

# UNITY

## THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Compiled from Federal parliamentary and other sources relevant to Australia's obligations to the United Nations.

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

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SLAMS WORLD LEADERS** Amnesty International challenges world leaders to apologise for six decades of human rights failure and re-commit themselves to deliver concrete improvements.

**CIVILIANS 'BEING' SPECIFICALLY TARGETED IN WAR ZONES** Millions already suffering from armed conflicts likely to be particularly hard hit by increase in food prices, ICRC warns.

### **TREATY TO BAN CLUSTER BOMBS AGREED**

### **B. CLIMATE CHANGE**

**BILLIONS IN EMISSIONS FUNDING 'WASTED'** Billions of dollars are wasted by paying industries in developing countries to reduce climate-change emissions: two analyses.

### **C. HUMAN RIGHTS**

**UN OFFICIALS CALL FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI RELEASE** Top UN officials have expressed their disappointment over the decision by the Myanmar Government to extend the house arrest of pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

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

#### **GAZA STRIP BLOCKADE AN 'ABOMINATION', SAYS TUTU**

Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu calls Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip an 'abomination'.

### **E. HEALTH & MEANS**

**WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY CLAIMS MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH** Major breakthrough for public health to benefit many millions for many years: WHO.

### **F. MEDIA MATTERS**

### **G. OTHER NEWS**

### **H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS**

### **I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

**RANGOON MEETING RAISES \$233 MILLION** Top UN humanitarian official says UN had raised 60 per cent of the funding of its appeal, with a total of \$233 million either contributed or pledged for Cyclone Nargis relief. **FOLLOW-UP ON MYANMAR AND CHINA CATASTROPHES**

**A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES (UNity, UN AND UNAA Contacts)**  
**FOR CHINA AND BURMA UPDATES: SEE ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT PAGE**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SLAMS WORLD LEADERS**

Amnesty International challenged world leaders to apologise for six decades of human rights failure and re-commit themselves to deliver concrete improvements, in its 2008 report (27/5/08).

“The human rights flashpoints in Darfur, Zimbabwe, Gaza, Iraq and Myanmar demand immediate action,” said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, launching AI Report 2008: State of the World’s Human Rights. “Injustice, inequality and impunity are the hallmarks of our world today. Governments must act now to close the yawning gap between promise and performance.”

Amnesty International’s Report 2008, shows that 60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, people are still tortured or ill-treated in at least 81 countries, face unfair trials in at least 54 countries and are not allowed to speak freely in at least 77 countries.

“2007 was characterised by the impotence of Western governments and the ambivalence or reluctance of emerging powers to tackle some of the world’s worst human rights crises, ranging from entrenched conflicts to growing inequalities which are leaving millions of people behind,” said Ms Khan.

Amnesty International cautioned that the biggest threat to the future of human rights is the absence of a shared vision and collective leadership.

“2008 presents an unprecedented opportunity for new leaders coming to power and countries emerging on the world stage to set a new direction and reject the myopic policies and practices that in recent years have made the world a more dangerous and divided place,” she said.

Amnesty International challenged governments to set a new paradigm for collective leadership based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “The most powerful must lead by example,” said Ms Khan.

China must live up to the human rights promises it made around the Olympic Games and allow free speech and freedom of the press and end “re-education through labour”.

The US must close Guantánamo detention camp and secret detention centres, prosecute the detainees under fair trial standards or release them, and unequivocally reject the use of torture and ill-treatment.

Russia must show greater tolerance for political dissent, and none for impunity on human rights abuses in Chechnya.

The EU must investigate the complicity of its member states in “renditions” of terrorist suspects and set the same bar on human rights for its own members as it does for other countries.

“World leaders are in a state of denial but their failure to act has a high cost. As Iraq and Afghanistan show, human rights problems are not isolated tragedies, but are like viruses that can infect and spread rapidly, endangering all of us,” Ms Khan said. “Governments today must show the same degree of vision, courage and commitment that led the UN to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sixty years ago.”

“There is a growing demand from people for justice, freedom and equality,” she said. Some of the most striking images of 2007 were of monks in Myanmar, lawyers in Pakistan and women activists in Iran. “Restless and angry, people will not be silenced, and leaders ignore them at their own peril,” she said.

REPORT: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/sixty-years-human-rights-failure-governments-must-apologize-and-act-now-200805>

### **CIVILIANS 'BEING SPECIFICALLY TARGETED' IN WAR ZONES**

Millions of people already suffering because of armed conflicts were likely to be particularly hard hit by the current increase in food prices, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned (26/5/08).

In the organisation's 2007 annual report, ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger said: "The recent rise in food and fuel prices is making life even harder for poor people already struggling to cope with the effects of war and internal violence. This is especially the case in countries such as Chad, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan and Haiti."

He also expressed concern that in many armed conflicts, civilians were being specifically targeted. "This report draws attention to the countless violations of international humanitarian law that we witnessed throughout the world last year and it documents the ICRC's efforts to put a stop to those violations," he said. "Greater respect for the law would mean fewer civilians being killed or wounded, fewer women and girls being raped, and fewer people forced to leave their homes."

Mr Kellenberger said that despite the price increases, the ICRC intended to maintain its planned volume of relief distributions, supplies of drinking water and level of medical aid in the 52 countries where it assists the civilian population.

He said the ICRC was also preparing to provide additional food and other relief for the people worst affected by the combined impact of rising food prices and armed conflict, including those forced to flee their homes, wounded and sick people, and detainees. The ICRC was about to step up food distributions in Yemen and Somalia.

**DETAILS:** Marçal Izard, ICRC Geneva, on +41 22 730 2458; +41 79 217 3224.

Annual Report 2007: [http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/section\\_annual\\_report\\_2007](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/section_annual_report_2007)  
SYDNEY Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific: Pauline Wall on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/ 61 (0)2 418 485 120; sydney.syd@icrc.org.

### **TREATY TO BAN CLUSTER BOMBS AGREED**

More than 100 nations have reached an agreement on a treaty which would ban current designs of cluster bombs, the BBC reported (29/5/08).

Diplomats meeting in Dublin agreed to back an international ban on the use of the controversial weapons following 10 days of talks. But some of the world's main producers and stockpilers - including the US, Russia and China - oppose the move.

UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown called it a "big step forward to make the world a safer place". He announced earlier that Britain would be taking cluster bombs out of service.

The final draft of the new convention banning cluster bombs went before delegates from a total of 109 countries on Wednesday. Cluster bombs have been used in countries including Cambodia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

They are made up of a big container which opens in mid-air, dropping hundreds of smaller individual bombs, or sub-munitions, across a wide area. These "bomblets" usually explode once they hit their target, but can fail to do so, leaving a deadly legacy as civilians (including children) return to their homes.

At Downing Street earlier, Mr Brown said: "We have decided, after a great deal of discussion that we can help break the log jam so that we can get international agreement that would ban cluster bombs."

Simon Conway, from campaign group the Cluster Munition Coalition, said Mr Brown's decision to lead efforts to establish a ban was a "major act of statesmanship". The BBC's Paul Adams said it appeared the UK was seeking a deal which other countries not present in Dublin, notably the US, might be persuaded to accept later. A stockpile of cluster munitions is kept by the US military at bases on British soil.

The British representative in Dublin, John Duncan, said the UK would work with Washington to find a solution to the issue. The ban also has the support of many humanitarian organisations.

Marc Garlasco, of Human Rights Watch, said even countries that had not made the commitment would be affected. He referred to the mine ban treaty of 1997 that was never signed by the US, Israel, Russia or China, yet those nations had not used landmines since it came into effect. He said, "By stigmatising a weapon you're causing nations not to use it and that's exactly what's going to happen here."

It was reported that the US, India, Pakistan and Israel claim such munitions can be highly useful on the battlefield and want to see the treaty watered down.

REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7423714.stm>

#### **CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO PROLIFERATION SECURITY**

Australia joined more than 85 other countries at a Senior-Level Meeting in Washington to reaffirm a long-standing commitment to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and set strategic directions for its future. David Ritchie, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, attend as Australia's representative.

DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s084\\_08.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s084_08.html)

#### **AUSTRALIA MOVES TO PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Australia is taking steps to accede to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Attorney-General Robert McClelland and Minister for the Status of Women Tanya Plibersek said that by becoming a party to the Optional Protocol, the Government was clearly demonstrating its commitment to promoting and protecting women's rights.

The Federal Government will be required to conduct an assessment examining the impact the protocol will have on Australia, and in particular, Australian women. It will work closely with Federal agencies, state and territory governments, and the Australian community, Mr McClelland said. His department, supported by the Office for Women, will commence the assessment shortly.

Becoming party to the Optional Protocol will enable Australian women to complain to the United Nations if Australia violates its obligations under CEDAW. DETAILS: Adam Sims (A-G'S Office) on 0419 480 224; Darrin Barnett (S of W Office) on 0428 119 703; [http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/www/ministers/robertmc.nsf/Page/MediaReleases\\_2008\\_SecoNdQuarter\\_23May2008-AustraliaMovestoProtectWomensRights](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.au/www/ministers/robertmc.nsf/Page/MediaReleases_2008_SecoNdQuarter_23May2008-AustraliaMovestoProtectWomensRights)

The Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, was due to attend the G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting in Kobe, Japan, at the weekend. This is the first time Australia has participated in the G8 Environment Ministers' Meeting. This meeting sets the groundwork for the G8 Leaders' Outreach Summit and the Major Economies Meeting on July 9.

REPORT: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080523a.pdf>

#### **CHILDREN 'ABUSED BY PEACEKEEPERS AND AID WORKERS': UK CHARITY**

Children in post-conflict areas were being abused by the very people drafted into such zones to help look after them, Save the Children has claimed, according to the BBC (27/5/08).

After research in Ivory Coast, southern Sudan and Haiti, the charity has proposed an international watchdog should be set up.

Save the Children said it had sacked three workers for breaching its codes, and called on others to do the same. The three men were all dismissed in the past year for having had sex with girls aged 17 - which the charity said was a sackable offence even though not illegal.

The UN has said it welcomes the charity's report, which it will study closely.

"In recent years, some important commitments have been made by the UN, the wider international community and by humanitarian and aid agencies to act on this problem," said Save the Children UK chief executive Jasmine Whitbread.

"However, all humanitarian and peacekeeping agencies working in emergency situations, including Save the Children UK, must own up to the fact that they are vulnerable to this problem and tackle it head on." REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/7420798.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7420798.stm)

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

To access major United Nations websites, go to:

[United Nations](#).

[Secretary-General](#).

[UN News Centre](#).

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

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

[New Zealand and the Pacific](#), Level 1, 7 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600, Canberra

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

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

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

UNAA ACT [unaaact@cyberone.com.au](mailto:unaaact@cyberone.com.au) on 02 6247 4499.

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

UNAA WA [unaawa@tpg.com.au](mailto: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.

Earlier editions of UNity 2004-05, 2006 and 2007 are on the UNAA website: [www.unaa.org.au](http://www.unaa.org.au) or email the editor. As a regular reader of UNity, please make sure you notify us if you change your email address by sending your new email address to [judycnna@yahoo.com.au](mailto:judycnna@yahoo.com.au)

Daily press briefing by the office of the spokesperson for the UN Secretary General:

<http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2008/db080527.doc.htm>

UN Daily News (Link only)

<http://www.un.org/news/dh/pdf/english/2008/27052008.pdf>

## B. CLIMATE CHANGE

### **BILLIONS IN EMISSIONS FUNDING 'WASTED'**

Billions of dollars were being wasted by paying industries in developing countries to reduce climate-change emissions, two analyses of the UN carbon offsetting program state, according to the Sydney Morning Herald (27/5/08).

It reported that leading academics and watchdog groups alleged the UN's offset fund was being abused by chemical, wind, gas and hydro companies that were claiming emission reduction credits for projects that should not qualify. The researchers claimed that as a result no genuine pollution cuts were being made, undermining assurances by Britain and others that carbon markets were reducing greenhouse gases.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/26/1211653939666.html>

### **POLLUTION INVENTORY SHOWS ARCHITECTURAL COATINGS LEVELS**

VOC emissions from coatings result from the presence of solvents (and other organic compounds) in solvent-based and water-based coatings. The National Pollutant Inventory shows that at a national level architectural coatings alone account for around 36,000 tonnes of VOC emissions per year, representing 6 per cent of national anthropogenic VOC emissions.

REPORT: <http://www.ephc.gov.au/ephc/vocs.html>

**ASIA PACIFIC NATIONS TARGET AVIATION EMISSIONS:** Asia Pacific nations have joined together to tackle aviation's growing carbon footprint, agreeing to set up a new high-level taskforce to advance pragmatic ways of limiting the industry's greenhouse gas emissions.

DETAILS: [http://www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/aa/releases/2008/may/aa045\\_2008.htm](http://www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/aa/releases/2008/may/aa045_2008.htm)

**\$4.5M TOWARDS REDUCING DEFORESTATION:** The sum of \$4.5 million from the Federal Government's International Forest Carbon Initiative has been allocated to help developing countries reduce deforestation as part of international efforts to tackle climate change.

DETAILS: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080526.pdf>

**AUSTRALIA/NORWAY STRENGTHEN COOPERATION:** Australia has strengthened its relationship with Norway on climate change with the two countries seeking ways to coordinate efforts to cut global greenhouse gas emissions by reducing deforestation and forest degradation. Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, met the Norwegian Minister for Environment, Erik Solheim, in Canberra. Australia and Norway work closely together in international negotiations on climate change through the Umbrella Group, a coalition of developed nations. Australia acts as chairperson.

DETAILS: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080526a.pdf>

## C. HUMAN RIGHTS

### **UN OFFICIALS CALL FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI RELEASE**

Top UN officials have expressed their disappointment over the decision by the Myanmar Government to extend the house arrest of pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (28/5/08).

High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour voiced her "profound disappointment," calling on the government to unconditionally release Ms Suu Kyi. "Her release will be critical in facilitating national reconciliation and democratic transition, to which the Myanmar leadership has committed itself," she said in a [statement](#).

The detention of Suu Kyi, 62, who is the General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and a Nobel laureate, was extended on May 27. She has been under house arrest for 12 of the last 18 years.

"These continued severe restrictions on the freedom of expression and movement against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi contravene basic human rights," Ms Arbour said. "They come at a time when the people of Myanmar are suffering hard and their suffering should not be compounded by more restrictive measures." She also expressed concern at the arrest on Tuesday of at least 15 members of the NLD who were marching towards Ms Suu Kyi's house.

General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim urged the release of "all political detainees" in Myanmar as well as his "disappointment" over the decision to extend Ms Suu Kyi's house arrest. He continued to believe in serious engagement and strong commitment from all parties to continue the process of national reconciliation.

The [BBC](#) reported that UN chief Ban Ki-moon said he regretted the extension of the detention, while US President George W Bush said he was "deeply troubled" by the decision. Ms Suu Kyi's party won 1990 elections, but she was denied power by the junta (27/5/08).

### **TESTAMENT TO DESIRE OF BURMESE 'TO FREELY DETERMINE THEIR FUTURE'**

Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith said on Wednesday he regretted that the Burmese military regime had extended the detention of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

He said, "Given the terrible human tragedy that has unfolded in Burma, the Australian Government has recently tempered its remarks so far as the Burmese military regime has been concerned. That has obviously been in order to seek to maximise our efforts to get humanitarian assistance into Burma in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. But this particular matter cannot go without comment.

"Since her most recent detention in May 2003, Australia has repeatedly called for her release and for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma. Australia's Embassy in Rangoon renewed these representations yesterday. Our estimates are that there are around 1,500 political prisoners in Burma."

Aung San Suu Kyi is "a testament to the desire of the Burmese people to freely determine their own future, to bring democracy to Burma and respect for human rights to Burma," he said. "Sadly, she is also a symbol of the lengths to which the military regime in Burma will go to stay in power.

"The extension of her detention comes after the military regime's recent announcement that over 92 per cent of the votes cast in the recent referendum were to approve a new constitution. That referendum and its process was a complete sham. The fact that it was held consecutively on 10 and 24 May was, in the circumstances, a complete disgrace. That new constitution is fundamentally flawed. It is designed to entrench military power, not to move the Burmese state and people back to democracy. It allows the military to deregister political parties and it prevents Aung San Suu Kyi from standing for political office.

"Progress towards democracy and respect for human rights in Burma will only occur in a manner which the international community supports and when all political players in Burma have a genuine and transparent opportunity to take part in a genuine political process. I welcome very much the statements overnight supportive of Aung San Suu Kyi from the UN Secretary-General and from a range of governments, including the governments of the US, the UK and Indonesia. DETAILS: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s083\\_08.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s083_08.html)

### **AFGHANS URGED TO REINSTATE WOMAN MP AS THEY SEEK AID BILLIONS**

Human Rights Watch called for Malalai Joya to be reinstated in the Afghan Parliament on May 21, one year after what it describes as "her illegal suspension."

On May 21 2007, the lower house of the Afghan Parliament, the Wolesi Jirga, voted to suspend Malalai Joya, a female MP elected from Farah province. Ms Malalai was accused of insulting the

parliament and suspended until the end of her term in 2009. At 29, she is the youngest member of the Wolesa Jirga.

Her suspension occurred after she appeared in a television interview comparing the parliament to an animal stable. Ms Malalai has told Human Rights Watch that her remarks were edited out of context. She said that her statement divided parliamentarians into two groups – one of which was working to uphold democratic principles while the other was undermining them, thereby serving the Afghan population even less than animals in a stable.

Ms Malalai has since received numerous death threats by phone and “night letters” (posted threats) and lives in hiding, with no security protection from parliament or the government.

“Afghanistan is requesting billions of dollars in assistance from donors next month and presenting itself as an emerging democracy,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “If Malalai Joya remains suspended for exercising her right to free expression and has to keep moving around because of threats for which the government does nothing, what does this say about the state of human rights and democracy?”

### **FIJI RELENTS ON VISIT BY INTERNATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION**

After facing widespread criticism, the military-backed government of Fiji has raised the prospect of allowing the International Bar Association to assess the independence of the country's judiciary and the state of the rule of law (16/5/08).

Fiji Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said the time "looked pretty good" for a new visit by the IBA. His statement came almost three months after an IBA delegation was turned away.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23705247-16953,00.html>

### **ACADEMIC CRITICISES ABORIGINAL BUREAUCRATS**

Tackling Indigenous disadvantage was being hindered because tens of thousands of people employed in the ‘Aboriginal industry’ were simply collecting their salary and serving out time instead of tackling the hard issues, according to a leading Aboriginal academic.

Queenslander Stephen Hagan, giving the Rob Riley memorial lecture in Perth, questioned whether remote communities should continue to exist or be shut down, The Australian reported (26/5/08).

A lecturer at Toowoomba's Southern Cross University, he said domestic violence in communities, which had led to increasing killings of Aboriginal women in remote parts of central Australia, required "a seismic shift in attitude.

"We all need to pool our collective thoughts on how we can best tackle this insidious problem afflicting our communities that has obviously been allowed to fester unchallenged by people in positions of responsibility for far too long," he said. Many public figures, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working in the Indigenous industry had taken a lighter option to heavy lifting when tackling Indigenous disadvantage - safe in the knowledge that results in their field were not aspirational outcomes that governments expect to see, he said.

Mr Hagan suggested a possible answer to solving the problems of child abuse and domestic violence in rural and remote communities was to "shut them down".

He said he often marvelled at the way mainstream Australians openly assisted waves of immigrants from overseas "with empathetic outstretched hands. Yet they (mainstream Australians) steadfastly brush us aside when we seek commensurate assistance for basic services," he said.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23757179-12332,00.html>

## **NEW LOOK AT NATIVE TITLE**

Fifteen years after the passage of this historic legislation, there was a need to look hard at the structures and institutions we have put in place, and make sure that they are working effectively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in the nation's interest, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin said when giving the 2008 Mabo Lecture, entitled Beyond Mabo: Native title and closing the gap at James Cook University, Townsville (21/5/08).

She outlined three areas which she believed demanded new approaches. She said firstly, the processes in place to resolve outstanding native title claims were overly complex and exceedingly slow.

Second, those who framed the Native Title Act had not left the system with the best possible representation for native title claimants. Further thought needed to be given to the composition and nature of the Native Title Representative Bodies - and to the bodies which hold native title, the Prescribed Bodies Corporate. Key stakeholders such as the Minerals Council and Native Title Representative Bodies themselves were calling for adequate resources for claim preparation and dispute resolution.

Third, there is uncertainty about how payments flowing to native title holders and claimants should be allocated and administered. Among other points, she indicated that as there was the potential for millions of dollars to be harnessed for the economic and social advancement of native title holders, claimants and their communities; this potential should not go unrealised.

**SPEECH SUMMARY:**

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/beyond\\_mabo\\_21may08.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/beyond_mabo_21may08.htm)

## **SORRY DAY PROVIDES CHANCE TO TURN SENTIMENT INTO ACTION**

National Sorry Day (Monday, May 26) was the perfect catalyst to turn sentiment into action for members of the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said.

"The National Apology was a defining moment in our nation's history, but it is now time to take the step beyond sorry and address the outstanding needs of the Stolen Generations," he said.

"National Sorry Day puts the spotlight again on the challenges we face as a nation in eliminating the gap between the life advantages of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians.

But for members of the Stolen Generations, "There is a pressing need to focus on those measures that will advance the healing process for the Stolen Generations. The focus in the coming months must be on consultation with Stolen Generations members on how best to promote a healing agenda and respond holistically to the recommendations of the Bringing them home report." **DETAILS:** <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/>

## **HELPING PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Boosting and retaining high-quality foster carers is one of a range of measures canvassed in a discussion paper released by the Federal Government (25/5/08). The *Australia's children: safe and well* discussion paper outlines options to address the substantial increase in the number of child protection substantiations. **DETAILS:**

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/helping\\_protect\\_children\\_25may08.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/helping_protect_children_25may08.htm)

## **COUNCIL TO FIGHT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The Federal Government announced the members of its National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children (26/5/08). The chairperson is a founder of the Australian White Ribbon Day campaign and international human rights advocate Libby Lloyd, Heather Nancarrow is deputy-chairperson, She is director of the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research. The other members are Lisa Wilkinson, Pauline Woodbridge, Vanessa Swan, Dorinda Cox, Andrew O'Keefe, Melanie Heenan, Associate Professor Moira Carmody, Maria Dimopoulos and Rachel Kayrooz. **DETAILS:** [www.ofw.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.ofw.fahcsia.gov.au).

### **GREEN PAPER ON HOMELESSNESS RELEASED**

The Federal Government launched its Green Paper - *Which Way Home? A new approach to homelessness* (22/5/08). The report highlights the challenges faced by people who are homeless and analyses Australia's response. It discusses options for reform. [DETAILS: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/tanyaplibersek.nsf/content/green\\_paper\\_22may08.htm](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/tanyaplibersek.nsf/content/green_paper_22may08.htm)

### **MORE LONG-TERM DETAINEES RECEIVE VISAS**

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said this week that a review of 72 people in immigration detention for more than two years had resulted in 31 people being granted visas or considered for visa grants, pending health and security checks. [DETAILS: http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08051.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08051.htm)

### **COMPENSATION FOR WRONGFULLY CONVICTED PRISONERS IN DOUBT: AIC**

Wrongfully convicted people may not be consistently compensated by Australian jurisdictions, according to a new research paper released from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC).

The paper - *Compensation for wrongful conviction* - is the latest in the AIC's Trends & Issues in a criminal justice series and examines the causes and effects of wrongful imprisonment, the prevalence of wrongful conviction and the applicability of international approaches and conventions (21/5/08).

"There is no reliable data on the prevalence of wrongful convictions. In the United States it has been estimated that between 0.5 and five per cent of prisoners have been wrongfully convicted, while in the United Kingdom it has suggested that the rate of wrongful conviction may be as high as 0.1 percent of all criminal cases," said Dr Judy Putt, General Manager of Research at the AIC. [DETAILS: www.aic.gov.au](http://www.aic.gov.au) or Barbara Walsh on 02.6260 9244/ 0409 985 600. [SUMMARY PAPER: Compensation for wrongfully convicted prisoners](#)

### **\$620,000 COMPENSATION PAID 'FOR UNLAWFUL DETENTION'**

The Commonwealth could face over \$10 million in compensation payments for unlawful immigration detentions after it was revealed at a Senate Estimates hearing that \$620,000 was paid to the first eight claimants, Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said (28/5/08).

Senator Nettle said it had been shown that of 247 cases investigated for unlawful detention, the department estimated it might be liable in 135 cases. Only 35 were resolved as "not unlawful."

She said the Greens were glad that people unlawfully detained under the mandatory detention system were now being compensated. "If you extrapolate the \$620,000 for eight cases out to all potential 135 cases identified, the total compensation bill will be over \$10 million," she said.

"This confirms that the cruel policy of mandatory detention is a huge waste of money. The Rudd government should scrap mandatory detention and deal with immigration matters while people live in the community. I'm relieved that the government confirmed today that Cornelia Rau has been paid \$2.29 million as compensation for her ordeal in immigration detention," she said. [DETAILS: Jon Edwards 0428 213 146.](#)

### **CHRISTMAS ISLAND DETENTION: \$1M PER DETAINEE PER YEAR?**

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle called for the Christmas Island immigration detention centre to be closed after it was revealed yesterday that the ongoing cost of detaining people in the detention centre will be over \$1 million per person, per year (29/5/08).

Last night at a Senate Estimates hearing, it was revealed that operating the new Christmas Island detention centre would cost \$32 million per year for "0 - 30 detainees", she said.

"The Greens are appalled that after spending \$400 million of tax payers' money building this remote detention centre, we are now told it will cost over a one million dollars per detainee per

year to operate," she said. "The minister has indicated that unless there is a large influx of boat people, it will not be used. This \$400 million white elephant that symbolises the cruelty of mandatory detention will stand empty and quickly deteriorate in the hot jungle environment.

"This detention centre is a sad relic of the Howard era of cruelty toward asylum seekers at any expense to taxpayers. Its purpose was to hide the inhumane treatment and injustice of mandatory detention away from the media and Australian public," she claimed. "Its location on a small remote island makes no sense and just adds to the ongoing cost of mandatory detention.

"The Rudd government shut down Nauru but is spending more money continuing offshore detention on Christmas Island," she said. The Greens supported the Christmas Island community request that the centre be used for another purpose. **DETAILS:** Jon Edwards 0428 213 146.

### **HREOC WELCOMES SAME-SEX LEGISLATION**

The introduction of legislation to remove discrimination against same-sex couples in Commonwealth superannuation schemes was welcomed by Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes (28/5/08). The Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws-Superannuation) Bill 2008 would finally provide equal access to superannuation benefits for all same-sex couples and their children.

"Superannuation is one of the main ways of saving for retirement," he said. "Most people expect that their superannuation entitlements will be inherited by their partner, children or other dependants, but Commonwealth employees in same-sex relationships have never had this right. This Bill, if passed, will ensure that right from July 1." **DETAILS:** <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/>

## **D. PEACE & SECURITY**

### **MIDDLE EAST**

#### **IRAQ IS MAKING 'NOTABLE PROGRESS', SAYS BAN**

Iraq is making "notable progress" in the security, political and economic fields, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the annual review conference of the International Compact with Iraq.

"If I were asked to use one word to describe the situation in Iraq today, I would choose the word 'hope,'" he said, speaking in Stockholm to the meeting on the Compact, the five-year plan to promote peace and development in the strife-torn country.

"There is new hope that the people and Government of Iraq are overcoming daunting challenges and working together to rebuild their country, after years of war, dictatorship and neglect," he said, addressing an audience that included the Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri Al-Maliki.

Because of concerted efforts by the government and others, Mr Ban said there had been steady progress in strengthening Iraqi security forces and in curbing the activities of militias and other armed groups.

"Iraq is stepping back from the abyss that we feared most," he said. Violence had retreated from the alarming levels of 2006 and early 2007.

**REPORT:** <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26836&Cr=iraq&Cr1=>

#### **IRAQ ASKS FOR DEBT RELIEF**

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki has said he will ask the international community to relieve the country's debt, as envoys gather for a UN forum, the BBC reported (29/5/08).

Officials said the move was aimed mainly at Arab countries, to which Iraq owes most of its \$67 billion (£34bn) debt. Nearly 100 countries are represented at the economic and political reform

forum near Sweden's capital, Stockholm. The UN called the conference to review a five-year package it brokered last year, called the International Compact with Iraq.

REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7424782.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7424782.stm)

### **UN OFFICIAL PRAISES LEBANON PROGRESS**

A senior UN official welcomed recent political progress in Lebanon and the start of indirect talks between Israel and Syria, but cautioned that there were still serious challenges to achieve a wider peace in the Middle East (28/5/08).

Robert Serry, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ([UNSCO](#)), told reporters after [briefing](#) the Security Council that the election of a president in Lebanon and the Israeli-Syrian negotiations "can change the dynamics," adding that he was very happy to be able to report some positive developments this month.

But he "warned the council that all these developments are still taking place in an environment which is very fragile and nowhere is that more true than on the Palestinian-Israeli track, which still remains a central issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict."

He welcomed a recent investment conference in Bethlehem with Israeli support, which resulted in pledges of up to \$1.4 billion for the Palestinian economy, as well as new steps announced by Tony Blair, Representative of the Middle East diplomatic Quartet, to spur economic development. "These various measures hold promise but action on the ground is key."

The complex political, security, human rights and humanitarian crisis in Gaza had deepened over the past month, he said, speaking out against the firing of indiscriminate rockets from Gaza into Israel, with 191 rockets and nearly 200 mortars fired at Israeli civilian targets. He also noted that Israel Defence Force (IDF) attacks – both by land and air – had continued. "While we acknowledge Israel's legitimate security concerns, we deplore the killing and injuring of civilians in some of these operations."

In his address to the council, he said the UN strongly supports Egypt's efforts to curb violence in and around Gaza, adding that the reopening of crossings was crucial for humanitarian relief and commercial flows.

"A calming and easing of the situation in and around Gaza is essential for genuine progress in both the Israel-Palestinian negotiations and in reuniting the West Bank and Gaza within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority," he said.

The situation "remains a very difficult, unsustainable humanitarian crisis which hasn't become any smaller," he said. Condemning attacks on border crossing points by extremists within Gaza, he said there was a continued Israeli policy on Gaza "which very much amounts to collective punishment," leaving Gaza with a prolonged lack of fuel and other commodities.

"Much more needs to be done to achieve what is so important in this process which is to achieve visible and tangible progress on the ground for the Palestinians," he said. "That is very important if at the end of the year we may have a political agreement between the two parties on the two-state solution." UK Ambassador John Sawers, current council president, said there was strong council support for talks on the establishment of a Palestinian state by the end of the year.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26825&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

### **GAZA STRIP BLOCKADE AN 'ABOMINATION', SAYS TUTU**

Nobel peace laureate Desmond Tutu has called Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip an "abomination", the BBC reported (29/5/08). He strongly condemned what he called international "silence and complicity" on the blockade, which he compared to the actions of Burma's leaders. Speaking at the end of a two-day mission to the area, the former archbishop said the humanitarian situation there could not be justified. Mr Tutu was in Gaza on a UN fact-finding

mission into the killing of 19 Palestinians by Israeli shellfire in November 2006. The former archbishop of Cape Town said the international community's "silence and complicity, especially on the situation in Gaza, shames us all".

REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7425082.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7425082.stm)

#### REACTIONS TO IAEA REPORT:

##### IRAN: NUCLEAR WATCHDOG WANTS MORE INFORMATION

UN nuclear watchdog has said it believes Iran is still withholding information on its nuclear program, the BBC reported (26/5/08). In a report, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Tehran's alleged weapons development studies remain a matter of serious concern and that Iran was operating 3,500 centrifuges, the machines used to enrich uranium, at its plant at Natanz. Enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons, but Tehran insists its nuclear program is entirely peaceful.

The IAEA had said it had reached an agreement with Iranian officials to clarify the main outstanding question about Iran's past nuclear work by the end of May, but in its latest report, the IAEA says Iran needs to provide much more explanation and information on its nuclear activities. Responding to the report, Iran's envoy to the IAEA told the AFP news agency his country had "left no question unanswered" and would continue to enrich uranium.

Iran's nuclear program has been under IAEA investigation since 2002, when Iranian dissidents revealed the existence of secret uranium enrichment.

REPORT: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7420737.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7420737.stm)

##### PROGRAM STILL PEACEFUL, UN AGENCY SAYS

A new report by the [U.N.](#) nuclear watchdog agency said on Monday that [Iran](#) continues to thwart efforts to obtain crucial documents that could shed light on the past activities of its nuclear program, but said inspectors have found no evidence that Tehran is currently attempting to divert its nuclear program to military uses, the Washington Post 27/5/08).

The report by the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) also said Iran's civilian nuclear program has made only incremental progress in recent months, despite claims by Iranian leaders that the program was making significantly larger strides.

The [European Union](#)'s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, said Monday that he was prepared to offer Iran a new package of incentives to persuade it to abide by UN demands that it stop uranium enrichment in its nuclear program, but declined to provide details. REPORT: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/26/AR2008052601136.html>

##### NUCLEAR AGENCY ACCUSES IRAN OF WILFUL LACK OF COOPERATION

A report issued by the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran's suspected research into developing nuclear warheads remains "a matter of serious concern" needing "substantive explanations." REPORT: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/world/middleeast/27iran.html?th&emc=th>

#### SOUTH EAST ASIA/ASIA

##### CHINA AND TAIWAN TO RESTART TALKS

Taiwan has accepted an invitation from China to restart bilateral talks that have been suspended for a decade in a further signal of warming relations, the BBC reported (29/5/08).

China invited Taiwanese officials to attend talks in Beijing from June 11, with the focus on tourism and charter flights. Accepting the invitation, Taiwan said it would organise a delegation.

On Wednesday, the head of Taiwan's ruling party held landmark talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung's meeting with Mr Hu was the highest-level encounter since the two sides split in 1949.

Beijing invited officials from Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation to have talks with its mainland counterpart, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait.

The Taiwanese foundation's chairman, Chiang Pin-kung, said he hoped that the two sides could reach agreements in Beijing.

Bilateral talks had been suspended for a decade but the election of Ma Ying-jeou as Taiwan's president in March has brought about a rapid thaw in relations.

### **UN PRAISES NEPALESE HUMAN RIGHTS BODY**

Congratulating Nepal's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on its eighth anniversary, a UN official said that it had seen significant progress in the past year (26/5/08).

"Over a period of little more than 12 months, some important steps have been taken to place the commission on a solid footing," Richard Bennett, representing the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, said at an anniversary event, attended by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Progress included being recognised as a constitutional body in the Interim Constitution; a draft law laying out the NHRC's specific functions and powers and new commissioners appointed and working. It had also regained its 'A' status among peers at the International Coordinating Committee of the National Institutions for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and had nearly finished work on a new three-year strategy.

"These developments will assist the commission in undertaking its formidable tasks as Nepal enters a new phase in its transition towards a society that I hope will embrace human rights as the cornerstone of its new democracy," Mr Bennett said.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has assessed that the government should focus on addressing impunity and discrimination as part of its efforts to consolidate the peace process. Mr Bennett said that his office was prepared to assist the government in this, especially through collaboration with others, including the NHRC.

Nepal, which has emerged from a decade-long civil war that claimed an estimated 13,000 lives before the government and Maoist rebels signed a peace accord in 2006, has convened the Constituent Assembly this week.

The commission and OHCHR are in talks over creating a district-level initiative to hold consultations on human rights and the constitution, which was key to protect and promote human rights, he added.

The representative noted the NHRC faced some issues, and called for bolstered measures to protect women. "The seemingly current lack of action for domestic violence implies that Nepal may be held accountable for complicity in violence against women," he said. "OHCHR-Nepal is extremely concerned about recent killings and other serious human rights violations during the fragile period prior to the swearing-in of the Constituent Assembly," the UN office said in a statement.

### **NEPAL BECOMES REPUBLIC**

The Himalayan nation of Nepal has become the world's newest republic, ending 240 years of monarchy, the BBC reported (28/5/08). A constituent assembly meeting in the capital, Kathmandu, overwhelmingly voted to abolish royal rule. The Maoists, who emerged as the largest party in last month's elections, were committed to ousting King Gyanendra and creating a republic. They entered politics in 2006, after signing a peace agreement that ended a decade-long insurgency.

The approved proposal states that Nepal is "an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular and an inclusive democratic republic nation". [REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7424302.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7424302.stm)

#### **MUSHARRAF 'ENRAGED' OVER LEADERSHIP TILT**

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, enraged over a tirade against him by Asif Ali Zardari, last night cut off long-standing secret contacts with the dominant Pakistan People's Party as speculation mounted he would launch a counter-strike to shore up his hold on power, The Australian reported (26/5/08).

Mr Zardari, leader of the country's ruling coalition, reportedly said he wanted the president to step down rather than be impeached. The Bush administration is concerned over peace deals the Pakistan Government is concluding with jihadi militants linked to al-Qa'ida and the Taliban. [REPORT: http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23756161-2703,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23756161-2703,00.html)

#### **INDONESIA: HIGHER FUEL PRICES CAUSE UNREST**

Indonesian government has raised fuel prices by nearly 30 percent, prompting fears of widespread unrest, the BBC reported (24/5/08). Several hundred students protested against the move, clashing with police at Jakarta's national university. More than 100 people were arrested. The government is struggling to meet the cost of fuel subsidies as global oil prices escalate but has begun a \$1.5bn cash handout scheme to cushion the effect on most needy people. Malaysia is considering overhauling its subsidy system; Taiwan is to end a petrol price freeze in June.

#### **BACK FROM EAST TIMOR**

A welcome home parade for the 3rd reconstruction task force and 3rd Timor Leste battle group was organised in Townsville for more than 1000 Defence personnel (24/5/08).

[DETAILS: http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/fitzgibbontpl.cfm?CurrentId=7770](http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/fitzgibbontpl.cfm?CurrentId=7770)

**VIETNAMESE OFFICIAL TALK REGIONAL COOPERATION:** Minister for Immigration Senator Chris Evans met a delegation of senior Vietnamese government officials visiting Australia for high-level discussions on regional cooperation, border security and migration management.

[DETAILS: http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08052.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08052.htm)

#### **JAPANESE GENERAL VISITS**

Minister for Defence Joel Fitzgibbon met with the Chief of Staff Japan Air Self Defense Force, General Toshio Tamogami on Monday. Minister Fitzgibbon and General Tamogami discussed Japan and Australia's growing defence and security relationship based on shared democratic values and mutual interests. "The Australian Government is committed to building on the 2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation by developing greater opportunities for practical defence cooperation in areas including disaster relief, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and maritime security," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

#### **AFRICA**

##### **BAN: AFRICA HAS TOP PRIORITY WITH UN**

The best means to address the problems Africa faces can be found in the continent's people, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on the occasion of Africa Day (25/5/08). Africa is one of the UN's priorities and is central to all of the world body's activities in peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian aid, he said.

"Although there are formidable challenges in all of these areas, we have at our disposal the best possible resource to meet them: the dynamism and creativity of African people." The Secretary-General welcomed the recent sustained economic growth in many of the continent's countries and African efforts to "resolve its own problems" through such mechanisms as the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) and the Panel of the Wise. The UN would continue its close cooperation with the AU regarding security issues, including those in Darfur and Somalia.

"This year, Africa Day has special significance as we focus on realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), our vision for a better world in the 21st century," Mr. Ban said, referring to the eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

South African President Thabo Mbeki made a rare national address to appeal for an end to "shameful" anti-immigrant violence that has left 50 dead and 35,000 displaced, the ABC reported (26/5/08).

### **ARMED BANDITS FORCE THOUSANDS TO FLEE**

A surge since the start of the year in the number of attacks by armed bandits across the north of the Central African Republic (CAR) was forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes and had brought economic activity to a standstill in large parts of the already impoverished and strife-torn country, the United Nations relief wing reports (28/5/08).

As many as a third of the estimated 300,000 people who have become displaced have done so because of banditry, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said.

Groups of between 10 and 30 armed men – known locally as "coupeurs de route" or "zaraguinas" – are roaming the northern CAR, killing or assaulting villagers and travellers, kidnapping both children and adults, looting property and burning homes. The bandits have burned down entire villages, often as punishment for resistance by village self-defence groups.

UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Catherine Bragg spoke out against "the indiscriminate and predatory attacks" and the impact they are having. "We need to make sure that victims have access to protection, shelter and health services. Toby Lanzer, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the CAR, said many farmers and traders were now afraid to travel to sell their wares in towns and villages. Although the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have launched a \$96.8 million aid program, they have received just over a third of the necessary funding.

### **MBEKI DUBS ANTI-IMMIGRANT VIOLENCE 'SHAMEFUL'**

South African President Thabo Mbeki has made a rare national address to appeal for an end to "shameful" anti-immigrant violence that has left 50 dead and 35,000 displaced (26/5/08).

Warning of a return to the country's violent past in its struggle against apartheid, he said the unrest had besmirched the image of the country and had soiled the reputation of liberation heroes such as Nelson Mandela.

"Never since the birth of our democracy have we witnessed such callousness. We must view the events of the past two weeks as an absolute disgrace," he said.

The Red Cross in South Africa says is caring for 25,000 destitute people around violence hotspot Johannesburg with another 10,000 sheltering at community centres in the tourist hub of Cape Town. Many migrants are fleeing the country.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/26/2255112.htm>

### **SUDAN OIL TOWN DOESN'T EXIST ANY MORE: UN OFFICIAL**

Scavenger birds pick through the charred remains of houses and shops in the central Sudanese town of Abyei, four days after violent clashes between troops from the North and South of the country ended, the BBC reported (24/5/08).

The place is almost empty - tens of thousands of people fled from the town and surrounding area to escape days of sporadic fighting.

There is almost nothing left of the once-vibrant market - just the charred skeletons of buildings. After a tour of the town in a UN armoured personnel carrier, the head of the UN mission in Sudan, Ashraf Qazi, was clearly shocked by what he had seen.

"We have been to the centre of Abyei and it doesn't exist any more," he told journalists. "It's totally charred. It's totally devastated. And it's an absolute human tragedy and it is something that must never happen again." The UN has always seen Abyei as a tinderbox.

The greatest fear is that the crisis in the area could escalate and reignite a bloody civil war, three years after a peace deal was signed between the north and south of the country. Both north and south are desperate to have Abyei inside their borders because of the oil fields that surround the town. They are unable to agree on the boundary for the area.

#### **ELEVEN SOMALIS KILLED IN ATTACK**

Eleven civilians died in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, during an attack by Islamists on the African Union headquarters. Al-Shabab, based in Eritrea, has claimed responsibility for the attacks. The UN estimates that 6,000 civilians have died in Somalia over the past year due to the clashes between Eritrean and Ethiopian forces. [BBC](#) (27/5/08).

### **E. HEALTH & MEANS**

#### **BAN RECOMMENDS COOPERATION TO ESCWA**

Closer economic integration can help the Western Asian region overcome recent conflicts and political tensions and also spur progress towards internationally agreed anti-poverty goals, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said (28/5/08).

"Growing political tensions and intense conflicts... [have] underscored the need for greater and improved regional cooperation and economic integration," he said in a [statement](#) to the current session of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ([ESCWA](#)), in the Yemen.

His statement was delivered by ESCWA's Executive Secretary Bader Omar Al-Dafa. Mr Ban stressed that the world was now past the midpoint in the race to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of targets relating to poverty, education and health that are supposed to be achieved by 2015, and said that too many countries were lagging behind.

"ESCWA's research and technical support can help regional governments focus their efforts and resources on key areas, and make up for lost time," he said.

Earlier Mr Al-Dafa said there had been noticeable economic growth in the region in recent years, but cautioned that this growth, particularly in the Gulf States, was fragile because it was closely linked to the price of oil.

"We must therefore work together to make optimum use of this opportunity and diversify the economic base, develop the capacities of institutions and build effective partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society," he said. The two-day conference in Sana'a has brought together ministers from 13 countries, as well as representatives of UN agencies, funding institutions and regional experts.

### **FOOD**

#### **SAUDI \$500M RESCUE PREVENTS WFP CUT IN FOOD SUPPLIES**

Impending widespread cuts to food aid by the UN World Food Program have been avoided by a last-minute \$500 million donation by Saudi Arabia, agency officials said. WFP has found itself increasingly unable to meet demand as rising food and fuel prices have simultaneously increased need and costs. [REPORTS: The Washington Times](#) (24/5/08), [The Washington Post](#) (27/5/08).

#### **WFP BOLSTERS FOOD OPERATIONS TO DISPLACED PEOPLE IN IRAQ**

The UN World Food Program (WFP) is now bolstering its operations to provide food to thousands of internally displaced Iraqis, using US\$40 million of funding from the Iraq Government (27/5/08).

"This contribution came at a crucial time and will allow us to maintain a regular and continuous food supply and distribution to up to 750,000 people over the next six months," said WFP Iraq Country Director Stefano Porretti. "The donation shows the government's commitment to support all Iraqis, particularly those not covered by the government-run food distribution system."

This year, WFP launched a regional operation to provide food assistance to 1.2 million Iraqis displaced inside their own country and in Syria. However, the Syrian part of the operation for 360,000 people still faces a 45 per cent shortfall.

Porretti said WFP was looking into the possibility of using a portion of the cash to purchase food inside Iraq, both as a means to reduce transport costs and to help to stimulate the local economy. Much of this would depend on access and security. Security has severely hampered WFP's ability to operate inside Iraq, where it began food distributions in March,

Donors to WFP's US\$133.5 million emergency operation in Iraq and Syria include Iraq (US\$40 million), the US (37.4 million), the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (US\$10.1 million), the UK (US\$3.9 million), Canada (US\$1.9 million), Italy (US\$1.8 million), Switzerland (US\$400,000), Norway (US\$270,000) and Greece (US\$190,000). A further US\$1.7 million has been received in multilateral contributions. **DETAILS:** <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

## HEALTH

### **AFGHANISTAN 'BECOMING INTERNALLY SUBSUMED BY DRUGS**

Saliha is a recovering opium addict. He's four years old. His 10-year-old sister is an addict. His mother is an addict. Scratch Saliha's tummy and the wide-eyed child giggles. Press just a little harder and he bursts into tears. "It hurts," he wails. Rosie DiManno writes in the Canadian Star.com (27/5/08), "This is the soreness that occurs with opium addiction, along with the nausea, the cramping, the diarrhea, the listlessness."

Rosie DiManno says that in Afghanistan "this is what parents had been instructed to do, by their families, by tribal elders, by well-intentioned but uneducated quacks who believed opium to be the benign cure-all, or at least helpful therapeutic intervention, for everything that ails a person, and so very handy. They just didn't know any better."

"They use it as a medicine for all kinds of illnesses," explains Dr. Mobien Sultani, 31, who runs the Counter-Narcotics Drug Recovery program at this 20-bed unit in northern Balkh province, one of only two such specialised hospital wards in the country.

**REPORT:** <http://www.thestar.com/News/World/article/431302>

### **WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY CLAIMS MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH**

A public health breakthrough by providing a platform for removing barriers and using innovative methods to encourage research, development and access to medicines for the common diseases of the developing world was highlighted by WHO Director-General Margaret Chan, at the ongoing 61<sup>st</sup> World Health Assembly. A record 2,704 participants from 190 nations attended.

"This is a major breakthrough for public health that will benefit many millions of people for many years to come," said Dr Chan. "This is a contribution to fairness in health and this is pro-active public health at its very best" (24/5/08).

The 'public health, innovation and intellectual property' strategy endorsed by the Health Assembly is designed to promote new approaches to pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) and to enhance access to medicines.

It is also designed to provide a medium-term framework for enhancing and making sustainable essential R&D relevant to diseases impacting developing countries. The strategy proposes clear objectives and priorities, and estimates of funding needs in this area.

Delegates to the Health Assembly were reported to have directly confronted major public health challenges.

"At this World Health Assembly, we witnessed the interplay between the political, trade and health interests," said the assembly president, Dr Leslie Ramsammy, who is also health minister of Guyana. "Child and maternal death, prevention and management of non-communicable diseases rely on the supply chain and commodities. We are now much closer to having an increased flow of quality health commodities that will lead to better health."

The assembly endorsed a six-year action plan to tackle what are now the leading threats to human health: non-communicable diseases. These diseases - particularly cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases - caused 60 per cent of all deaths globally in 2005 (estimated at 35 million deaths). Low- and middle-income countries are the worst affected by these diseases, largely preventable by modifying four common risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol.

Delegates also requested WHO - through a resolution - to intensify its work to curb harmful use of alcohol, which is the fifth leading risk factor for death and disability in the world and called on WHO to develop a global strategy. Work on the strategy is to start immediately in consultation with member states. The resolution also requested the director-general to consult with intergovernmental organisations, health professionals, nongovernmental organisations and economic operators on ways they could contribute to reducing harmful use of alcohol.

Delegates also requested WHO and committed their own health ministries to act to protect health from climate change and in a resolution urged member states to take decisive action to address climate change health impacts. It called on the health sector to scale up adaptation projects that would limit the impacts of climate change on health; to raise global awareness of the impacts of health from climate change at national and international levels; and to boost political attention and action. WHO was requested to develop and strengthen the evidence base on links between climate change and health, and to help developing countries address such health.

Delegates reaffirmed their commitments to eradicating polio and preparing for an influenza pandemic; to accelerate actions to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM); to help countries reach higher immunisation coverage and encourage development of new vaccines; to assess the health aspects in migrant environments and to explore options to improve the migrant health.

DETAILS: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2008/wha61/en/index.html>; and

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2008/wha61/journal/en/index.html>

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## F. MEDIA MATTERS

### **BRUTAL MURDER OF JOURNALIST IN JAFFNA REGION**

TV and radio correspondent Paranirupasingam Devakumar, 36, of Vaddukoddai, Jaffna, was hacked to death in Navanthurei by unidentified attackers on May 28. His companion was also reported killed.

The Free Media Movement (FMM) reported that Mr Devakumar had worked for Sirasa TV and MTV for almost three years. The IFJ vehemently condemned the murder of Mr Devakumar, who is the ninth journalist or media worker to be killed in Jaffna since 2006.

It also remains extremely concerned about three journalists from Jaffna whose whereabouts remain unknown since their suspected abduction in 2007. According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), a camera crew working for Sirasa TV was ambushed by unidentified attackers as they tried to film preparations for the Vesak (Buddhist religious event) in Kiribathgoda on May

19. Police were reported within view but did not protect the journalists. In the same week, defence reporter and senior journalist for *The Nation* Keith Noyahr was abducted and brutally bashed (22/5/08).

Another senior journalist, J.S. Tissainayagam, remains in the custody of the Terrorist Investigation Division of the Sri Lankan police following his arrest on March 7  
**DETAILS:** IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

### **SUSPECTS WIN INJUNCTION IN PHILIPPINES MURDER CASE**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has requested that courts in the Philippines, particularly the Court of Appeals, seek to ensure that the suspects in the murder of journalist Marlene Grace Esperat face trial.

According to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), the Court of Appeals granted an injunction petition by the two suspects on May 14. The injunction was reportedly granted because of an administrative error in moving the hearing from Tacurong City to Cebu City.

“There is cause for concern that the suspects, who are accused of gunning down Esperat in front of her family, may not be tried due to legal technicalities,” IFJ Asia-Pacific said. “It is deeply worrying that fewer than six of those responsible for the murders of 93 journalists or media workers in the Philippines since 1986 have been convicted.”

**BAIL MOTION DENIED:** The Cebu Regional Trial Court decided to deny a bail motion by the suspected killer of Bombo Radiyo broadcaster Herson Hinolan, who died of multiple gunshot wounds on November 15 2004. Mr Hinolan, who hosted the controversial radio program *Bombohanay Bigtime*, was repeatedly shot by a lone gunman in the capital town of Kalibo, Aklan. According to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), the Cebu court’s decision was “a significant step towards solving the four-year-old murder case”. The IFJ joined the NUJP in urging ongoing action by local authorities and the judiciary to investigate over 80 unresolved murder cases involving media workers since 1986.

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

### **REPORTERS GET THEIR FIRST SNIFF OF FREEDOM**

China’s worst natural disaster since 1976 showed the pervasiveness of the Communist Party’s strict controls on the media, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (26/5/08). Within an hour of the May 12 earthquake, the powerful Central Propaganda Department called newspapers and other media, banning them from sending reporters to the disaster zone. But with 140 million internet and 580 million mobile phone users, the news quickly spread.

When it was clear the edict had been ignored, another propaganda arm, China’s General Administration of Press and Publication, issued a more realistic memo, asking the media to be accurate and reassure the public. Virtually all reports focused on non-threatening storylines, rescues, survivals, heroism, heartbreaking losses and the premier’s laudable efforts.

**REPORT:** <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/25/1211653847415.html>

**AFGHANISTAN:** The International Federation of Journalists reported it was deeply disturbed by the further delay in deciding the appeal by journalist Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh against a death sentence for the alleged crime of “blasphemy”. (26/5/08). The Afghan Independent Journalists’ Association (AIJA) and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ) reported that the hearing scheduled for May 25 was adjourned on the grounds of Mr Kambakhsh’s illness. This followed an earlier adjournment on May 18, on the grounds that a defence lawyer was not present. Mr Kambakhsh’s brother, journalist Yaqub Ibrahimi, has informed the IFJ that the reason for his ill health was his prolonged detention in highly unsanitary conditions and severe psychological stress since his arrest last October and conviction in January.

The IFJ has urged the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, to intervene. The IFJ is encouraging affiliates to write to Hameed Nasry Wardak, spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Information and Cultural Affairs at [hameednasry@yahoo.com](mailto:hameednasry@yahoo.com), or call him on +93 700 989696. Humayun Hamidzada, spokesman for President Karzai, is at [bafir.ayoubi@gmail.com](mailto:bafir.ayoubi@gmail.com) and on +93 797 163 355. His deputy, Siyamak Heraway, is on + 93 700 282 508/ + 93 799 234 576. Yaqub Ibrahim is at [yaqub.ibrahimi@gmail.com](mailto:yaqub.ibrahimi@gmail.com), or mobile +93 798 008.  
**DETAILS:** IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

**NEPAL:** With the newly elected constituent assembly in Nepal due to meet, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) urged all parties – and in particular the largest political grouping, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), – to explicitly commit to honouring all norms of media freedom in the new republican Nepal (28/5/08). According to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), four Maoist party members went into the office of the *Sudur Sandesh* daily in Kailali, a town in the far-western region, and threatened the editor Hemanta Poudel. This action followed a news item published by Mr Poudel on May 23 and an editorial published on May 25 that suggested corruption and illegal dealing by prominent Maoist figures. In the same town, Lucky Chaudhari, editor and publisher of *Hamar Pahura* daily, was allegedly attacked by Young Communist League (YCL) members on May 28. He suffered minor injuries.  
**DETAILS:** IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

#### **RUPERT MURDOCH TO PRESENT 2008 BOYER LECTURES**

Rupert Murdoch will present the Boyer Lectures for 2008, to be broadcast on ABC Radio National later this year. **DETAILS:** <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2258313.htm>

#### **ABC LATELINE REPORTED**

The Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) upheld one part of a complaint made against a number of editions of *Lateline* and other programs dealing with the Mutitjulu community broadcast during the period June to October 2006, the ABC reported (26/5/08).  
**DETAILS:** <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2255785.htm>.

#### **ANDREW OLLE MEDIA LECTURE**

The Andrew Olle Media Lecture, in honour of respected and much-loved ABC broadcaster Andrew Olle who died of a brain tumour in 1995, this year will be addressed by well-known broadcaster Ray Martin. **DETAILS:** <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2255309.htm>

### **G. OTHER NEWS**

#### **UNESCO: SOCIAL INEQUALITY AFFECTS CHILDREN IN SCHOOL**

Social inequality has a major impact on the kind of schooling children receive and is a significant challenge to providing all children with equal learning opportunities, according to a report released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation ([UNESCO](http://www.unesco.org)).

“The data reveal how social inequality affects a child's opportunity to learn. And clearly, no country – rich or poor – is immune to these disparities,” Hendrik van der Pol, director of UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, said (28/5/08).

The report, which is based on a survey of 7,600 schools in 11 countries in Latin America, Asia and North Africa, reveals a glaring gap between resources available to urban and rural schools.

The report found that in India 27 per cent of village schools have electricity compared to 76 per cent of schools in towns or cities; only about half of rural schools have enough toilets for girls and fewer than 4 per cent have a telephone.

In Peru, fewer than half of village schools have electricity, a library or toilets for boys or girls. Yet, in urban areas, nearly all schools have electricity, 65 per cent have enough lavatories and 74 per

cent have libraries. In general, village schools were in greater need of repair. In Brazil, half the pupils in villages sit in run-down classrooms compared to fewer than 30 per cent of city pupils.

The survey also found wide variations in how much parents were expected to contribute financially.

"It is disturbing to think that students get more or less resources based on where they live. But that is just part of the story," says Yanhong Zhang, one of the report's authors. "The inequalities in school resources are linked to their socio-economic status. In effect, these children are subject to a double-jeopardy – with fewer resources at home and in school."

According to the study, teachers and principals in schools serving socially-disadvantaged children tend to report lower levels of pupil motivation and more behavioural problems and teachers were generally dissatisfied with salary, parental support, class size and access to classroom materials. The UNESCO survey was carried out in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Uruguay.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26827&Cr=unesco&Cr1=>

### **FEAR AFTER ISLAMIC SCHOOL BLOCKED**

A senior figure within Australia's Islamic community has warned that the blocking of a proposed Muslim school in Camden could result in Islamic children being taught extreme religious views in "backyards and garages" (28/5/08).

Australian Federation of Islamic Councils President Ikebal Patel said it was "very sad" that Camden Council had rejected a proposal to build a school for 1200 students on planning grounds.

Announcing the decision, the Mayor, Chris Patterson, stressed that the refusal of the application had nothing to do with religious tensions that underpinned much of the debate.

He later told AAP he encouraged the school's developers to resubmit their proposal if they could find an alternative site within his south-western Sydney municipality.

Mr Patel said he was saddened by the attitudes of Camden residents, some of whom declared the rejection of the school plan a victory for "decency". "It's very, very distressing that that sort of phobia exists in the community," he said.

REPORT: <http://au.mg1.mail.yahoo.com/dc/launch?.rand=d77u81v21qc66>

### **PM TO VISIT JAPAN AND INDONESIA**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will visit Japan and Indonesia from June 8 to 14 to advance Australia's economic and security interests and how best to advance mutual interests in the region on matters including financial cooperation, the development of regional architecture, climate change and disaster relief coordination, a Federal Government media release stated this week.

In Japan he will be received by the Emperor and Empress of Japan and meet Prime Minister Fukuda, other senior Japanese ministers and Diet members as well as senior Japanese and Australian business representatives. During a visit to Indonesia from June 12-14, Mr Rudd will meet with President Yudhoyono, National Parliament and business representatives.

### **MINIMUM PAY RAISED FOR OVERSEAS WORKERS**

Minimum Salary Levels (MSLs) for temporary skilled overseas workers would increase by 3.8 per cent from August 1, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said this week. A comprehensive information strategy would also reduce the potential for exploitation by promoting awareness of rights and obligations of 457 visa holders and employer sponsors.

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08050.htm>

### **AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCES \$4M 'AID FOR TRADE'**

Australia has a long-standing relationship with Laos. In collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP, Australia will extend current assistance to support Laotian integration of trade policy into its development plans and coordination of trade sector development assistance. [DETAILS: http://www.aisaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=220\\_1210\\_4001\\_9955\\_6068](http://www.aisaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Latest&ID=220_1210_4001_9955_6068).

### **TASMANIAN SCHOLAR TAKES THIRD IN WORLD CONTEST**

After winning the 2008 BHP Billiton Awards in February, Storm Holwill, from Marist Regional College in Burnie, Tasmania, last week won third prize in the Energy and Transportation division at the International Science and Engineering Fair in Atlanta. In competition with around 1500 students from over 50 countries, Storm's project also demonstrated that the process would be enhanced if CO<sub>2</sub> from industry could be used, reducing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> being pumped into the atmosphere. Of 103 science students from around the world who submitted science projects via the Internet, eight finalist teams travelled to Doha for the final judging and awards ceremony. [DETAILS: http://www.csiro.au/news/InternationalAward4Students.html](http://www.csiro.au/news/InternationalAward4Students.html)

## **H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS**

### **GUANTANAMO DEFENDERS SHOULD HANG THEIR HEADS**

I wonder if, in the time-out room of their souls, the former government's doughty little foot soldiers of freedom feel the odd shiver of embarrassment or shame, Richard Ackland writes in the Sydney Morning Herald (23/5/08): The extent to which Messrs Howard, Ruddock and Downer were prepared to subvert some sacred principles might have brought normal mortals unstitched. But by all appearances they have kept their chins up and their rectitude unexamined. The principle that they nearly wrestled to the ground and choked to death was that of the "fair trial". As they abandoned David Hicks, an Australian citizen, to the spectacularly bogus "judicial" regime at Guantanamo Bay, we were told repeatedly that our fears were baseless, that the system the Americans had devised for the detainees there was fairness itself.

[ARTICLE: http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/22/1211182996658.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/22/1211182996658.html)

### **DON'T MENTION THE WAR**

How do you know when things are going well for the US and its coalition allies in Iraq? When you see virtually nothing about it on your television screen or in the papers, writes Michael Costello in The Australian (23/5/08). When President George W. Bush announced a surge of US forces in Iraq, he was almost universally condemned as compounding already bungled and failed policies ... But as things began to get better on the ground, events faded from our screens. Al-Qa'ida, which had controlled Sunni areas such as Anbar province, was virtually driven out. The same thing happened in and around Baghdad. Remaining al-Qa'ida forces retreated to the northern city of Mosul, where they are now under pressure from Iraqi and US forces. This extraordinary achievement, the virtual destruction of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, occurred in less than a year.

[ARTICLE: http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23743270-7583,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23743270-7583,00.html)

### **THE BURMA CYCLONE IS UNLIKE ANY DISASTER I HAVE COVERED.**

It starts at the international airport in Rangoon, Gavin Hewitt of the BBC reported (23/5/08). Usually, after a few days, an air bridge has been established and the skies are crowded with helicopters and military transport planes. In Rangoon on Friday, there were just two transport planes. You could fly in and not have the slightest clue there was a crisis. After a few days of chaos, the Burmese authorities began to erect road blocks. They were there to keep foreigners from seeing the delta ... This week troops were handing out leaflets to Burmese citizens ... The authorities wanted to discourage people acting alone and offering aid to the cyclone victims.

[ARTICLE: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7416952.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7416952.stm)

Also: MYANMAR'S RECLUSIVE LEADER:

[http://www.news24.com/News24/World/News/0,,2-10-1462\\_2327848,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/World/News/0,,2-10-1462_2327848,00.html)

## **GROWTH THE KEY TO HELPING POOR**

The world will contain 4 billion people in abject poverty by 2050 unless the poorest countries adopt policies to deliver rapid and sustained growth over the coming decades, according to a report backed by the World Bank. A group of policymakers and economists published a blueprint designed to allow the least developed nations to emulate the 13 countries that have expanded at an average rate of at least 7 per cent a year for 25 years or longer since the Second World War, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (24/5/08). Professor Mike Spence, Commission on Growth and Development chairman, said there was no prospect of meeting the Millennium Development Goals set by the UN - including halving the number in poverty by 2015 - without faster growth.

ARTICLE: <http://business.smh.com.au/growth-the-key-to-helping-poor-20080523-2hli.html>

### **SOUTH AFRICAN VIOLENCE A SYMPTOM OF DEEPER PROBLEMS**

Recent anti-foreigner violence in South Africa pinpoints the country's need to immediately tackle widespread economic and social problems, the Toronto Star reports. The violence has driven more than 25,000 from their homes and left dozens dead and injured (26/5/08).

ARTICLE: [The Toronto Star / http://www.thestar.com/News/World/article/429863](http://www.thestar.com/News/World/article/429863)

### **NEW YORK BEGINS TO ALTER POLICY ON GAY MARRIAGE**

Governor David A. Paterson has directed all state agencies to begin to revise their policies and regulations to recognise same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions, like Massachusetts, California and Canada. In a directive the governor's legal counsel, David Nocenti, instructed the agencies that gay couples married elsewhere "should be afforded the same recognition as any other legally performed union." (28/5/08).

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

## **I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**

### **BURMA/MYANMAR**

#### **RANGOON MEETING RAISES \$233 MILLION**

Top UN humanitarian official, Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes, said on Tuesday that the UN had raised 60 per cent of the funding of its appeal, with a total of \$233 million either contributed or pledged for overall relief following Cyclone Nargis.

Australia was represented at the meeting by the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan. Australia has announced a contribution of \$25 million, in addition to private donations of Australians.

The UN estimates that aid has reached about one million people, not including the government's own emergency response. A total of 2.4 million people are thought to have been severely affected by the cyclone.

Mr Holmes said there had been some progress on access for international aid workers, especially into the delta area, and better logistical arrangements were now in place, particularly after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's meeting with Myanmar's Senior General Than Shwe on Friday.

"The key to all this is implementation – to see if the promises made turn into reality on the ground," Mr Holmes, who also serves as UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said. "A lot of people have received either nothing or not enough. That's why we need to step up the aid effort."

People who had fled their homes to either official or informal settlements should only return home voluntarily "so that basic services are in place for them. They should not be pushed back before that," he said.

Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Elizabeth Byrs [said](#) this week that between 10 and 15 international flights were coming in every day to Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and that air-bridge flights from the logistics hub at Bangkok's

Don Muang Airport to Yangon, were now fully operational. In total, the UN said that 169 international relief flights had landed so far.

Ms Brys said that [OCHA](#) hoped that the UN World Food Program ([WFP](#)) would be able to start operating 10 helicopters in Myanmar as soon as possible, after the government gave the go-ahead. So far, WFP and its partners had delivered over 3,000 tons of food reaching 460,000.

The UN World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) said the highest priority now was access to water, sanitation and basic healthcare. It has mobilised a specialised team to prevent and control malaria. The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) was assessing children's needs regarding health, education, water and sanitation supplies and technical assistance.

Royal Australian Air Force C-17 Globemaster aircraft are assisting the UN World Food Program to transport helicopters from South Africa to Thailand so they can be used to transport aid to remote cyclone-affected areas of Burma. The WFP requested immediate support from a small number of countries as commercial aircraft were not available (23/5/08).

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/fitzgibbontpl.cfm?CurrentId=7765>

## CHINA

### CHINA MOVES ON SCHOOL DESIGN AFTER EARTHQUAKE

An international coalition of engineers, community activists, earthquake specialists and others are working to ensure schools are able to withstand earthquakes, the New York Times reported (27/5/08). For decades, thousands of schoolchildren around the world have been buried and died when schools collapsed, as in Pakistan in 2005 and recently in China. **REPORT:** [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/science/27school.html?\\_r=2&ref=world&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/science/27school.html?_r=2&ref=world&oref=slogin&oref=slogin)

### BAN PRAISES CHINA QUAKE RESPONSE

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has praised China's "extraordinary leadership" in dealing with the recent earthquake in Sichuan, the BBC reported (24/5/08). He was speaking in the badly-hit town of Yingxiu, as Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said the death toll had passed 60,000 and could rise to 80,000. Mr Ban said the UN was ready to provide further support for the relief effort.

Earlier a Chinese official said 50 sources of radiation were now known to have been buried by the earthquake. Thirty-five of the sources had been secured but the remaining 15 were buried under debris or in dangerous buildings, Environment Vice-Minister Wu Xiaoqing stated, saying there had been no leaks of radioactive substances.

### AFTERSHOCKS CONTINUE

Authorities in China said at least one person died and 262 have been injured in the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu during the strongest aftershock since the massive earthquake on May 12, the ABC reported (26/5/08). The aftershock is reported to have toppled more than 70,000 houses and has led to renewed fears of landslides. The official death toll from the quake on the May 12 has now risen to 62,664 people, with nearly 24,000 missing.

**REPORT:** <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/25/2255039.htm>

## SOUTH AMERICA

### AT LEAST 11 DIE IN COLOMBIAN EARTHQUAKE

Hundreds of Colombians huddled in makeshift shelters on Sunday afraid to go home a day after a 5.6-magnitude earthquake damaged scores of homes and triggered landslides killing at least 11 people, The Australian reported (26/5/08).

In the rural town of Quetame, the most seriously hit, families spent the night sheltered on the town's football field or in a public building after the quake knocked out water supplies and damaged or collapsed houses and its church.

Colombia's Red Cross said at least 11 people died and 54 were injured, with about 5000 affected by damaged houses and buildings. President Alvaro Uribe visited affected area, where landslides blocked a major highway from Bogota to Villavicencio near the epicentre, which was 33 miles (54 km) southeast of the capital, the US Geological Survey said.

Colombia's disaster-prevention office said on Sunday in Quetame alone around 3300 people were affected and either moved to safer housing or shelters while authorities checked homes.

### **MINC STEPS INTO BRAZIL DEFORESTATION CONTROVERSY**

Brazil's new environment minister has taken office in the middle of a spat over an apparent recent increase in deforestation in the Amazon region, the London Financial Times reported (26/5/08).

The dispute concerns satellite data on deforestation and punitive measures based on that data taken by the government against ranchers and farmers in the worst-affected regions. The government sees the clampdown as essential to slow deforestation, but a leading Amazon scientists said the measures were "just wrong" and could precipitate "a new wave of anarchy".

REPORT: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/494641c6-2b45-11dd-a7fc-000077b07658.html>

## **AUSTRALIA**

### **UNDERSTANDING AUTUMN RAIN DECLINE IN SE AUSTRALIA**

According to a report from a CSIRO Wealth From Oceans Flagship study – published this week in the science journal *Geophysical Research Letters* – since 1950 Victoria has suffered a 40 per cent decline in autumn rainfall (March to May) compared to the average recorded between 1961–90 (23/5/08). The authors, CSIRO's Dr Wenju Cai and Tim Cowan, said that the decline was most prominent in May, which accounts for about half of the total seasonal reduction. The identified causes show imprints of climate change influences, in part through a reduction in the number of La Niña events, and in part through changing weather systems originating from the subtropical Indian Ocean that are conducive to late autumn rainfall across Victoria.

DETAILS: <http://www.csiro.au/news/UnderstandingDeclineAutumnRain.html>

The Federal Government's \$50 million water buy-back will secure entitlements to 35 billion extra litres of water for Murray Darling Basin rivers (23/5/08).

DETAILS: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080523.pdf>

GRAPHIC: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080523-att.pdf>

### **AUSTRALIAN COASTS ATTRACT \$100 MILLION PACKAGE**

Australia's fragile coasts and beaches will benefit from a \$100 million Community Coastcare package launched by Environment Minister, Peter Garrett. Jointly administered by Minister Garrett and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister, Tony Burke, it is part of the \$2.25 billion Caring for our Country initiative, and will help local communities undertake vital beach and coastal protection and restoration projects right around the country. DETAILS:

[http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/may\\_2008/australias\\_coasts\\_to\\_win\\_in\\_\\$100\\_million\\_package2](http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/may_2008/australias_coasts_to_win_in_$100_million_package2)

### **SCOUTS JOIN WORLD CLEAN UP**

A new relationship between the world organisation of the Scout Movement and Clean Up the World has been launched in the lead-up to World Environment Day on June 5. Up to 28 million Scouts in 156 countries – including 60,000 in Australia – will be involved in a range of environmental projects.

Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector, launched the project which the Australian Government supports, on Tuesday with World founder

Ian Kiernan, Clean Up the World CEO Terri-Ann Johnson; and Scouts Australia Chief Commissioner John Ravenhall. The senator said it gave her great pleasure to officially announce the new relationship between the World Organisation of the Scout Movement and Clean Up the World. [DETAILS](#): Simon Robson on 0434 736 519; <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/stephens/releases/worldenvironmentday.htm>