

UNITY

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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

SUMMIT ENDS WITH CLIMATE 'VISION' BUT NO COMMITMENT

World leaders have proclaimed a "shared vision" on climate change, but failed to bridge differences between rich and emerging nations on curbing emissions, the BBC reported (9/7/08).

Concluding a summit in northern Japan, leaders from the G8 and developing countries said "deep cuts" in greenhouse gas emissions were needed. China and other emerging powers declined to endorse specific targets.

Host Japan called the summit a success, highlighting the G8's commitment to halve global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, Deutsche Welle reported (9/7/08). But the size of the cuts was not quantified, since leaders did not agree on a base year with which to compare emission levels. Nor did leaders agree on any medium-term cuts, as many had hoped.

"On climate change, this summit will be seen as a setback, particularly since there is no baseline for the emission cuts and no medium-term objectives," James Meers, an analyst at the Munk Centre, a Canadian think-tank that assesses the results of G8s, told the DPA news agency.

The three-day meeting closed with pledges on the food and oil crises. Leaders passed on tough decisions on climate change, Africa and Zimbabwe to the United Nation, Deutsche Welle reported.

"But the presence of big developing countries also highlighted differences between them and G8 members on the best way to tackle emissions reduction. Both recognised that 'deep cuts' were needed in order to combat climate change, they failed to agree on setting specific targets, saying only that the reduction in greenhouse gases should take place according to the means of each country." **REPORT:** <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3472192,00.html>

India and China dismissed the rich nations' call for them to halve emissions by 2050. The BBC's Roger Harrabin at the summit says China felt that emerging economies were being implicitly asked to take responsibility for a problem caused mainly so far by the West. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7497032.stm>

EMERGING ECONOMIES REJECT EMISSION CUT BY HALF

Leaders of the world's emerging economies have rejected a push from the Group of Eight industrialised nations, backed by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to commit to cutting their greenhouse gas emissions as part of a new international deal to tackle climate change the Sydney Morning Herald reported (10/7/08).

On the final day of the G8 summit in Japan, a declaration by the world's major emitting economies refused to endorse the rich world's goal of halving emissions by 2050.

Mr Rudd, who addressed the meeting between the G8 leaders and their Third World counterparts, had pushed for countries such as China and India to join the developed world in urgent action to tackle climate change, trying to bridge differences between developed and developing countries.

Mr Rudd told the meeting: "The buck stops with us. It doesn't stop with anyone else. It stops at this table." **REPORT:** <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/09/1215282928109.html>

BAN: NOW THE CHALLENGE IS TO MOVE BEYOND DISCUSSIONS TO ACTION

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the Group of Eight's (G-8) statement on climate change, food security and development as a good start for addressing the three interrelated global crises, while stressing the need for speedier action in the days ahead.

"The discussion here provides initial direction for global efforts that must be accelerated in the coming weeks and months," Mr. Ban said in a [statement](#). Mr. Ban welcomed the group's

statement on climate change and the environment, including the long-term goal of reducing emissions by at least 50 per cent by 2050, as “a clear step forward.”

At the same time, he stressed the need to go further. “By next year in Copenhagen we need to collectively agree to ambitious mid-term emission reduction targets for developed countries, coupled with meaningful efforts by developing countries to reduce the growth of their emissions, consistent with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities,” he stated. He was also pleased with the “strong commitment” of the G-8 to address the global food crisis in a Global Partnership for Food, facilitated and coordinated by the UN.

“The sense of urgency displayed by the G-8 in tackling the most immediate food, nutrition, and agricultural inputs needs of tens of millions of hungry people worldwide is encouraging,” Mr Ban said. “However, the G-8 call on all member states to contribute to this shared human responsibility must be accompanied by a strong willingness to tackle the underlying structural causes of this crisis with a similar sense of urgency,” he said, emphasising the need to significantly step up public and private investment into agriculture. “We see how much needs to be done in all these areas,” Mr. Ban stated. “Now the challenge is to move beyond discussions to action.”

GLOBAL CONSENSUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE MORE FEASIBLE NOW: UN PRESIDENT

Not only was it more pressing than ever, but it was now more achievable than ever for the international community to reach agreement on how to combat climate change, Srgjan Kerim, President of the UN General Assembly, said (8/7/08).

“To achieve this we need to build on our previous work and strengthen the ability of the UN system to assist vulnerable countries build their capacity and capability to adapt, while ensuring that the system works together more coherently to deliver more than the sum of its parts,” he told a special one-day Assembly debate on the issue.

The head of the 192-member body also called for stepped up efforts to transfer technology to developing countries that cannot otherwise afford it, as well as to ensure sufficient funding to help the neediest.

“We have the technological capability and scientific know-how,” he said, but warned that “a global consensus can only be secured if all countries can share in the benefits from action to address it – in particular the most vulnerable countries.”

Emphasising that addressing global warming is intrinsically linked to sustainable development, the president also voiced concern over the impact of climate change on least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS).

Also addressing the debate, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro underscored the “particularly immediate and severe” burden placed on the poor by climate change. The most vulnerable risked being flooded out of their homes, greater health risks and finding access to (clean) water.

“These trends would be alarming enough individually, but taken together they amount to a development crisis – unless action is taken on a war-footing, the world will not only miss the Millennium Development Goals, we will see existing development gains unravel as well,” she said, referring to the eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

[TRANSCRIPT of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Press Conference, G8 Summit, Japan \(9/7/08\):
http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview_0351.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview_0351.cfm)

KERIM: CHANGE FOCUS FROM STATES AND SECURITY TO WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE

Talking about Security Council reform, UN President Srgjan Kerim said this week that after 14 years of discussions, member states knew quite well the various positions that had been put

forward, including the option of an intermediary solution, which would entail agreeing on a set of reforms which would be reviewed after 10 or 15 years.

"It seems, however, that it is difficult to reach agreement for negotiations on this basis," he said. "Under these circumstances, the only way one can imagine is to open negotiations based on all positions expressed so far and to conduct them in various configurations."

He said, "All of us agree that the Security Council does not reflect anymore the realities of the 21st century and thus needs to adapt its working methods and composition."

He concluded a briefing with journalists by saying that in his speeches and recent travels he had been speaking about the need for a new culture of international relations.

"This new culture I believe must rest on the principles of human rights, human security, responsibility to protect, shared responsibilities and sustainable development," he said. "But let me stress that this new culture is not just about major institutional reforms but really about a change in our mindset: it is about changing our focus from states and security and the well-being of states to also the well-being of people," he said.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27319&Cr=kerim&Cr1=>

UN OFFICIAL AND WFP DRIVER KILLED IN SOMALIA

Gunmen opened fire on people leaving a mosque in Mogadishu on Sunday, killing one of the country's senior United Nations officials and wounding his son and another man, a witness and a family member said, according to a UN Dispatch quoted in UN Wire (7/7/08).

Osman Ali Ahmed was the head of the UN Development Program for Somalia. His assassination - and he appears to have been [specifically targeted](#) - follows the [abduction](#) last week of the top man at another key UN agency operating in the country, the UN High Commission for Refugees, as well as the [emergence](#) of an al-Qaeda video calling for attacks on the UN in Somalia.

Facing the constant threat of such violence, UN personnel in Somalia must be among the bravest individuals to volunteer their services. Their work is exceedingly valuable - and necessary, in a country in which an estimated half of the population will be in need of assistance this year - but they cannot continue to have to operate under conditions of such rampant insecurity. As in most countries in which the UN works, most of its employees are nationals of the host country. The Dispatch also commented that Somalis were taking up the burden of repairing their country and "We owe it to them to help make sure they are not kidnapped and killed."

Gunmen shot and killed a WFP-contracted truck driver in southern Somalia, the fourth driver delivering WFP food assistance killed this year, the UN World Food Program (WFP) said (9/7/08).

Driver Ahmed Saalim was part of a convoy of WFP-contracted trucks carrying 602 metric tons of WFP food from Mogadishu to Bay and Bakool regions. He was shot when fighting broke out on Monday between convoy escorts and militiamen at a checkpoint near the village of Leego in Lower Shabelle region and was the fourth WFP-contracted driver killed this year.

WFP urged all parties to ensure the safe passage of humanitarian staff and assistance for the Somali people amid worsening insecurity in much of southern and central Somalia with killings and kidnappings of aid workers.

"WFP food is reaching many people but our drivers are daily risking their lives to deliver it," said Peter Goossens, WFP Somalia Country Director, saying Somalia was becoming increasingly dangerous at the same time as the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is on the rise. DETAILS: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

BAN CONDEMNS DEADLY ATTACK ON PEACEKEEPERS

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly condemned a deadly attack on the joint United Nations-African Union force in Darfur that killed seven peacekeepers and wounded twenty-two, seven of them critically (9/7/08).

The attack on the peacekeeping mission, known as [UNAMID](#), occurred when a joint police and military patrol was ambushed by unidentified militia between Gusa Jamat and Wadah. The attackers used heavy weapons during a two-hour exchange.

“The Secretary-General condemns in the strongest possible terms this unacceptable act of extreme violence against AU-UN peacekeepers in Darfur and calls on the Government of Sudan to do its utmost to ensure that the perpetrators are swiftly identified and brought to justice,” his spokesperson said in a [statement](#).

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27316&Cr=unamid&Cr1=attack>

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

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Daily press 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>

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B. CLIMATE CHANGE

PUT SHOULDER TO WHEEL ON EMISSIONS, RUDD URGED

By holding one-on-one meetings with the leaders of five G8 countries at the summit, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said he was appealing for more political momentum to achieve a successful global agreement on reducing emissions, the ABC reported (10/7/08). Mr Rudd says the science on climate change made it all the more important to achieve progress in international negotiations.

"All nations must put their shoulder to the wheel in doing more to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions," he said after talks with UN Secretary-General Ban and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. He was also to talk with leaders of India, the UK Brazil and Japan, as well as the head of the World Bank.

A spokesman said Mr Rudd's meeting with Mr Ban was a brief 10 minutes, when they agreed on the need to keep the momentum on climate change going towards next year's Copenhagen conference and both believe the world has no time to lose. German Chancellor Merkel talked about emissions trading schemes when she said she appreciated Australia's move to the active side of the climate change debate. **REPORT:** <http://www.abc.net.au/news/>

Greens Leader Bob Brown has vowed to use his party's new power in the Senate to push for a tough emissions trading scheme (ETS), the ABC reported (9/7/08). The Greens now share the balance of power in the Upper House and Senator Brown says he will use his vote to force stronger action on climate change.

The Federal Government supports cutting greenhouse emissions to 60 per cent of the 2000 levels by 2050, but has not yet revealed details on interim targets. Senator Brown says if the Federal Government fails to commit to deep cuts, he will move to change the legislation in the Senate.

He said what was required was "a rigorous and comprehensive scheme which not only lowers Australia's 1990 pollution levels by 40 per cent by 2020 but which also turns down the growing rate of emissions by 2015 - seven years away."

In-principle agreement reached at the G8 summit for the need to halve carbon emissions by 2050 was described by Professor Ross Garnaut as a small step forward that would help frame future talks. "No one was seeking a commitment out of yesterday's meeting," he said.

WE MUST ACT NOW ON CLIMATE CHANGE: ROSS GARNAUT

Kevin Rudd's hand-picked climate change adviser Ross Garnaut has backed Labor's ambitious plan to introduce an emissions trading scheme within two years, saying it would be "terribly hard, but possible", The Australian reported (5/7/08).

Releasing his landmark report on Australia's climate-change challenge, Professor Garnaut warned that the nation faced dire economic and environmental consequences if the world did not act quickly to slow global warming.

He said that despite some uncertainty about the science of climate change, and despite the fact that there was not yet a comprehensive international agreement for sharing the burden of greenhouse reductions, the economic and scientific evidence supported rapid domestic action.

But without bipartisan support, Australia risked "arbitrary political adjustments" that could result in a "bit of a mess" of an ETS, which Labor has pledged to introduce by 2010. That call appeared to fall on deaf ears when Brendan Nelson, immediately targeted Professor Garnaut's view about the need to put a carbon price on petrol by including transport in an ETS.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23971496-5013871,00.html>

Climate change adviser Ross Garnaut said he believed there was good public support for introducing an emissions trading scheme to combat climate change, the ABC reported (6/7/08). Professor Garnaut was holding public forums in five capital cities this week as the Federal Government prepared its response to his draft report.

'WE MUST ACT – AUSTRALIA IS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE'

A Federal Government media release welcomed the draft report, saying it made it absolutely clear that the time for playing short-term political games was over. Issued by Minister for Climate Change and Water, it stated: "We must act on climate change. This report is a timely reminder that the world is warming and this is causing more droughts, water shortages and extreme weather. Scientists have consistently warned that Australia is particularly vulnerable to climate change, given our already hot and dry conditions."

REPORT: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080704.pdf>

'DISTURBING' DROUGHT REPORT RELEASED

The Federal Government has released a report into the link between drought and climate change, which it says will trigger major review of drought policy, the ABC reported (6/7/08).

The report is by the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO and is the first of three commissioned by the Federal Government. It warns that extreme conditions previously thought to occur once in every 20 to 25 years, could become as frequent as every one or two years.

Agriculture Minister Tony Burke says it means drought assistance policy will have to be re-written. "If we fail to review drought policy, if we were to continue the neglect and pretend that the climate wasn't changing, we'd be leaving our farmers out to dry well and truly," he said.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/07/06/2295733.htm>

SEE ALSO ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY PAGE

Most Australians don't have time to read Professor Garnaut's shocking 600-page climate report, says GetUp, so it has created a quick clip:

QUICK CLIP: www.getup.org.au/campaign/ClimateActionNow

HYDRO AND SOLAR POWER IN KENYA

The first power-generating centre using environmentally friendly hydro and solar power has been inaugurated in a Kenyan village 150 kilometres north east of Nairobi by the UN Industrial Development Organisation ([UNIDO](#)) (8/7/08).

Apart from generating electricity, the new centre, in Kibai village in Kenya's Kerugoya division, promotes the use of Light Emitting Diode (LED) lamps to replace kerosene lamps that contribute to respiratory illnesses in children and women who use them on a daily basis.

Kibai villagers have begun using the centre for phone and lamp charging as well as accessing the internet, a rare phenomenon in rural Kenya, where only 10 per cent of the population has electricity. UNIDO is calling on communities without access to electricity to submit proposals for similar initiatives in Kenya for consideration by international donors.

The project is part of the "Lighting Up Kenya" program led by UNIDO and other UN agencies with the objective of eliminating kerosene from home lighting, and using electricity for income generation. **REPORT:** <http://www.unido.org/>

GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE HEARINGS

The House of Representatives Primary Industries and Resources Committee will conduct public hearings, as part of its inquiry into the Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Greenhouse Gas Storage) Bill, at Parliament House, Canberra, on July 15/18.

The Bill amends the *Offshore Petroleum Act 2006* to establish a framework for the management of carbon dioxide injection and storage operations in offshore Commonwealth waters. It will enable safe and secure storage of CO₂ in geological formations deep underground and seeks to tackle the effects of climate change while maintaining Australia jobs and security.

The inquiry has so far attracted 27 submissions from a range of industry and environmental groups and state governments. Those to appear before the committee include the Victorian Government (Submission no.16), Monash Energy (Submission no. 13), the CO2CRC (Submission 1), ExxonMobil (Submission 6), and the Australian Network of Environmental Defender's Offices (Submission 14). The committee will also be taking evidence from the Department of Energy, Resources and Tourism. Details of submissions and hearing programs are available on the committee website.

DETAILS: Inquiry Secretary on 02 6277 2500; pir.reps@aph.gov.au; <http://www.aph.gov.au/pir>.

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST CRITICISES PM FOR GOING TO OLYMPICS' OPENING

A leading Chinese human rights activist, Wei Jingsheng, who was the subject of Kevin Rudd's honours thesis, has criticised the Prime Minister for his decision to attend the opening of the Beijing Olympics, likening the event to the Berlin Games under Hitler in 1936, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (9/7/08).

Wei Jingsheng was reported as saying that as a Mandarin-speaking political leader in the Western world, Mr Rudd has a special responsibility to pressure the Chinese authorities to introduce democratic reforms.

The authorities jailed Mr Wei in 1979 for criticising the communist leadership and advocating democratic reforms. He spent 18 years in jail before being released in 1997 and was allowed to go to the US. **REPORT:** <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/08/1215282835510.html>

BURMA FAIR TO MUDDLING IN WAKE OF SAVAGE BLOW

Two months after a cyclone savaged the fertile Irrawaddy Delta, in Burma's south-west, the bones of drowned victims still clutter the muddy banks of waterways, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (7/7/08).

One bamboo stick at a time, survivors in hundreds of flattened villages are struggling to rebuild their homes. For shelter, they squeeze several families into a single tent. For drinking water, they collect monsoon rainwater that trickles off tarpaulin roof coverings into buckets or salvaged ceramic vases. For food, they cook communal meals with rice, beans and oil from hand-outs. Sometimes it is spoiled.

In one village, survivors kept up a steady pace of sawing and hammering at planks salvaged from the wreckage.

"To work is to be busy, and to be busy helps them forget," said Soe, the village leader.

He said 943 people used to live here. In the storm that came ashore the night of May 2, 660 of them disappeared. Across the vast, maze-like delta, an estimated 130,000 people were killed and 2.4 million affected.

Persistent obstruction by Burma's military rulers has kept aid at tragically meagre levels.

International efforts to quickly dispatch emergency assistance were delayed as the xenophobic junta rebuffed offers of help, denied visas to foreign aid workers and required permits for travel within the country.

Aid workers say most survivors of tropical cyclone Nargis have received at least some help but few are even remotely equipped to make their way in coming months. Some communities have only recently been reached by aid teams, who had journeyed for hours on foot, by motorcycle and by boat. **REPORT:** <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/06/1215282653611.html>

UN ENVOY DENOUNCES HIDDEN ABUSE OF AFGHAN BOYS

Afghanistan must do more to end an age-old practice of young boys being kept as sex slaves by wealthy and powerful patrons, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict said (7/7/08).

Radhika Coomaraswamy said the practice, called "bacha bazi" - literally "boy play" - was a taboo subject, but she had heard reports of warlords and military commanders keeping young boys and "exploiting them in terrible ways." Known as 'bacha bereesh', boys without beards, the victims are teenage boys who dress up as girls and dance for male patrons at parties in northern Afghanistan.

"We feel that a campaign should be run to raise awareness about this issue and to stop this practice," she said. "We talk about sexual violence against girls and women, which is also terrible, but this hidden issue of sexual violence against boys should also be dealt with seriously."

Afghan police have tried to crack down on the practice and Islamic clerics say those involved should be stoned for sodomy, forbidden under Islamic law.

REPORT: <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN0743087620080707>

TRAFFICKING OF GIRLS BOOMS IN NIGERIA

The trafficking of girls from villages to cities in Nigeria is increasing and the state is powerless to stop the trade, officials told IRIN (7/7/08).

"The business of recruiting teenage girls as domestic help in rich and middle-class homes is booming despite our efforts to put a stop to it", Bello Ahmed, head of the Kano office of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP), said.

Girls aged 12-17 are regularly trafficked from villages and brought to the city to work as maids for an average monthly wage of 1,500 naira (US\$13) which they usually send back to their parents and families, according to Mr Ahmed. "Apart from being denied access to education, these girls are in many cases raped and beaten by their employers and this is why we keep a dormitory to rehabilitate them," he said. **REPORT:** <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79118>

AID AGENCIES CONCERNED OVER REFUGEE AID

Forbidden to work, Iraqi war refugees in Amman, Jordan, were poor and getting poorer and waiting lists for food and cash assistance had grown into thousands, the Christian Science Monitor reported (2/7/08).

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is looking to donors for money to meet these needs; a large portion of the aid already provided has gone to address Jordan's own urgent national priorities.

It was reported that in 2007, 61 per cent of UNHCR's operational budget was given directly to Jordan, along with millions in bilateral aid from the European Community and the United States. This trickle-down development helped host countries help refugees.

But the newspaper reported that with budgets squeezed by rising fuel and food prices, some experts were questioning how much Iraqis were benefiting from international funds that are not going directly to refugee services.

REPORT: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0703/p04s02-wome.html>

SEEKING A 'EUROPE OF ASYLUM'

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is calling on the European Union (EU) to safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, as senior officials from the 27-member bloc debate a proposed pact on immigration issues (8/7/08).

UNHCR is closely following discussions concerning the draft European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, presented by the French EU Presidency at an informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Cannes, France.

Spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis said the agency hoped the document, which focuses mainly on managing legal migration and controlling irregular migration, will support the creation of a 'Europe of Asylum' – one of the pact's stated aims. "We consider there is a need to develop practical and reliable ways to safeguard the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees in the context of migration management and border control," she said.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27303&Cr=asylum&Cr1=>

CHAD: UN MISSION TRAINS POLICE OFFICERS TO PROTECT REFUGEES

The UN peacekeeping mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) have started training about 200 gendarmes and police officers to protect refugees and displaced people in the east of Chad (8/7/08).

Police officers with the UN mission, known as MINURCAT, are carrying out the program, which aims to train 850 gendarmes and police officers by the end of September when they will form part of a new unit known as the Détachement Intégré de Sécurité.

The training is part of a wider initiative to ensure the safety and security of an estimated 250,000 refugees and 180,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in the east of the country.

MINURCAT's role is to reinforce security, administration and the justice system to help create the conditions for refugees and IDPs to return voluntarily and safely to their homes. The mission was created last September to help protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian aid to thousands of people uprooted by insecurity in the north-east of the CAR and eastern Chad and in the neighbouring Darfur region of western Sudan.

WORKING TO ELIMINATE SEX SLAVE TRADE

Government, police and welfare agencies are joining forces in an unprecedented bid to expose and eliminate Australia's sex slave trade, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (6/7/08).

Representatives of more than 20 organisations and government departments met recently to discuss ways to combat the trade in human lives at a summit in Canberra. The Federal Government has committed \$20 million a year to halt the practice as well as doubling the Australian Federal Police's sex trafficking department's budget.

Authorities have identified more than 100 women as sex slaves, imported into Australia to work as prostitutes, since 2004. They often have their passports seized by brothel owners and must work to pay off so-called "debts", as high as \$45,000, for the opportunity to work in Australia.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/05/1214951110445.html>

NEW \$396M CHRISTMAS ISLAND DETENTION CENTRE TO BE INSPECTED

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration will visit immigration detention facilities in Darwin and Christmas Island next week as part of its inquiry into immigration detention in Australia.

"This visit will give the committee a clearer understanding of border security in Australia's northern waters, and assist us in determining the most appropriate and humane means of responding", said Chairman Michael Danby.

The committee was scheduled this week to visit the Northern Immigration Detention Centre, primarily used for the short-term detention of Indonesian illegal fishers, and the local hotel where minors are held while awaiting deportation. "In 2006-07, a total of 1,391 illegal foreign fishers were detained in Australia," said Mr Danby, "Some of these are unaccompanied minors so the Darwin facilities have a unique client profile in contrast to the rest of Australia's detention centres".

The committee was expected on Christmas Island on July 8 to visit temporary detention facility at Phosphate Hill as well as the recently completed \$396 million facility built by the previous government. Both facilities, with a combined maximum capacity of over 1000 people, are currently empty.

The committee is inquiring into and reporting on issues such as:

- the criteria for detention and length of time in detention;
- the criteria for release from detention;
- accountability and transparency in immigration detention processes;
- the infrastructure and physical environments of detention centres;
- types of detention (including residential housing and community detention) and other alternatives;
- and the administration of the services available to those in detention.

BACKGROUND: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/index.htm>; Committee Secretariat on 02 6277 4560; jscm@aph.gov.au.

SUBMISSIONS DETENTION URGED

In view of a new inquiry into detention, Pamela Curr, Campaign coordinator of the Victorian Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, is calling on advocates, activists, human rights defenders and friends of people detained to make submissions to the inquiry by July 18:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/index.htm>

She writes: "It would be useful to give the committee members an accurate picture of the arbitrary conditions of detention. Photos which do not identify people can also be submitted. Those people still visiting can also provide a picture of current conditions and what has not changed. Medical and mental health care experiences would be useful for the committee to hear about. Remember most of the committee have either never been in a detention centre or been VIPs on a quick tour. We need to paint a picture of the conditions of life in detention that they can feel."

SUBMISSIONS: By July 18.

DETAILS: Committee Secretary, Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Department of House of Representatives, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600; on 02 6277 4560; F 02 6277 4427 and jscm@aph.gov.au.

Pamela Curr, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 12 Batman St, Melbourne 3003; and on 03 93266006 /F 03 93265199; www.asrc.org.au

END FARC 'HATE', BETANCOURT URGES

The recently freed Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt has urged an end to the Colombian Government's "vocabulary of hate" against her former captors, the BBC reported (8/7/08). Ms Betancourt, a former presidential candidate, was held hostage for six years by Marxist Farc rebels.

But, while praising President Alvaro Uribe's work towards her release, she said it was time to end "extremist" language towards the Farc. She told the BBC that she did not rule out running for president again.

In a separate interview for French radio, she said: "I think we have reached a point where we must change this radical, extremist vocabulary of hate of very strong words that intimately wound the human being." **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7494196.stm>

D. PEACE & SECURITY

MIDDLE EAST

MESSAGE IN A MISSILE

Iran has test-fired what it called a new version of the Shahab-3 missile, which puts it within range of its main regional enemy Israel, state media say, the BBC reported (9/7/08).

The missile, said to have a range of 2,000 km (1,240 miles), was one of nine launched from a remote desert site. Iran has tested the Shahab-3 before, but the latest test comes amid rising tensions with the US and Israel over Iran's nuclear program.

Worries about the stand-off have been one factor pushing up world oil prices. The BBC's Jon Leyne in Tehran says this is a clear warning from Iran.
REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7496765.stm

IRAN WARNS IT WOULD RETALIATE

Ali Shirazi, a clerical aide to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued the harsh warning for both Israel and the US amid reports that the nations are possibly planning strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran has said that it is prepared to negotiate over its nuclear program; the U.S. has said that opening another military front in the Middle East would be extremely difficult for the military. **BBC** (7/8/7/08).

PENTAGON AFRAID OF IGNORANCE ABOUT IRAN

Pentagon chiefs fear that Israeli plans for an attack on Iran's nuclear program would fail to destroy the facilities because neither the CIA nor Mossad knows where every base is located, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (7/7/08)/.

US commanders fear Israel will feel compelled to act within 12 months, with no guarantee that it can do more than slow Iran's development of a nuclear weapon.

The assessment emerged as Iran in effect thumbed its nose at proposals by the West for Tehran to freeze its uranium enrichment program in exchange for the easing of economic sanctions.
REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/pentagon-afraid-of-ignorance-about-iran/2008/07/06/1215282653575.html>

IRAN OFFERS TALKS WITHOUT NUCLEAR FREEZE

Iran was ready to negotiate with world powers on its nuclear program but without suspending its controversial uranium enrichment work, the government spokesman said, according to the ABC (5/7/08).

"Iran will not go back on its rights on the nuclear issue," Gholamhossein Elham said, in the first comments from Iran since it handed over a response to an international bid to end the nuclear stand-off. The will of the Iranian people is firm and will continue to follow the principles defined by the supreme guide (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei)," the spokesman said at a weekly news conference.

"Iran insists on negotiations (with world powers) while respecting its rights and avoiding any loss of international rights," he said, referring to Iran's refusal to give up on nuclear enrichment. Iran had delivered its response to a package drawn up by six world powers offering Iran technology and negotiations if it suspends uranium enrichment, which the West fears could be used to make atomic weapons.

Mr Elham said his country was prepared to hold talks "especially with the 5+1 Group" of the UN Security Council members plus Germany "on the common points in the Iranian package and the offer of the world powers."

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/07/05/2295472.htm>

IRAQI PM ASKS US FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is pushing the US to set a timetable for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Other Iraqi officials said a withdrawal would hinge upon the ability of Iraqi forces to guarantee security. [The Toronto Star/Associated Press](#) (7/7/08).

ASIA

FOREIGN FIGHTERS 'TRAVELLING TO PAKISTAN'S TRIBAL AREAS'

American military and intelligence officials say there has been an increase in recent months in the number of foreign fighters who have travelled to [Pakistan's](#) tribal areas to join with militants there, the New York Times reported (10/7/08).

The flow may reflect a change that is making Pakistan, not Iraq, the preferred destination for some Sunni extremists from the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia who are seeking to take up arms against the West, they say.

The American officials say the influx, which could be in the dozens but could also be higher, shows a further strengthening of the position of the forces of [Al Qaeda](#) in the tribal areas, increasingly seen as an important base of support for the [Taliban](#), whose forces in Afghanistan have become more aggressive in their campaign against American-led troops. REPORT: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/world/asia/10terror.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin

AFGHAN VIOLENCE RIPPLES ACROSS REGION

Monday's bombing outside the Indian Embassy in the Afghan capital Kabul is raising tensions and reflects increasing risks across the region as governments look to apportion blame.

"[Afghanistan] is not a single conflict anymore -- it is becoming a regional war that is spreading to Pakistan, Central Asia and Iran," Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid tells Der Spiegel in an interview. [TIME](#) (7/7/08), [Der Spiegel](#) (English online version) (7/7/08).

DEADLY KABUL ATTACK AT TIME OF CHANGING STRENGTHS

It was the deadliest suicide car bombing in Kabul since the American-led invasion of Afghanistan ousted the [Taliban](#) in 2001, the New York Times reported (8/7/08). It comes as Afghan and Western officials have noted with alarm both the weakness of the government of President [Hamid](#)

[Karzai](#) and the growing strength of Pakistani militants in the tribal areas. **REPORT:**
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/08/world/asia/08afghanistan.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin

AFGHANISTAN: TOP UN ENVOY DEPLORES KILLING OF WOLESI JIRGA MEMBER

The top UN envoy to Afghanistan expressed shock and sadness at the assassination of Haji Habibullah, the Kandahar province member of Wolesi Jirga (People's House) (5/7/08).

"This attack represents an assault on the democratic will of the Afghan people who voted in their millions for peace, stability and progress during historic elections" that were held in 2005, the Secretary-General's Special Representative Kai Eide said. Haji Habibullah had "served his country honorably as a mujahid, as a tribal elder and as a parliamentarian," he said.

Mr Eide, who also serves as head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, called on the South Asian nation's authorities to bring those behind the attack to justice and urged them to bolster protection for all parliamentarians.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

RUDD PRAISES 'VIBRANT' MALAYSIAN DEMOCRACY

The Australian and Malaysian prime ministers have declared the relationship between the two countries was strong, the ABC reported (10/7/08). Kevin Rudd is on his first visit to Malaysia as prime minister.

Mr Rudd has praised Malaysia's democracy as vibrant, and while they did not comment specifically on the question of human rights, Malaysian counterpart Abdullah Badawi said there were no limits to the subjects they can discuss.

They agreed to more cooperation in education and defence and both countries will be involved in training peacekeepers and teachers for Afghanistan. They also talked about further developing the defence relationship and believe the existing five power defence agreement, which involves both countries, was relevant.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/07/10/2300186.htm>

THOUSANDS TURN OUT FOR ANWAR

Thousands of Malaysians braved police roadblocks and the threat of arrest to attend a mass political rally over increasing fuel prices and fresh sodomy accusations against the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, the Sydney Morning Herald (6/7/08).

Any public gathering of more than four people in Malaysia requires a permit from police, but organisers said they did not bother applying because their application would have been automatically rejected.

"This protest sends a strong signal to Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi that the people are angry," said Hatta Ramli, a senior official in the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.

Last week one of Dr Anwar's male aides told police that Dr Anwar had sodomised him. The allegation mirrored similar charges against Dr Anwar 10 years ago, which were eventually overturned after he spent six years in prison.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/06/1215282653590.html>

AFRICA

UN DEPUTY: ZIMBABWE A CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD

The crisis in Zimbabwe, which has been beset by months of deadly violence and witnessed the recent holding of tarnished elections, not only represents a 'moment of truth' for democracy on

the continent but also poses a challenge to the world, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said (8/7/08).

"When an election is conducted in an atmosphere of fear and violence, its outcome cannot have a legitimacy that is built on the will of the people," she told the Security Council, as she briefed the 15-member body on the recent African Union Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh. "Consequently, the principle of democracy is at stake."

President Robert Mugabe was sworn in for a sixth term after being declared the winner of the June 27 run-off, in which he was the sole candidate. Violence and intimidation directed towards the opposition forces had led to the withdrawal of Morgan Tsvangirai, the candidate of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Ms Migiro stated that the "flawed" elections produced illegitimate results, adding that "the seriousness of the situation and its possible consequences has the potential to affect regional peace and security in profound ways."

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27301&Cr=zimbabwe&Cr1=>

G8 CALLS FOR SANCTIONS BUT AFRICAN LEADERS SAY 'NO'

G8 leaders meeting in Japan have said they will seek targeted sanctions against members of the Zimbabwean Government over last month's polls, the BBC (8/7/08).

Their call for financial and other measures against individuals "responsible for violence" in Zimbabwe marked a change of stance for Russia. The G8 also called for a special UN Security Council envoy to report on the situation in Zimbabwe and help mediate.

African leaders earlier told the G8 they opposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. South African President Thabo Mbeki, the chief regional negotiator on Zimbabwe who has been urging a unity government, reportedly told G8 leaders that UN sanctions could lead to civil war.

TALKS BETWEEN MUGABE AND TSVANGIRAI?

President Robert Mugabe's ruling party and Zimbabwe's Opposition are to resume talks to resolve the country's political crisis, the state media has reported (8/7/08).

Zimbabwean Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa told the Herald newspaper that the Opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has agreed to the resumption of negotiations with the ruling ZANU-PF under the mediation of South African President Thabo Mbeki.

Tendai Biti, a senior MDC official, declined to confirm or deny the report. MDC Leader Morgan Tsvangirai has said the Opposition will not participate in any negotiations until Mr Mugabe's government halts a wave of political violence against his supporters and accepts his victory in a March 29 presidential election.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/07/08/2298155.htm>

ZIMBABWE 'INFECTING WHOLE OF AFRICA'

The crisis in Zimbabwe is "infecting the whole of southern Africa", UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband has said after visiting refugees, the BBC reported (6/7/08). On a visit to Johannesburg, South Africa, he said victims of political repression were fleeing there in their thousands.

He said it was now "imperative" there was a new government in Zimbabwe. After meeting some of the 2,000 refugees who have taken refuge in the Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg, Mr Miliband said: "This is now a crisis infecting the whole of southern Africa and one that is a man-made tragedy from the top of the Zimbabwean regime."

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7491979.stm

PEACEKEEPERS IN DARFUR HOBbled BY NEED

Nearly a year after its creation, a joint [U.N.-African Union](#) peacekeeping mission to Darfur is struggling, with fewer than half the soldiers promised, broken-down equipment, government obstacles, and what commanders say are the unrealistically high expectations of a world that has failed to support them (4/7/08).

The mission, the largest peacekeeping force in UN history, was to have been the robust replacement for an underfunded, poorly equipped AU force that had been on the ground since 2004. But of the 26,000 police and soldiers who were to deploy to protect civilians in this region of western Sudan, only 140 Bangladeshi police and a smattering of officers, engineers and UN bureaucrats have arrived.

The rest of the 8,000 or so troops in the field are holdovers from the old AU mission - soldiers who merely painted their green helmets UN blue. **REPORT:** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/03/AR2008070303915.html>

AID WORKER OFFERS WAY OF RECONCILIATION

Forum of Conscience director John Caulker hopes to bring his program, Fambol Talk (Krio or creole for "family talk"), to villages throughout Sierra Leone. By offering a way for soldiers who committed atrocities to speak with the victims of those crimes, Caulker hopes eventually that his communication program will become a form of rehabilitation. [The Christian Science Monitor](#) (7/8)

EUROPE

US AND CZECH SIGN ON MISSILE SHIELD

Russia has said it will be forced to react with military means if the US and Czech Republic go ahead with plans for a missile shield, the BBC reported (8/7/08).

The statement came hours after the US signed an initial deal to base part of Washington's controversial missile defence system in the Czech Republic. The deal, signed by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Prague on Tuesday, allows a tracking radar base to be set up on Czech territory. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7496399.stm>

E. HEALTH & MEANS

GLOBAL HEALTH MONITORS WELCOMED

The World Health Organisation (WHO) welcomed the agreement announced in Japan by G8 leaders and their commitment to full, annual measurements of progress in meeting their pledges to improve global health (8/7/08).

"Many noble commitments have been made over the last decade to support health," said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan. "And now G8 nations are saying they will ensure an accounting of those promises every year. This is commendable. WHO and its partners will do everything possible to support their efforts."

The G8 also agreed that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by the UN in 2000, should be supported in a comprehensive manner. In particular, G8 noted the need:

to greatly increase progress on maternal, newborn and child health;
to reaffirm, sustain and extend previous commitments on HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, as well as on polio and neglected tropical diseases; and
to strengthen health systems, including social health protection and building an adequate health workforce with a voluntary code of practice regarding ethical recruitment of health workers.

"The G8 has taken an important step to relieve suffering and improve the health of the world's most vulnerable people," said Dr Chan. "I applaud the strong commitment of all G8 leaders. I would also like to thank the Government of Japan for its leadership of this meeting."

DETAILS: Dick Thompson, Communication Office, WHO, Geneva, on +41 22 791 1492; thompsond@who.int

WHO IN TEST OF RADIATION EMERGENCY PLAN

In an effort to strengthen public health emergency response, the World Health Organisation (WHO) took part in a test of radiation emergency plans through a simulated accident at the Laguna Verde Nuclear power plant, Mexico, over July 9/10, WHO reported (8/7/08).

This exercise was coordinated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and carried out in co-operation with 74 IAEA member states and nine international organisations in order to test national and international preparedness to respond to a nuclear or radiological emergency.

In this exercise WHO was scheduled to test in particular, its Strategic Health Operations Centre and the Radiation Emergency Medical Preparedness and Assistance Network (REMPAN) as key tools of WHO's activities for public health risk detection, assessment and response under the umbrellas of the two Emergency Conventions and the International Health Regulations (IHR-2005). In particular, the WHO Regional Office for Americas (AMRO/PAHO) and the WHO Country Office in Mexico interact with the National IHR Focal Point of Mexico to test communication channels under the IHR.

Exercises of the international plan, called the 'Joint Radiation Emergency Management Plan', are conducted every few years so that the IAEA, its member states and international organisations can test preparedness for working cooperatively to respond effectively to an actual nuclear or radiological emergency or incident.

This exercise was focused primarily on testing communication networks and international assistance mechanisms. **DETAILS:** Sari Setiogi, Health Security and Environment, on + 41 22 791 3576; F on +41 22 791 4721; setiogis@who.int

AUSTRALIANS 'IGNORANT OF POVERTY'

Australians are ignorant of the extent of child poverty in our region, even though Papua New Guinea and East Timor are as poor as Sudan and Haiti, a new survey shows.

Almost 40 per cent of Australians nominate Ethiopia as the world's poorest country but many countries where children are equally or much worse off failed to register in the public's consciousness, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (7/7/08).

The survey by ChildFund Australia, an international aid and development agency, reveals the gaps in Australians' knowledge about children in the developing world and shows Australians are unduly pessimistic about progress in improving conditions in many countries.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/06/1215282653572.html>

F. MEDIA MATTERS

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT 'MUST STOP CAMPAIGN OF HARASSMENT'

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has condemned threats of jail and harassment towards *Sunday Times* reporter Paul Lampathakis after he refused to reveal an information source to the Western Australian Government (9/7/08).

According to the Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), Mr Lampathakis was reportedly called before a State Parliament Upper House inquiry this week and ordered to reveal the source of a leak about WA Government plans for a multi-million dollar advertising campaign.

The reporter, who refused to name the source in accordance with the Code of Ethics for journalists, was allegedly threatened with a lengthy jail term for either contempt of Parliament or violation of the criminal code, the MEAA reported.

Mr Lampathakis' office was reportedly raided by state police in April and his journalist colleagues searched and questioned. One reporter from *The Australian* newspaper, which shares the same building, had her suitcase emptied and searched after returning from a country assignment.

Alliance WA Branch Secretary Michael Sinclair-Jones said Mr Lampathakis was the sixth WA journalist to be threatened with jail over confidential sources in the past 18 months.

[DETAILS](#): IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

Police State Mindset

In an editorial entitled *Police State Mindset*, The Australian comments on the West Australian incident and adds: In a push to remove more obstacles keeping the public in the dark, Australia's Right to Know media coalition, of which News Limited was a founding member, has launched an inquiry to help reform the use of suppression orders to gag reporting of criminal trials in the nation's courts. As legal affairs editor Chris Merritt reports, these number about 1000. To be led by Prue Innes, a former law reporter for The Age, who established the nation's first register of suppression orders while working for the Supreme Court of Victoria, it should put the public interest first by examining how courts can be made more open in every jurisdiction. While not pre-judging the issue, Ms Innes has expressed interest in a new South Australian system that obliges courts to state why suppression orders have been imposed and how they will be lifted. This could be a good model for a national approach.

Also essential is the Right to Know coalition's push for all governments to overhaul the Freedom of Information laws. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh has broadly supported an FOI review demanding major reform to make government more open. Others should follow suit. The Rudd Government has promised a more liberal approach, although the heavy censoring of Treasury papers requested by the ABC was disappointing. Forcing meaningful FOI reforms is vital if public officials are to be held accountable. Our democracy depends on it (10/7/08).

CHINA MEDIA CLAMPS SLAMMED A MONTH BEFORE OLYMPICS

A month before the Olympic Games, China continues to severely breach its pledge to allow full media freedoms, harassing and restricting foreign journalists in Tibet and elsewhere, Human Rights Watch said in a new report (7/7/08).

"Correspondents face severe difficulties in accessing forbidden zones, geographical areas and topics which the Chinese Government considers sensitive and thus off-limits to foreign media," said the HRW report, entitled *China's Forbidden Zones: Shutting out of Tibet and other sensitive stories*.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) issued this week a new appeal to China to give unrestricted access to journalists from the Asia Pacific region who wish to visit the country. "This is the moment for China to open itself to the outside world," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary.

As part of Beijing's bid to host the Games it promised temporary regulations to allow complete media freedoms. Around 25,000 foreign journalists are expected to cover events. The global rights group criticised the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for not doing more to ensure China lived up to its media and human rights pledges.

"The Chinese Government, with the help of the International Olympic Committee, has done its best to impede progress," Sophie Richardson, Asia advocacy director at HRW, said.

"(The IOC) has said it prefers quiet diplomacy and in general we don't have a problem with quiet diplomacy ... the problem is when it's so quiet as to be utterly inaudible," Ms Richardson said at a media briefing in Hong Kong.

HRW urged the IOC to establish a 24-hour hotline in Beijing for reporters during the Games to report media violations and to "publicly press the Chinese government to uphold" its temporary media freedom pledge until it expires in October. The group also urged Western leaders to speak out against abuses now, while they still had some leverage before the Games.

"I think if there isn't more pressure now, it's going to be very difficult to make any significant changes from the outside directed inward after the Games," Ms Richardson said.

While the reporting environment has improved for foreign journalists, the country has not relaxed its grip over domestic reporters.

The HRW report also documented intimidation of foreign reporters including death threats, the silencing of their Chinese sources as well as beatings of those pursuing sensitive stories.

REPORT: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP130954.htm>

PAKISTAN: A call for vigilance to protect journalists' safety in Pakistan after the latest spike in abductions of journalists has been made by the International Federation of Journalists following the release of Wiqar Kiyani, a journalist working for the London *Guardian* newspaper, after his mysterious disappearance on July 6 from his home in Islamabad (9/7/08).

Mr Kiyani's case is the third in sequence, after the abduction of the journalists Pir Zubair Shah and Akhtar Soomoro, in the Mohmand agency area of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan.

The IFJ urges the state agencies and insurgent groups to respond positively to the appeals made by Pakistan journalists' unions and other professional organisations, and to honour that journalists are non-combatants entitled to equal protection from all sides in a conflict.

"We are worried though, that the culture of hostility and physical violence against media workers is an entrenched fact in Pakistan's more troubled areas", said IFJ Asia Pacific.

"We call upon the federal and provincial governments in Pakistan to heed the call made by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) that immediate safety measures be instituted for journalists, especially those working in the tribal areas, allowing them to work without fear or intimidation from state agents or non-state actors."

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

G. OTHER NEWS

UAE CANCELS IRAQ'S \$7 BILLION DEBT

The United Arab Emirates has cancelled the entire debt owed to it by Iraq - a sum of almost \$7bn (£3.5bn) including interest and arrears, the BBC reported (6/7/08). The Gulf state also appointed a new ambassador to Iraq, in a move which eases Baghdad's diplomatic isolation.

Correspondents say Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbours have been wary of fostering ties with Iraq's mainly Shia government because of its links with Iran. The UAE has named its former envoy to India, Abdullah al-Shehi, as its new ambassador to Baghdad.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7492115.stm

WARNING FOR INDONESIAN PRESIDENT

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is in thrall to hard-line Muslim groups as national polling and community sentiment suggest he will fight an uphill battle in general elections next year, a report warns.

The Geneva-based International Crisis Group, in an analysis, argues that radical groups are increasingly influencing government policy, taking as its example a recent Yudhoyono decree on the Ahmadiyah Muslim sect, The Australian reported (8/7/08).

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23983652-2703,00.html>

SAFE HAVEN FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

An Australian living in East Africa has brought new meaning to the phrase "keeping the bastards honest", the Sydney Morning Herald reported (9/7/08). In the past year-and-a-half, Julian Assange and his band of online dissidents have helped swing the Kenyan presidential election, embarrassed the US Government and sparked international scandal.

His site, Wikileaks, provides a safe haven for whistleblowers to anonymously upload confidential documents and, after 18 months of operation, Mr Assange says no source has ever been exposed and no document - now more than 1.2 million and counting - has ever been censored or removed. Now the site is shifting its focus from despotic regimes and shady corporate dealings to religion and even the cult of celebrity.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/08/1215282800995.html>

NEW INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S RELATIONS WITH ASEAN

Parliament's Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee will conduct a new inquiry into Australia's relationship with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Representing a population of around 575 million, the ten ASEAN nations are an important trading partner for Australia, worth over \$55 billion in 2007.

ASEAN is the sixth most important export destination for Australian goods and services, and Australia is the eighth most important source of imports from ASEAN.

Announcing the new inquiry, Sub-Committee Chairman Michael Danby said the committee would explore a range of issues, including economic opportunities and security.

"ASEAN has a forecasted combined gross domestic product of US\$1450 billion in 2008—a doubling since 2003. This provides a huge opportunity for Australian business.

"The countries of ASEAN are also of strategic importance to Australia being situated to the north of the country. Political stability in the region and good international relations are integral to Australia's security and prosperity," Mr Danby said.

"ASEAN is currently focusing on regional integration through 'ASEAN plus three' and the ASEAN Regional Forum. It is also looking to establish an ASEAN Economic Community. In addition the Australian Government has expressed support for the implementation of an ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Partnership's Plan of Action," he said.

Along with exploring ways to improve Australia's involvement in ASEAN and opportunities to enhance the regional economy and security through Australian involvement, the committee will examine cultural links and the impact of global warming on the region.

This new inquiry follows previous inquiries into Australia's relationship with individual ASEAN countries: in 2004 with Indonesia; and in 2007 with Malaysia.

SUBMISSIONS: By August 22. A series of public hearings will follow.

DETAILS: <http://www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/malaysia/index.htm>

CHINA UPDATE 2008: CONFRONTING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Leading international experts on China will be arriving at the Australian National University in Canberra ahead of the 2008 China Update on July 14. The theme of this year's conference,

hosted by the Crawford School of Economics and Government at ANU, is *Confronting Global Challenges: Growth, the Environment and Rebalancing World Power*.

Conference highlights included: Confronting Global Challenges, Panel on the US/China relationship, China's and Environmental Challenges.

DETAILS: Jane O'Dwyer, ANU Communications and External Liaison Office, on 02 6125 5001; F 02 6125 8255; www.anu.edu.au/media.

EURO 2008 ITEMS IN ONLINE AUCTION TO HELP AFGHAN MINE VICTIMS

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is organising an online auction of rare UEFA EURO 2008™ collectors' items, including footballs autographed by players from the tournament champion, Spain.

The auction, which will take place on www.ebay.ch/redcross until July 17, is part of the 'Score for the Red Cross' campaign to raise funds for the ICRC's physical rehabilitation programs in Afghanistan. It will also feature footballs and campaign T-shirts signed by the ICRC's 'Score for the Red Cross' ambassadors – Cristiano Ronaldo, the Portuguese football star, and Marc Forster, the director of the new James Bond film – and items signed by players from the Swiss, German and French national teams, which played in UEFA EURO 2008™.

The ICRC will keep www.scorefortheredcross.org online until the end of the season so that football fans can support their team while helping mine victims in Afghanistan to walk again.

DETAILS: Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific - Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/61 (0)2 418 485 120.

'MATURE WORKERS MEAN BUSINESS'

Federal Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination Elizabeth Broderick launched a new community education campaign to bust myths and stereotypes about mature age workers.

Targeted specifically at employers, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) campaign 'Mature workers mean business' will use a range of print advertisements and web-based material to highlight the benefits of mature age workers and to address discrimination.

Commissioner Broderick said many older participants in her recent national 'Listening Tour' raised age discrimination as a barrier to full and equal participation in the workplace.

"Some people told me that ageist assumptions and attitudes heavily impacted on their ability to find meaningful work, including misconceptions about being able to adapt to change or wanting work at senior levels," said Ms Broderick. "Others recounted the barriers they faced in other areas of life, such as accessing public spaces or being awarded driver's licences."

"As we live and work for longer, it is crucial that older Australians of all ages are able to fully participate in society. There is also a strong business imperative for employers to attract and retain mature age workers," she said. A new website resources provide a number of case studies and information for employers on the benefits of attracting and retaining mature age workers.

CASE STUDIES/INFORMATION: www.humanrights.gov.au/matureworkers/

INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS: www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_employers/

FOR NAIDOC WEEK

The National Museum of Australia celebrates NAIDOC Week 2008 with the introduction of an online resource to help teachers and their students explore the 1967 Referendum and the significance of this landmark event in Australian history. The creation of both the Collaborating for Indigenous Rights website and associated online units of work is a good example of the increasing emphasis the National Museum is placing on the web as a means of producing and disseminating quality teaching and learning materials to education audiences. The National Museum is now providing much of its education outreach content online, a strategy that goes

hand-in-hand with the overall objectives of the Museum to provide increasing information about exhibitions and collections through its website. **REPORT:** http://www.nma.gov.au/media/media_releases_index/museum_introduces_online_education_resource/

REVIEW OF DEFENCE

The Defence Sub-Committee is to review the Department of Defence Annual Report 2006-2007 at a public hearing on July 10 .

The hearing will be on Thursday 10 July 2008 at the venue is Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House, Canberra. The Sub-Committee, chaired by Arch Bevis, Member for Brisbane, will such topics as Joint Strike Fighter Project (AIR 6000); Seasprite - Lessons Learnt; Through Life Support of Defence Equipment; Australian Industry Capability; Recruitment and Retention; Personnel shortages in Specialist trades; Progress of Military Justice changes; Abrams Tank - Current and Future role of Armour; Communications - lack of interoperability of new and legacy communications equipment and ADFpreparedness for Peace Keeping.

DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/index.htm>

NEW WAYS TO COMBAT TERRORISM

In a small compound on the outskirts of Riyadh, the Saudi government is exploring new ways to combat extremism, the BBC reported (9/7/08).

This is still a prison, run by the Ministry of Interior and housed inside secure premises with high perimeter walls and barbed wire, but the Saudi authorities prefer to call it a 'care centre' and refer to prisoners as "beneficiaries".

This is not what you would imagine when you think of a typical Saudi jail. Inside, prisoners enjoy access to wide-ranging recreational facilities including their own swimming pools, video games and table tennis. In return for the more relaxed environment, prisoners have to attend religious education classes where Islamic scholars challenge their views. The thinking behind this is to fight al-Qaeda's ideology by convincing militant Islamists they have a distorted view of Islam.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7496375.stm

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

GLOBAL ACTION TO SAVE GLOBAL GROWTH

"Global growth is the leitmotif of our era. The great economic expansion, now in its fifth decade, has raised living standards worldwide and lifted billions out of poverty," writes UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in the Washington Post (3/7/08). "Yet today, many wonder how long it can last. The reason: Plenty comes at an increasingly high price. We see it daily in the rising cost of fuel, food and commodities. Consumers in developed countries fear the return of 'stagflation' - inflation coupled with slowing growth or outright recession - while the world's poorest no longer can afford to eat. Meanwhile, climate change and environmental degradation threaten the future of our planet. Population growth and rising wealth place unprecedented stress on the Earth's resources. Malthus is back in vogue. Everything seems suddenly in short supply: energy, clean air and fresh water, all that nourishes us and supports our modern ways of life."

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/02/AR2008070202349.html>

CO-OPERATING TO BEAT TERRORISM

Decisive action by the Indonesian authorities in rounding up members of an alleged terrorist cell in South Sumatra is reason for celebration, and concern, according to the Sydney Morning herald (7/7/08). Celebration because advanced preparations for another murderous atrocity seem to have been thwarted; concern because the arrests of 10 people and the seizure of many explosives are dramatic evidence that the terrorism threat remains very much alive in Indonesia and across South-East Asia. That no major attacks have been successfully launched in Indonesia for more than two years provides no grounds for relaxing vigilance, let alone for complacency.

EDITORIAL: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/06/1215282644107.html>

GUANTANAMO CRUMBLES

The case of Huzaifa Parhat provides the clearest, most compelling evidence yet that the process used by the Bush administration to justify holding detainees at Guantanamo Bay is deeply and irreversibly flawed and must be discarded, reports the Washington Post (7/7/08). Mr Parhat is an ethnic Uighur who fled China in 2001 because of the abuses against Uighurs ... (he went to Afghanistan and with fellow Uighurs fled to Pakistan before being turned over to the US by Pakistani officials). He was sent to Guantanamo Bay in 2002. According to court records, Mr Parhat is not a member of Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. There is no record of his involvement in hostilities against the US or its allies. In 2003, a military officer who reviewed Mr Parhat's detention recommended his release ... Yet Mr Parhat languishes in Guantanamo to this day - six years after his capture. **ARTICLE:** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/06/AR2008070601715.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

THE TALIBAN: A PROXY WAR

The suicide bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul is the deadliest attack in the Afghan capital since the US forces toppled the Taliban Government in 2001. It is also a vicious warning not only of the growing strength of the insurgency but also of the undeclared struggle for influence over their northern neighbour by both India and Pakistan, writes Jawid, of Kabul, Afghanistan, in the Timesonline (8/7/08) ... The Pakistan army needs to be cleansed from the Pashtun Islamists. They want impose their rule onto Afghanistan through their agent Pashtuns within Afghanistan. Their agents within Afghanistan need to be removed instead of being important government positions. Jawid, Kabul, Afghanistan.

COMMENT: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article4289591.ece

IT'S TRUE, WE MUSLIMS KEEP OUR HEADS DOWN

"Tomorrow night, on the eve of the third anniversary of the 7/7 bombings, Channel 4's Dispatches returns to one of its favourite subjects – Muslims," writes Huma Qureshi in the London Observer (6/7/08). The program, called It Shouldn't Happen to a Muslim, looks at how life has changed for Muslim families in the UK since 9/11. It recounts vicious stories of horrific, racist brutality against Muslims, not the extremist ones, but the ordinary, law-abiding ones; stories that are rarely reported in the press. I imagine this will annoy a hell of a lot of people ... When people start talking about 7/7, 9/11, terrorism and Osama, rationality is lost and prejudice and stereotype emerge. Most people are so (understandably) full of rage at what happened and what's still happening that they don't want to hear that not all Muslims are terrorists, illegal immigrants or uneducated illiterates that the rest of the nation has to 'respect'."

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jul/06/islam.religion>

FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Last weekend's newspaper headlines were full of doom: Adapt or perish, warned one, Cause to be afraid, very afraid, intoned another. What is it in the human condition that finds apocalyptic visions of the end of the human race so appealing? ANU emeritus professor and former DIO director Paul Dibb asks in The Australian (9/7/08). "First, it was terrorism that was going to end our way of life. Today, it is the mass hysteria phenomenon known as global warming. Now we have Ross Garnaut predicting that immense damage from climate change will very likely be part of the Australian reality of the 21st century. Garnaut is an internationally recognised academic economist with serious policy experience in his discipline. But even he recognises there are large uncertainties surrounding the science of climate change.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23990723-7583,00.html>

EMAIL SPELLS OUT EPA-WHITE HOUSE DISCORD

An increasingly open conflict between the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House over how to respond to climate change intensified on Tuesday with the disclosure that Vice President Dick Cheney's office sought to prevent a federal official from publicly discussing the health consequences of global warming, Stephen Power reports in the Wall Street Journal (9/7/08). The latest in a series of disclosures about internal disputes within the Bush

administration came as President George W. Bush was in Japan with other leaders of the Group of Eight Nations to forge an agreement on combating climate change. But back home, Mr. Bush's critics contend that his aides are working to ensure that any actions his administration takes in response to climate change will have a limited impact.

REPORT: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121554228130836473.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

CHARGE LIKE WOUNDED BULL, STING LIKE BEE

In ancient Hindu mythology there existed an infinite number of universes, each one having its own set of gods, rules and ideals, writes Richard Ackland in the Sydney Morning Herald (4/7/08). The idea of 'alternative universes' is a handy one, for as C.S. Lewis and Lewis Carroll have shown, much escapist fun can be had when we move freely from one "reality" to another. The law is a bit like that. There's an earthly reality and a legal fantasy reality. You could fill a large warehouse with all the papers, reports, tomes and investigations into the way lawyers bill their costs and conduct litigation. Yet the whole system seems to grind along in much the same old fashion, untouched by inspirations of "improvement".

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/03/1214950947568.html>

A LONG DAY WANES IN MALAYSIA

There is a political storm building in Malaysia that Australia cannot afford to ignore. The decision by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to seek to avoid the worst of the turbulence when he flies into Kuala Lumpur on Thursday is short sighted. Mr Rudd will meet the beleaguered Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, who suffered an extraordinary swing against his ruling party in March despite the considerable advantages of incumbency. But Mr Rudd will not meet the man at the centre of the political drama, the de facto opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim. Yet if there is one man steeled to challenge the political stranglehold of the coalition that has ruled Malaysia for half a century, it is Mr Anwar ... How Malaysia's deepening political tensions play out, and at what cost to democracy and stability, is of great regional significance. Mr Anwar is a former deputy prime minister and now leads a coalition of opposition parties that has already delivered an unexpected body blow to the government. He is a man Australia needs to understand.

SMH EDITORIAL: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/09/1215282842083.html?page=2>

I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

HOARDING NATIONS DRIVE FOOD COSTS 'EVER HIGHER'

At least 29 countries have sharply curbed food exports in recent months, to ensure that their own people have enough to eat, at affordable prices, according to the New York Times (30/6/08).

When it comes to rice, India, Vietnam, China and 11 other countries have limited or banned exports. Fifteen countries, including Pakistan and Bolivia, have capped or halted wheat exports. More than a dozen have limited corn exports. Kazakhstan has restricted exports of sunflower seeds.

The restrictions are making it harder for impoverished importing countries to afford the food they need. The export limits are forcing some of the most vulnerable people, those who rely on relief agencies, to go hungry.

"It's obvious that these export restrictions fuel the fire of price increases," said [Pascal Lamy](#), the director general of the [World Trade Organisation](#). And by increasing perceptions of shortages, the restrictions have led to hoarding around the world, by farmers, traders and consumers.

"People are in a panic, so they are buying more and more — at least, those who have money are buying," said Conching Vasquez, a 56-year-old rice vendor in Los Baños, in the Philippines, the world's largest rice importer, with customers buying 8,000 pounds of rice a day, up from 5,500 pounds a year ago. REPORT:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/30/business/worldbusiness/30trade.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

TOXIC PROBLEMS HAVE NOT GONE AWAY

Hundreds of tons of waste still languish inside a tin-roofed warehouse in a corner of the old grounds of the Union Carbide pesticide factory in the Indian city of Bhopal, nearly a quarter-century after a poison gas leak killed thousands and turned this ancient city into a notorious symbol of industrial disaster, the International Herald Tribune reported (7/7/08).

The toxic remains have yet to be carted away. No one has examined to what extent, over more than two decades, they have seeped into the soil and water, except in desultory checks by a state environmental agency, which turned up pesticide residues in the neighbourhood wells far exceeding permissible levels.

Nor has anyone bothered to address the concerns of those who have drunk that water and tended kitchen gardens on this soil and who now present ailments from cleft palates to mental retardation among their children as evidence of a second generation of Bhopal victims, though it is impossible to say with any certainty what is the source of the afflictions.

It was here that on Dec. 3, 1984, a tank inside the factory released 40 tons of methyl isocyanate gas, killing those who inhaled it while they slept. At the time, it was called the world's worst industrial accident. At least 3,000 people were killed immediately. Thousands more may have died later from the after effects, though the exact death toll remains unclear. More than 500,000 people were declared to be affected by the gas and awarded compensation, an average of \$550. Some victims say they have yet to receive any money.

In 2005, a state-financed study called for long-term epidemiological studies to determine the impact of contaminated drinking water, concluding that while the levels of toxic contaminants were not very high, water and soil contamination had caused an increase in respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments.

In the Shiv Nagar slum about half a mile from the factory, there is a boy, Akash, who was born with an empty socket for a left eye. Now 6, he cannot see properly or speak. He is a cheerful child who plays in the lanes near his house.

In Arif Nagar, Nawab and Hassan Mian, brothers who are 8 and 12, move through their house like newly hatched birds, barely able to stand. They have no control over their muscles. Their mother, Fareeda Bi, is unsure of exactly what caused their ailment, but she, too, blames the water. "There are more children like this in the neighborhood," she said, "who cannot walk, who cannot see."

To compound the tragedy, there is no way to know to what extent the water is to blame. The government suspended long-term public health studies many years ago.

REPORT: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/07/07/asia/07bhopal.php>

WORLD HERITAGE LISTING FOR NEW CALEDONIAN REEFS

The New Caledonian coral reefs, lagoon and associated ecosystems have been placed on the World Heritage list after a long campaign by local organisations and international NGOs, Australian Greens Senator and Vice President of the IUCN World Conservation Union, Christine Milne, said (8/7/08).

Senator Milne said, "This wonderful result is testament to the power of a group of passionate people dedicating themselves to a vital cause. Coming on the heels of last week's 25th anniversary of saving the Franklin, I am personally delighted to have been able to help the Kanak people achieve this win for the environment and for Indigenous rights over the short-term interests of the Goro nickel mine."

The international campaign was launched after four New Caledonian delegates described the impact of nickel mining on their community and environment at an Asia Pacific Greens meeting in Brisbane in April 2000.

DETAILS: Tim Hollo on +61 (0)2 6277 3063; www.christinemilne.org.au

SEAWEED ENDANGERS CORAL REEFS

The introduction of seaweed cultivation as a cash crop over the last three decades has proved disastrous for coral reefs and the marine life that dwells there. Resulting changes are also adversely affecting local populations that rely on reefs for their livelihoods, reported. [The New York Times](#) (8/7/08).

'ROBUST DEVELOPMENT REGIME' NEEDED FOR AMAZON FORESTS

A "fragile" land tenure system and "a scarce presence" by the state were identified as key factors in rising Amazon deforestation last week, ENN reported (4/7/08). The diagnosis was delivered to the 3rd International Congress on Bioenergy by WWF-Brazil forest engineer Ana Euler, who said there was a need to re-discuss the Brazilian development model.

"In many areas of the Amazon we come across a situation in which there are various 'landowners' for the same piece of land and proof of land ownership is extremely difficult," he said. "In such a scenario, the populations that are more vulnerable end up being penalised. Indigenous peoples, extractivists and small peasants generally lose the dispute to agribusiness and other groups that deploy greater political and economic strength." A more robust development regime that protects trade as well as state lands could curb deforestation, says forest engineer Ana Euler

REPORT: <http://www.enn.com/ecosystems/article/37574>

MEXICANS SET OUT TO PLANT 8 MILLION TREES IN ONE DAY

Mexicans set out to plant more than 8 million trees across the country on Saturday as part of a government push to shed its reputation for environmental mismanagement and rampant illegal logging, Reuters reported (5/7/08).

Packs of volunteers, including oil workers and schoolchildren, trekked into fields and forests up and down Mexico wielding shovels and wheelbarrows full of government-supplied saplings. They planted 8.3 million trees, the environment ministry said.

"We are repairing just a little of the enormous damage that we are doing" to the environment, President Felipe Calderon said at a tree planting event just north of the capital.

Illegal logging destroys some 64,000 acres (26,000 hectares) of Mexican forest each year, the government says, putting Mexico near the top of a UN list of nations losing primary forest fastest. Environmental activists say the figure is much higher.

REPORT: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N05369570.htm>

EU BACKS AWAY FROM BIO-FUEL GOAL AND EYES BRAZIL ACCORD

European Union energy chiefs considered an accord with Brazil over bio-fuels on Saturday at the end of a three day meeting in Paris during which they backed away from the EU's controversial bio-fuels target, Reuters reported (5/7/08).

Though no concrete changes were made to proposed bio-fuel legislation, ministers said the EU had failed to properly communicate plans to get 10 per cent road transport fuels from renewable sources, such as bio-fuels, by 2020.

French Ecology Minister Jean-Louis Borloo said many people had misinterpreted the target to mean 10 per cent from bio-fuels alone. He said the EU had to make clear it could also include electric vehicles recharged using green electricity or powered by hydrogen - nascent technologies that while virtually non-existent today could play a vital role by 2020.

REPORT: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L05428948.htm>

OIL PALM ‘GOLD’ RUSH HAS HIGH SOCIAL PRICE

The modern day gold rush for oil palm plantations is a financial boom to many Indonesians, but the expansion also plays a significant role in rapid and irreversible environmental change, damaging deforestation, and rising social inequity and more needs to be done to investigate the issues, according to a ANU research team.

The team, led by Dr John McCarthy, a senior lecturer at ANU Crawford School of Economics and Government, are meeting at the ANU to talk about the study, outline the issues and discuss a way forward.

Dr McCarthy said that if the global community wished to reduce environmentally-damaging deforestation, it was essential that we gain a thorough understanding of the issues around the explosion in the growth of oil palm cultivation.

“If we are at all serious about addressing global warming through Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) then we need to try and understand as much as we can about oil palm, which is of course a primary driver of deforestation in Indonesia,” he said.

“The development of oil palm plantations in Indonesia also has enormous social and economic impacts. Millions of hectares of land are being converted and, around those areas, there are tens of millions of people. It’s a modern day gold rush for some, but one with many losers,” he said.

Dr McCarthy added that spiralling demand from China and India, high commodity prices and rising demand for bio-fuels is fuelling the boom.

“Palm oil is now the second most consumed edible oil globally and, per unit area, the highest-yielding vegetable oil crop in the world. It’s incredibly lucrative for those involved – the price of the product has gone up three-fold in the last year alone.

“But while oil palm cultivation may generate significant revenue for governments, business and landowners, it may also be associated with extensive social conflict and rising inequity. Our project aims to understand the scale of the environmental change and the impact on the livelihoods of millions of smallholders. We are interested in how policies might be modified to help secure local livelihoods in a more sustainable way.”

The project: *Oil palm and agrarian change on the Indonesian and Malaysia frontiers* is financed through an Australian Research Council grant and includes researchers from ANU and the University of Queensland.

PROJECT DETAILS: <http://www.crawford.anu.edu.au/palm/palm.php>; Martyn Pearce, ANU Media Office, on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245.

AUSTRALIA

SEVERE DROUGHT MORE OFTEN: REPORT

Australia could experience drought twice as often and the events will be twice as severe within 20 to 30 years, according to a new Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO report (6/7/08).

The overall review, announced in April, is expected to help prepare farmers, rural communities and Australia’s primary industries for the challenges of climate change.

The Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO climatic report on future drought events – the first of its kind in Australia – is to be considered as part of government drought policy review.

Key findings of the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO report include:

Under a high scenario, droughts could occur twice as often, cover twice the area and be more severe in key agricultural production areas;

The current definition of 'Exceptional Circumstances', which defines areas eligible to apply for Federal Government drought assistance, is out-of-date;

Temperatures currently defined as 'exceptional' are likely to occur, on average, once in every two years in many key agricultural production areas within the next 20 to 30 years;

[BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY AND CSIRO REPORT](#) *An assessment of the impact of climate change on the nature and frequency of exceptional climatic event* is available at:

www.daff.gov.au/droughtpolicyreview or on freecall 1800 200 876.

FARMERS TELL OF DROUGHT DEVASTATION

More than one in five Australian farmers in drought-affected areas have had to pawn or sell something because of lack of money, a study reveals. And more than one-third say farm production is at its lowest level ever, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (9/7/08). The study, involving 8000 people in rural and regional Australia, is the biggest of its kind undertaken, was carried out late last year by investigators from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Australian National University, and La Trobe University.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/07/08/1215282835442.html>

MURRAY-DARLING 'GETTING WORSE'

The drought in the Murray-Darling Basin is getting worse with June inflows the lowest on record and autumn inflows only just above the record lows of 2007, says the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) latest Drought Update (10/7/08).

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik said inflows in June were 95 GL, lower than the previous record low of 106 GL June 2006. In June 2007 inflows were 220 GL. The long term average is 680 GL.

Inflows during autumn this year were 200 GL, just above the lowest on record of 195 GL in autumn 2007. The long term average is 806 GL

"This is very disappointing and the likelihood of upper Murray inflows being above average for the remainder of winter and spring is very low," Dr Craik said. "And until there is significant rain and run-off, the prospects for irrigation and the environment in 2008-09 remain grim. 2008-09 is shaping up to be a very tough year for water availability and there is likely to be continuing pressure on the riverine environment.

"The new water year is also likely to pose operational challenges with low river flows and varying weir pool levels. The most recent seasonal climate outlook issued by the Bureau of Meteorology shows a shift in the odds towards drier than average conditions in across the Murray-Darling Basin from July to September, including the high yielding catchments of the upper Murray and its tributaries."

LATEST DROUGHT UPDATE: www.mdbc.gov.au; **DETAILS:** Sam Leone on 0407 006 332.