of cyber-terrorists, the UN information technology agency warned, Yahoo/AAP reported (20/5/08). Hamadoun Toure, secretary general of the International Telecommunication Union, told envoys and technology experts from more than 30 countries at a Kuala Lumpur meeting that information technology has "changed the dynamics of terrorism" and that the world must do more to counter the threat. REPORT: Yahoo!/AAP

BAN ENCOURAGES UN STUDENTS TO 'DREAM BIG'

The UN must not be deterred by the threat of terrorism and the challenge of limited resources from trying to meet its responsibilities, such as curbing climate change, promoting peace and

encouraging economic development around the world, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [told students](#) (16/5/08).

Addressing the Model UN Conference in New York, Mr Ban said the world body often needed greater support – financial and political – to achieve its tasks, such as in the strife-torn Darfur region of Sudan, where the hybrid UN-African Union peacekeeping mission ([UNAMID](#)) was deployed to try to quell the fighting and humanitarian suffering.

He said last December's terror attack in Algiers, Algeria, which claimed the lives of 17 staff members, illustrated that the UN was now under threat. "But we are not deterred by these tough conditions," he said. "If anything, we are more determined than ever to press forward with our mission to promote peace, development and human rights."

He encouraged conference participants to blaze trails on a global scale. "You have a higher sense of purpose that draws you to think beyond the borders of your own countries," he said. "I want to encourage you continue on this path, and to dream big."

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26699&Cr=ki-moon&Cr1=responsib>

[UNITY, UN AND UNAA CONTACTS](#)

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[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>.

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

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

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

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

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Daily Press briefings by spokesperson for UN Secretary General:

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2008/db080507.doc.htm>

B. CLIMATE CHANGE

BLAIR TO LEAD INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Tony Blair is to lead a new international team to tackle the intractable problem of securing a global deal on climate change which would have the backing of China and America, the UK Guardian reported (14/5/08).

The former UK prime minister believes he can help prepare a blueprint for an agreement to cut carbon emissions by 50 per cent by 2050, and has the backing of the White House, the UN and Europe, including UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

He told the Guardian he has been working on the project with a group of climate change experts since he left office last summer, and will publish an interim report to the G8 group of industrialised nations this (Northern) summer.

"This is extremely urgent. A 50 per cent cut by 2050 has to be a central component of this. We have to try this year to get that agreed, because the moment you do agree that, then you have something for everyone to focus upon. We need a true and proper global deal, and that needs to include America and China," Mr Blair said.

REPORT: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/mar/14/tonyblair.climatechange>

SOUTH EAST ASIAN MILLIONS 'AT GREAT RISK': PM

It was critically important that the international community addressed the challenges of climate change, energy security, food security and water security with urgency, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told the National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development at Parliament House, Canberra (19/5/08). His address focussed on leadership for long term sustainability: the roles of government, business and the international community.

He said these concerned humanitarian challenges, environmental challenges and security challenges. The security threat had been highlighted in the food riots reported in recent weeks in more than a dozen countries, including Bangladesh, Haiti, Indonesia and several African nations.

Climate change also presented a long term threat to global security, he said. The international community must develop practical strategies for climate change adaptation.

"There are hundreds of millions of people in the heavily populated mega delta regions in South, East and South East Asia who will be at great risk as climate change accelerates, and the international community must work to address these dangers.

"Without making a specific connection between climate change and Cyclone Nargis, the current human calamity in Burma demonstrates the vulnerability of developing nations to the impact of increasingly frequent extreme weather events." Australia was seeking to play a constructive role internationally in addressing the long-term sustainability and security challenges, he said.

SPEECH: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/speech/2008/speech_0253.cfm

GOVERNMENT RECOGNISES CONCERN OF RIVER COMMUNITIES

A Stakeholder Consultative Committee to evaluate the first Federal Government water purchase in the Murray Darling Basin was described by Climate Change and Water Senator Wong at an Irrigation Australia conference in Melbourne (20/5/08). The \$50 million open tender to purchase water across the Murray Darling Basin began in February and closed on May 16. She said Australia was the driest inhabited continent and yet it had one of the highest per capita water usages in the world. For too long, Australians had ignored the impacts of climate change, drought and historic over-allocation of water supplies. The Federal Government recognised and accepted the scale of the problem that the nation confronted as the government begins to roll out our plan – particularly in the Murray Darling Basin.

"We are also acutely aware that many communities in the Murray Darling Basin are concerned about what *Water for the Future* will mean for *their* future," she said.
SPEECH: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/sp20080520.pdf>

GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE - NEW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

The House of Representatives Primary Industries and Resources Committee commenced a new inquiry into draft legislation for greenhouse gas storage (19/5/08). The committee will investigate an exposure draft of the *Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Greenhouse Gas Storage) Bill*, which proposes to amend the *Offshore Petroleum Act 2006* to establish a framework for access, property rights and the management of carbon dioxide injection and storage operations in offshore Commonwealth waters.

The committee will review the provisions of the draft *Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Greenhouse Gas Storage) Bill*. Specifically, the committee will ascertain whether the Bill:

- Establishes legal certainty for access and property rights for the injection and long-term storage of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in offshore Commonwealth waters;

- Provides a regulatory regime which will enable management of GHG injection and storage activities in a manner which responds to community and industry concerns;

- Provides a predictable and transparent system to manage the interaction between GHG injection and storage operators with pre-existing and co-existing rights, including, but not limited to, those of petroleum and fishing operators, should these come into conflict;

- Promotes certainty for investment in injection and storage activities; and

- Establishes a legislative framework that provides a model that could be adopted on a national basis. The committee is due to report at the end of July.

SUBMISSIONS: Due latest by **June 10**, but can be sent early: pir.reps@aph.gov.au.

Submission guidelines: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pir/exposedraft/index.htm>

DETAILS: Inquiry Secretary on 02 6277 2500.

\$3.6 MILLION CONTRIBUTION TO ASSIST LATROBE AQUIFER FARMERS

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, has announced a \$3.6m contribution towards assisting 55 Gippsland irrigators affected by falling groundwater levels in the Latrobe Aquifer. She said the contribution was in line with advice from Victorian and Commonwealth officials that a package of \$7.2 million was appropriate to assist irrigators to access their groundwater entitlements (15/5/08).

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ON AUSTRALIA'S COAST

The House of Representatives Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts Committee is conducting an inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on Australia's coastal zone. Committee chairperson Jennie George has emphasised the critical importance of the inquiry for Australia's coastal areas (20/5/08)

"Climate change has serious implications for coastal areas as much of Australia's population and infrastructure is in the coastal zone," Ms George said. "The growth in population along the coast is also increasing pressure on the environment in many areas. The committee has received excellent submissions to date, raising significant coastal management issues", she said. "The committee is keen to hear the views of interested persons and groups across Australia and encourages them to put in their submissions by the end of May".

The inquiry will examine existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, ways to promote sustainable use of coastal resources and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise. It is also looking at mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities, and governance and institutional arrangements.

DETAILS and submissions: <http://www.aph.gov.au/ccwea>. Submissions due latest by **May 30**.

BACKGROUND: Committee secretariat on 02 6277 4580; ccwea.reps@aph.gov.au.

FUNDS TO MEET THREATS AND DISASTERS

Funds of \$42.6 million over four years have been allocated to help communities become more resilient to threats and disasters, both man-made and natural. It will also provide funding for natural disaster risk management studies and strategies. The inclusion of other critical sectors will be considered in mid-2009, a Federal Government media release stated. DETAILS:

http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/www/ministers/RobertMc.nsf/Page/MediaReleases_2008_SecondQuarter_BuildingMoreResilientCommunitiestoMeettheChallengesofthe21stCentury

GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE NEW INQUIRY - NEW SUBMISSIONS DATE

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Promotes certainty for investment in injection and storage activities; and

Establishes a legislative framework that provides a model that could be adopted on a national basis.

The committee is due to report in mid August 2008.

SUBMISSIONS: Due by **June 30**, preferred electronically to: pir.reps@aph.gov.au.

DETAILS: Inquiry Secretary (02) 6277 2500, email pir.reps@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee's webpage at <http://www.aph.gov.au/pir>

NEW VISION OF CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH GOOGLE EARTH

Millions of Google Earth users around the world will be able to see how climate change could affect the planet and its people over the next century, along with viewing the loss of Antarctic ice shelves over the past 50 years, The Hindu reported (21/5/08). The new project, 'Climate Change in Our World,' was launched as a collaboration of Google, the UK Government, the Met Office Hadley Centre and the British Antarctic Survey.

REPORT: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/05/21/stories/2008052157491500.htm>

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

FBI AGENT SAYS HABIB ENDURED 30HR INTERROGATION WITH ONLY SHORT BREAK

An FBI agent watched the Australian prisoner Mamdouh Habib repeatedly vomit during a marathon interrogation session at Guantanamo Bay in 2004, a US Justice Department report says. The agent said Mr Habib, a former Sydney taxi driver held at the US military prison at Guantanamo for more than two years, endured two 15-hour interrogation sessions with only a short break in between, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (22/5/08).

Details about Mr Habib's confinement at Guantanamo, including an alleged assault inflicted by a private-contract interrogator with Lockheed Martin, were included in the report, which took the Department of Justice more than three years to compile.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/21/1211182896574.html>

In another Sydney Morning Herald report, 'FBI staff silenced over torture' (22/5/08), it was stated that when evidence of prisoner mistreatment at Guantanamo Bay began to mount in 2002, FBI agents created a 'war crimes file' to document accusations against American military personnel, but were eventually ordered to close the file down, a Justice Department report disclosed. REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/21/1211182897520.html>

JUNTA USES 'SURVIVORS IN LABOUR CAMPS'

Following the devastation of Cyclone Nargis on May 2, the military has forcibly relocated tens of thousands of survivors from the Irrawaddy Delta, including many who had sought shelter in Buddhist monasteries - the centre of unrest during protests against the junta last year (17/5/08).

Ko Hla Min, a 35-year-old farmer who lost nine relatives in the storm, said those rounded up by soldiers around the devastated town of Bogalay were being used as work gangs. "They have to break stones at the construction sites," he said. "They are paid [\$US1] a day but are not provided with any food." A senior UN official said he feared other survivors would be moved back to the delta and used to plant the next rice crop in coming weeks.

GAMBIAN LEADER WARNS HOMOSEXUALS

Gambian President Alhaji Dr Yahya Jammeh has delivered a stark warning to homosexuals to leave the country or face judicial consequences. Gambia has laws criminalising homosexuality, and the president said anyone harbouring or supporting gays would also face prosecution. [AllAfrica Global Media/The Daily Observer](#) (19/5/08).

APPEAL FOR PALESTINIAN ORPHANS

Justice for Palestine Matters is appealing to Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Ambassador, and Dan Gillerman, Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, because it believed the Israeli military was about to close down schools and orphanages run by the Islamic Charitable Society (ICS) in the West Bank city of Hebron. The Palestinian organisation said Israel had killed 1,020 Palestinian children since 2000 and Palestinians had killed 124 Israeli children. "Too many precious children have suffered and died as a result of politics," the appeal stated.

DETAILS: admin@palestinematters.com

100,000 AUSTRALIANS HOMELESS EACH NIGHT

Each night, around 100,000 Australians were homeless, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said when addressing Homeless Australia on Thursday. He said "46,000 of these are young people under 24 years old, 10,000 are children under the age of 12, 17,000 are Indigenous and 6,000 are senior Australians over the age of 65.

"The cost of homelessness to individuals and their families is large. It's not just an economic cost. It's also an acute social cost. For children, homelessness affects school routines and friendships, education and employment. Worse still, experiencing homelessness as a child makes adult homelessness more likely. That's why we need to turn the corner," he said.

SPEECH: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0260.cfm.

TIWI BOARDING FACILITY OPENS

The first residential boarding facility on the Tiwi Islands was officially opened this week at Pickertaramoor on Melville Island. REPORT: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/tiwi_islands_20may08.htm

FIRST BISHOP - ANOTHER MILESTONE FOR WOMEN

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick said on Thursday that equality between Australian women and men remained a challenging but relevant task, considering that 51 per cent of the population was still grossly under-represented in boardrooms, the judiciary and in politics.

"Women make up just 12 per cent of executive manager positions in the ASX top 200 companies and just three per cent of CEO positions; women comprise only 13 per cent of the bench; and women still earn less than men - receiving just under 84 cents for every dollar a man earns," she said. Ms Broderick was congratulating Archdeacon Kay Goldsworthy in Perth for becoming the first woman bishop in Australia. She also congratulated the Anglican Church.

Archdeacon Goldsworthy's appointment as Australia's first woman Bishop was one of four major milestones Australia had reached over the last year, she said. These included a federal ministry and outer Cabinet of nearly 25 per cent of women; Australia's first female Deputy Prime Minister and the announcement of the first female Governor General.

Earlier in the week Commissioner Broderick outlined the Human Rights & Equal Opportunities Commission's model for a national paid leave scheme for parents in her opening statement to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave. HREOC will lodge a more detailed submission by the closing date, **June 2**. STATEMENT: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/2008/paid_maternity_leave_20080520.html

COMMITMENT TO IMPLEMENT HREOC SAME-SEX RECOMMENDATIONS

This year, the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHo), held on May 17, was marked by the Federal Government's commitment to implement HREOC Same-Sex recommendations.

"This is a historic year for Australia, with the Federal Government committing to implement the recommendations of HREOC's Same-Sex: Same Entitlements report to change the 58 financial and work-related federal laws that discriminate against gay and lesbian couples and their children, as well as to change around 40 additional discriminatory laws," said Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes.

"With the amendment of approximately 100 federal laws to provide equality for gay and lesbian people in Australia forming part of the Federal Budget announcements this week, IDAHo has taken on a very special significance this year."

Internationally, there were still around 85 member states of the UN that considered homosexuality to be a criminal act, Mr Innes said. A small number carried the death penalty as punishment. AUSTRALIAN DETAILS: www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/gay_lesbian/stories.html

CLARKE INQUIRY: DEPARTMENT PROMISES TRANSPARENCY

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship remained totally committed to co-operating fully with the Clarke Inquiry, a departmental media release stated (15/5/08).

"The department has made it clear it would be completely transparent in presenting all appropriate material to the inquiry. In its appearance before the preliminary hearing, the department gave assurances it looked forward to fully cooperating with the inquiry.

'The inquiry will have full access to the department's documents, systems, emails and officers,' Secretary Andrew Metcalfe said. "In fact I will be inviting the inquiry to visit the department where inspection of our documents will be arranged if requested."

The issue of the release of documents under Freedom of Information (FOI) was an entirely separate matter, the media released stated.

"The department released a substantial number of documents under FOI to Dr Haneef's legal representative, Peter Russo on November 8 and 14, 2007 and January 8," Mr Metcalfe said. "Following this release, his lawyers requested an internal review of the documents exempted, as is their right under the FOI Act.

"The department assigned a senior officer to review the three decisions and gave priority to the request to enable Maurice Blackburn (Dr Haneef's lawyers) to have the FOI review finalised before the Clarke Inquiry's preliminary hearing on April 28. This process resulted in further documents being released to Dr Haneef's legal representatives on April 24, a number of which were released following further consultation with other Commonwealth agencies.

"It is not unusual for an internal review process to result in further releases. That is the purpose of internal review – to have a new decision-maker look afresh at the relevant documents and make a new decision," he said. DETAILS: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/d08043.htm> and 02 6264 2244.

END TO UNJUST VISA WILL HELP REFUGEES REBUILD LIVES

The abolition of the Temporary Protection visa (TPV) regime will help about 1000 refugees rebuild their lives in Australia, Immigration and Citizenship Minister, Senator Chris Evans, said (15/5/08).

He said from early 2008-09, refugees on TPVs currently in Australia would receive a permanent visa, regardless of their mode of arrival. Provided they met security and character requirements, they would be granted permanent residency in Australia and would not need to have their protection claims reassessed.

'It means these refugees will now be afforded the same benefits and entitlements as holders of a permanent visa,' he said. DETAILS: Simon Dowding on 02 6277 7860 / 0411 138 541 and <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08048.htm>

TAKE-AWAY ALCOHOL BAN EXTENSION

Extending the ban on full and mid-strength take away alcohol for an indefinite period in Western Australia's Fitzroy Crossing was a step in the right direction, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma and Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick said (22/5/08).

"This move paves the way for promoting long-term change in the community," he said.

"Whilst this indefinite extension will be assessed at 12 months for its effectiveness, its extension is a testament to the Aboriginal women leaders in the community whose determination to create a better future for their community has led to this extension being granted," Commissioner Broderick said. "These women, with the support of many men in the community, put in a huge effort to get this extension in place and I congratulate them on their success," she said.

"This is yet another example of community led solutions, which is exactly the sort of thing we have been advocating for in Indigenous communities around the country: when local Indigenous people are involved in instigating and building change in their communities, there is a unique opportunity to achieve positive and long-term change," Mr Calma said.

"Extension of this alcohol ban is just the start. It is essential that governments get behind the Fitzroy community's efforts to push ahead with positive initiatives in health, housing and education."

Commissioner Broderick said there had been a significant reduction of reported instances of domestic violence since the ban had been introduced and that hospital visits related to alcohol abuse had also been reduced. The West Australian director of liquor licensing banned the takeaway sale of full-strength and mid-strength alcohol last October for six months following the high rates of domestic violence and suicide in the area.

D. PEACE & SECURITY

UN COUNTER-TERRORISM TASKFORCE NEEDS SUSTAINABLE FUNDING – CHIEF

The UN task force charged with coordinating the world body's counter-terrorism efforts needs guaranteed and sustainable funding, rather than the current voluntary model, so that it can carry out its work, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim told a at UN briefing (21/5/08).

The group – established three years ago – had already played an important role in identifying where the UN can assist in global efforts against terrorism, but the taskforce had no standing resources of its own and had to attract funds on a voluntary basis, the assembly president said.

"I commend the governments for providing funding for various working groups, but it is also important to ensure a stable and sustainable central support for the taskforce," he said. "Indeed, there is a need to complete the institutionalisation of the taskforce, as supported by the General Assembly when it adopted the Strategy [in September 2006]."

Robert Orr, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning and taskforce chairman, said the voluntary funding model "has significantly slowed the pace" of the work of the taskforce. We have needed to collect, process and transfer funds to set the working groups on their feet financially, to help them bring on relevant experts, and to get them what they need administratively from the UN system," he said. "And we have been doing so with a skeletal staff run out of my office." On September 4 the General Assembly will meet in plenary session to review the implementation of the strategy so far.

AUSTRALIA/ASIA PACIFIC

EAST TIMORESE LOOK TO UNCERTAIN FUTURE

East Timorese citizens celebrated the sixth anniversary of their independence, but with an edge of uncertainty about their political and economic future, Jill Jolliffe reported in the Sydney Morning Herald (20/5/08). Claims that the government would collapse after Xavier do Amaral, the leader of the Timorese Social Democratic Association, apparently dumped the coalition in a deal backing Fretilin's return, had so far come to nothing.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/19/1211182703393.html>

AUSTRALIA JOINS PROJECTED BAN ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

The Australian Government believes that the time has come for the international community to address the impact of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable humanitarian harm, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said this week.

Australia was pleased to join over 120 states at a Diplomatic Conference in Dublin from May 19-30 to negotiate and agree the text of a legally binding convention prohibiting cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

The Australian delegation, led by Ambassador Caroline Millar, includes representatives of the Australian Red Cross and World Vision Australia. These organisations have first-hand experience in assisting survivors and rebuilding communities affected by cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW).

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

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WAR CRIMES

The Australian Red Cross and Mallesons Stephen Jaques are organising the 2008 Humanitarian Law Perspectives seminar. The Melbourne seminar, titled 'Accountability for War Crimes - Issues of Command Responsibility in International Tribunals', will be held at Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Level 50, Bourke Place, 600 Bourke Street, Melbourne, on May 28, at 6pm for 6:30pm-8pm.

The seminar will include two presentations on the issue of command responsibility, when 'The Defender', Melbourne barrister Peter Morrissey, will discuss his experience as lead counsel for the defence in the Halilovic proceedings at the ICTY in 2005. Under the title, 'The Prosecutor', Elli Lewis will discuss her experience as a solicitor in the Office of the Prosecutor at the ICTY in 2006/7 when she was assigned to the Boskoski and Tarculovski trials.

DETAILS: Agata Wierzbowski at ARC on 03 8327 7737; or Taryn McCamley on 03 9643 4157/

ASIA

AUSTRALIAN FORCES PUSH INTO TALIBAN TERRITORY

Australian soldiers have begun a major push into the Taliban heartland of Oruzgan Province in Southern Afghanistan with the intent of pushing out the Taliban, restoring vital infrastructure and creating a safe environment for the Afghan people, a Federal Government media release said (19/5/08).

The Australian push is being spearheaded by engineers, infantry, cavalry and support troops of the 4th Reconstruction Task Force (RTF 4), drawn mainly from Sydney and Brisbane areas.

RTF 4 Commanding Officer, Lt Colonel Stuart Yeaman, said the taskforce had moved into the Baluchi region, north of its base at Tarin Kowt as part of a joint Dutch and Coalition operation.

"This is an area of huge tactical and strategic significance for the Taliban extremists," Lt Colonel Yeaman said. "This is the Taliban's backyard and we are right on their main supply route between Helmand Province and their supply bases to the north.

"The aim of this series of operations is to clear out the Taliban, and then build the physical infrastructure – patrol bases particularly - which will allow the Afghan National Army (ANA) and police, with support from the International Security Assistance Force, to dominate these areas.

"Just months ago Taliban extremists were able to operate almost unhindered here, now the situation is very different. It's fair to say that these operations, which are happening across Afghanistan are having a real, positive impact on the security situation here." Lt Colonel Yeaman said a delicate balance was required between overcoming the Taliban by force and making them irrelevant through capacity building and winning the hearts and minds of the local population.
DETAILS: Defence on 02 6265 3343/0408 498 664.

UN ENVOY AND IRANIAN PRESIDENT CONFER ON AFGHAN RECONSTRUCTION

The top UN envoy to Afghanistan met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Tehran in a bid to boost support for the reconstruction of strife-torn Afghanistan, the UN News reported (19/5/08).

"We had a very constructive discussion on the challenges facing Afghanistan and the importance of full cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbours to help secure peace, stability and progress for all people in the region," Kai Eide, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, said after the talks.

He said the two agreed that a stable Afghanistan would benefit Iran, and noted that they also discussed next month's Paris Conference in support of the Afghan Government and the current food crisis. "I interpret the fact that the president received me immediately upon my arrival in Tehran today as a clear sign of support for my mission and for our work together in the future," Mr. Eide, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan noted.

MIDDLE EAST

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the announcement that Syria and Israel have started holding indirect peace talks aimed at resolving their long-running conflict. The two Middle

East countries confirmed that they were holding talks, under the auspices of Turkey, in the hope of reaching a comprehensive peace in accordance with the 1991 Madrid Conference terms of reference for peace (21/5/08).

Mr Ban commended Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "for taking this important step." He also thanked Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for his efforts.

LEBANESE AVOID NEW CIVIL WAR

Rival Lebanese leaders have reached a deal to end 18 months of political conflict that had pushed their country to the brink of a new civil war, The Australian reported (21/5/08).

Delegates from the US-backed ruling coalition and the Hezbollah-led opposition said disputes over a parliamentary election law and a new cabinet had been settled on the sixth day of Arab-mediated talks in Qatar. This assists parliament to elect army chief General Michel Suleiman as president, a post that has been vacant since November because of the political deadlock.

FRANCE IN CONTACT WITH HAMAS

France confirmed on Monday that it had been engaged in contacts with Hamas leaders for several months to try to better understand its positions, the New York Times reported (20/5/08). The French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, says France's recent contacts with Hamas do not constitute "relations." The Bush administration, which recently likened talks with Hamas and other groups to appeasement of the Nazis, criticised the French for the contacts, calling them unhelpful.

KILLER OF ARCHBISHOP SENTENCED

A leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq has been sentenced to death for the killing of the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, the BBC reported this week. The archbishop of the northern city of Mosul was kidnapped in February by gunmen who attacked his car, killing his driver and two bodyguards. His body was found in a shallow grave two weeks later. The Iraqi government said the criminal court had imposed the death sentence on Ahmed Ali Ahmed, known as Abu Omar.

IRANIAN PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS 'DANGEROUS STUFF': PM

In an interview with David Speers, of Sky News this week, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was asked whether he was planning to take the Iranian President Ahmedinejad to the International Court of Justice for inciting genocide and denying the holocaust.

The prime minister replied: "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.

"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." There was no decision yet.

He said it was important 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."

AFRICA

WORLD ASKED TO ACT ON UGANDA ABDUCTIONS

The international community needs to take action to counter a renewed campaign by the Lord's Resistance Army to abduct civilians, including youngsters, for fighting and in some cases sexual abuse, Human Rights Watch said Monday. The group urged the International Criminal Court to act on arrest warrants it previously has issued for leaders of the Ugandan rebel group (20/5/08).

United Nations agencies operating in South Africa have expressed deep concern at the outbreak of violent xenophobic attacks in the province of Gauteng in the past week that has led to the deaths of several people and many others being left injured or homeless (21/5/08).

In a statement in Pretoria by the Office of the Resident Coordinator in South Africa, UN officials said they were equally disturbed by the violence and xenophobia that has been occurring across the country in recent months.

"Most of the victims are law-abiding migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers seeking a safe and better life for their families among South Africans," the statement noted. "We remain gravely concerned at the prospect of [a] further escalation in violence, especially against the most vulnerable, including women, children and poor families."

The officials said they welcomed the deployment of more police to affected areas to restore order, as well as the condemnation of the attacks by senior figures in the government and public life.

"The United Nations organisations in South Africa stand ready to provide assistance and support for immediate humanitarian needs faced by the victims of attacks, as well as to find medium and long-term solutions to the unfolding developments."

FOREIGNERS ATTACKED IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gangs of men armed with guns, clubs and threats have chased thousands of Zimbabweans and other foreigners from their homes in this nation's poor townships over the past week, leaving at least 12 people dead and scores injured, according to news reports/ Washington Post (18/5/08).

The night rampages have turned police stations in several townships in the Johannesburg area into virtual refugee camps. The attacks have embarrassed many South Africans, including prominent members of the ruling ANC, whose own leadership depended on the hospitality of its neighbours during decades in exile before the 1994 fall of apartheid.

E. HEALTH & MEANS

FOOD

WORLD HAS 'KNOWLEDGE TO FIGHT FOOD CRISIS'

The world has the necessary knowledge and expertise to fight the current global food crisis but needs to muster the political will and resources to ensure a lasting solution for millions now suffering, the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) said (20/5/08).

Léo Mérorès told a meeting on the food crisis at the UN in New York that the crisis of soaring food prices and shortages of basic crops was not only threatening the health of ordinary people, but jeopardising the political and economic stability of many governments.

"The time to act is now," Mr. Mérorès said, stressing the need for both immediate action to meet humanitarian needs and for longer-term increased agricultural production. It is my view that agriculture has to be put back in the centre of the development agenda," he said. "We need to concentrate efforts on minimising greenhouse emissions, deforestation and global warming, while finding ways to promote investments in agriculture [and] maximise the use of agro-science and

technology, with the aim of reducing the costs of production and substantially increasing the productivity and output of every hectare of arable land.”

The [ECOSOC](#) president welcomed the recent establishment by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of a high-level task force on the crisis, adding that ECOSOC would do all it could to contribute. During its substantive session in July the council will convene roundtable and panel discussions on food security and its humanitarian segment is expected to focus in part on the challenges related to the provision of food aid.

Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said the crisis was driving an estimated 100 million people or more into deep poverty, on top of the 830 million others already facing acute shortages of basic foods.

“That represents seven lost years in the global fight against poverty and hunger,” she said, adding that the progress so far towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – the set of eight anti-poverty targets which world leaders have agreed to work towards by 2015 – could be virtually wiped out.

General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim emphasized the need for greater investment in agriculture to boost production. “We need to use our best science, tools and technologies to optimise efficiency and boost production,” he said. “We also need to implement policies that support land and resource ownership. Trade policy reforms are overdue. We need to create more of a level playing field for developing country farmers to benefit from higher prices.”

WFP PURCHASES EMERGENCY FOOD FOR CHINA QUAKE VICTIMS

The UN World Food Program (WFP) said it was purchasing 1.6 million packs of ready-to-eat noodles for survivors of the earthquake that struck Sichuan province on Monday – enough to feed 118,000 people for one week (16/5/08). The packs of noodles will be added to larger food parcels being distributed by the Red Cross in Mianyang city, where tens of thousands of people have taken refuge.

“This is a symbol of our solidarity with the people of China. We stand ready to help in any way,” said Josette Sheeran, WFP’s Executive Director, in Rome. WFP is working with the UN Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) and the Chinese Government following the devastating earthquake killed tens of thousands. DETAILS: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

EU SHAKE-UP ON FARMING SUBSIDIES

The European Union once again is planning to overhaul its common agriculture policy, looking to cut subsidies and make farming more sustainable as well as more efficient. The proposals to be announced soon will aim to tie farmers more to the agricultural marketplace while also giving them incentives to adopt more environmentally friendly methods.

The EU unveiled a reform plan for its common agricultural policy, the rural payments system that costs more than 40bn euros (£32bn) a year, the BBC reported (20/5/08).

The proposals are aimed at making farmers more responsive to market forces amid rapidly rising food prices. They aim to scrap milk quotas and give farmers incentives to look after the countryside rather than producing food. EU agriculture boss Mariann Fischer Boel wants to minimise the distortion to food markets the subsidies create. The draft policy requires approval by all 27 EU member states and the European Parliament.

REPORT: [BBC/ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7409739.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7409739.stm)

WORLD BANK LOOKS AT FOOD CRISIS AND TAX SYSTEMS

The World Bank’s vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean has said countries in the region should consider overhauling their tax systems in order to counter inflation linked to the

global food crisis. Tax reforms similar to those seen in Europe are preferable to adopting subsidies or banning exports, Pamela Cox told the Financial Times. [Financial Times](#) (19/5/08).

HEALTH

UN: PALESTINIAN HEALTH CAUSING CONCERN

Calling for a boost in funding to continue its operations, a UN agency expressed its concern over the deteriorating health conditions of Palestinian refugees, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, in a new report launched (20/5/08).

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](#)) said in the report that many Palestinian refugee families now have to spend nearly two-thirds of their incomes on food. Rising poverty rates and the lack of access to quality food were further threatening their health, Guido Sabatinelli, UNRWA's Director of Health Services, said in Geneva. The agency has also witnessed an increase in diabetes, hypertension, post-traumatic stress and other behavioural disorders related to the violence.

Through a network of 129 health clinics and 11 mobile clinics, UNRWA was able to provide 9 million health consultations to the refugees, he said. The agency was satisfied that it had full control over communicable diseases, with no epidemic outbreaks.

Surging prices globally had impeded UNRWA's ability to provide all the medicines necessary to refugees. With staff encountering access problems, the agency also found its ability to assist those in need had been impeded.

UNRWA is appealing for a further 30 per cent of their budget to provide the same level of services to 4 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza.

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES NOW WORLD'S BIGGEST KILLERS

The global burden of disease is shifting from infectious diseases to non-communicable diseases, with chronic conditions such as heart disease and stroke now being the chief causes of death globally, according to a new WHO report published (19/5/08).

The shifting health trends indicate that leading infectious diseases – diarrhoea, HIV, tuberculosis, neonatal infections and malaria – will become less important causes of death globally over the next 20 years.

WHO's *World health statistics 2008* is based on data collected from WHO's 193 member states. This annual report is described as the most authoritative reference for a set of 73 health indicators in countries around the world and essential for painting the global picture of health and how it is changing.

"We are definitely seeing a trend towards fewer people dying of infectious diseases across the world," said Dr Ties Boerma, Director of the WHO Department of Health Statistics and Informatics. "We tend to associate developing countries with infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. But in more and more countries the chief causes of death are non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease and stroke."

The statistical report documents in detail the levels of mortality in children and adults, patterns of morbidity and burden of disease, prevalence of risk factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption, use of health care, availability of health care workers, and health care financing. It also draws attention to important issues in global health, including:

Maternal mortality: in developed countries, nine mothers die for every 100 000 live births, while in developing countries the death rate is 450 and in sub-Saharan Africa it is 950. Life expectancy trends in Europe: life expectancy in eastern Europe increased from an average of 64.2 years in 1950 to 67.8 years in 2005, representing an increase of only about four years compared with 9 to 15 years for the rest of Europe.

Health-care costs: 100 million people are impoverished every year by paying out of pocket for health care.

Coverage of key maternal, neonatal and child health interventions: four out of 10 women and children do not receive basic preventive and curative interventions and at current rates of progress it will take several decades before this gap is closed.

World health statistics 2008 is the official record of data produced by WHO's technical programs and regional offices in consultation with countries and collaboration with researchers and development agencies. The WHO statistics underline continuing health challenges and provides an evidence base for strategies to improve global public health.

DETAILS: *World health statistics 2008* at: <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2008/en/index.html>

WHO: TROPICAL DISEASES 'COULD BE CONTROLLED, EVEN ELIMINATED' BY 2015

As the 61st World Health Assembly opened in Geneva, Switzerland, officials from 193 countries began the annual task of reviewing progress and setting new priorities for one of the most powerful tools in global public health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) (19/5/08).

The event marked the 60th year of the international collaborative effort to relieve the burden of disease globally. The mood of the meeting was sombre at the loss of life in the Myanmar cyclone and the China earthquake.

"We are meeting at a time of tragedy," WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan told 2,500 delegates at the Palais des Nations. "Unfortunately, looking ahead, we must all brace ourselves for more humanitarian crises in the immediate and near future."

She said big strides in global health could be made through the control of neglected tropical diseases. Drugs were being donated through public-private partnerships or being sold at discount. She said that, with comparatively modest, time-limited funding, many of these diseases could be controlled, and some even eliminated, by 2015.

Dr Chan provided a stark survey of world health challenges - from ancient afflictions to future human health impacts of climate change. She reported on the mixed progress towards polio eradication and expressed the hope of overcoming economic barriers that sometimes stand in the way of future public health achievements.

She also looked ahead at looming crises: the soaring food prices crisis which could undermine the foundation of health and adequate nutrition; climate change expected to bring more droughts, floods and tropical storms, and greater demands for humanitarian assistance. Poor people were at greatest risk, she said. A third crisis, pandemic influenza, lurked in the future. "The threat has by no means receded, and we would be very unwise to let down our guard or slacken our preparedness measures," she said.

The existing list of health problems which continued to press nations and strain resources were HIV/AIDS, TB, polio, malaria, pneumonia and the need for immunisation.

DETAILS: Fadéla Chaib, mob +41 79 475 5556; chaibf@who.int; WHO website: www.who.int.

DR CHAN'S ADDRESS: <http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2008/20080519/en/index.html>.

SRI LANKA: CLEAN WATER, SANITATION AND SHELTER TO HELP 125,000

Several thousand Sri Lankans displaced by armed conflict currently need help obtaining safe drinking water, adequate sanitation and housing. Some were displaced by recent fighting, while others were forced to flee their homes in northern and eastern Sri Lanka several times over the past two decades, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (16/5/08).

Since early 2007, the ICRC has enabled more than 125,000 people displaced within Sri Lanka to procure clean drinking water, sanitation and shelter. In April alone, it provided this kind of

assistance for over 2,000 people. The ICRC cleaned and upgraded wells, repaired hand pumps and restored water-distribution systems. Many returnees have found their property damaged or destroyed. Since November 2007, the ICRC has helped returnees rebuild or repair their houses and facilities, such as toilets.

In addition to helping hospitals and providing hospital supplies, it also monitors violations of international humanitarian law affecting civilians throughout the country and helps members of families separated by the conflict keep in touch through the Red Cross message service.

DETAILS: Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific
Pauline Wall on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120; www.icrc.org

SUDAN: ICRC PROLONGS SUPPORT IN SOUTH DARFUR

The ICRC is prolonging until the end of the year its operation to help some 130,000 people at the Gereida camp, one of the biggest facilities for displaced people in Darfur. It has been the main humanitarian agency since a security incident in December 2006 forced almost all other organisations to leave (20/5/08).

Since the end of last year, an additional 9,000 people have arrived at Gereida. Most had fled their homes because of fighting, lawlessness and insufficient access to drinking water, basic health care and other services.

The ICRC is providing food, shelter materials, household items, clean water, sanitation, and health and nutritional care and contact with family members who had lost touch. The ICRC has nearly 320 staff at Gereida, working alongside Sudanese Red Crescent volunteers, with the British and Australian Red Cross supporting ICRC's feeding centre at the camp. Additional funds will cover until the end of 2008 the cost of a field surgical team in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan to treat wounded people without access to medical care.

DETAILS: Saleh Dabbakeh, ICRC Khartoum, on + 249 91 213 77 64; <http://www.icrc.org> and Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific
Pauline Wall on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120; www.icrc.org

F. MEDIA MATTERS

KOSOVO ALBANIAN JOURNALIST BEFORE UN WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL

A Kosovo Albanian journalist is being brought before the UN war crimes tribunal set up to deal with the war crimes committed during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s on charges of contempt of court after he allegedly identified a secret witness in a trial, the UN News reported (20/5/08).

Prosecutors at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ([ICTY](#)) allege that Baton Haxhiu, the editor of a newspaper last year, obtained information about a witness with a protected identity and then revealed the witness' identity in an article he published.

Mr Haxhiu was arrested this week, the ICTY said in a [press statement](#) issued in The Hague, and is being transferred to the tribunal's detention unit. Mr Haxhiu is the third Kosovo Albanian to be charged with contempt of court in the past month, with all three cases relating to the recent trial of Ramush Haradinaj, the former prime minister of Kosovo, and others.

On April 25, Astrit Haraqija and Bajrush Morina were indicted for allegedly attempting to persuade a witness with the codename PW not to testify against Mr Haradinaj. They have pleaded not guilty to all charges and have been granted provisional release until the trial begins next month.

Mr Haradinaj, who was a prominent commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the conflict with Serb forces in 1998-99, was acquitted by the ICTY last month of a series of charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, torture, abduction, cruel treatment, imprisonment and the forced deportation of Serbian and Kosovar Roma civilians.

When they announced the verdict, the judges said the tribunal had encountered many difficulties in securing testimony from witnesses during the trials of Mr Haradinaj and his two co-accused. Earlier this month prosecutors filed an appeal in the Haradinaj case, describing what they called the “prevailing circumstances of intimidation and fear.”

FOURTH PAKISTAN JOURNALIST KILLED

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has strongly condemned the targeted killing of Mohammad Ibrahim, a reporter with Pakistan’s Express TV on May 21.

According to reports received from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Mr Ibrahim was returning from an interview with a spokesman for the Tehreek-e-Taliban militant group when he was sprayed with automatic gunfire by unidentified assailants on a motorcycle in the Bajaur area of Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Mohammad Ibrahim was the general secretary of the Bajaur unit of the Tribal Union of Journalists. He is the fourth journalist from Pakistan to be killed this year and the eleventh since the beginning of 2007.

“We join the PFUJ in calling for an immediate investigation into Ibrahim’s murder,” said IFJ Asia - Pacific Director Jacqueline Park. The IFJ supports the PFUJ’s demand that media organisations assigning journalists in the more troubled areas such as FATA and Baluchistan, should ensure that they are trained in best safety practices and given adequate protection.

WAGE BOARD RECORDS DISAPPEAR

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) is calling for an investigation into the alleged disappearance of records of the deliberations of the Seventh Wage Board constituted under the Pakistan Working Journalists’ Act (20/5/08). It was reported that the missing records concerned commitments made by the All-Pakistan Newspapers Society, the apex body of newspaper management, to give workers a fair deal. A PFUJ delegation met with Federal Information Minister Sherry Rehman on May 16 to protest delays in implementing wage measures and concern about the missing records. The continuing default by Pakistan’s newspaper owners to implement the statutory wage awards for journalists and other workers has been of longstanding concern, the IFJ said. It was reported the minister had committed to early implementation of the statutory wage award. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

BEATEN DEFENCE WRITER IN INTENSIVE CARE

According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), Keith Noyahr, 44, deputy editor and defence writer for the English weekly *The Nation* was abducted after leaving his office about 10.30pm on Thursday (22/5/08). His vehicle was found in front of his house, its headlights on and engine still running. Local reports suggest he was abducted while he was opening the gate to his garage. The editor of *The Nation* immediately reported Mr Noyahr’s disappearance to the Dehiwala police. When he returned home early next morning, he had been badly hurt and is currently in intensive care. The IFJ believes Keith Noyahr was abducted and physically assaulted because of his work as a journalist. As a defence writer for *The Nation*, he had reported on the conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). According to a family member, he had received a number of threats recently.

J.S. Tissainayagam, columnist of the Sunday Times and editor of the website www.outreach.com and V. Jesiharan, owner of the E-Kwality printing press and manager of www.outreach.com and his wife Walarmathi, remain in detention after being arrested in early March by the Terrorist Investigation Division of the Sri Lankan Police. No one has been charged.

CAMBODIAN PAPER ‘THREATENED’ FOR CARRYING BURMA NEWS

Alleged threats to suspend the publication of the *Cambodia Daily* for 30 days were said to have come after the *Cambodia Daily* began publishing an eight-page supplement, *Burma Daily*, on May 16 with the stated aim of providing Burmese citizens with news regarding Burma and the world (22/5/08).

According to the Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPJ), Information Minister Khieu Kanharith stated on May 20 that the *Cambodia Daily* did not have the correct permission from the government to publish its *Burma Daily* supplement. The newspaper's publisher has insisted that no further permission was necessary.

It was claimed the Information Ministry ordered all copies of the *Burma Daily* to be confiscated, and further warned that publication of the *Cambodia Daily* could be suspended for 30 days if it continued to publish the *Burma Daily* without the appropriate permission.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has joined the CAPJ in appealing for discussions between the company and Cambodia's authorities to resolve the impasse.

According to Mizzima News, Burmese private weekly newspapers have been ordered by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board "not to run any story that depicts the destruction caused by the cyclone that pummelled the Rangoon and Irrawaddy deltas." A senior journalist told Mizzima that the media have been warned not to comment on critical food shortages and instead are to report only on "the reconstruction efforts by the authorities". There have also been heavy restrictions placed on the freedom to travel, with many journalists having been told to leave areas of devastation.

PHILIPPINES: TRIAL FOLLOWS MURDER OF RADIO JOURNALIST

The trial for the murder of radio journalist Roland Ureta in Kalibo, Aklan, on January 3 2001, has begun, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) reported (16/5/08). Two suspects were arrested in November 2007 after one of them disclosed his plan to surrender during an interview on dyKR, Radio Mindanao Network. It was reported that Emily Ureta told the Cebu Regional Trial Court, which convened on May 9, that her late husband had received several death threats in relation to his job as a journalist before he was killed. Mr Ureta had hosted the Agong Nightwatch program and was investigating illegal gambling and drugs when he was killed, the NUJP reported. The IFJ reported, however, that threats against journalists continue. On May 10, two correspondents from the *Malaya* newspaper were threatened with guns while reporting on a festival in Ifugao province. According to the NUJP, Elena Catajan and Redgie Cawis were verbally abused by town officials who drew guns. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

AFGHANISTAN: KAMBAKSH CASE HEARING ADJOURNED

An appeals court in Kabul on May 18, adjourned the hearing of the case against Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, 24, a journalist facing the death sentence for an alleged crime of blasphemy, until May 25. The IFJ learned that the court heard the arguments of the prosecution before adjourning because a defence lawyer was not present. It was reported that in his statement before the court, Mr Kambakhsh said that he had been forced by Afghan intelligence and security agencies to make a confession of his alleged crime and that he did not have a defence lawyer when a court in the northern province of Balkh sentenced him to death in January. He also claimed a rumour that he had converted religion was being intentionally spread to discredit his defence.

AFGHAN WOMEN JOURNALISTS THREATENED

Nilofer Habibi, a woman presenter and reporter for the Herat station of Afghanistan's official broadcast agency, Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA), sustained minor injuries on May 15 when attackers forced her into a vehicle and demanded that she stop working for the Herat TV station, the IFJ reported (19/5/08). Director of Herat TV station Hisam-ud-din Shams told the Afghanistan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) that Ms Habibi and two other women journalists had received several death threats for their professional work. The other two women journalists had since left. In another report, a senior officer of Herat province was alleged to have summoned to his office the acting director of Herat TV, Farhad Joya, on May 11 and assaulted him physically. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919

NEPAL: Death threats received by two journalists in the western Nepal district of Rupandehi on May 13 were reported by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) (16/5/08). Bindu Kumar Chauhan and Kanhai Yadav allegedly received death threats by phone from a sub-inspector of district police headquarters, according to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Other unnamed police personnel were also claimed to have threatened the journalists. Mohan Chapagain, president of the FNJ Rupandehi chapter, said the journalists attracted police anger for reporting smuggling in Nepal's border areas. The IFJ and the FNJ have called for strong disciplinary proceedings against involved officers. DETAILS: IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

SRI LANKA: Reports of violent attacks on journalists in eastern town of Kathankudi in the aftermath of the Eastern Province elections on May 10 have been reported (21/5/08). According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), freelance journalist J.L. Jawfarkhan was beaten by a group of political protesters when he attempted to meet with Provincial Councillor M. Hisbullah for an interview. On May 9, the eve of the Eastern Province election, M.I. Rahmahetulla (also known as Poovi), the editor of the weekend newspaper *Vaara Ureikal*, was reported to have been assaulted by three unidentified men on his way home from work. The FMM said the gang stole his digital camera apparently for not supporting a local powerful politician. Despite both victims lodging formal complaints with the Kathankudi Police identifying the assailants, no action had been taken by local authorities, the IFJ reported.

CHINA: Chinese authorities suspended publication of a magazine and forced the dismissal of editorial staff over coverage of last week's earthquake in Sichuan province, IFJ reported (22/5/08). *New Travel Weekly*, published in Chongqing, was reportedly suspended from publishing on May 20 after failing to carry mourning messages in the manner laid out by propaganda directives. In its issue dated May 19, the magazine instead published photos of models with red ink on their bodies standing in front of sites of destruction, under the title 'Disaster Areas Reborn'. According to local reports, the publisher, editor-in-chief and deputy editor have been dismissed, and the publication suspended indefinitely. An official from the Chongqing Publication Department, a division of Chongqing Municipal Government, told the IFJ that though the motives of the magazine may have been "honourable", divergence from the official directives constituted an "extremely evil social influence". The IJF reports that after an initial period of unusually free reporting, the Central Publicity Department, the Chinese government propaganda unit, last weekend sought to reassert control over coverage of the earthquake. According to official news agency Xinhua, propaganda directives ordered media to maintain a focus on positive stories of rescue and reconstruction.

GREENS SENATOR REJECTED BRIBE OFFER

Greens Senator Bob Brown claimed on Monday that he had been offered a \$1 million bribe by a media company to support the loosening of the nation's media laws. He said in 2000 he received a phone call from someone offering a package of media coverage and publicity for the Greens worth \$1m over the course of a year. Senator Brown and a number of independents held the balance of power in the Senate at the time. Senator Brown said he rejected the offer. REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/19/2248346.htm>

G. OTHER NEWS

NEW TAIWAN PRESIDENT TO SEEK CO-OPERATION WITH CHINA

A proponent of improved ties with China took office as Taiwan's president on Tuesday, immediately promising to pursue peace with the larger rival and work for regional stability, CBC reported (20/5/08).

The inauguration of Ma Ying-jeou, 57, represents a clear break from the eight-year presidency of Chen Shui-bian, whose confrontational pro-independence policies often led to friction with Beijing — and with the United States, Taiwan's most important foreign partner.

Mr Ma, elected on promises to seek greater economic co-operation with China, said in his inaugural address that Taiwan "will pursue cross-strait peace and regional stability ... It is our consistent goal."

In contrast to the independence bent of Mr Chen's Democratic Progressive Party, the Nationalists have never formally renounced a desire for eventual unification with China, from which Taiwan split amid civil war in 1949.

REPORT: <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/05/20/taiwan-president.html>

TRACING SERVICE GOES DIGITAL

The International Commission for the International Tracing Service (ITS) opened the discussion on the future of the institution at its annual meeting (21/5/08). A working group is to be set up.

"Following the opening of the archives for research and the reduction of the amount of humanitarian work, details of the future structure of and administrative responsibility for the ITS must be considered", said Beat Schweizer, Deputy Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The international commission, whose eleven member states control the Tracing Service in Arolsen, has asked the working group to "identify the future structural and organisational challenges to the ITS, with a view of presenting proposals on how to address these challenges". A written progress report is due to be published at the next annual meeting in London in May 2009. The member states, the ICRC and the ITS will take part in the working group.

"Setting up the working group is a logical consequence of the 2006 decision to open the archives for historical research, said the current commission chairman, Polish Ambassador Krzysztof Kocel. "This has a direct effect on the areas in which the Tracing Service operates, and raises the question of the future role of the International Tracing Service and its administration by the International Committee of the Red Cross. In view of the magnitude and significance of the historically valuable evidence contained in the documents at Arolsen, we are aware of the responsibility of the international commission". Great Britain will preside for the next 12 months.

The commission also considered the progress of digitisation of ITS documents, a requirement for the unanimously agreed transfer of the data to the member states, due to be completed in 2011. The ITS is completing digitisation of documents dealing with forced labourers and scanning of documents from camps for Displaced Persons (DPs) has begun.

DETAILS: Kathrin Flor, ITS, on +49 170 900 8495; www.its-arolsen.org

Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific

Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, (61 2) 9388 9039/Mobile (61 2) 418 485 120.

2008 WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY AWARDS

The finalists for the 2008 United Nations Association of Australia World Environment Day Awards have been announced. From the heights of the Andes Mountains, to schools, home, businesses, communities and local councils, submissions to this year's awards have truly traversed the globe.

The standard of the finalists was outstanding, which reflected the growing awareness across all Australian sectors of the critical role the environment plays in all aspects of human endeavour. Each project – whether it be a Great Australian Shark Count or a Green Hotel – confronts the extents of global warming, climate change and environmental transformation, and shows practical and imaginative ways to combat these challenges by taking action at a local level.

Award winners will be announced at the Awards Presentation Dinner to be held at the Grant Hyatt, Melbourne, on June 6. The event will be hosted by Rob Gell, Environmentalist and President of Greening Australia, Victoria. Gavin Jennings MLC, State Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, is also expected to attend. DETAILS: Laura Szekfy at the United Nations Association of Australia Victorian office on 03 9670 7878, or office@unaavictoria.org.au.

POLITICAL ENGINEERING & ETHNIC POLITICS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

A scholarly and public policy debate concerning the optimal design of political institutions for new democracies, particularly those facing deep ethnic or cultural cleavages was the subject for an ANU seminar on Tuesday. Drawing on a book-length study of political engineering in the Asia Pacific region, Ben Reilly, of Crawford School, surveys the different models advanced to manage the consequences of ethnic pluralism in democracies, the most prominent of these models being consociationalism, centripetalism and communalism. Applications in Asia Pacific countries show many democracies have adopted explicitly centripetal political reforms in recent years. DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575; www.anu.edu.au/media

WINDING UP THE RADIO

Millions of Africans live without electricity, forced to make do instead with kerosene and firewood — sources of energy that wreak havoc on the environment. Likewise, struggling farmers, refugees and child-headed households often depend on radio broadcasts as a vital source of information and education — yet radio batteries are not only expensive but toxic when disposed of improperly.

"It all comes back to the problem of power. There is huge energy poverty in the world, and that energy poverty causes more pollution," says Rory Stear, founder of Freeplay Energy, a London-based company that makes hand-powered radios, lanterns, flashlights and portable generators — products that provide affordable energy anywhere without requiring disposable batteries.

Mr Stear, a two-metre South African, oversees the 12-year-old company. His American wife, Kristine Pearson, directs the independently run Freeplay Foundation, a charity that works with agencies like UNICEF and CARE to distribute these products to those who need them most but can afford them least.

Ms Pearson, a fearless traveller, spends much of her time visiting refugee camps and AIDS orphans, figuring out what kinds of designs will really help them. Her encounters with orphans in Rwanda, for example, led to the development of a bright blue radio that's virtually indestructible and thus ideal for child-headed households. The foundation has distributed 150,000 radios in the past four years, and is currently delivering another 80,000 to southern Sudan. Kristine Pearson was named one of TIME magazine's Heroes of the Environment for 2007.

AUSTRALIA ATTENDS CLUSTER AMMUNITIONS CONFERENCE

Australia is joining over 120 states at a Diplomatic Conference in Dublin from May 19-30 to negotiate and agree the text of a legally binding convention prohibiting cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s079_08.html.

ANOTHER STEP IN DOHA ROUND

Minister for Trade, Simon Crean, has welcomed the release of the revised negotiating text on agriculture in Geneva by the negotiating chairman, New Zealand Ambassador Crawford Falconer. "The release of this text is another important step in trying to bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion," said Mr Crean. "A successful conclusion to the Doha Round this year would provide a real confidence boost to the global economy at a time of some uncertainty in the outlook. DETAILS: http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2008/sc_036.html

LOOKING AT WAR CRIMES ACCOUNTABILITY

A Melbourne seminar, entitled 'Accountability for War Crimes - Issues of Command Responsibility in International Tribunals', will be held at Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Level 50, Bourke Place, 600 Bourke Street, Melbourne, on May 28, from 6:30pm.

The seminar will consist of two presentations focusing on the issue of command responsibility. Firstly, 'The Defender', Melbourne barrister Peter Morrissey, will discuss his experience as lead

counsel for the defence in the Halilovic proceedings at the ICTY in 2005. Secondly, 'The Prosecutor', Elli Lewis, will discuss her experience as a solicitor in the Office of the Prosecutor at the ICTY in 2006/7, when she was assigned to the Boskoski and Tarculovski trials. Entry is free. DETAILS: Agata Wierzbowski at Australian Red Cross on 03 8327 7737; awierzbowski@redcross.org.au.

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

WITH THE JUNTA OR WITHOUT IT

The story of [Cyclone Nargis](#) long ago moved from the tragic to the criminal. It is now becoming grotesque, the Washington Post says in an editorial (20/5/08): Diplomats from the [United Nations](#) and the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#) have announced they will hold a "donor conference" in Burma's capital on Sunday. This will allow foreign ministers from around the world to preen and promise millions ...will enrich and empower the corrupt rulers ...as many as 3 million people affected by the cyclone will still be suffering, and in many cases dying ... Rather than honouring the results (of the 1990 election), the generals imprisoned the winners; [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), the Nobel peace laureate who leads the [National League for Democracy](#), has been under strict house arrest for most of the past 18 years ... her year-to-year detention is scheduled to end Sunday, the same day as the 'donor conference'; will the foreign ministers be extending loans to the regime on the day it extends her confinement for another year?

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/19/AR2008051902660.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

BREAKING THROUGH BURMA'S CRUEL WALL OF SILENCE

Harry McKenzie decided to crack the Burmese regime's Bamboo Curtain that bans foreign aid workers and journalists from the areas worst hit by the cyclone. He organised a truckload of food, hired a few locals and set off into the Irrawaddy delta. This is his story. "Last week our secret aid truck penetrated the wall of secrecy the junta has thrown up around the Irrawaddy delta. The truck, packed with food bought by foreign donors, myself and locals, made it into Bogale, at the centre of the worst-hit area." Sydney Morning Herald (21/5/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/20/1211182801757.html>

WOMEN-RUN BANKS ARE BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE

In Ghana, there is a running joke that they are all becoming Italians - they can't afford rice anymore and are eating processed pasta from Italy, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (20/5/08). Connie Levett writes that: These are not the poorest of the poor, these are working urban Ghanaians, according to Amrote Abdella, who runs projects to break the hunger cycle in Africa. In Ethiopia, the price of wheat has trebled in the past year. Across the developing world, the global food crisis is biting higher and higher up the economic food chain as grain prices are driven up by a trifecta of climate change, growing demand for animal fodder and the use of grains for bio-fuels. Rural Africans living on less than a dollar a day can do nothing to influence these factors, but there are ways to escape the poverty and chronic hunger trap, said Ms Abdella, an Ethiopian aid worker with the New York-based The Hunger Project. She is in Australia to raise awareness about NGOs' microfinance program which empowers women to break the cycle.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/19/1211182703411.html>

SHIFT FROM FEUDALISM NO EASY LEAP

For almost 600 years, the monks of the Sera Monastery in Lhasa have debated each other in the same courtyard, writes Paul Sheehan in the Sydney Morning Herald (19/5/08). He says: The debates, which began when the monastery opened in 1419, have always been theatrical and passionate, as the monks shout, spin, point and slam their hands into palms for emphasis as they debate their sacred texts. It is quite a sight - more than a hundred animated young men, heads shaved, all in maroon robes - a spectacle I saw in Lhasa last year and will never forget. Six hundred years. Tibet is a society redolent with tradition, remoteness and mystique. It is palpably different from the vast Han Chinese majority. It is thus easy, even romantic, to feel sympathy for

Tibetan nationalism, for a nation independent and distinct from China. The monks, who form the core of the nation's spirit, also form the core of this yearning.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/18/1211049061107.html>

MALAYSIA EVOLUTION GOING BY UNNOTICED

One of the oddest and least optimistic developments of recent years has been the way a sense of South East Asia has slipped out of the Australian consciousness, writes Greg Sheridan in *The Australian* (17/5/08). He says: Everyone involved in foreign policy in Australia accepts the centrality of Indonesia to Australia's national interests. But the wider sense of South East Asia is fading, as are South East Asian studies at our universities, which could leave us radically undersupplied with specialists in nations of vital importance to us. Several disparate factors are at work. One is, paradoxically, the success of establishing Indonesia's importance, so that institutions and individuals feel they have made their South East Asian effort so long as they have an Indonesian dimension. Another is the compelling quality of the North East Asian trade and geo-strategic story. Yet another is the rise of India, which has become our fourth largest export market. And, finally, we are understandably preoccupied with our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. All this has tended to crowd South East Asia off our agenda and my guess is we are less generally South East Asia literate than we were a decade ago.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23709693-7583,00.html>

WHITE HOUSE IGNORED TORTURE WARNINGS

Top White House officials waved off early warnings from the FBI that interrogation tactics being used on detainees might be illegal, according to a new report from the Justice Department's inspector general, the *Washington Post's* Dan Froomkin writes (21/5/08): The report states that FBI personnel started notifying headquarters as early as 2002 that other government employees were using abusive tactics - including sexual humiliation, prolonged hand-to-foot shackling and exposure to extreme temperatures - on detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo. Justice officials conveyed some of these concerns in at least one White House meeting in 2003 ... That the White House ignored the FBI's red flags is not really surprising, considering that as of Spring 2002, top Bush aides including Vice President Cheney were reportedly micromanaging the torture of terrorist suspects from the White House basement.

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2008/05/21/BL2008052100638.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

MINISTERS VOICE DEEP CONCERN OVER DROUGHT

The Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting in Adelaide expressed deep concern that record drought conditions had not eased for many basin communities, enterprises, families and individuals (23/5/08).

They expressed strong disappointment that good rainfall in the northern part of the Basin earlier in the year had now stopped and that autumn inflows in the southern basin are heading back towards last year's record lows. In the central and southern parts of the basin headwater storage levels are well below long term averages.

The day before the ministers flew over the lower Murray River to view the impact of the continuing drought (photographs and television footage are available from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. Council members observed that the ecological condition of the Coorong and the lower lakes in South Australia continued to decline without freshwater flows from the Murray River and the upper South East region of South Australia.

As part of the \$6 million of works approved at the last meeting in March, a temporary structure was built to separate the lakes and pumping water from Lake Alexandrina to Lake Albert began in early May.

About 45 GL of water will be pumped into Lake Albert to prevent further sulfidic sediments being exposed and to mitigate further risk to Lake Albert until the end of September 2008. The council noted the interim report on the assessment of acid sulfate soil risks at key wetlands in the basin. A fact sheet on acid sulfate soils is available at http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique

They also noted that if dry conditions continued it might be necessary, before October, to consider implementing other interim options. Advice on these measures will be developed as part of the project looking at longer term management options and will be reported at the next meeting. TLM AUDIT REPORT: http://www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique

GREEN REVOLUTION NEEDED TO FEED THE POOR: UN

High food prices were here to stay and the world needed a "green revolution" to feed its rising population, John Holmes, UN Under-secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, stated, saying that structural changes in the global economy explained the sudden rise in food prices, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (20/5/08).

"It is possible that in the next two or three years prices will come down a bit from the peaks we've seen in the last few months, but not to where they were before," he said. "The real truth is that people have got very used to cheap and plentiful food and food availability not really being a problem for most people in the world. It didn't sink in until rather late that there was actually something structural going on."

In New York, Sir John said among the causes was the increasing demand from the emergence of hundreds of millions of middle-class consumers in China and India. The solution was to help farmers in poor countries become more productive and affordable seed and fertiliser must be made available and more land opened for agriculture.

The world's rising population, forecast to be 9 billion by 2050, was about 6 billion now. To provide for 3 billion more people the world needed a "green revolution", especially in Africa, and to make up for a "neglect of agriculture by institutions and by governments around the world over the last 30 years". REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/19/1211182703408.html>

COMBINED EFFORT TO CONTAIN GMO DAMAGE

More than 2,000 participants, who attended a week-long bio-safety meeting, agreed to work towards legally binding rules for liability and redress for potential damage caused by the movements of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the UN Environment Program (UNEP) reported (17/5/08).

The participants at the fourth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety, in Bonn, Germany, was said to be the largest gathering on the issue so far and reached a deal on both a timetable and a framework for negotiating the rules and procedures.

The contents of the legally binding instrument for liability and redress for the GMOs, also known as living modified organisms (LMOs), will now be discussed at the next meeting of the parties to the Protocol, itself a supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity. That meeting is scheduled for October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Convention Executive Secretary, welcomed the agreement as "great news for the biodiversity family." While GMOs or LMOs have the potential to increase agricultural yields and to grow in habitats otherwise unfavourable to crops, there was also widespread concern that they might pose major threats to local ecosystems and therefore biodiversity.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26701&Cr=Biological&Cr1=Diversity>

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CUTS 'FOOLISH'

It was a foolish time to cut funding to agricultural research, Australian Greens Agriculture spokesperson Senator Rachel Siewert said (22/5/08).

"It is foolish to cut funding for agricultural research when the industry is facing arguably its biggest challenge - adapting to climate change," Senator Siewert said. "Now is the time we should be doubling our efforts to help rural communities and boosting our research capability."

"The problem is particularly stark in the Murray Darling Basin where we have to massively transform our land use practices to cope with a future in which significantly less water will be available. Australian farmers need significant investment in agricultural research and development and to expand flexible and seasonally adaptive farming systems."

"We simply don't have enough of the kind of profitable, productive low water use farming systems we require to meet the needs of basin landscapes and communities in a hotter drier and more uncertain future," Senator Siewert said. DETAILS: Chris Twomey on 0407 725 025.

PLAN FOR POLLINATION INDUSTRY

A new cross-industry alliance will be formed to guide the establishment of a commercial pollination industry to help protect the honeybee industry and ensure continued pollination of important food crops in Australia. However pollination services to pollination-dependent industries 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. Pollination services where honeybee hives are trucked to crops to provide pollination are not well developed in this country, with only a proportion of hives dedicated to pollination. DETAILS: http://www.rirdc.gov.au/pub/media_releases/21may08.html

ICELAND BEGINS LIMITED WHALE HUNT

Iceland's commercial whalers are to start hunting after they received government approval but for only 40 minke whales instead of the 100 requested. Environmental groups said the decision to permit any commercial whaling would harm Iceland's reputation and economy. [BBC](#) (19/5/08).

NUCLEAR POWER A LOGICAL CHOICE

Australia was being denied the immense technological, environmental and economic benefits of civilian nuclear energy production and a domestic nuclear power industry, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (17/5/08). It reported that this was happening through political vacillation, poor education and the societal pressures of special interest groups including the hydrocarbon lobby. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/16/1210765164972.html>

STATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

A national conference, organised by the ANU Centre for Environmental Law, is to take a national look at environmental assessment, examining the state of the law and practice of environmental assessment across the country and the need for reform at both a state and federal level. DETAILS: <http://law.anu.edu.au/ancel/Events.asp>

GREENS WANT TO MAKE CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION AN OFFENCE

The Tasmanian Greens have pledged to reintroduce their Chemical Trespass Bill when State Parliament resumes this month, claiming that authorities were now beginning to recognise that contamination of land and waterways by agricultural chemical escapes was unacceptable, (18/5/08). Tim Morris MP said the Greens' Chemical Trespass Bill, would tackle the issue of chemical contamination by making the movement of agricultural chemicals from the designated target site to an unauthorised location, including public and private land and waterways, an offence. DETAILS: www.tas.greens.org.au and (03) 6233 8300.

CHARGE AIRLINES, BREAK GREENHOUSE IMPASSE: ACADEMIC

Airlines and their passengers should foot the bill for offset programs to counter spiralling international aviation carbon dioxide emissions, according to an ANU (19/5/08).

Associate Director of the ANU Centre for Climate Law and Policy Andrew Macintosh is proposing a new aviation charge to break an impasse on international discussions on how to address greenhouse gas emissions related to international flights. The proposal is detailed in a working paper, *Overcoming the barriers to international aviation greenhouse gas emissions abatement*, was published on Monday.

“An emission charge could be imposed at a low level of between \$5 and \$15 per tonne of CO₂ on all developed country flights, with developing country flights paying a lower amount to account for equity considerations,” he said. “The charge would be applied to 50 per cent of emissions from inbound and outbound flights. From the funds raised, a proportion would be allocated to help reduce emissions from deforestation, thereby offsetting the carbon dioxide emissions from aviation.

“This charge would of course be passed on to the consumer, but it is a small amount of money. For example, a \$10 per tonne of CO₂ charge would add approximately \$20 to the price of a ticket for a trip from London to Sydney – that’s about the same cost of the environmental levy that some airlines already impose on passengers under voluntary schemes.”

WORKING PAPER: <http://law.anu.edu.au/cclp/Index.asp>

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