

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.

June 6 2008

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

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

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

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

PM CALLS FOR ASIAN/PACIFIC ALLIANCE

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has called on Asian and Pacific nations to form a regional alliance similar to the European Union, the ABC reported (5/6/08).

He said a strong multilateral body was needed to help the region maintain security, foster trade and respond to natural disasters and terrorism. Asia needed to react quickly to cope with changes brought about by rapid economic growth in the region.

"The European Union does not represent an identikit model of what we would seek to develop in the Asia-Pacific, but what we can learn from Europe is this - it is necessary to take the first step," he said.

"Our special challenge is that we face a region with a greater diversity in political systems and economic structures, levels of development religious beliefs, languages and cultures than our counterparts in Europe," he said. "But that should not stop us from thinking big."

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/05/2265460.htm>

WOOLCOTT BACK ON THE ASIA SCENE

When former prime minister Bob Hawke sought, in 1989, to deepen Australia's links with Asia's emerging political community by creating APEC, he turned to career diplomat Richard Woolcott to make it happen, the Australian reported (5/6/08).

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had now turned to the same man to finish the job he started almost 20 years ago and bring Mr Rudd's concept of an Asia-Pacific Community into being, making Mr Woolcott Australia's envoy for the new Asia push.

Unique among his contemporaries, Mr Woolcott served as a trusted adviser to every prime minister from Bob Menzies to John Howard. He was charged with developing APEC in 1989 and also served in Singapore, Ghana, The Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and was ambassador and permanent representative to the UN.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23812645-5013871,00.html>

SECURITY COUNCIL BACKING NEEDED TO FIND FUGITIVES

Two United Nations war crimes tribunals still seek fugitives from justice in both Serbia and Rwanda. The tribunals appealed for help to the UN Security Council and said both countries could do more to hunt down the war criminals. [The Boston Globe/Associated Press](#) (5/6/08).

US AND UK DIPLOMATS ATTACKED AND DETAINED

A group of US and British diplomats who were traveling in Zimbabwe to investigate politically motivated violence were attacked by police and detained at a roadblock on Thursday, the US Embassy said. US Ambassador James McGee, who was not part of the group, said supporters of President Robert Mugabe were also to blame for the "illegal action." [The New York Times/Associated Press](#) (5/6/08).

PAPER ON RESTRUCTURING THE UN

A satisfactory reform of the UN Security Council is important, but currently impossible given the veto power of the five permanent members and an absence of consensus among other members of the UN, according to a speaker at the ANU Canberra (6/6/08).

Richard Hartwig, a graduate of Southern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, conducted research as a Rotary Fellow in Argentina and as a Fulbright Fellow in Colombia. Since 1990, Professor Hartwig has taught in four different universities in Mexico and is

currently Professor in the Department of Political Science at Texas A&M University-Kingsville where he teaches courses in comparative politics, international relations, and US government.

An ANU media release stated that in 2004 a UN sponsored High-Level Panel proposed two models for UN Security Council reform; neither model is satisfactory and neither has been, or is likely to be adopted.

Richard Hartwig's paper advocates a radical restructuring of the Security Council called the Regional/Economic Proposal (REP), which would require revising the UN Charter. Change from a uni-polar to a multi-polar world – and, perhaps, a major world crisis – would be required for this proposal to become politically feasible. The required conditions may be present by 2020, the year the High-Level Panel has suggested for a review of the composition of the Security Council, if not earlier. [DETAILS](#): Martyn Pearce, ANU Media Office, on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245.

APEC MINISTERS READY FOR WTO AGREEMENT

APEC ministers indicated that they were ready to engage to deliver expeditiously a modalities agreement and urged other WTO members to do the same, Trade Minister Simon Crean said following the conclusion of the WTO Doha Round of negotiations at Arequipa, Peru on May 31.

"This is an important message of political commitment at a time when the completion of negotiations in Geneva is within our grasp. The 21 members of APEC account for around half of world GDP, and over half of world trade. I was encouraged by the overwhelming consensus within APEC to support the Multilateral Trading System in recognition of its critical role in raising living standards around the globe, and in the Asia-Pacific specifically."

The statement also highlighted that a prompt, ambitious and balanced conclusion to the round would be one of the important factors in overcoming the serious international situation caused by recent food price escalation, he said.

[APEC STATEMENT: A copy of the APEC Ministers' statement is attached.](#)

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - UNAA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 08

The National Conference of the United Nations Association of Australia will be held at Parliament House, Brisbane, over August 21/23, with the theme *Making a Difference*. Several distinguished speakers have been invited to present papers on themes at community, state, national and international levels. Delegates will have an opportunity to contribute.

Conference sessions will include discussion on climate change, life-long education, governance, peace, conflict and resolution, global compact and sustainability and human rights. A gala conference dinner is planned. Tours have been organised to visit World Heritage, UNESCO Eco-biosphere, Rainforests and Eco Centres on the Gold Coast (south of Brisbane), the Sunshine Coast (north of Brisbane) or special facilities within Brisbane.

The conference will emphasise the theme *Making a Difference* because "The future is in our hands." United Nations Associations are established in over 100 countries and in a statement the UNAA says, "We believe that the United Nations DOES make a difference in world affairs, and associations are part of making a difference." The United Nations Charter focuses on peace, security and justice, and the Human Rights Charter focuses on people's rights.

[DETAILS](#): Virginia Balmain on ph/fax 07 32541096; unaabalmain@optusnet.com.au or P O Box 244, New Farm Qld 4006 [or download a registration form here](#)

DAY IN A DIARY SENT FROM MYANMAR

Because Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) has been on the ground since the Myanmar tragedy occurred, [The Intrepid Foundation](#) has donated \$A20,000 to the [MSF Emergency Appeal](#). The foundation has also made available the following letter.

Dr Khine Myae, from Myanmar, was one of the first physicians MSF sent to the devastated Irrawaddy Delta to provide assistance after it had been battered by Cyclone Nargis. An extract from his diary gives a vivid insight into the horrific challenges faced on a daily basis:

Sunday, May 12:

'Everyone on our team sees an average of more than 200 patients a day and many people are in shock or are experiencing trauma. There are confused people still searching for their families, children who have lost their parents, parents who have watched their children drown. In the evenings, I sit with my colleagues and everyone tells what they've heard and seen during the day. It is difficult for everyone. We are all tired and we sleep poorly.

"I can't get the stench of the dead bodies out of my nose," says one of the doctors. She spent a few hours sitting in a boat going through an area where there were many dead bodies and animal carcasses. The smells, the images and the people's stories together form an overwhelming picture. I feel myself blocking it out. Tonight I went outside for a moment. I didn't want to hear anything anymore.'

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 on 02 6247 4499.

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

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

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

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

Earlier editions of UNity 2004-05, 2006 and 2007 are on the UNAA website: 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 judycnnn@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

TRANSPORT SECTOR 'SHOULD LEAD' ON CLIMATE CHANGE: UN OFFICIAL

The transport sector is expected to contribute so much to greenhouse gas emissions in the future that it must play a key role in shaping the global climate change deal which countries have agreed to try to clinch next year, a senior UN environmental official [says](#) (30/5/08).

Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)), told the [International Transport Forum](#) in Leipzig, Germany, that data indicates that emissions from the sector will rise by more than 30 per cent by 2010 when compared to 1990 levels – the highest increase of any sector.

“You have a choice,” he said. “The question is whether you as transport stakeholders are willing to proactively shape the Copenhagen deal [scheduled for next year] or have your policies shaped by it.” Last December in Bali the world’s countries agreed to launch formal negotiations to reach a long-term global agreement on climate change, including detailed measures on mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance, by the time of the international conference scheduled for Copenhagen in late 2009.

Mr de Boer said the transport sector had been “woefully inadequate” so far in taking political action to curb greenhouse gas emissions and develop strategies to benefit the environment.

“All of the current trends in transport fly in the face of what science tells us is required. Developed countries now need to start thinking hard about what short and medium-term sectoral emission reductions they want to commit to in the transport sector, along with what interim targets they want to build in on the way.” He suggested the sector consider ambitious carbon dioxide standards for cars, more integrated transport strategies and encouraging emissions trading as potential ways to combat climate change. [REPORT:](#)
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26856&Cr=climate&Cr1=transport&Kw1=world&Kw2=environment&Kw3=day>

UN URGES WORLD TO BREAK CARBON ADDICTION

Every country must act now to battle climate change and help cure the world of its mass production of carbon dioxide, the United Nations urged on Thursday, World Environment Day. “Our world is in the grip of a dangerous carbon habit. Addiction is a terrible thing,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (5/6/08).

NZ EMISSIONS SCHEME 'DID NOT BODE WELL'

The difficulties faced by the New Zealand Government with introducing an Emissions Trading Scheme and the Australian discussions about how to discount petrol did not bode well for the country’s ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, an ANU academic warned (3/6/08).

Associate Professor Richard Denniss, of Crawford School, has been studying the likely effectiveness of the NZ Government’s Emissions Trading Scheme for his paper *The NZ Emissions Trading Scheme – why is it so bad and can Australia’s be any better?*

Professor Denniss said that politicians arguing about how to discount petrol should ring alarm bells for anyone keen to see effective action taken against rising greenhouse gas emissions.

“Given the recent consternation in Australia over very small reductions in the price of petrol, it is difficult to see how we are going to have a sensible debate about an effective Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) in Australia,” he said.

“The worst thing Australia could do would be to follow New Zealand down the path of incurring all the costs of an ETS, while missing out on all the economic and environmental benefits. They have gone for the worst of both worlds, but hopefully Australia can do better.”

He said Australian policy makers needed to look across the Tasman to learn a number of valuable lessons before the introduction of any national emissions trading scheme, to ensure the New Zealand experience was not repeated here.

"The most significant lesson is that the introduction of a new policy should not be confused with the introduction of an actual solution," he said. "New Zealand may soon have an ETS, but there is little chance that the rate of greenhouse gas emissions will even slow, let alone decline. The underlying cause of this problem is the failure to set a domestic target and the decision to give away so many of the permits to polluters.

"Another lesson is that powerful industry groups have the capacity to insulate themselves from the impact of an ETS. The agriculture sector, for example, which accounts for nearly 50 per cent of New Zealand's emissions, has been excluded from the scheme until at least 2013."

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

TENDER RELEASED FOR NATIONAL EMISSIONS REGISTRY

The Department of Climate Change has released a request for tender to set up and manage an Australian national registry under the Kyoto Protocol and ultimately for an Australian emissions trading scheme. The request for tender seeks a Kyoto Protocol-compliant registry, software development capabilities (to make the registry functional for Australia's future emissions trading scheme), and hosting and support services, in accordance with a set amount of emissions as 'assigned amount units' and must set up a registry to monitor them.

DETAILS: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080530.pdf>

RUDD TREASURY 'NOT MODELLING REAL CLIMATE PROTECTION SCENARIOS'

Treasury was only modelling global emissions scenarios with a very high risk of triggering runaway climate change, Australian Greens climate change spokesperson, Senator Christine Milne, discovered in Senate Estimates hearings (4/6/08).

Senator Milne said, "I will be writing to Prime Minister Rudd and Professor Garnaut today, outlining the tremendous danger inherent in the scenarios Treasury is modelling, and calling on them to instruct the modelling team to include safe climate scenarios in their work if it is to be worth anything as a guide to public policy.

"It is deeply troubling to find that the modelling work now being undertaken for the Rudd Government is restricted to emissions scenarios which would see a very high chance of triggering runaway climate change," she said. At the Estimates hearings, Meghan Quinn said her department was only modelling scenarios leading to global atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at 450 and 550ppm of carbon dioxide equivalent.

"If Treasury has not been asked to model safe climate scenarios, I will fill that gap today by calling on the Prime Minister to direct Treasury to model at 350 and 400ppm as well as 450ppm and to drop the 550ppm scenarios as too dangerous for the climate.

"450ppm gives us a less than even chance of avoiding 2 degrees warming, leading most likely to the complete loss of Arctic summer ice, extinction of polar bears and so many other species in the wild, and potentially setting in train positive feedback loops that could send our climate into an uncontrollable heating cycle.

"550ppm will send us toward 3 degrees warming, destroy the Great Barrier Reef and almost certainly trigger runaway climate change, leading some to say that there is no such thing as stabilisation at 550ppm. It should not even be being modelled as it is beyond the point where a safe climate for all living creatures, including humanity, can be imagined.

"If Professor Garnaut and Kevin Rudd are not modelling deeper cuts because they are worried

about economic impacts, they should look to the USA where modelling has shown that, beyond a certain threshold, emissions reductions become cheaper with greater cuts because of the effects of scale and learning. Unless we aim high, we have no chance of success," she said.

DETAILS: Tim Hollo on +61 (0)2 6277 3063

CENTRE A WORLD FIRST IN CLIMATE CHANGE FIGHT

Claimed as the first in the world, a legal research centre devoted to climate change and policy was due to be opened at the Australian National University on Friday (6/6/08) by Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Arts Peter Garrett.

The ANU Centre for Climate Law and Policy, established in response to a growing awareness of the legal dimensions of global warming, will be headed up by Director Tim Bonyhady and Associate Director Andrew Macintosh. It will carry out research on climate law and policy issues including the international legal regime post-2012, regulation of transport and forestry emissions, climate litigation and the encouragement of renewable energy. In addition, the centre will offer Australian climate law and policy courses as part of the College of Law's postgraduate program.

The launch follows the recent publication of *Climate Law in Australia*, which has already become the key text in the area and showcases some of the research work being undertaken by the centre. **DETAILS:** ANU Centre for Climate Law and Policy see: <http://law.anu.edu.au/CCLP>

GetUp SEES 'ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM'

GetUp writes that "On World Environment Day, we're left scratching our heads as Kevin Rudd and Brendan Nelson race to the bottom of the petrol bowser. They're arguing about *rising* petrol prices whilst ignoring the elephant in the room - our *rising* greenhouse pollution.

"We don't need to remove the GST on petrol, we need to start weaning Australia off its oil addiction, with a 3 point recovery plan - massive federal investment in public transport, laws for dramatically more efficient cars, and an emissions trading scheme which includes transport. We're tired of waiting for the bus while our politicians dither in parliament. Tell your MP you want far-sighted, low-carbon transport solutions now:"

DETAILS: www.getup.org.au/campaign/FixTransport

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

UN RIGHTS CHIEF 'ALARMED' AT EROSION OF TERROR SUSPECTS' RIGHTS

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed concern about the treatment of people suspected of committing terrorist acts, and called for reform of legal procedures used in such cases (4/6/08).

"There are concerns regarding the transfer of suspects without due process, and the use of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, which are unacceptable practices," Louise Arbour reported to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva.

"I am alarmed by the continuing erosion of the right to fair trial which occurs when suspects of terrorist acts are denied the right to obtain a judicial review of their case," she said. There was a need to establish specific and effective legislation to avoid vague or overly broad definitions of terrorism.

"We know that such definitions have led to inappropriate restrictions of the legitimate exercise of rights, such as the rights of association, expression and assembly," she said, while also calling for intelligence-gathering on terrorism to be regulated by law and monitored as much as possible by independent agencies.

Commenting on another UN report, on the *Question of the death penalty*, she said that the number of countries that have a "completely abolitionist" policy toward the death penalty has increased from 85 to 93 since 2005.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26914&Cr=arbour&Cr1=>

HANEEF SPEAKS AT ANTI-TERROR MEETING

Less than a year after being locked up in Brisbane as a suspected terrorist, Mohamed Haneef shared a speakers' podium with the Dalai Lama at a high-profile anti-terrorism conference in India, *The Age* reported (4/6/08).

The Indian doctor, who was arrested last July and later had terror charges against him dropped, told young Muslims across the world to beware because they had been typecast as terrorists.

"I am a living example of how the menace of terrorism has affected innocent lives and the phenomenon of how Muslims are stereotyped as being terrorists or sympathisers of terrorists whether they are guilty or not," he said.

Dr Haneef was an invited guest at a New Delhi conference organised by the Jama Masjid United Forum, an Indian-based Islamic organisation that aims to "eradicate the root cause" of terrorism. Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama also addressed the meeting, along with Islamic leaders, Indian ministers and parliamentarians.

The Dalai Lama used his speech to strongly condemn terrorism but called for "unbiased initiatives" to combat it. He said it was wrong to malign any one religions community because of terrorist acts. **REPORT:** <http://www.theage.com.au/national/haneef-speaks-at-antiterror-meeting-20080603-2lcr.html>

HOWARD ACCUSED OF WAR CRIMES OVER IRAQ TROOP DEPLOYMENT

A legal brief has been sent to the International Criminal Court (ICC) alleging former prime minister John Howard committed a war crime by sending troops to Iraq, the ABC reported (2/6/08). The ABC said a loose alliance of peace activists, lawyers, academics and politicians was behind the brief, organised by the ICC Action group in Melbourne. Organiser Glen Floyd says Mr Howard should be held accountable for sending troops to a war not sanctioned by the United Nations. Democrats Senator Lyn Allison says the legal brief sent to the ICC was justified.

A similar brief has been sent by a group from the United Kingdom regarding former prime minister Tony Blair. The United States is not a signatory to the court.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/02/2262414.htm>

SENATE COMMITTEE PROBES DFAT OVER HABIB

Australia's foreign affairs department is unsure who represented it at a meeting in 2001 when the possible rendition of Mamdouh Habib was discussed, a Senate committee has been told, *The Age* reported (2/6/08). It was revealed during parliamentary hearings last week that senior Australian government officials learnt during a meeting with US authorities in Pakistan on October 22 2001 that the Sydney father of four might be rendered. **REPORT:** <http://news.theage.com.au/national/dfat-clueless-about-habib-rendition-meet-20080602-2kpo.html>

DIVERSITY A STRENGTH DESPITE MINORITY RACISM

The unfortunate minority-expressed racist sentiments in Camden surrounding the decision to reject a proposal for a Muslim school was to be deplored and needed political leaders to speak out against such behaviour, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO) said in a joint media release (4/6/08).

FECCA Chairperson Voula Messimeri expressed concern that a minority group of people had used the planning decision to express racist sentiments towards Australian Muslims.

"The majority of Australians live peacefully side by side and have done so for generations," she said. "The situation has been hijacked by a group of extremists who are using it as an opportunity to gain support for their anti-Islamic campaign."

APRO Chairman Abd Malak said that planning guidelines and systems had to be respected and supported; however, it was very important that councils provided clear information to the potential applicants to avoid a lot of wasted resources and time.

"We should be supporting the regulation of all faith schools to avoid proliferation of non-regulated 'backyard' schools," he said. "Providing religious schools, where qualified teachers are employed and schools are supervised by state boards of education, reduces the risk of extreme teachings." FECCA and APRO called for strong leadership and ongoing commitment to Australian diversity.

"The world now is going through a major crisis," Ms Messimeri said. "Australia can provide a way forward and an example and to the world that we can live together under a multicultural banner and harvest the diversity benefit. We call for a recommitment to a multicultural policy that will lead us into a future where this sentiment is a reality," she said.

DETAILS: Voula Messimeri, FECCA Chairperson, on 0414 532 529; Abd Malak, APRO Convenor, on 0417 489 066.

LAST BRITON IN GUANTANAMO FACES DEATH PENALTY

After being held prisoner by the US for six years, inmate to be charged with terrorism offences despite protesting his innocence, the UK Independent reported (30/5/08).

The newspaper reported that in a letter delivered to Downing Street, Binyam Mohamed, the last Guantanamo inmate with the automatic right to British residency, calls on the prime minister to use his influence with President George Bush to stop an American military "kangaroo court" sending him to his death. Mr Mohamed, 29, from Kensington, London, claimed he has suffered horrific abuse during more than six years in detention without trial.

Both Tony Blair and Mr Brown have called for the closure of the prison camp at the US naval base in Cuba which still holds nearly 300 inmates, many of whom have been unlawfully detained for more than five years. The former attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, also expressed concerns about the legally flawed system of the military tribunals, set up to try non-US citizens and which one law lord likened to "kangaroo courts".

REPORT: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-last-briton-in-guantanamo-faces-death-penalty-836745.html>

SUSTAINABLE OPTIONS FOR NEW NATIONAL INDIGENOUS BODY

Governments risked failure – and would continue to risk to do so - if they develop and implement policies about Indigenous issues without engaging with the intended recipients of those services, Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, said in a speech on 'Sustainable options for Australia's new national Indigenous representative body' at the Native Title Conference 2008 (4/6/08).

"Bureaucrats and governments can have the best intentions in the world, but if their ideas have not been subject to the 'reality test' of the life experience of the local Indigenous peoples who are intended to benefit from this, then government efforts will fail," he said.

This need for participation existed at the local, regional and national levels. Processes were needed to ensure Indigenous input in a systemic manner at the regional level, and linked up to the state and national levels.

"With the recent demise of the National Indigenous Council, the need at the national level is particularly pressing," he said. "The NIC was not intended to be a representative organisation, and it did not adopt a consultative approach to its work during its existence. But now that it is

gone there is no systemic structure in place for Indigenous input into government decision making at the national level.

“And this, ultimately, is what the discussion about a new national Indigenous representative body is about. It is about our place at the table in making the decisions that impact on our communities and on our children. It is about creating a genuine partnership,” he said. [SPEECH: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/speeches/social_justice/2008/20080604_representative_body.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/speeches/social_justice/2008/20080604_representative_body.html)

DELAYING SAME SEX BILL WILL UNNECESSARILY CONTINUE DISTRESS

Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, expressed his disappointment at the potential delay to the first Bill to remove discrimination against same sex couples (4/6/08). Media reports suggested that the Coalition would send the Same-Sex Relationships (Equal Treatment in Commonwealth Laws – Superannuation) Bill to a Senate Committee. This could mean legislation would not be considered by the Senate until the spring session of Parliament in September.

“Discrimination against same-sex couples is both emotionally and financially distressing, particularly to older couples who are concerned about the financial security of their partners, should they die before the discrimination is removed,” said Mr Innes. “This further delay adds to that distress.” [DETAILS: http://www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)

COMMITMENT TO REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WELCOMED

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick welcomed the Prime Minister's commitment to reduce violence against women, saying that it is a long awaited move to curb the high levels of violence against women in Australia (4/6/08).

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was speaking at the inaugural meeting of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children.

“Domestic violence affects up to one in three women in Australia and around one in five women will experience sexual violence over their lifetime,” Ms Broderick said. “Rates of violence are particularly alarming for women with disabilities and Indigenous women.”

[DETAILS: Patrick Flynn on 02 9284 9851 or 0419 258 597.](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING NOW \$32B ANNUAL INDUSTRY

Global and regional pacts must be put into action if the world is to tackle the scourge of human trafficking, a \$32 billion annual industry, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim said in New York, the UN News reported (3/6/08).

Despite UN-backed agreements and initiatives, “there remains a vast gulf between the letter of the law and the situation on the ground,” he told a thematic [debate](#) convened by the Assembly on the issue.

Despite such pacts as the landmark UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, roughly 2.5 million people worldwide – mostly women and children – are believed to be victims of human trafficking. Additionally, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) has identified 127 countries as sources of trafficked people and 137 nations as destinations for these victims.

Mr Kerim said increased global interdependence had “provided new avenues for criminal networks to operate on a global scale,” adding that trafficking affects all regions of the world and did not discriminate between developed and developing areas. He urged member states to act on their commitments, to enhance protection and assistance for victims and to prosecute traffickers.

The Assembly President also [stressed](#) the need to boost the economic and social conditions to minimise people's vulnerability to trafficking, and appealed for stepped-up cooperation among the private sector and nations. Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro [called](#) on all countries to ratify the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

“For millions of people around the world, the fight against human trafficking is a matter of life and death,” she told the debate. “To reunite families that have been torn apart, to restore childhood to kids who have been robbed of their youth, to bring back dignity to all those violated by these abuses – we must act now.”

Last year, the UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), an initiative launched by UNODC and several UN partners last year to bring governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and the media together to combat a practice that is viewed as modern-day slavery, was launched.

Anwar Gargash, Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), said that the Gulf nation, which has been a strong supporter of UN.GIFT since its inception, is endeavouring to address the problem, saying the UAE was leading the fight in the region against human trafficking.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26900&Cr=trafficking&Cr1=>

\$34 MILLION TO ASSIST IN SETTLEMENT

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, said the Federal Government would spend about \$34 million next financial year on services to assist the integration of refugees and migrants.

REPORT: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2008/lf08041.htm>

UKRAINE MURDER RENEWS ALARM OVER ATTACKS ON FOREIGNERS

The UN refugee agency has condemned the murder of a Nigerian man in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, in the latest of a series of attacks against foreigners in the country (3/6/08). The victim was found on May 29 in the Solomenskiy district of the city suffering numerous knife wounds. Police said the motive for the fatal attack was unknown.

The man had approached the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kyiv two years ago, seeking legal assistance. UNHCR, along with some 30 other groups belonging to the Diversity Initiative human rights coalition in the country, have urged Ukrainian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the killing, including the possibility it was racially motivated.

Over the past two years, human rights groups have reported increasing violent attacks on foreigners and non-Ukrainians in Kyiv and elsewhere in the country. UNHCR [says](#) it has repeatedly expressed concern over unprovoked attacks, beatings and verbal abuse aimed at asylum-seekers, refugees, migrants, foreigners and minorities in Ukraine.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26891&Cr=ukraine&Cr1=refugee>

D. PEACE & SECURITY

EX-NUCLEAR CHIEF SAYS HE HAD PAKISTAN GOVERNMENT BLESSING

Abdul Qadeer Khan created nuclear bombs for Pakistan and sold nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea and Libya. Under house arrest since 2004, the 72-year-old scientist spoke out in an effort to clear his name. Mr Khan said he conducted his work with the full blessing of the government, including former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. [The Washington Post](#) (5/6/08).

CLUSTER BOMB BAN PRAISED IN NAME OF MILLIONS OF CHILDREN

Stressing the unspeakable suffering inflicted on millions of children by the use of cluster munitions, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has lauded the recent adoption of a new global treaty banning the production, use and transfer of these deadly weapons (3/6/08).

“This is an important treaty and [UNICEF](#) calls on all governments to sign and ratify it as quickly as possible,” said the agency’s Deputy Executive Director, Hilde F. Johnson.

Delegations from 111 states agreed on the text of the new international convention at the Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions held in Dublin last month.

The treaty – which will be signed in Oslo in December – has been widely hailed by UN officials, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said it will “enhance the protection of civilians, strengthen human rights and improve prospects for development.”

According to UNICEF, the deadly weapons have been in use for over six decades and continue to contaminate wide areas of countries like Laos, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Roughly 40 per cent of victims of cluster bombs are children who are injured or killed long after direct hostilities end. Children are particularly at risk from cluster munitions as they are small and shiny and attract children’s natural curiosity.

“By their very nature, cluster munitions spread out littering wide areas and rendering them uninhabitable. Bomblets are frequently found in school yards, fields and other areas where children play and explore,” Ms Johnson said. “With billions of cluster munitions stockpiled around the world, this treaty could help secure the world for generations to come,” she said.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26892&Cr=cluster&Cr1=bomb>

CLUSTER MUNITIONS: CONVENTION ‘A MAJOR STEP FORWARD’

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomed the agreement on a historic treaty prohibiting cluster munitions that have caused decades of suffering for civilians (30/5/08).

“The ICRC has regularly witnessed the terrible impact of cluster munitions on civilians,” stated Jakob Kellenberger, ICRC President. “The convention adopted in Dublin means that these weapons are not only morally unacceptable but also now illegal under international humanitarian law. When implemented, it will prevent tremendous civilian suffering.”

The ICRC urges all states to adhere to the Cluster Munitions Convention in the near future and called on them to end the use of cluster munitions prohibited by the convention, regardless of whether they participated in the Dublin negotiations.

The ICRC first called for a Cluster Munition treaty and an end to their use in 2000 following the conflict in Kosovo, where it documented widespread civilian casualties. In more than 20 countries, unexploded cluster sub-munitions have rendered large areas as dangerous as minefields. Their deadly legacy can continue for generations.

The Cluster Munitions Convention will be open for signature in Oslo in early December and will enter into force when 30 states have deposited their instruments of ratification with the UN Secretary General.

DETAILS: ICRC SYDNEY SUPPORT OFFICE TO THE REGIONAL DELEGATION FOR THE PACIFIC on 61 (0)2 9388 9039; F 61 (0)2 9388 9042; sydney.syd@icrc.org.

INDIAN COLLEGE ISSUES FATWA ON TERRORISM

A radical Muslim seminary in India, said to have inspired the Taliban, has issued a fatwa, or edict, against terrorism at a meeting attended by thousands of clerics and students, The Age reported (2/6/08).

The Darul Uloom Deoband, a 150-year-old institute controlling thousands of smaller Islamic seminaries in India, vowed on Saturday in New Delhi to wipe out terrorism.

“Islam rejects all kinds of unjust violence, breach of peace, bloodshed, murder and plunder and does not allow it in any form,” said senior rector Habibur Rehman. Thousands of clerics and students cheered as Mr Rehman read out a statement: “The religion of Islam has come to wipe out all kinds of terrorism and to spread the message of global peace.” **REPORT:**

<http://www.theage.com.au/world/indian-college-issues-fatwa-on-terrorism-20080601-2kh0.html>

MIDDLE EAST

IRAN SUPREME LEADER: NO MANUFACTURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Iran's supreme leader has insisted it will continue its nuclear activities for civilian purposes only and will not manufacture nuclear weapons, the BBC reported (3/6/08).

"No wise nation would be interested in making a nuclear weapon today. They are against rational thought," said Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a speech. The comments came a day after the UN's atomic watchdog urged from Iran "full disclosure" about its atomic work, saying alleged research into warheads was "of serious concern". Some western powers accuse Iran of seeking to develop nuclear arms.

Iran has always denied such charges but has refused to suspend some nuclear work which could have military application, prompting three rounds of sanctions imposed by the UN.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7432916.stm

AL-QA'IDA 'ESSENTIALLY DEFEATED IN IRAQ AND SAUDI ARABIA'

Al-Qa'ida was essentially defeated in Iraq and Saudi Arabia and on the defensive throughout much of the world, according to CIA director Michael Hayden, the Australian reported (31/5/08).

The upbeat assessment from General Hayden came less than a year after the CIA warned of new threats from a resurgent al-Qa'ida and as world leaders hailed Iraq's "remarkable" progress in easing violence.

"On balance, we are doing pretty well," General Hayden told the Washington Post, citing major gains against Osama bin Laden's network and its allies.

DELEGATIONS PRAISE IRAQ GOVERNMENT

Led by UN chief Ban Ki-moon and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, 100 international delegations in Stockholm said they "recognised the important efforts made by the (Iraqi) Government to improve security and public order and combat terrorism and sectarian violence".

The international declaration said: "Given the difficult context, these successes are all the more remarkable." Mr Ban said Iraq was "stepping back from the abyss that we feared most", adding that with international help the war-torn country could fulfill its "vision of becoming a free, secure, stable and prosperous nation" but cautioned the situation remained fragile.

The one-day conference hosted by Mr Ban and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, was attended by Dr Rice, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband. **REPORT:** <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23786960-601,00.html>

SOUTH EAST ASIA

9/11 'PLOTTERS' FACE GUANTANAMO COURT

Almost seven years after the September 11 attacks, five men accused of plotting the strikes are facing a military tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, the Australian reported (5/6/08).

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the other four co-accused - Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, Ramzi Binalshibh, Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi and Walid bin Attash - were to appear before a judge at a remote US navy base in Cuba for the first time on charges of conspiring with al-Qa'ida to murder civilians.

They were reported as also charged with 2973 counts of murder, one for each person killed in 2001 when hijacked passenger planes slammed into the World Trade Centre in New York, the Pentagon in Washington and a Pennsylvania field. They could be executed if convicted.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23814992-2703,00.html>

BALI BOMBERS FACE FIRING SQUAD IN JAVA

Three men sentenced to death over the 2002 Bali bombings will face the firing squad in Indonesia's Central Java province at an unspecified date, a senior prosecutor said (30/5/08). "We have received a letter from the minister of justice and human rights about where the execution will take place. It will be somewhere in Central Java," prosecutor Abdul Hakim Ritonga said, according to the ABC (30/5/08).

The trio filed a third appeal with the Denpasar court in Bali this month, despite an earlier ruling by the Supreme Court that there would be no more reviews of their convictions.

REPORT: www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/30/2261021.htm

AUSTRALIAN TROOPS LEAVE IRAQ

Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon said the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq would close another chapter in Australian military history (2/6/08). Federal Opposition leader Brendan Nelson said the Australian troops had done a brilliant job training Iraqi soldiers and providing security.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/02/2261831.htm>

The Australian Greens also welcomed the return of Australian combat forces from Iraq (2/6/08). "Australians will breathe a sigh of relief that we are being extracted from the invasion of Iraq and there have been no combat deaths," Australian Greens leader Bob Brown said in Hobart.

"The Green vigorously opposed Australia's involvement in the Iraq war. It was a huge mistake made by John Howard without reference to parliament. It has led to the deaths of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and increased, not decreased, the threat of terrorism."

NATO FORCES 'UNDER-RESOURCED' IN AFGHANISTAN

The outgoing American general in charge of NATO forces in Afghanistan for the past 15 months says the war against the Taliban is "under-resourced", the BBC reported (3/6/08).

Gen Dan McNeill was speaking before handing command of Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) to another American, Gen David McKiernan. Isaf currently has 53,000 troops from 40 countries. But Gen McNeill said more manpower and equipment is needed.

The handover took place at an hour-long ceremony in the capital, Kabul.

It was attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, foreign ambassadors and a host of other dignitaries.

President Karzai warned the new general that his task would not be easy and that more lives would be lost before Afghanistan could stand on its own feet.

It is not clear how Gen McKiernan's command will differ from that of his predecessor.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7432700.stm

NATO WARNS RUSSIA OVER ABKHAZIA

Nato's secretary general has demanded that Russia withdraw troops it sent to the disputed breakaway Georgian province of Abkhazia last week, the BBC reported (3/6/08).

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer accused Russia of breaching Georgia's sovereignty by sending in military railway personnel.

Mr de Hoop Scheffer said the Russian move was "contributing to instability in what is already a volatile area".

Abkhazia broke away from Georgia in a war in the early 1990s after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7434516.stm>

UK AND AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE MINISTERS MEET

At the meeting between the Minister of Defence Joel Fitzgibbon and the UK Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne discussed broad areas of national security and defence policy, including the

recently published UK National Security Strategy and the current Australian Defence White Paper process (29/5/08).

Both welcomed a NATO strategic approach to Afghanistan that recognised the importance of broader political and military coordination. Discussing regional security issues, both ministers noted the importance of the Five Power Defence Arrangements as one of the few multi-lateral operationally-focused defence mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region and expressed their commitment to meet fellow FPDA ministers in the near future at the Shangri La Dialogue.

DETAILS: <http://www.defence.gov.au/media/download>

AFRICA

RIVAL TROOPS IN SUDAN 'ON THE BRINK'

Rival troops from north and south were converging on central Sudan, a UN official has told the BBC (4/6/08). UN regional co-ordinator for South Sudan David Gressley said the country was "on the brink".

The warning follows recent clashes in the oil-rich region of Abyei, which is claimed by both sides. Mr Gressley said the troop build-up in the area could unravel the 2005 peace agreement which ended two decades of civil war.

The US envoy to Sudan had warned that leaders from both sides were not interested in peace as the UN Security Council was in Sudan, trying to ease tensions in Abyei, as well as the western region of Darfur. **DETAILS:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7435012.stm>

SECURITY COUNCIL MEETS PEACEKEEPERS IN DARFUR

Members of the United Nations Security Council visited Darfur on Thursday, meeting with the UN-African Union peacekeeping mission that is trying to bring stability to the conflict-torn Sudanese region. Meanwhile, an International Criminal Court prosecutor was expected to brief the council on attempts to pursue charges against two men indicted last year for alleged war crimes in Darfur. The conflict has now left some 300,000 people dead and forced 2.5 million locals to abandon their homes. [Google/Associated Press](#) (5/6/08), [CNN](#)

ZIMBABWE SOLDIERS TOLD WHO TO VOTE FOR

Zimbabwe's army chief has told soldiers they must leave the military if they do not vote for incumbent President Robert Mugabe in next month's run-off poll, the BBC reported (31/5/08).

Chief-of-staff Maj Gen Martin Chedondo said soldiers had signed up to protect Mr Mugabe's principles of defending the revolution, state media reported. "If you have other thoughts, then you should remove that uniform," he said, according to the Herald newspaper. Zimbabwe's generals have in the past vowed never to support the main opposition candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai, if he is elected in the 27 June run-off election. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7429238.stm>

Zimbabwe opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai was released by police after being detained for about eight hours, his spokesman told the BBC (4/6/08). He was freed without charge. Police had accused Mr Tsvangirai of violating public security for addressing a rally without authorisation. His arrest was heavily criticised by the US and European governments. Mr Tsvangirai said his detention was "nothing but the usual harassment which is totally unnecessary".

E. HEALTH & MEANS

FOOD

UN TO PROVIDE \$1.2bn IN FOOD AID

The UN is to provide an additional \$1.2bn (£613m) of food aid for 75 million people in the 60 nations hardest hit by rising food prices, the BBC reported (5/6/08). The announcement was made by World Food Program chief Josette Sheeran at a UN-sponsored summit in Rome.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon also said there was an "urgent need" for international policy guidelines on bio-fuel production. Food costs have reached a 30-year high; there have been riots in several countries and an estimated 100 million people into hunger worldwide.

Ms Sheeran said that unless the international community acted quickly, the number of people in dire poverty could double.

Mr Ban said \$15bn-\$20bn (£7.6bn-£10.2bn) would be needed each year to boost food production to combat hunger. He was encouraged that leading nations were beginning to recognise the size of the challenge, and singled out the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, for praise. On Tuesday Mr Sarkozy pledged \$1.5bn over five years, specifically aimed at boosting production in Africa.

Mr Ban also called for more research into the impact of bio-fuels on the food crisis. The International Food Policy Research Institute says bio-fuels are behind 30 per cent global food price rises, while the US says bio-fuels are responsible for 2-3 per cent of the rise.

He urged nations to revitalise agriculture as a way of tackling the food crisis, the BBC reported (3/6/08). He said food production would have to rise by 50 per cent by 2030 to meet demand. Export restrictions and import tariffs ought to be minimised to alleviate the crisis.

The host of the conference - the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) - has warned the industrialised countries that unless they increase yields, eliminate barriers and move food to where it is needed most, a global catastrophe could result.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7432583.stm

Mr Ban welcomed the announcement by the [World Bank](#) of a \$1.2 billion rapid financing facility as an important step in providing quick support to those most affected by the current food security crisis, a spokesperson for Mr Ban said in a [statement](#) (30/6/08).

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26864&Cr=food&Cr1=crisis>

BURMA/MYANMAR - AID DELIVERIES IMPROVE BUT WORKERS STILL CHALLENGED

Aid deliveries to the victims of Cyclone Nargis have stepped up in recent days but access for international workers to the worst affected areas in Myanmar remains a challenge, according to United Nations aid agencies (4/6/08).

More than 1.3 million people, or about 50 per cent of the population, in the badly hit Ayeyarwady Delta area have received some kind of humanitarian assistance, but the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) said the relief operation still needs to be scaled up.

"We want better access for international aid workers, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the International Red Cross Movement, both in terms of visas to get into the country, but also in terms of more consistent access to the delta areas," OCHA spokesperson Amanda Pitt said in Bangkok.

The UN World Food Program ([WFP](#)) said it had been able to increase supplies into the delta area recently now that it has three operating hubs in Labutta, Bogale and Pyapon. With its partners dispatching greater numbers of small boats to deliver directly to villages, WFP has supplied 8,500 tons of food (mainly rice), enough to feed about 750,000 people.

WFP has also started operating one helicopter out of Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, while it hoped to have nine additional helicopters ready in Bangkok by the end of the week. Despite progress, WFP spokesperson Paul Risley said that access for international staff in the Delta area "remains a challenge."

The UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said that Monday was the first day back at school for children in the cyclone-affected area, though eight townships had not reopened schools as yet.

Spokesperson Michael Bociurkiw said that about 1,200 schools were completely destroyed, 800 were severely damaged and almost 2,000 had lost their roofs. "The best way we can put it is that this was really a children's catastrophe in terms of the damage to infrastructure that kids access – we are talking about schools, health clinics and play areas," he said, adding that UNICEF has been moving quickly to rehabilitate school buildings.

The UN Development Program ([UNDP](#)) announced a six-month early recovery package aimed at supporting about 100,000 survivors of the cyclone, through cash grants and cash-for-work projects. The scheme aims to assist landless, poor people who depend on seasonal jobs. The cash-for-work initiatives will be used to clear and renovate villages as well as to help farmers plant crops or set-up small businesses.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation ([FAO](#)) said there was urgent need to help farmers sow rice seedlings by the end of July at the latest to avoid further serious economic impact on rural areas and the country as a whole.

FAO has carried out an assessment of agriculture in the affected areas over the past month. Preliminary results indicate that about 60 per cent of the paddy fields in the delta have been affected by the cyclone and that 16 per cent of the area has been seriously damaged because of high salinity or flooding with dirty water.

FAO spokesperson Hiroyuki Konuma said that most of the area can be cultivated for rice, but she cautioned that there were still many obstacles before rice cultivation could begin.

"In some areas farmers have returned and have started some cultivation, but many areas are still empty and farmers have not yet come back because of a lack of shelter or lack of food," she said. She said seeds would need to be provided by external sources, since the majority were washed away, lost or damaged. About 20 per cent of draft animals, particularly oxen and water buffaloes, had died. She said that FAO had already started buying seeds, fertiliser and agricultural tools.

[DETAILS:](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26910&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26910&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=>

ZIMBABWE RESTRICTS AID DISTRIBUTION: UN OFFICIAL

The top UN relief official expressed grave concern at a decision by authorities in Zimbabwe to restrict distribution of aid in the country in the run-up to presidential elections (4/6/08).

"This goes against fundamental humanitarian principles," John Holmes, Emergency Relief Coordinator, said. "Humanitarian agencies must be allowed to reach freely those who are in need in Zimbabwe. Millions of Zimbabweans are unfortunately dependant on humanitarian aid in the present circumstances," he said.

Mr Holmes, who is also the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, called on the Zimbabwean Government to facilitate unrestricted access for aid workers. "Humanitarian agencies are guided by the principles of neutrality and impartiality, their mandate being only to alleviate the suffering of people in distress," he said.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe have been facing increasing restrictions in advance of presidential elections later this month. NGOs in different parts of the country have recently been ordered to suspend their operations, partially or totally.

[DETAILS:](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26908&Cr=zimbabwe&Cr1=) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26908&Cr=zimbabwe&Cr1=>

WFP PROVIDE FOOD IN 62 COUNTRIES

The UN World Food Program ([WFP](#)) said it will provide \$1.2 billion in additional food aid in the 62 countries hit hardest by the current crisis resulting from the surge in food and fuel prices (4/6/08).

"With soaring food and fuel prices, hunger is on the march and we must act now," WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran said in written remarks to the food summit in Rome.

"If we do not act quickly, the bottom billion will become the bottom two billion virtually overnight as their purchasing power is cut in half due to a doubling in food and fuel prices," she said. Her agency will provide some \$5 billion to assist nearly 90 million people in 78 countries this year.

To address the current crisis, WFP is tripling the number of people who receive food in Haiti, doubling those who will receive food in Afghanistan, and delivering more critical food aid to people in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Also [addressing](#) the summit yesterday was High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, who said human rights violations by governments often lie at the roots of food crises and hinder efforts to assist affected populations.

"Food insecurity is often compounded by warfare, bad governance, and natural disasters," she said. "In such cases, it becomes painfully evident that we cannot always rely on the willingness and ability of national authorities to discharge their obligations towards people in need.

[DETAILS:](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26903&Cr=food&Cr1=crisis) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26903&Cr=food&Cr1=crisis>

RALLY TO RAISE MONEY FOR FOOD

Tens of thousands of people worldwide were joining a mass rally to raise money and awareness about rising food costs, the BBC reported (31/5/08). The rally begins on the east coast of Asia and will continue across a series of countries, finishing on the west coast of the United States. End Hunger: Walk the World aims to have a walk going on somewhere in the world during a 24-hour period. Organised by the World Food Program, the rally aims to raise money for WFP programs to feed school children. [REPORT:](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7429564.stm) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/7429564.stm

WHEAT EXPORT CHANGES

The Federal Government has introduced legislation into Federal Parliament proposing major reforms to Australia's bulk wheat export marketing system. The Bill puts to end the current bulk wheat export marketing arrangements, which were introduced by the former government as a temporary measure in response to the Cole Commission into the conduct of Australian companies in the UN Oil-for-Food program. [DETAILS:](http://www.maff.gov.au/media/transcripts2/june_2008/minister_for_agriculture,_fisheries_and_for_etry,_tony_burke_-_doorstop_interview) http://www.maff.gov.au/media/transcripts2/june_2008/minister_for_agriculture,_fisheries_and_for_etry,_tony_burke_-_doorstop_interview

HEALTH

WHO WANTS BAN ON TOBACCO ADVERTISING TO PROTECT YOUTH

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has urged governments to protect the world's 1.8 billion young people by imposing a ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (30/5/08).

WHO says recent studies prove that the more young people are exposed to tobacco advertising, the more likely they are to start smoking. Despite this, only five per cent of the world's population is covered by comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Tobacco companies, meanwhile, continue targeting young people by falsely associating use of tobacco products with qualities such as glamour, energy and sex appeal.

"In order to survive, the tobacco industry needs to replace those who quit or die with new young consumers," said WHO Director-General, Margaret Chan. "It does this by creating a complex 'tobacco marketing net' that ensnares millions of young people worldwide, with potentially

devastating health consequences. A ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship is a powerful tool we can use to protect the world's youth," she said.

WHO believes since most people start smoking before the age of 18, and almost a quarter of those before the age of 10, tobacco companies market their products wherever youth can be easily accessed – in the movies, on the Internet, in fashion magazines and at music and sports venues. In a WHO worldwide school-based study of 13-15 year-olds, more than 55 per cent of students reported seeing advertisements for cigarettes on billboards in the previous month, while 20 per cent owned an item with a cigarette brand logo on it.

"But it is the developing world, home to more than 80 per cent of the world's youth, which is most aggressively targeted by tobacco companies," she said. "Young women and girls are particularly at risk, with tobacco companies seeking to weaken cultural opposition to their products in countries where women have traditionally not used tobacco."

"The tobacco industry employs predatory marketing strategies to get young people hooked to their addictive drug," said Dr Douglas Bettcher, Director of WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative. "But comprehensive advertising bans do work, reducing tobacco consumption by up to 16 per cent in countries that have already taken this legislative step."

"Half measures are not enough," added Dr Bettcher. "When one form of advertising is banned, the tobacco industry simply shifts its vast resources to another channel. We urge governments to impose a complete ban to break the tobacco marketing net," he said.

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY: www.who.int/tobacco/wntd; Alison Clements-Hunt
WHO Communications Officer WHO/TFI on +41 22 791 55 39; clementshunta@who.int.

F. MEDIA MATTERS

SRI LANKA MEDIA FEARFUL CHARGES IN EFFECT 'A DEATH WARRANT'

The IFJ has appealed to the Sri Lankan Government to order defence ministry and defence personnel to end immediately their campaign of slanderous attacks and threats against independent journalists and media in Sri Lanka.

The IFJ said it was alarmed by the latest attack in which an editorial posted on a website run by the Ministry of Defence calls on "all members of the armed forces to unite and guard against" a "treacherous media campaign [being run] against them".

The editorial, posted on May 31, was reported to make serious allegations against the Free Media Movement (FMM), former FMM Convenor Sunanda Deshapriya, Sunday Times Associate Editor and defence columnist Iqbal Athas, and eight news outlets. The FMM and Deshapriya are accused of "terrorist propaganda" while Sirasa TV, Sunday Leader, Morning Leader, Iru Dina, Daily Mirror, Sunday Times, Lanka Dissent and Lanka E are accused of carrying content that "humiliated, scorned and blamed" soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army.

Athas has suffered similar attacks in the past, but the invective has increased recently following the abduction and assault of journalist Keith Noyahr on May 22 and with threats against several journalists.

The FMM said, "We are deeply fearful that these charges are in effect a death warrant to journalists and editors of the media mentioned in the statement. These allegations criminalise independent media and viciously clamp down on their ability and democratic right to question tactics, promotions, procurements and allegations of significant corruption in matters related to defence and governance."

Former officer of Sri Lankan Air Force warned off

According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), an IFJ affiliate, the home of senior defence reporter Sirimevan Kasturiarachchi, of the Sinhala *Divaina* newspaper, was stormed by an unknown group at 4am on May 29. (2/6/08). The intruders warned Mr Kasturiarachchi, a former officer of the Sri Lankan Air Force, to stop reporting on all matters related to the Sri Lankan Army and defence personnel.

Earlier last week, the Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) reported an incident involving an unidentified man dressed in a Sri Lankan Army uniform who tried to enter the SLPI offices without permission. He sought information about individual employees of SLPI, including its directorate. A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence, Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, said the army had not authorised any member of its force to approach SLPI. Pressure on journalists who report on Sri Lanka's security situation and the conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has intensified in recent weeks after the abduction and beating of Keith Noyahr, defence reporter for *The Nation*, on May 22.

After a peaceful demonstration in Colombo on May 27 to protest the attack on Mr Noyahr, the president and secretary of the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association, Sanath Balasooriya and Poddala Jayantha, were reported threatened by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who had said the government would not offer them safety or protection if they continued to advocate for press freedom. The IFJ has protested to the Sri Lankan president.

AFGHANISAN: LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Jacqueline Park, Director, IFJ Asia –Pacific has written to Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai regarding Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh.

She writes:

'I am writing to you to express the serious concern of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) regarding the physical and psychological welfare of Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, who is waiting to appeal the death sentence imposed on him on charges of "blasphemy".

'According to reports from the IFJ's local associates, including the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association, Kambakhsh, 24, is in serious need of immediate medical attention after spending seven months in detention, and five months waiting for his appeal to be heard.

'The IFJ is extremely concerned at a decision of the Afghanistan courts to continue to delay the appeal hearing, which was scheduled for May 25, 2008, and again deferred on June 1, 2008.

'The IFJ respectfully requests your immediate intervention in this case.

'The IFJ maintains that the conviction of Kambakhsh for allegedly distributing articles and books that contain anti-Islamic sentiment is in direct contradiction with his constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under Article 34 of the Constitution of Afghanistan.

'Kambakhsh has been denied the right to free expression and a fair trial, and now his physical and psychological welfare are in jeopardy. Allegations that Kambakhsh has been the victim of serious ill-treatment during his time in detention are of grave concern to the IFJ.

'The IFJ urges you to ensure that Kambakhsh is provided with immediate medical treatment to restore his physical health and psychological well-being, and to ensure his safety and protection while in detention.

'The IFJ also again requests that you intervene to overturn the court's decision to impose the death penalty, keeping in mind the universal right to free expression.

'This positive action will reassure the people of Afghanistan and the world that Afghanistan respects, upholds and protects the rights of all citizens under the Constitution of Afghanistan and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'

US ASKED TO EXPLAIN AFGHAN JOURNALIST'S DETENTION

An explanation from the US Government for the continued detention without charge of Afghan journalist Jawed Ahmad is being demanded by IFJ (5/6/08). According to the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA), Ahmad was on assignment for Canadian Television (CTV) when he was arrested by US military forces at Kandahar airport on September 2, 2007.

Mr Ahmad, 22, is accused of having contacts with local Taliban leaders and possessing a video containing Taliban materials. US forces are holding him at Bagram air base.

Mr Ahmad's family told the AIJA that US officials continue to deny knowledge of Mr Ahmad's situation, despite repeated attempts to draw the attention of the US Embassy in Kabul, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the US military.

The safety of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan remains under frequent threat. Naqibullah Saiq, chief editor of Kal Choort Goye, a monthly newspaper, was reportedly stopped and beaten by local police in Faryab province on June 2 and his mobile phone confiscated.

Faryab province authorities denied the allegations and reportedly said Mr Saiq had entered a restricted area under police control. However, the AIJA and local Wakht News Agency were concerned the incident was related to articles and cartoons critical of local officials and authorities published in Kal Choort Goye.

The Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ) asked Afghan authorities to conduct an immediate independent investigation into the attack on Mr Saiq and also demanded the US military account for the detention of Mr Ahmad and release him as it was not against the law for journalists to be in contact with multiple sides when reporting in a conflict zone.

MEDIA TRIP TO TRIBAL AREAS

With great fanfare, the Pakistani Army flew journalists to a rugged corner of the nation's lawless tribal areas in May to show how decisively it had destroyed the lairs of the [Taliban](#), including a school for suicide bombers, in fighting early this year, the New York Times reported (2/6/08).

Usually reclusive leader of the Pakistani Taliban, [Baitullah Mehsud](#), held a news conference of his own, in the same region, to show just who was in charge.

He rolled up in an expensive-looking pick-up packed with heavily armed Taliban fighters, according to the Pakistani journalists. Squatting on the floor of a government school, Mr Mehsud, clasping a new Kalashnikov, announced he would press his fight against the American military across the border in Afghanistan.

"Islam does not recognise boundaries," he said, in accounts published in Pakistani newspapers and reported by the BBC. "There can be no deal with the US." [REPORT:](#)
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/02/world/asia/02pstan.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin

ZIMBABWE: A senior Zimbabwean opposition politician has been arrested over a written attack on Robert Mugabe, the BBC reported (1/6/08). Arthur Mutambara, who recently pledged to work with a rival opposition leader to defeat President Mugabe in run-off elections, was detained in Harare. His lawyer told the BBC his client had been accused of publishing falsehoods and contempt of court after a critical article he wrote in April. Mr Mutambara leads a break-away faction of the country's main opposition group. He was arrested at his home and his lawyer believes he is being held at a Harare police station.

[REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7430000.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7430000.stm)

CHINA: Liu Shui, a veteran journalist and freelance writer, was dropped from a financial magazine in Shenzhen in May due to articles he wrote in 2006 exposing torture and inhumane conditions in a detention centre in Shenzhen, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

A source, speaking to the IFJ on condition of anonymity, revealed that the magazine planned to recruit Liu Shui as an editor last month (2/6/08). However, Shenzhen police approached the magazine and demanded Liu not be employed, reportedly acting for the Shenzhen Government. Police later detained Mr Liu for about 10 hours before ordering him to leave Shenzhen within three days as he no longer had work or temporary residence in the city. The source said that police do not have the right to interfere in the employment of journalists but often do so.

Liu Shui was a student leader in Lanzhou, Gansu, during the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. He has worked as a journalist for Nan Fang Du Shi Bao and Shenzhen Wan Bao, and has been detained four times due to articles relating to government malpractices and for editing *The Truth About June 4th*, a book dealing with the Tiananmen Square 'incident'.

Xiong Zhongjun, who writes under the penname of Chen Yiming, was ordered to leave Shenzhen last month for publishing articles detailing the arrest of more than 1,000 activists during anti-Japan demonstrations in 2004. Mr Xiong was detained for more than two months on charges of "inciting subversion of state power". [DETAILS:](#) IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

Tiananmen Square anniversary ban

The IFJ has been told by journalists, writers, academics, lawyers and activists that police in various provinces have issued warnings not to participate in any kind of memorial gathering related to events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 (4/6/08). Sources said they were warned not to write anything related to June 4. China's 'cyber police' have continued to scrutinise all sensitive words and phrases about the anniversary. A new website, www.tiananmenmother.org, was blocked in China this week.

Human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang was prevented from visiting Tiananmen Square Mr Pu was escorted home from his office by plain-clothed officials from the Beijing security bureau. A student representative in Tiananmen Square in 1989, he visits the square every year on June 3 to pay his respects to those killed.

IRAN: Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, the editor of Afghanistan's monthly *Haqq-i-Zan* (Women's Rights) magazine, was released on May 29 after 86 days in jail in Iran without charge the IFJ reported (3/6/08).

According to the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA), Mr Nasab was held in solitary confinement for 81 of the 86 days he was held in a prison in Qumm, Iran Mr Nasab, who has been a refugee in Iran for 24 years, was detained on March 4 under an order issued by a religious court for alleged "suspicious relations" with foreign embassies and "publicity against the government and publication of false information" in an application for resettlement submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

However, the IFJ and AIJA are informed that interrogation of Mr Nasab focused on his journalistic activities and articles published in *Haqq-i-Zan*, particularly in regard to women's rights under Islam. Mr Nasab's wife, Sahar Muhaqiq Nasab, told the AIJA that her husband had suffered serious kidney and chest pain but was denied medical treatment while in detention. Iranian authorities reportedly warned Nasab that he was not allowed to leave Iran and he would be monitored.

He was previously charged with blasphemy in Afghanistan in October 2005, and sentenced to two years' jail. He was charged then with intentionally publishing anti-Islamic articles in *Haqq-i-Zan* that questioned harsh penalties for adultery and theft. After an investigation by the

government-appointed Media Commission for Investigating Media-Related Offences, his sentence was reduced on appeal to six months.

NEPAL: The safety of journalists and media workers in Nepal is causing concern after several newspaper editors and publishers suspended publication in Kailali, in far western Nepal, on May 29, citing lack of security (3/6/08). According to the Kailali chapter of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), an IFJ affiliate, 12 editors and publishers decided to close their operations. They alleged the state had failed to ensure security and protection for the media.

Three civilians were killed on May 28 when police opened fire on press freedom and human rights activists as they protested against a May 27 assault on journalists Lucky Chaudhari and Hemanta Paudel in Kailali. Journalists trying to reach the Kailali District Administration Office to file formal complaints of violence on April 10 were continually confronted and attacked by groups allegedly led by a Maoist. [DETAILS:](#) IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

NEPALESE LEADER'S WARNING

Leader of the CPN (Maoist) party Puspa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda, apparently issued a warning to Kantipur Publications when he addressed a mass meeting in Kathmandu on May 30 to celebrate the declaration of a republic. His CPN (Maoist) party is the single biggest party in Nepal and is expected to lead the government, IFJ reported (2/6/08). Chairman Prachanda was quoted as saying "You journalists did well to continuously criticise the Maoists before the Constituent Assembly polls. Otherwise the election would not have taken place at all. Now we will no longer tolerate criticism as we have already been elected by the people."

INDIA: Charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy brought against two journalists and India's largest English newspaper, the Times of India, by the police commissioner in Ahmedabad city in the western state of Gujarat are reported by the IFJ (5/6/08).

The IFJ said the criminal complaint lodged by O.P. Mathur named Bharat Desai, resident editor of the Ahmedabad edition of the Times, and Prashant Dayal, a reporter with the same newspaper.

The National Union of Journalists of India (NUJ-I) and the All-India Newspaper Employees' Federation (AINEF), with the IFJ, have called for the charges to be withdrawn.

It was reported that the Ahmedabad edition of the Times ran a series of reports between May 28 and 31 claiming serious complaints against Mr Mathur, who recently had been appointed police commissioner. The complaints had been subject to inconclusive judicial proceedings and departmental inquiries, it was reported. [DETAILS:](#) IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

G. OTHER NEWS

PUSH FOR NATIONAL PARENTAL LEAVE

In its written submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) reiterated its call for the introduction of national scheme of paid leave (3/6/08).

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick said a national scheme of paid maternity leave was long overdue and was a woman's basic human right.

"With nearly 70 per cent of women of child bearing age in the workforce and only one third of working mothers able to access paid maternity leave, this is a pressing issue for Australian women who must be able to care for their newborn baby while retaining their skills and their job," she said. "This is especially important for women in lesser paid jobs or casual employment who don't have access to any paid maternity leave.

"The first stage of HREOC's submission proposes 14 weeks paid leave for mothers and two

weeks for the other parent. Following an independent review of the scheme after two years HREOC proposes a second stage where we add 38 weeks paid parental leave," she said.
SUBMISSIONS: www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/parentalsupport.

HREOC SUBMISSION:

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/2008/20080602_productivity.html

MS BRODERICK ORAL STATEMENT TO INQUIRY:

www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/2008/paid_maternity_leave_20080520.html

SEVENTY ARRESTED OVER ALLEGED NATIONWIDE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Seventy people have been arrested in a nation-wide child pornography bust dubbed Operation Centurion, the ABC reported (5/6/08). The operation is a joint investigation between Australian Federal Police and state forces and for the past six months has been looking at paedophile communities online and how they trade images of child pornography on the internet.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/05/2265503.htm>

AUSTRALIA 2020 SUMMIT REPORT

The final report of the *Australia 2020* Summit was released this week. Practical ideas put forwarded included:

A comprehensive inquiry into Australia's taxation system; Community corps, whereby young Australians undertake community service in return for HECS debt relief; A learning for life account that extends Australia's superannuation system into new areas like lifelong learning; A new national preventative health agency to ensure a new prevention effort is sustained, coordinated and evidence-based. A national clean energy portfolio of several flagship projects – in 'natural advantage' categories such as agriculture, clean coal and renewable energy; An Australian sustainability challenge (from the Youth Summit) whereby local communities compete to deliver the largest shift towards sustainable living; Initiatives to improve the understanding of rural Australia among those living in urban Australia, particularly among school children.

REPORT: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/release/2008/media_release_0279.cfm

AUSTRALIA ATTENDS OECD MINISTERS AND G6 MEETINGS

Major global economic challenges were listed on the agendas of the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM) and the G8 Finance Ministers' Outreach Meeting when Treasurer Wayne Swan acted as Australia's representative.

He said in an earlier media release that he planned to focus on global challenges of food and commodity price rises, financial market turbulence, climate change, broadening the OECD and G8 engagement, and strengthening bilateral economic relationships. He was due to jointly lead a discussion on the economics of climate change.

"China's growing importance to Australia cannot be overstated," he said. "China is now our largest trading partner and second largest export destination after Japan. Economic policy decisions made in Beijing over the coming decades will increasingly shape our external environment. My visit will build critical institutional relationships and set the stage for greater cooperation between our two economies in the future," he said.

This is only the second time an Australian Treasurer has been invited to participate in the G8 Finance Ministers' Outreach Meeting. The 2008 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting was being held on June 4-5 in Paris. The G8 Finance Ministers meet over June 13/14 in Japan.

DETAILS: Matt Coghlan on 0415 098 050

<http://www.treasurer.gov.au/displaydocs.aspx?doc=pressreleases/2008/060.htm&pageID=003&min=wms&Year=&DocType=0>

NEXT SOLICITOR-GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA

Stephen John Gageler SC will be the next Solicitor-General of Australia and commences a five year term on September 1. A member of the NSW Bar, he has extensive experience as a legal

adviser with expertise in Australian public law, especially constitutional law. Mr Gageler was admitted as a barrister and solicitor of the High Court in 1982 and as a barrister of the NSW Supreme Court in 1989. From 1987 he was Assistant to Solicitor-General, and from 1983-1985 Associate to Sir Anthony Mason at the High Court.

OVERSEAS APPOINTMENTS ANNOUNCED

VIETNAM: Graeme Swift will be Australia's next Consul-General in Ho Chi Minh City. A career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, he is currently Assistant Secretary, Financial Services and Systems Branch. He has previously served in Jakarta, Tokyo, Brussels and in Damascus, Lisbon, Seoul, Baghdad, Belgrade and New Delhi.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s085_08.html

POLAND: Ruth Pearce as Australia's Ambassador to the Republic of Poland with concurrent accreditation to the Czech Republic. She is expected to take up her appointment in July 2008. Ms Pearce was most recently Deputy Director-General, Corporate Governance and Review Division in AusAID (2006-07). Overseas, she has served in Manila, as ambassador to the Russian Federation, in the Solomon Islands, Geneva, Tel Aviv and Dhaka.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s084a_08.html

SHANGHAI: Tom Connor is to be Australia's new Consul-General for Australia in Shanghai. Mr Connor is a career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and is currently Assistant Secretary, North East Asia Branch. He has served in Tokyo, Beijing (1994-97) and as Vice-Consul, later Consul in Shanghai.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s086_08.html

REVIEWING EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Representatives from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will appear before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training in Canberra on June 6 to discuss a range of issues concerning education and training, at Committee Room 1R6, Parliament House, Canberra. The hearing is part of the committee's review of the former Department of Education, Science and Training Annual Report 2006-07.

DETAILS: Secretary on 02 6277 4578; edt.reps@aph.gov.au; <http://www.aph.gov.au/edt/>

NEXT RESERVE BANK HEARING ON SEPTEMBER 8

The House Economics Committee tabled its report on the *Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report 2007 (First Report)* on 2 June. This report provides a summary of key issues raised at the public hearing with the Reserve Bank of Australia on 4 April 2008.

Committee Chairman Craig Thomson said "the current upward trend in inflation has prompted the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) to increase the official cash rate to 7.25 up 75 basis points since the former committee met with the Bank in August 2007. The RBA has now increased the cash rate 12 times since 2001; with a total of a 100 basis point increase from 8 August 2007."

"On top of these official rate rises, commercial banks have been raising rates independently of the Reserve Bank of Australia. This has placed a heavy load on people struggling with their mortgages who, at the same time, are facing increasing pressures to pay their bills," he said.

The committee, taking these issues into account, would continue to scrutinise the RBA over its conduct of monetary policy and seek the most up to date forecasts for inflation, growth and rates.

REPORT: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/economics/rba2007/index.htm>

DETAILS: Secretariat on 02 6277 4564, efpa.reps@aph.gov.au or <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/efpa/index.htm>

INQUIRY INTO COMPETITION IN THE BANKING AND NON-BANKING SECTORS

The House of Representatives Economics Committee will examine competition in the banking and non-banking sectors in Australia with a particular focus on home mortgage products.

During March 2008, the average size of a new home loan was over \$246 000 and, on average, 38 per cent of a family's income went into paying their mortgage.

Chairman of the House Economics Committee, Craig Thomson said: "We need to open up competition in the retail banking and non-banking sectors, demystify the number of home mortgage products available and offer a wider choice to the consumer." The committee's inquiry will focus on home mortgage products, their providers and the current state of the industry.

SUBMISSIONS: preferably by email, until **July 11**. The committee is to report by December 2008. DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/economics/index.htm> or secretariat on 02 6277 4209; economics.reps@aph.gov.au

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

FOOD IS GOLD, AND INVESTORS POUR BILLIONS INTO FARMING

Huge investment funds have already poured hundreds of billions of dollars into booming financial markets for commodities like wheat, corn and soybeans, Ben Garvin writes in the New York Times (5/6/08). But a few big private investors are starting to make bolder and longer-term bets that the world's need for food will greatly increase — by buying farmland, [fertilizer](#), grain elevators and shipping equipment. One has bought several ethanol plants, Canadian farmland and enough storage space in the Midwest to hold millions of bushels of grain. Another is buying more than five dozen grain elevators, nearly that many fertilizer distribution outlets and a fleet of barges and ships. And three institutional investors, including the giant [BlackRock](#) fund group in New York, are separately planning to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in agriculture, chiefly farmland, from sub-Saharan Africa to the English countryside.

ARTICLE: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/05/business/05farm.html?th&emc=th>

THE THREAT OF GLOBAL FOOD SHORTAGES

The potentially serious consequences of sustained high food prices were recently underlined by Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, who suggested that 100 million individuals could be pushed below the poverty line, thus wiping out seven years of gains against poverty, writes Peter Timmer in Part 1 of two articles, entitled The Threat of Global Shortages, for On Line Opinion (3/6/08). There is however no agreement as to what explains the dramatic rise in food prices. One thing seems certain though: absent a global understanding between producer and consumer countries, current high prices could last for a long time.

ON LINE OPINION Timmer Part 1: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=7421>

Last month, the wheat fields in the Indian state of Punjab stretched in amber-tinged waves as far as the eye could see, promising bountiful harvests, Mira Kamdar writes in Part 2. Nothing hinted at the grave crisis that has gripped the state, driving farmers to suicide and unemployed youth to the comforts of heroin. Dubbed 'the breadbasket of India', Punjab is in the throws of a serious crisis, one that bodes ill for the future of agriculture when the world faces an acute food crisis (4/6/08).

ON LINE OPINION Kamdar Part 2: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=7420>

OCCUPATION HAS COST ISRAEL DEAR, SAYS REPORT

Israel's occupied territories and conflict with the Palestinians has undermined the country's economic growth and has cost at least an extra 36.6bn shekels (£5.7bn) in defence spending over the past two decades, according to an Israeli think tank (4/6/08). The UK Guardian reports that calculations by the Adva Centre, an independent policy centre in Tel Aviv, suggest Israel's economy has been held back, inequality within the country has grown and there have been significant government budget cuts to pay for mounting defence spending.

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/04/israelandthepalestinians.middleeast>

THE GREAT IMMIGRATION PANIC

Someday, the country will recognise the true cost of its war on illegal immigration. We don't mean dollars, though those are being squandered by the billions. The true cost is to the national identity: the sense of who we are and what we value. It will hit us once the enforcement fever breaks, when we look at what has been done and no longer recognise the country that did it, says a New York Times editorial (3/6/08). A nation of immigrants is holding another nation of immigrants in bondage, exploiting its labour while ignoring its suffering, condemning its lawlessness while sealing off a path to living lawfully. The evidence is all around that something pragmatic and welcoming at the American core has been eclipsed, or is slipping away.

EDITORIAL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/03/opinion/03tue1.html?hp>

OBAMA SECURES DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION

Senator [Barack Obama](#) claimed the Democratic presidential nomination on Tuesday, prevailing through an epic battle with Senator [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) in a primary campaign that inspired millions of voters from every corner of America to demand change in Washington, the New York Times reported (4/6/08). A last-minute rush of Democratic [superdelegates](#), as well as split results from the final primaries in [Montana](#) and [South Dakota](#), pushed him over the threshold of 2,118 delegates needed to be nominated at the party's convention in August. The victory for Mr Obama, the son of a black Kenyan father and white Kansan mother, broke racial barriers and represented a remarkable rise for a man who just four years ago served in the Illinois State Senate.

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

I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

BRINGING POWER TO ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Two initiatives to bring clean power to remote communities off the electricity grid in isolated areas of Peru and Laos are this year's recipients of the prestigious Sasakawa Prize awarded by the UN Environment Program ([UNEP](#)) (4/6/08).

Practical Action of Peru and Sunlabob Rural Energy Ltd of Laos, which are extending solar and hydropower to the most far-flung regions of both nations, were selected by a five-member jury and will each receive \$100,000.

The theme for this year's prize, to spur sustainable grassroots programs, was 'Moving towards a low carbon economy', which is also the focus of this year's World Environment Day.

"Addressing the monumental challenge of the 21st century involves practical projects at ground level that bring tangible changes," said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. He said that the work of Sunlabob and Practical Action were "setting further examples of the energy alternatives available to the developing but also the developed world."

Established in 2001, Sunlabob brings energy to remote areas of Laos, where less than half of the population has access to grid electricity. The company provides an incentive to families in over 70 villages to rent solar-home-systems and solar lanterns at a lower cost than kerosene lamps, which are highly polluting and more dangerous, causing burns and starting fires. **DETAILS:** <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26905&Cr=environment&Cr1=&Kw1=world&Kw2=environment&Kw3=day>

SALINITY STILL A RISK TO MURRAY

High river salinity is a continuing risk for the lower Murray River, according to recently released MDBC salinity reports.

The Basin Salinity Management Strategy 2006-07 Implementation Report shows that although salinity remained relatively low at Morgan in South Australia for much of 2006-07, the higher river salinity was a continuing risk for the lower Murray River

Salinity levels are being kept in check largely through the cumulative effect of salt interception schemes which prevent highly saline groundwater from entering the Murray.

The Report of the Independent Audit Group for Salinity is an annual assessment of the progress of the strategy's implementation.

The latest report identified substantial progress across all jurisdictions, including: the likelihood that salt interception works will achieve the agreed 61EC off-set at Morgan by 2010-11; progress in improving on-farm water use efficiency; and, timely, high-standard reporting by all jurisdictions.

It also identified four broad areas needing further development: assessing salinity risk from activities near rivers and their floodplains; assessing dryland salinity risks; knowledge on salt movement from floodplains following floods; and capacity to assess risks to resources from industrial projects such as coal seam gas extraction and intensive livestock production.

As this is the final year for the current Independent Audit Group, its report contains an additional chapter reflecting lessons from the five audits undertaken to date.

REPORTS: www.mdbc.gov.au/news/MC_communique

PROTECTING PLANTS AND ANIMALS FROM EXTINCTION NOT 'A LUXURY'

Protecting the world's many species of plants and animals from extinction should not be considered a luxury option, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told a meeting of female environment ministers, urging them to take a lead to maintain fragile ecosystems (30/5/08).

In a [video message](#) to ministers attending the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Bonn, Germany, Ms Migiro said it was a critical time when many species of plants and animals were faced with extinction.

"Conserving biodiversity is not a luxury," she said. "All of us – particularly the poor – depend on the ability of the world's ecosystems to provide the full spectrum of goods and services essential to our survival. This requires us to conserve and manage biodiversity in a sustainable manner."

Women "possess knowledge, practices and a capacity for innovation acquired over centuries. They are at the forefront of protecting life on Earth, and the key to achieving the 2010 biodiversity target to reduce or reverse biodiversity loss." **DETAILS:**
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26855&Cr=biodiversity&Cr1=&Kw1=world&Kw2=environment&Kw3=day>

EXPERTS WILL STUDY DROUGHT IMPACT ON FARMS AND RURAL AREA

An expert panel to examine the social impact of drought on farm families and rural communities, as part of its national review of drought policy, will be chaired by AgForce Queensland President Peter Kenny, a Federal Government media release stated this week. The panel will consult extensively with rural communities and call for submissions. **DETAILS:**
http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/june_2008/expert_panel_to_review_social_impact_of_drought

PENGUIN STOPS TRAFFIC

A little penguin caused big traffic problems on the north island of New Zealand on Thursday, the ABC reported. In the city of Porirua, just north of Wellington, the penguin was quite literally stopping traffic as it waddled along Falcon street, about three kilometres from water. Porirua police took the penguin into custody and later released it into the city's harbour.

