

UNITY

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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

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

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A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES (UNity, UN AND UNAA Contacts) **UN COMMEMORATES TWO INTERNATIONAL ANNIVERSARIES**

Two UN anniversaries are being marked this week by special messages from the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon:

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE OZONE LAYER **September 16**

Market turmoil, economic downturns and talk of recession have historically spelt tough times for the environment. At such moments, safeguarding the planet has often been seen as a luxury, and as a burden on economic recovery and development. But the remarkable story of the ozone layer, whose preservation we celebrate today, shows such thinking for what it is: mere myth.

Decisive multilateral action on environmental threats and challenges can bring wide-ranging health, social and economic benefits. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which underpins our efforts to combat depletion of the earth's fragile protective shield, also contributes to combating climate change, since many of the chemicals controlled under the treaty have also emerged as ones that contribute to global warming. By phasing out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) - once common in products such as refrigerators -- and now deciding to accelerate a freeze and phase-out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), the treaty has provided two benefits at once. I hope governments will look at such results and feel empowered to act across a wide range of environmental challenges, and not only in prosperous times. Such action should include exploring more fully the natural synergies that can occur among our various multilateral environmental agreements.

Next year in Copenhagen, Governments will gather for a crucial meeting on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Our goal must be a decisive new agreement that sets the world on track to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and that provides the funding needed for vulnerable countries to adapt to the impact of climate change. Such an agreement would not only represent progress on one of the greatest challenges of our time, but is also likely to help tackle urban air pollution, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity and other dangers.

After decades of chemical attack, it may take another 50 years or so for the ozone layer to recover fully. As the Montreal Protocol has taught us, when we degrade our environment too far, nursing it back to health tends to be a long journey, not a quick fix. But the overarching lesson of the protocol is that by acting on one challenge, we also act on many others. Continued progress, and the possibility of new breakthroughs from Copenhagen and other fora, would also make significant contributions to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. On this International Day, let us pledge to seize more such multi-faceted opportunities, and do our utmost to create tomorrow's 'green economy' today.

– Ban Ki-moon

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE **September 21**

This year, the International Day of Peace takes on special meaning.

This is the year we also mark the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We know that human rights are essential to peace. Yet too many people around the world still have their rights violated -- especially during and after armed conflict. That is why we must ensure that the rights in the declaration are a living reality -- that they are known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. It is often those who most need their human rights protected, who also need to be informed that the declaration exists -- and that it exists for them.

At the same time, we face a development emergency. This year, we pass the midpoint in the race to reach the Millennium Development Goals -- the common vision agreed by leaders of all countries for building a better world in the 21st century. Reaching these goals is also

essential to peace. Yet many countries in Africa are not on track to reach a single one of the goals by the deadline of 2015. That is why, just after the International Day of Peace, governments, civil society and business will meet at the United Nations to forge a broad coalition and try to bridge the gap.

There is so much to unite around on this International Day of Peace. To mobilise people around the world, the UN is launching a text messaging campaign. My message reads: "On 21 September, the International Day of Peace, I call on world leaders and peoples around the world to join forces against conflict, poverty and hunger, and for all human rights for all."

Together, let us send a powerful signal for peace that will be read, heard and felt around the world.
– **Ban Ki-moon**

UN LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO TEXT MESSAGE FOR PEACE

The United Nations has launched (2/9/08) a text messaging for peace campaign, urging cell phone users in the United States to compose peace messages to be published on a website and delivered to world leaders gathered for the General Assembly later this month.

One of the events promoting the International Day of Peace, on September 21 to observe "a day of ceasefire and non-violence", encourages US cell phone users to send 160-character text messages starting with the word 'PEACE' to phone number 69866.

The UN Department of Public information will collect the texts on a website :www.peaceday2008.org as well as send the messages to dignitaries attending the UN General Assembly on September 23.

"I call on world leaders and peoples around the world to join forces against conflict, poverty and hunger, and for all human rights for all," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a message on August 29. Together let us send a powerful signal for peace that will be read, heard and felt around the world," he said.

The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by the General Assembly, and this year the Secretary-General will ring the Japanese Peace Bell at UN Headquarters on September 19 at noon to signal a minute of silence.

Attending the ceremony in New York will be Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, Michael Douglas, Jane Goodall and Midori Goto, who are all UN Messengers of Peace. After the ceremony, students from schools around New York will hold a video conference with their counterparts in Sudan, Afghanistan and Liberia.

PARAGUAY PLANS REVERSE ON TAIWAN

Paraguay will reverse its historic support for Taiwan at the upcoming United Nations General Assembly, and also is reconsidering its relations with communist regimes.

President Fernando Lugo said his government wants to maintain diplomatic relations with all countries of similar interests, the UN Wire News reported (2/9/08).

"Paraguay's foreign policy will be independent under my government and will not accept conditions," Lugo said on Sunday.

Paraguay, the last South American country to recognise Taiwan, has supported the island since 1957, voting every year in support of resolutions to admit Taiwan to the assembly. Nations that recognise Taiwan don't have diplomatic relations with communist China, which considers Taiwan as a renegade province.

But Lugo's election last April ended 61 years of one-party, conservative rule under which Paraguay distanced itself from communist countries. The leftist president, who was inaugurated on August 15, said he wants to establish relations with China, which has boosted its diplomatic and trade ties with Latin America in recent years. Lugo also said he is considering an invitation to visit Cuba from former President Fidel Castro.

GENDER INEQUALITY RENDERS AID INEFFECTIVE, UN AGENCY SAYS

Governments and aid donor partners need to make greater efforts in tackling gender inequality if they are to successfully combat global poverty, the United Nations and the European Commission (EC) stressed at a high-level forum in Accra, Ghana (2/9/08).

“Over a billion women worldwide continue to be trapped in poverty,” the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Director, Inés Alberdi, told the 3rd High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

“Where women can’t thrive, national development strategies and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals [MDG] are in jeopardy. There can be no aid effectiveness without a focus on gender equality,” she said.

Including women’s ministries and gender equality advocates in national development and aid delivery planning increases the effectiveness of aid assistance, according to UNIFEM, the EC and the UN International Training Centre of the International Labour Organisation (ITC/ILO).

Gender-responsive budgeting, which UNIFEM has supported in some 40 countries, at times with the EC, has been effective in ensuring aid resources benefit women’s development needs.

“Today, we know how important the role of women is in society, to health, nutrition and education of children, to economic growth and the development of a country,” said the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel.

“[This] Forum on Aid Effectiveness offers a unique opportunity for governments and donors to come together and commit to accelerate achievements in gender equality.”

The EC/UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace program also urged governments and donors to further ensure that gender equality advocates are part of the entire development planning, programing, budgeting and monitoring process.

REPORT: www.un.org/news

UN TO UNDERTAKE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY REVIEW FOR IRAQ

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) announced that it will work with the Iraqi Government to map out a strategy for using science, technology and innovation to reconstruct its economy and accelerate its development (29/9/08).

The parties plan on performing a science, technology and innovation policy review (STIP) with a view to helping Iraq successfully function in a knowledge-based, globalised economy, UNCTAD said in a press release.

While Iraq’s efforts in science, technology and innovation were once among the best in the region, its intellectual infrastructure has been decimated in more recent years.

UNCTAD report estimates have put 80 per cent of the country’s universities and research institutions are not fully operational, and large numbers of Iraqi engineers and scientists have left the country.

The STIP will be prepared by experts working under the direction of UNCTAD and in partnership with government officials, private-sector interests, academics and researchers.

The major goal of the STIP is to help Iraq ensure that its science, technology and innovation programs become an instrument for supporting the reconstruction of Iraq, including assisting the government to stimulate the return of Iraqi scientists and engineers, UNCTAD said.

REPORT: www.un.org/news

NEW LAWS CHILL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A highly critical UN report has accused the British Government of creating laws that chill freedom of expression in the UK, the London Guardian reported (15/8/09). The government’s use of the Official Secrets Act to prevent issues of public interest being published is also

condemned in an intervention from the UN which warns that public servants are being gagged even where national security is not at risk.

The criticisms are made as part of analysis of a report which the UK is required to submit to the UN every three years, appraising human rights in its jurisdiction.

Among the problems identified, the UN says:

Terrorism Act 2006 provisions covering encouragement of terrorism are too broad and vague, and should be amended so that their application does not lead to "a disproportionate interference with freedom of expression".

Libel laws should be reformed to end so-called "libel tourism", whereby wealthy foreigners have gone to the high court to sue over articles that would not warrant action in their own country.

Powers under the Official Secrets Act have been "exercised to frustrate former employees of the crown from bringing into the public domain issues of genuine public interest, and can be exercised to prevent the media from publishing such matters".

The analysis committee also warns that, in the age of the internet, Britain's unduly restrictive libel laws create the danger of affecting freedom of expression worldwide, contrary to a UN covenant on civil and political rights which guarantees the right to freedom of speech and to exchange ideas and information "regardless of borders".

PILLAY BEGINS WORK AS HEAD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Navanethem Pillay has begun duties as the top UN human rights official, taking over a growing office that now has 1,000 staff working in 50 countries. Ms Pillay, a renowned jurist from South Africa, was appointed the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in July by the General Assembly. She became the fifth High Commissioner since the office was created in 1993.

Since 2003, Ms Pillay has served as judge on the International Criminal Court (ICC). Based in The Hague, Netherlands, it is the first permanent independent court set up to try cases of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

A fervent supporter of women's rights, Ms Pillay was one of the co-founders of the international non-governmental organisation Equality Now, which campaigns for women's rights. She has also been involved on issues relating to children, detainees, victims of torture, and of domestic violence as well as a range of other economic, social and cultural rights. She succeeds Louise Arbour, of Canada, who completed her term on June 30.

REPORT: www.un.org/news

AUSTRALIAN TO HEAD WORLD MIGRATION REPORT

An Australian has been appointed to head the 50-strong Human Development Report Office, part of the UN Development Program, in New York. She will be responsible for compiling and editing the major 2009 UN report on worldwide migration, due out late next year.

Dr Jeni Klugman has had a diverse career at the World Bank since 1992 as an economist, focusing in particular on Africa, Europe and Asia. Her most recent position was as Lead for Ethiopia and Sudan, where she led the Sudan Joint Assessment Mission. She has also completed a number of consultancies, including with UNICEF, the ADB in Manila, the World Institute Development Economic Research at UNU (WIDER), and with the Human Development Report Office in UNDP in New York.

Dr Klugman holds a PhD in Economics from the Australian National University. She also has an MSc in Development Economics, a graduate law degree from Oxford University, and an Economics/Law degree from Sydney University. She is the daughter of CLA President, Dr Kristine Klugman.

PROFESSOR NOMINATED FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Australia has nominated Professor Ron McCallum for election to the international committee to monitor implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Australia, as one of the first countries to become a party to this important human rights treaty, is eligible to nominate a candidate for the committee election which will be held in New York on November 3, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes said (4/9/08).

"Professor McCallum is an eminent Australian and I am fortunate to have had him as a friend and mentor," said Commissioner Innes. "His achievements in the law, culminating in his term as Dean of the Law School at Sydney University, plus his lived experience of disability, provide him with excellent qualifications for this role."

Commissioner Innes said that Australian government and non-government representatives had made outstanding contributions to the promotion of human rights for people with disability through the international system. Professor McCallum, if elected, would take that contribution to new levels.

UN STAFF DIE IN CONGO AIR CRASH

An aircraft carrying humanitarian supplies with 17 people on board, including seven UN staff, crashed into a mountain near Bukavu, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UN confirmed. The search for passengers continued on Thursday.

The aircraft was en route from Kisangani to Bukavu when it crashed into a mountain about 15 km north-east of Bukavu Airport while beginning its landing approach in bad weather, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe said.

The aircraft was operated by Aid Serv, a US-based company providing air transport for the international humanitarian community.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced his deep sadness at the news of the crash, stating that his thoughts are with the families and colleagues of those UN and non-governmental organisation (NGO) aid workers, Congolese officials and crew who were on board the aircraft.

In a **statement**, Mr Ban expressed his gratitude to all UN staff and international aid workers in the DRC "who continue to work tirelessly under difficult conditions to support the Congolese people in their efforts to consolidate peace in their country."

A team from the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, known as MONUC, has located the wreckage. There will be an investigation into the cause of the crash.

REPORT: www.un.org/news

MELBOURNE DECLARED CITY OF LITERATURE: UN

Melbourne has been declared a City of Literature by the UN cultural agency, joining a global network of cities set up to promote their cultural, social and economic development in fields ranging from gastronomy to music to folk art).

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) announced (29/8/08) that Melbourne had been selected as the twelfth member of the Creative Cities Network, which was founded in 2004, in recognition of its rich literary culture and history and its pool of creative talent. The announcement coincided with the annual Melbourne Writers' Festival.

"Melbourne demonstrates the important role literature plays in the overall development of the city, through various multilingual editorial initiatives, the active development of related industries and the quality of educational programs and public events reaching out to different audiences, reflecting the cultural diversity of local communities," UNESCO said in its evaluation of the city's bid to join the network. **DETAILS:** www.un.org/news

30TH ANNIVERSARY MEDIA PEACE AWARDS

Nominations OPEN

The United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Awards were established in 1979, and recognise those in the media whose work highlights and champions humanitarian and social justice issues.

This year, 2008, marks the 30th anniversary of these prestigious awards, the pre-eminent national awards program for media excellence in issues of peace.

Awards are presented in five major categories:

Best Print (News, Feature)
Best Television (News, Current Affairs & Feature)
Best Radio
Best Photojournalism
Best Online

And in five special categories:

Promotion of Aboriginal Reconciliation
Promotion of Multicultural Issues
Increasing Understanding and Awareness of Children's Rights and Issues
Promotion of Positive Images of the Older Person
Increasing Awareness and Understanding of Women's Rights and Issues

DETAILS: <http://www.unaavictoria.org.au/pages/awards-program/media-peace-awards/nomination-forms.php>; office@unaavictoria.org.au

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>.

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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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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

GARNAUT CARBON TARGET UNDER FIRE

Australia's climate change adviser Professor Ross Garnaut has been criticised for recommending a soft pollution reduction target, the ABC reported (5/9/08).

Professor Garnaut called for a 10 per cent cut of Australia's 2000 pollution levels by 2020, conditional on the next international global agreement. He admitted that he would prefer a cut of 25 per cent but said that it would not be achievable.

Steve Campbell of Greenpeace Australia Pacific says Professor Garnaut's 10 per cent target will sign the death warrant of the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and the Murray Darling river system. He is calling for a 40 per cent reduction by 2020.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/05/2356828.htm>

GARNAUT REPORT:

The Supplementary Draft Report Targets and trajectories was released on 5 September 2008 at the National Press Club in Canberra. [Download the transcript \(PDF, 94kb\)](#)

BAN URGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO MOVE ON CLIMATE DEAL

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said on Sunday countries negotiating to create a post-Kyoto Treaty deal should not wait until the end of 2009 but seek to find agreement at an upcoming December meeting. "It is my sincere hope that by the end of this year in Poznan parties to the climate change convention will have achieved a better understanding of a shared vision for long-term cooperative action," he said. [Environmental News Network/Reuters](#) (31/8/08).

DISASTERS AMPLIFY NEED FOR URGENT ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: UN

The destruction wreaked by Hurricane Gustav in the past week and the uprooting of some two million Indians by the worst flood in five decades has reinforced the need for countries to reach agreement on a successor pact to the Kyoto Protocol, the head of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) said (2/9/08).

These events "underline the increasing vulnerability of humanity to natural disasters – vulnerability that is set to rise under the scientific scenarios if climate change is left unchecked," Achim Steiner said in a **statement**.

This year is already proving to be a significant year, disaster-wise, according to Munich Re, one of the world's top insurance companies. At the halfway mark of 2008, some 400 natural disasters – including Cyclone Nargis that struck Myanmar in May – have reaped damages in excess of \$80 billion.

Although the devastating May earthquake in China which claimed some 70,000 people and left almost 5 million homeless cannot be attributed to global warming, many of this year's other disasters "are in line with the scientific predictions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)," Mr Steiner said. Less than 500 days remained before nations converged in Copenhagen, Denmark, to wrap up negotiations on greenhouse gas emissions.

"Nothing less than firm, legally binding commitments to significantly reduce pollution linked with the burning of fossil fuels will suffice alongside increased funding to climate-proof vulnerable economies and communities," said UNEP's Executive Director.

He also warned of other climate-related problems of urgent concern, such as the melting of glaciers in mountain ranges around the world and sea level rises threatening to submerge small island states.

"The current calamities facing the planet, from the serious threat of famine in Ethiopia to the misery and loss of life in India and the disruptions to the people of New Orleans, underline the kind of economic and human suffering the globe is facing within the coming years." But he voiced optimism that the costs of taking action – less than one per cent of global GDP, according to the IPCC – will not overburden the planet.

The Nobel Peace Prize co-winning Panel celebrated its 20th anniversary on August 31, and he praised the IPCC for its numerous contributions to environmental science since its conception.

"Over 20 years, thousands of scientists have selflessly come together to periodically sift, to weigh and to validate the scientific evidence on the links between rising greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the global climate," he told the body's 29th session in Geneva. The IPCC was established in 1988 by the UN World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and UNEP to help the world better understand the phenomenon of climate change.

CLIMATE FORECASTS CRUCIAL FOR WATER AND POVERTY SITUATION: UN

The chief of the UN meteorological agency called for weather forecasts to play a greater role in planning for economic development and poverty reduction because of the impact climate change has on water resources (2/9/08).

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), told the World Water Congress that the agricultural, energy, tourism and health sectors are among those most affected by the impact of climate change due to drought, deterioration in water quality, increased run-off and an increase in the salinisation of ground water as a result of rising sea levels.

"Mainstreaming climate change in decision-making processes will therefore be central to all development and poverty alleviation efforts," he told a meeting in Montpellier, France.

Mr Jarraud said six of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to water resource management, and that severe flooding, drought and cyclones caused by climate change seriously obstructed efforts to meet the MDGs by 2015.

WMO has launched an appeal for funding to set up hydrological information systems that can provide timely, accurate and comprehensive water resources information and support economic development through better land and water resource strategy planning.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27902&Cr=climate&Cr1=>

MONEY IS NO OBJECT IN BATTLE TO SAVE PLANET

A major survey of Australians' views on climate change has found an overwhelming majority think it is happening and they're prepared to pay to address it, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (31/8/08).

The study by University of Technology Sydney found Australians wanted to see cuts in the nation's greenhouse gas emissions irrespective of the actions of other countries. Researchers quizzed 768 people, who were chosen randomly but with a method to ensure the sample was reflective of the Australian population.

"The bottom line from this study is that Australians think now is the time to adopt a climate change program that has some real teeth," visiting economics professor at UTS Richard Carson said.

The study, entitled 'Survey on Controlling Greenhouse Gases', was conducted by the UTS Centre for the Study of Choice. Professor Carson is a Professor of Economics at the University of California and is a Visiting Distinguished Professor at the UTS.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/08/30/1219516797991.html>

THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL RIVERSYMPIOSIUM

September 1/4 at Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The 11th International Riversymposium is exploring the challenges associated with the increased incidence of flooding and drought expected with climate change.

The key areas addressed are:

Climate change and rivers - building climate resilience into rivers

Drought management and planning - water management with drying dams

Floodplain rivers – flood mitigation and maintaining ecological values

Preparing our urban waterways

Maintaining food production

DETAILS: [2008 Topic Briefing](#)

Regular symposium features include Environmental flows and the trials of transboundary rivers.

New symposium features include:

Water sensitive urban design

Responsible mining - sustaining rivers and communities

Manufactured water.

DETAILS: <http://www.riversymposium.com/>

GEOSCIENCE AUSTRALIA AT CANBERRA HEARING

The House of Representatives Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts Committee was scheduled to hear from Geoscience Australia at a public hearing in Canberra on September 4 as part of its inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on Australia's coastal zone.

"Geoscience Australia is Australia's national geoscience research and information agency, and for many years has played an important role in assisting State and Commonwealth environmental and disaster managers by providing fundamental geoscientific data, information and advice related to coastal issues," Committee Chairperson Jennie George said.

"The agency's mission is to use geoscientific research and information for the economic, social and environmental benefit of Australia. It can assist the committee in developing its understanding of the vulnerability of our coastal environment to natural hazards, including the threat posed by climate change, and can provide technical advice on a variety of issues in environmental management of the coast and natural hazard/risk management."

The terms of reference provide for the committee to inquire into climate change and environmental pressures experienced by Australian coastal areas. The inquiry has particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources
- the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities
- governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

DETAILS: <http://www.apf.gov.au/ccwea>.

BACKGROUND: Secretariat on 02 6277 4580; ccwea.reps@apf.gov.au.

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

UN URGES IRAN NOT TO IMPOSE DEATH PENALTY ON JUVENILES

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has urged Iran not to impose the death penalty on juvenile offenders, following reports that two minors were recently put to death, in violation of the country's obligations under international law (2/9/08).

Reza Hedjazi is believed to have been executed on August 19 and Behnam Zaare on August 26. They are reported to have been 15 and 16, respectively, when they committed their crimes.

"These executions appear to be in clear violation of international law which contains an absolute prohibition of the death penalty for juvenile offenders," OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville said, pointing out that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which Iran has ratified, prohibit the death penalty for crimes committed by people below the age of 18.

OHCHR is also concerned that two other juvenile offenders, Mohammad Fadaaee and Amir Amrollahi, also face an imminent risk of execution.

"We urge the Government of Iran to stay the executions of both of them in strict compliance with its international human rights obligations, and not to impose the death penalty for juvenile offenders in the future," said Mr Colville. OHCHR is also concerned over reports of a recent increase in the number of executions in Iran, noting that more than 220 people, including six juvenile offenders, are believed to have been executed this year.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27894&Cr=iran&Cr1=>

PARENTS WANT TO MEET 'KIDNAPPED' GIRL

A lawyer for the Indian parents of a girl, allegedly stolen by child traffickers and unwittingly adopted in Australia, were seeking a meeting with the girl, the Australian reported (3/9/08).

The lawyer said the girl, now aged nine, was kidnapped by people in a moving vehicle while playing on the street as a two-year-old, before her mother's eyes. The parents learned the child had been adopted by a Queensland couple from their local police.

REPORT: <http://au.news.yahoo.com/a/-/latest/4986541/indian-child-theft-victims-meeting>

PAKISTAN INVESTIGATES 'HONOUR' KILLINGS OF FIVE WOMEN

Pakistan has opened an investigation into the killings of five women who tried to choose their own husbands, after a provincial lawmaker defended their deaths as a "centuries-old tradition", the Sydney Morning Herald reported (2/9/08).

The women, three of whom were teenagers, were shot, thrown into a ditch and buried alive more than a month ago in what authorities have said they suspect were "honour killings". Authorities say they have arrested three relatives of the women.

The killings - which apparently occurred after the women defied tribal elders and asked a civil court to marry at least three of them - were raised in parliament on Friday.

"These are centuries-old traditions and I will continue to defend them," Israr Ullah Zehri, who represents the province where the women died, told the chamber on Saturday. His remarks - even more than the killings themselves - outraged his fellow lawmakers and spurred protests as well as promises of an investigation.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/shot-then-buried-alive-in-honour-killings/2008/09/02/1220121169879.html>

MAHBOBA ASKS AUSTRALIANS TO BACK HER MAHBOBA'S PROMISE

At the recent national conference of the United Nations Association of Australia in Brisbane those present heard of the work of Mahboba's Promise from Mahboba Rawa herself. She also screened the Australian Story documentary about her and the Mahboba's Promise.

She writes: "The situation in Afghanistan today is heartbreaking. Prices of food and other necessities have shot up and the average person who was barely scraping by is now facing starvation. The level of poverty is so extreme that over half of the children suffer chronic malnutrition. Decades of war have destroyed the fabric of society, widows and orphans work very hard trying to survive.

"Every day more desperate people are coming to us and we can't turn them away. A pregnant woman with four small children turned up just this week, her husband died suddenly and she had nowhere to turn - it is impossible to say "No" to her. To help as many people as we want to help we need more resources, more money and more support.

"Our centre, Hope House, is one example of our high standards of development. Hope House is a safe, warm and healthy environment which takes in orphans and widows and puts them back on their feet. We encourage self sufficiency and facilitate emotional and physical healing and the training in marketable skills.

"We have many other innovative and sustainable projects designed to help the people of Afghanistan not just today but for the future and at every level of society. Please investigate the project section of our website":

<http://www.plugins.com.au/frontend/content.cfm?id=1613&menulink=468&subid=0>

- Mahboba Rawi

DR HANEEF DELIGHTED TO BE CLEARED

More than a year after a terrorism charge against him was dropped and more than \$8 million later, the Australian Federal Police have finally confirmed they have cleared the Indian doctor Mohamed Haneef as a suspect in last year's terrorism attack on Glasgow airport, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (30/8/08).

In a short statement, the AFP confirmed it had informed Dr Haneef's solicitor, Rod Hodgson, the federal Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, and the Home Affairs Minister, Bob Debus, that Dr Haneef was "no longer a person of interest".

"The AFP has concluded its active inquiries, although some long-standing overseas inquiries are yet to be fully resolved," the statement said. "At the present time, there is insufficient evidence to institute proceedings against Dr Haneef for any criminal offence".

On the ABC on Monday Dr Haneef's lawyer Rod Hodgson said Dr Haneef was delighted by the announcement he had no case to answer and would seek an apology and compensation once the Clarke inquiry was completed at the end of the month.

Dr Haneef, a registrar at a Gold Coast hospital, was arrested at Brisbane Airport on July 2 last year as he tried to leave Australia on a one-way ticket to India after Kafeel Ahmed, the brother of his second cousin, Sabeel Ahmed, drove a burning Jeep packed with gas cylinders into Glasgow airport on June 30.

He was granted bail by a Brisbane magistrate on July 16. Just hours later the then immigration minister, Kevin Andrews, cancelled Dr Haneef's 457 work visa, ensuring he remained in detention. Dr Haneef later returned to India.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/08/29/1219516736197.html>

The Australian Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, should stand down pending the outcome of the Clarke Inquiry into the handling of the Haneef case, the Australian Lawyers Alliance said, according to the newspaper (1/9/08).

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/08/31/1220121048794.html>

O'GORMAN DECRIES 'MICKEY MOUSE' HANEEF INQUIRY

The Australian Council for Civil Liberties says the inquiry into the case of Dr Mohamed Haneef should have the powers of a Royal Commission, the ABC reported (31/8/08). Retired Supreme Court Justice John Clarke is conducting the inquiry.

Council's president Terry O'Gorman has described the inquiry as a "Mickey Mouse" inquiry.
REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/08/31/2351033.htm>

FORMER DETAINEE CHILDREN STILL NEED SUPPORT: GREENS

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young urged the Rudd Government to inquire into the ongoing effects Australia's immigration policy has had on over 2,000 former imprisoned children and their families (3/9/08).

"Even though children are now released from detention, the psychological effects of the incarceration can go on," she said. "It's important that Australia continues to be aware of the price paid by children in detention and investigate how to make amends."

Senator Hanson-Young asked Immigration Minister Evans in the Senate whether there would be any substantial support for the over 2000 children who had been detained for an average of 20 months from 1992 to 2005 in Australian immigration detention centres.

"His answer that Australia should be looking into the future, not backwards, shows a minister washing his hands of the ongoing psychological effects of the detention upon children," she said.

"The fact is that the current Inquiry into immigration policy does not adequately look at the continuing psychological effects on children - and therefore needs to be greatly expanded.

"A Royal Commission, or at the very least, extending the Terms of Reference of the current Inquiry into immigration detention to look into the psychological effects of detention on children, would assist in restoring Australia's commitment to refugees under our international obligations."

Senator Hanson-Young said she recognised the work of the Rudd Government in changing the policy of mandatory detention, but said that current parliamentarians "carry a responsibility to assist people affected by their time spent locked up" in detention centres in past years. **DETAILS:** Gemma Clark on 0427 604 760.

PIMS ON TAP IN QUEENSLAND

Queensland police and anti-corruption operatives can now extend their telephone tapping, after the Queensland Government did a deal with the Federal Government, CLArion the newsletter of Civil Liberties Australia reports (1/9/08).

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has agreed to amend the Commonwealth's legislation to allow Queensland's Public Interest Monitor (PIM) to oversee telephone tapping, it says. Oversight of the process had held up the intelligence-sharing arrangement in the Queensland jurisdiction, with the Australian Government not wanting a precedent that secret tapping could be second-guessed by an independent observer.

Now that Queensland has an external monitoring process to ensure telephone tapping is only used in appropriate circumstances, Civil Liberties Australia (CLA) believes each state and territory should have the same external checks-and-balances mechanism, or there should be a federal one.

"(The PIM) ensures that an appropriate balance between law enforcement and privacy is maintained in the application process," Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said. CLA agrees with her. **REPORT:** <http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24254213-3102,00.html>; Bill Rowlings, CEO, Civil Liberties Australia; www.cla.asn.au; 0408 697 971; <mailto:secretary@cla.asn.au>.

I'LL BE KILLED IN LEBANON, SAYS GUARD

The former bodyguard of a Lebanese president is reported to have said he will be killed if the Australian government forces him to return to Lebanon.

The Sun-Herald (31/8/08) reported Naji Mazloum, who has lived as a refugee in Melbourne's western suburbs since 2001, was to be deported to Lebanon this week unless the Federal Government granted a last-minute reprieve. Mr Mazloum was once a vocal member of the Lebanese Liberal party, and says he will be murdered by political opponents if sent back.
REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24269934-12377,00.html>

DETAINEES IN COMMUNITY 'POSE LITTLE RISK'

The positive impact of a shift to community and alternative forms of immigration detention was due to be the subject of discussions at a public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on September 3. The hearing is part of the committee's inquiry into immigration detention future policies and practices in Australia.

The Immigration Detention Advisory Group (IDAG) was expected to describe the benefits of community and alternative forms of detention. The group noted there was a perception that "releasing people from detention into the Australian community creates significant risks for the community at large". However, IDAG stated that "the facts indicate otherwise."

The advisory group said it knew of no case in which a person has escaped from a detention centre or has absconded from other forms of detention and created any major problems for the community at large.

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

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

Secretariat on 02 6277 4560; jscm@aph.gov.au

MUSLIM PRESIDENT CALLS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS IN CHINA

The President of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Ikebal Patel, has called on China to deal fairly with all its people.

"China has moved a long way forward since the Mao era, when all forms of religious identification was destroyed; however, persecution and injustice is, unfortunately, still prevalent," he said.

A member of Civil Liberties Australia, Mr Patel said that estimates of the number of Muslims in China varied, and ranged between 20 and 130 million, most of whom live in western China. There are an estimated 30,000 mosques.

China's treatment of the Tibetan uprising outraged the West, but the plight of the Uighurs was also an issue with the Chinese Government. "The suffering of the Uighurs receives little attention," he said. "Beijing defends the suppression of the Muslim minority as fighting terrorism. I urge the Chinese Government to uphold basic human rights of all its citizens, so that a Chinese citizen is valued as a human being regardless of their creed, colour or affiliation," he said.

MI5 MISLED MPS OVER BRITON'S SECRET RENDITION, COURT TOLD

MI5 misled British MPs about what it knew of the whereabouts of Binyam Mohamed, a British resident who says he was tortured before being secretly rendered to Guantánamo Bay, the British High Court have been told.

Lawyers for Mohamed were demanding release of information held by the government's which, they say, shows he was subject to extraordinary rendition, held incommunicado, and tortured. The government argued that disclosing the information would jeopardise Britain's diplomatic and intelligence relationship with the US.

The High Court found that MI5 participated in the unlawful interrogation of Mr Mohamed. The judgment raises serious questions about the conduct of Britain's security and intelligence agencies, and contains implications for Australia: Mamdouh Habib made similar allegations that Australians were present when he was tortured.

REPORT: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/aug/22/uksecurity.guantanamo>

IRAN HALTED STONING EXECUTIONS

Iran has suspended stoning people to death as a judicial sentence. Stoning has been, until now, the official penalty for adultery: it usually sees the condemned person buried up their neck and then stoned - big enough to cause serious pain but not large enough to lead to a quick death - thrown at them by a group of people.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/08/06/2325285.htm>

SEDITION LAWS STILL NEED REFORM

After Attorney-General Robert McClelland said he was committed to ensuring reforms to the legal system would remove hindrances to business and personal activity by minimising red tape, reducing costs and simplifying and modernising our laws, the Civil Liberties Australia (CLA) has reminded him about another major area of the law – sedition, saying that the Labor Party’s platform promise before the 2004 federal election was to get rid of the sedition laws.

CLA says it would be a simple, quick, easy, positive move for him to abolish the sedition laws before the end of 2008. “We have been doing the rounds of federal MPs, Labor and Liberal, and asking for them to bring pressure on the government to act quickly on the clear promise over removing sedition laws, says Bill Rowlings, CEO, Civil Liberties Australia, www.cla.asn.au; 0408 697 971; <mailto:secretary@cla.asn.au>).

PROTECTING WHISTLEBLOWERS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC SECTOR

The Commonwealth Ombudsman’s views on the establishment of a “Public Service Ombudsman” with responsibility for investigating public interest disclosures was to be one of many issues the House of Representatives Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee discussed with the Ombudsman at a public hearing in Canberra on September 4.

The hearing is part of an inquiry being conducted by the committee into whistle-blowing protections within the federal government public sector.

In Australia now, there are no uniform laws to protect whistleblowers. Some protections exist at both the federal and at the state and territory level. At the federal level, the Public Service Act 1999 provides protection for Australian Public Service (APS) employees making disclosures in certain circumstances, and a Commonwealth Government employee who “blows the whistle” is currently only protected in a narrow range of circumstances.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has indicated a long-held view that Ombudsman offices have a role to play in any whistleblower protection. The Commonwealth Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, was due to appear before the committee to discuss his position on some of the issues, challenges and best practices, surrounding whistle-blowing protections within the federal government public sector.

The committee is inquiring into and will report on a preferred model for legislation to protect public interest disclosures (whistle-blowing) within the Australian Government public sector, addressing:

the categories of people who could make protected disclosures

the types of disclosures that should be protected

the conditions that should apply to a person making a disclosure

the scope of statutory protection that should be available

procedures in relation to protected disclosures, and

the relationship between the Committee’s preferred model and existing Commonwealth laws.

BACKGROUND: www.aph.gov.au/laca or Secretariat on 02 6277 2358.

BETTER PROTECTION ‘NEEDED AGAINST GENDER DISCRIMINATION’

The current review of the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) is a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure a first-class national gender equality law to build a fairer and more equal Australia, federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick said (4/9/08).

Commenting on the Australian Human Rights Commission’s comprehensive submission to the Senate Inquiry into the SDA, she said progress in achieving substantive gender equality in Australia had stalled.

“The current Senate Inquiry is a significant law reform opportunity to bring the SDA into line with the changes in Australian society which have occurred since the Act was introduced in 1984.”

Ms Broderick said the submission called for a two-stage reform process over a three-year period.

“We can improve some of the deficiencies in the Act with reasonable haste and minimal inconvenience but a second stage inquiry is essential to completely assess how best to create equality laws that prohibit discrimination and promote gender equality,” she said.

Among more than 50 recommendations for immediate implementation is a move to better protect both women and men from discrimination based on family and carer responsibilities, a positive duty on employers to reasonably accommodate the needs of workers who are pregnant or have family or carer responsibilities, and a beefing up of protection against sexual harassment.

The submission also recommends expanded coverage of the SDA to include state instrumentalities, volunteers and students, as well as the immediate introduction of a three-year sunset clause on all permanent exemptions.

The Senate Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984 in eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality is due to report to the Australian Parliament by November 12.

SUBMISSION: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/2008/20080901_SDA.html

HREOC WILL NOW BE KNOWN AS AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has changed its name to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The new corporate image for the Australian Human Rights Commission is the first step towards ensuring that all Australian audiences know that Australia has an independent national institution with the responsibility to protect and promote human rights in Australia, the commission said this week. Its legal name will remain the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

DETAILS: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/89_08.html

The commission’s goals are outlined in its new vision and mission statements:

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/about/index.html>

MOVE ON SAME SEX LAWS WELCOMED

The introduction of legislation to remove discrimination against same-sex couples in Commonwealth laws was welcomed by Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes (4/9/08).

“This is historic legislation,” said Commissioner Innes. “The effect of this legislation is that same-sex couples and their children will have the same rights and responsibilities as all other Australian families.”

The legislation implements the recommendations of Same-Sex: Same Entitlements, the 2007 report of the Australian Human Rights Commission’s National Inquiry into Discrimination against People in Same-Sex Relationships: Financial and Work-Related Entitlements and Benefits, he said.

The removal of discrimination in areas such as workers’ compensation entitlements, taxation, social security, veterans’ entitlements, Medicare, aged care and migration would have a practical impact on the lives of thousands of Australians. This legislation also removed discrimination experienced by children of same-sex families.

D. PEACE & SECURITY

THAI PROTESTORS 'DOOMSDAY CULT': PM REFUSES TO RESIGN

Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej has refused to resign or call snap elections, and lashed the protesters besieging his offices for 10 days as a "doomsday cult," the ABC reported (5/9/08).

"I am not resigning, I will not dissolve parliament. I have to stay in order to preserve democracy and to protect the monarchy," he said in a radio address. Mr Samak summoned his cabinet for an emergency meeting and proposed holding a referendum to ask the public whether he should stay or go.

In an attack on the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), which is occupying the grounds of his Government House offices, Mr Samak accused them of trying to subvert Thailand's democracy.

The PAD - a group of royalists, businessmen and activists - wants to roll back many of Thailand's democratic gains by creating a new parliament in which only 30 per cent of seats would be elected. The PAD is like a radical doomsday cult, Mr Samak said.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/04/2355932.htm?section=world>

THAILAND DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY AS PROTESTS INTENSIFY

Thai authorities imposed a state of emergency on the capital Bangkok as anti-government protests continue to intensify. The move bans any meeting or gathering that might disturb public order and limits news reports or published materials that could affect stability, but protest leaders have vowed to continue their efforts. [The New York Times](#) (1/9/08).

PHILIPPINES: CIVILIANS THREATENED BY CONFLICT RESCUED

Intensifying conflict between the army and an armed group on Mindanao Island is worsening the lot of thousands of displaced civilians.

The ICRC's head of delegation in Manila, Felipe Donoso, reported that according to government sources, the largest displacement took place in North Cotabato Province, where over 130,000 people fled their homes just a few days after widespread fighting resumed on August 10. Many have been returning to their villages since, but about 50,000 remain in evacuation centres for fear of renewed clashes. Fighting also started in other southern provinces, temporarily displacing over 80,000 people.

On August 22, while fighting was taking place near villages in the Datu Piang municipality in Maguidanao Province, it was reported that hundreds of villagers had been trapped in the combat zone. Thanks to ICRC's long-standing presence in Mindanao and the trust gained, ICRC received the go-ahead from the armed forces and the armed group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, to escort over 900 civilians to safety.

In the first two weeks of fighting the ICRC provided one-week food rations for nearly 50,000 displaced people in Cotabato and Sarangani provinces, with the support of the Philippine National Red Cross. Around 11,000 people received essential items, such as tarpaulins, water containers and mosquito nets. ICRC teams also deployed water bladder tanks, pumps and pipes with the capacity to supply safe drinking water for up to 15,000 people.

In addition, the ICRC and Philippine National Red Cross teams assisted 23 war wounded people. In the Iligan area, three health clinics offering treatment to displaced people were provided with essential drugs and medical supplies.

DETAILS: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) SYDNEY SUPPORT OFFICE TO THE REGIONAL DELEGATION FOR THE PACIFIC on 61 2 9388 9039; sydney.syd@icrc.org

REPORT: http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/philippines-interview-280808?OpenDocument&style=custo_print

LEADERS BEGIN CYPRUS NEGOTIATIONS

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the launch of full-fledged negotiations between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities aimed at reunifying the island of Cyprus (3/9/08).

Mr Ban commended Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat "for their seriousness of purpose, sense of compromise and commitment to seeing the peace process through to a successful conclusion."

Mr Ban stressed that "the United Nations supports and encourages both parties as they take this historic step together, so as to reach a negotiated settlement to reunify the island for the benefit of all the people of Cyprus."

Mr. Ban's **message** was delivered by his Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alexander Downer, who issued his own statement at the launch wishing Mr Christofias and Mr Talat success during the negotiations.

Mr Downer said significant progress had already been made in the lead-up to the negotiations, including in the work of technical committees that had agreed on a number of measures designed to improve the daily lives of Cypriots.

In May, Mr Christofias and Mr Talat committed themselves in a statement to working towards "a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions."

The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (**UNFICYP**) has been in place on the island since 1964 after the outbreak of intercommunal violence. Its task is to prevent a recurrence of fighting, contributing to a return to normal conditions and the maintenance of law and order.

US HANDS OVER KEY IRAQ PROVINCE

The US military arranged to hand control of Anbar province, once the centre of Iraq's Sunni insurgency, to the Iraqi government, the BBC reported (1/9/08).

The province began a transformation in late 2006 as former insurgents turned against al-Qaeda and became US allies. More than a quarter of all US soldiers killed in Iraq have died in Anbar, which is Iraq's biggest province.

With Anbar's transfer Iraqi forces will control security in 11 of the country's 18 provinces. The BBC's Mike Sergeant in Baghdad says the handover represents a significant milestone for America in Iraq. **REPORT:** http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7591111.stm

COLOMBIA: ICRC PROVIDES OVER 4,400 PEOPLE WITH EMERGENCY AID

In the past few weeks, clashes between government forces and armed groups have had a serious impact on inhabitants of the Colombian departments of Cauca and Nariño. Over 4,400 people have either fled their homes or can no longer carry out their usual subsistence activities. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported (3/9/08) it had just completed an emergency distribution of 60 tonnes of food and hygiene items to these people.

In Cauca, more than 1,300 people from various villages have streamed into the town of López de Micay. Meanwhile, over 350 residents can no longer farm as it is too dangerous to venture into the fields. In Nariño, more than 1,000 people from the towns of Barbacoas, Satinga and Policarpa have been forced to abandon their land, and over 1,750 Policarpa residents have had to stop working, leaving them unable to provide for their families. Many of the displaced are women and children who are now sharing cramped quarters with local residents.

"The armed conflict in these areas is very worrying, both for the displaced and for other residents," said Serge Thierry, head of the ICRC's office in Cali. "Many people have no choice but to abandon their homes and, consequently, their sources of income."

DETAILS: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) SYDNEY SUPPORT OFFICE TO THE REGIONAL DELEGATION FOR THE PACIFIC on 61 2 9388 9039; sydney.sydney@icrc.org

REVIVED CUBAN LINK IRKS US

Amid rising tensions over Georgia, US officials are increasingly concerned that Russia is moving to rebuild one of the most dangerous features of the old Soviet Union's security structure - its alliance with Cuba, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (3/9/08). Moscow has been signalling it wants to restore a relationship with Havana that included not only economic ties, but military and intelligence co-operation.

The relationship brought the world to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when Russia secretly installed nuclear missiles on the island. It ended when a weakened, post-Soviet Russia finally closed a massive electronic intelligence complex in Lourdes near Havana in 2001.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/09/02/1220121234692.html>

GEORGIAN LEADER 'A POLITICAL CORPSE': MEDVEDEV

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev has lashed out at his Georgian counterpart, saying he no longer recognises Mikhail Saakashvili's authority, the ABC reported (3/9/08).

Mr Medvedev said Russia was open to any international initiative which remembered who started the aggression in the Caucasus. He said the Georgian regime had bankrupted itself, said Mr Saakashvili "no longer existed in his mind" and labelled him a "political corpse".

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/03/2353780.htm>

EU LEADERS SUSPEND TALKS

European Union leaders have agreed to suspend talks on a new partnership agreement with Moscow until Russian troops have withdrawn from Georgia, the BBC reported (1/9/08).

EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said it was clear it could not "continue as if nothing had happened", after an emergency summit in Brussels. The EU also condemned Russia's move to recognise the independence of Georgia's regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7592541.stm>

RUSSIA: 'RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT'

The Russian Government has argued that its military operations in Georgia were justified by the "responsibility to protect", the new approach to dealing with mass atrocity crimes embraced unanimously by the UN general assembly at the 2005 world summit, The Australian reported (2/9/08).

President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin have described Georgia's actions against the population in South Ossetia as genocide, while Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued that Russia's use of force was an exercise of the responsibility to protect, which applied not only "in the UN when people see some trouble in Africa" but also under the Russian Constitution when its citizens were at risk.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24278542-7583,00.html>

PAKISTAN SUSPENDS ATTACKS ON EXTREMISTS

Pakistan has suspended its attacks against extremists camped in the state's tribal mountainous regions. Although Pakistan declared that the operation was suspended in recognition of Ramadan, the move might have been predicated by domestic politics and the upcoming presidential election. [The Miami Herald/McClatchy News Service](#) (2/9/08).

HUGE RALLY AGAINST TAIWAN LEADER

Thousands of opposition supporters in Taiwan have taken part in a protest in Taipei as President Ma Ying-jeou marked his first 100 days in office, BBC News, reported (31/8/08). It was the first mass rally against Mr Ma since his inauguration, and also comes amid increased worries over his pro-China policies and the economy.

The protesters said he was moving too quickly to improve ties with Beijing.

China claims Taiwan as part of its territory, although they have been governed separately since 1949. **REPORT:** <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7589838.stm>

AIR RAID THAT KILLED 91 TO BE INVESTIGATED

The US has agreed to take part in a joint investigation into reports that a recent air raid in western Afghanistan killed more than 91 civilians.

US officials insist most of those killed by the strike, in the western region of Herat, were militants and that only five civilians died.

The investigation will be conducted jointly with the UN and the Afghan Government. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has been increasingly critical of the number of civilians dying in coalition air raids. Correspondents say Mr Karzai believes the anger felt by many Afghans towards foreign forces in Afghanistan may reduce support for his government.

Dan McNorton, a spokesman for the UN mission in Afghanistan, confirmed the investigation and said it would have to be broad-based.

"We believe this is a right way forward and we will be open and co-operative," he said. Brig Gen Richard Blanchette, chief NATO spokesman in Afghanistan, told the Associated Press that he hoped the investigation would unfold quickly.

"It is obviously a case where all three [the US, UN and Afghanistan] have received different bits of information and they need to reconcile this," he said.

REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7590303.stm

DIGGERS ADMIT TALIBAN HELD IN DOG PENS

Suspected Taliban militants arrested by Australian special forces in Afghanistan have been detained in "dog pens" in actions that have left Australian Muslim groups outraged and prompted a protest from the Afghan ambassador in Canberra, the Australian reported (2/9/08).

The empty dog pens were used to hold overnight four suspected Taliban insurgents who were arrested in a raid by special forces soldiers on April 29.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24279569-601,00.html>

AUSTRALIAN TROOPS 'MUST GET BETTER SUPPORT'

The Rudd government must give better back-up to Australian Defence Force personnel in Afghanistan, Australian Greens Leader Bob Brown said (2/9/08).

"The keeping of four Taliban prisoners, one aged 70, in dog cages overnight, in apparent breach of the Geneva conventions, points to a failure by the government to provide back-up to ensure adequate transfer and detention facilities. Our soldiers are doing a lot to maintain good relations with the people in Afghanistan and such events don't help," Senator Brown said. DETAILS: Ebony Bennett 0409 164 603.

WILPF CRITICISE ARMS MANUFACTURER EXHIBITION

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell, for Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, write: 'Like the RSL, our organisation would also like to see the date of the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition changed. We would like to see the date of the War Fair changed to "the 11th of never".'

'This is not simply a blunder on the part of the arms manufacturers and a poor choice of date - it is indeed an insult to the memory of all those who lost their lives in war and whom we honour on Remembrance Day. It is truly hard to believe that the arms manufacturers could be so negligent and disrespectful as to schedule the opening of their arms expo to coincide with an important day of remembrance. It is insensitive in the extreme.'

'But our organisation is also critical of our premier and of our Labor Government for encouraging the arms manufacturers to come to Adelaide to display their wares and for encouraging us in South Australia to become what Mr Rann calls the 'Defence State' - by which he means that we should seek job and economic security in our state through the manufacture of military hardware.'

'We South Australians have an important choice to make. We must choose between what Mr Rann is offering - the development of a state where the manufacture of weapons of war and the development of a 'defence' export industry supposedly brings us our economic security, or a state where we build our economic security based on industries that do no harm.

'We in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, like many others in South Australia, do not want 'defence' industries that bring death and suffering. We say 'Do no harm'! We invite all South Australians to join us in opposing the War Fair.'

E. HEALTH & MEANS

GAMES IN NEW SUBJECTS FOR FREERICE WEB PHENOMENON

The FreeRice web vocabulary phenomenon that has captured the imagination of millions of people around the world has now turned its attention to a range of new games encompassing art, maths, language and chemistry.

"FreeRice has shown that a simple click of a mouse can do so much to help a hungry world," said the UN World Food Program (WFP) Director of Communications, Nancy Roman (31/8/08). "For the user, it's fun, it's free, and it allows them to make a difference."

Since its launch in October 2007, FreeRice has been a runaway success, attracting a growing number of users to its ingenious vocabulary game that generates a donation of rice to the WFP for every correct answer submitted.

With the launch of new games on the site, players will now be able to test their knowledge of multiplication, world capital cities, chemical symbols, foreign languages and even the styles of famous painters. Every correct answer generates a donation of 20 grains of rice to WFP.

"These extra games will really push FreeRice to another level," said the website's creator, John Breen. Students and teachers from across the world loved the vocabulary game. Now, they had a chance to test their skills and knowledge in different and exciting new disciplines.

FreeRice peaked last year at around 500,000 a day and the site is still regularly used by around 40,000 people a daily. Over the ten months since its launch, it has generated more than 40 billion grains of rice in donations to WFP – enough to feed more than two million people for a day.

Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University (<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu>) has offered to provide servers to host the FreeRice site and to work with John Breen on developing new ideas and content. Until now, John Breen has provided server support for FreeRice using his own funds. Funding for the purchase of rice for WFP comes from private sector sponsors who pay to advertise on the FreeRice site.

FREERICE: (<http://www.freerice.com>)

DETAILS: Brenda Barton, Deputy Director Communications, WFP/Rome, on +39-06-65132602/ +39-3472582217 (ISDN line available); Caroline Hurford, WFP/London, on +44-20-72409001/ +44-7968-008474.

UN SAYS NORTH KOREA NEEDS HALF BILLION IN FOOD AID

Between now and November 2009, North Korea will need to receive \$503 million to stave off famine, the likes of which killed 1 million in the mid-1990s. North Korea depends on aid from China, South Korea and UN agencies to provide 20% of its grain requirements. [Reuters](#) (2/9/08).

WHO: IT'S NOT EXPENSIVE TO PREVENT REPEATED SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

The vast majority (85 per cent) of deaths due to suicide occur in low and middle-income countries, WHO Bulletin reported (1/9/08). While wealthy, industrialised countries provide sophisticated psychotherapeutic treatment, poorer countries have little to nothing to offer those who have survived suicide attempts,

New findings just published show, however, that poor countries can considerably improve prevention of repeated attempts at suicide. Providing an information session and supportive ongoing contact to people who attempted suicide, such as telephone calls, can significantly reduce these deaths, according to the study published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization, a leading public health journal.

"People who make attempts at suicide often end up in emergency rooms. But in low to middle-income countries, if there are no complications, patients are discharged after being treated for their injuries with no referral to mental health services," says author Fleischmann.

The study was conducted in Brazil, China India, Islamic Republic of Iran and Sri Lanka from January 2002 to October 2005.

STUDY: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/9/07-046995.pdf>

KEY ARTICLES: <http://www.who.int/bulletin/en/>

DETAILS: Fiona Fleck, Bulletin News Editor, on +41 22 791 1897; fleckf@who.int

CHILD MALNUTRITION CRISIS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE, SAY AID AGENCIES

Aid agencies which have been allowed to resume work in Zimbabwe have reported a dramatic increase in malnutrition in rural provinces which were at the heart of the recent election violence, even as President Robert Mugabe hands out cash to the country's medal-winning Olympians, the Independent reported (31/9/08).

The government announced last week that it would lift a five-month-old ban on aid work in rural communities, imposed after Mr Mugabe accused agencies of backing the opposition Movement for Democratic Change.

On Thursday, the Red Cross federation made an urgent appeal for almost \$27m (£15m), saying the food security situation was likely to be the worst on record because of rocketing inflation and Zimbabwe's shortage of foreign currency.

REPORT: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/child-malnutrition-crisis-in-rural-zimbabwe-say-aid-agencies-913935.html>

AFRICAN MINISTERS COMBINE TO DEFEND HEALTH FROM ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

Health and environment ministers in Africa have resolved to build a strategic health and environment alliance to reduce environmental threats to human health and well-being.

Following a gathering in Gabon, the ministers signed and adopted the Libreville Declaration which commits governments to take the required measures to stimulate the necessary policy, institutional and investment changes that should be effected to optimise synergies between health, environment and other relevant sectors (29/8/08).

"The signing of this landmark declaration," said Dr Luis G. Sambo, Regional Director of WHO Africa Regional Office, "is the first step towards saving the lives of millions of people from the harmful effects of changes in the environment. We will work together to promote strategic alliances between health and environment. I am delighted that we have managed to secure political commitment to catalyse institutional changes needed to improve the health and well being of communities in the region."

After deliberations on a range of issues, delegates were convinced that the root causes of global environmental degradation were embedded in social and economic problems such as pervasive poverty, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, inequity of distribution of wealth and the debt burden. These result in malaria, tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid, dracunculiasis, helminthiasis, schistosomiasis, asthma, bronchitis and heart diseases that are taking their toll on millions of people living in the region.

"The Libreville declaration is a milestone for Africa. Nowhere is the human health impact of environmental threats more urgent" said Dr Maria Neira, WHO's Director for Department of Public Health and Environment. "The challenge now is to ensure Africa moves onto the global environmental health agenda."

The declaration urges member states among other things to:

1. Update their national sub-regional and regional frameworks in order to address more effectively the interlinkages between health and environment through integration of these links in policies, strategies and national development plans;
2. Ensure integration of the agreed objectives in the areas of health and environment in national poverty reduction strategies;
3. Implement priority intersectoral programmes at all levels in health and environment, aimed at accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
4. Build national and regional capacities to address the linkages between environment and health through the establishment and strengthening of health and environment institutions.

Expressing his appreciation at the outcomes of this landmark Inter-Ministerial Conference, UNEP's Regional Director, Mounkaila Goumandakoye said: "For too long both health and environment have sought to cope with the downstream consequences of policies regarding environment, health and economic development that have been designed in parallel, not in concert. In valuing the inextricable links between human health and the sustainability of ecosystems along with the goods and services they provide, this historic conference in Africa reasserts that the work of the environment sector is an issue of human well being and that together health and environment in acting proactively are critical development partners in the achievement of global and national development objectives."

LIBREVILLE DECLARATION and information: <http://www.unep.org>; <http://www.afro.who.int>. WHO media information, press releases, fact sheets and statements: www.who.int.

UNICEF ANNOUNCES BOOST TO SCHOOL, HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN TOGO

The head of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced \$3 million of extra support for education, health and nutrition programs in Togo during her first visit to the West African country.

Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, unveiled the additional support at a meeting with Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe, the agency said in a press release (2/9/08). During the meeting with Mr Gnassingbe, Ms Veneman stressed the need to place Togo's children at the heart of national policy and planning.

She later visited a convent for followers of vodon – also known as voodoo – and met with the high priestess and a group of girls under her religious instruction. In Togo, girls as young as four enter convents for training, and many do not continue their education after their initiation period. A recent joint initiative involving UNICEF, the Togolese Government and local organisations aims to encourage those girls to attend school.

GAINS FOR LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN CONTINUE

Latin America and the Caribbean have posted positive economic gains for the sixth year in a row, despite the global downturn, with gross domestic product (GDP) rising nearly 5 per cent this year, according to the most recent estimates of the UN office in the region.

Economic growth for 2008 did not match the nearly 6 per cent expansion recorded last year, but GDP per capita is forecasted to increase by 3 per cent in the region for the fifth consecutive year, marking the first time this has happened in four decades.

The Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean 2007-2008, Macroeconomic policy and volatility, which was (released 28/8/08), also noted that unemployment has steadily fallen every year since 2003, decreasing from 8 per cent in 2007 to an estimated 7.5 per cent this year.

Also continuing to drop is the poverty rate, which has been slashed by over 9 per cent since 2002, propelled by economic growth, falling joblessness, higher quality employment and improved non-wage income, such as remittances.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (**ECLAC**) said that the region will not be immune to the current global market turmoil, but it will be better able to

weather the storm due to its economic strength. Thanks to GDP surpluses, the area's governments have been able to earmark more resources for public investment and social spending, as well as create bulwarks in case of economic turbulence in the future.

Additionally, the region's countries have substantially cut back their public debt, dropping from 36 per cent of GDP in 2006 to 33 per cent of GDP last year. However, the report cautioned that rising inflation rates, as well as soaring food and oil prices, could slow the area's stellar growth, which it predicted will continue next year, albeit at a lower pace of 4 per cent.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27858&Cr=economy&Cr1=>

LARGE PROTESTS IN MEXICO DEMAND ACTION ON DRUG VIOLENCE

Thousands gathered in large protests throughout Mexico over the weekend to call for President Felipe Calderón's administration to do more to stem the rising crime epidemic.

Mr Calderón has said that it is his government's success in thwarting drug smuggling and interrupting criminal organisations that has spawned more violence, but his logic is lost in the wake of gruesome beheadings and other violent murders. Early in his administration, the president deployed 25,000 military and federal officers across the country to stem the violence. [The Christian Science Monitor](#) (2/9/08).

F. MEDIA MATTERS

KREMLIN CRITIC 'KILLED BY POLICE'

Colleagues of a critic of Kremlin politics on Monday called for a massive protest of his killing by police in southern Russia's Ingushetia Province, UPI/ Washington Post reported (1/9/08).

Magomed Yevloyev, who ran a website on government corruption and police abuse, was shot in the head on Sunday in a police car taking him to a station for questioning, Colleagues of Yevloyev dismissed government contentions that he was shot while struggling for a gun held by an officer, the Post reported.

A posting on Mr Yevloyev's website, Ingushetiya.ru, called for a mass protest on Monday in Nazran, Ingushetia's main city and the scene earlier this year of violent clashes between anti-government protesters and security forces. Mr Yevloyev was seized on Sunday when he arrived in Ingushetia after spending several months in Moscow.

REPORT: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/09/01/Kremlin_critic_killed_by_police/UPI-93891220277702/

SRI LANKA: Four journalists in Sri Lanka have been accused by a government-owned and controlled newspaper of having links to the intelligence unit of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported (2/9/08).

The unsubstantiated allegations in the Sinhala language daily Dinamina on August 28 also claimed the journalists, who had worked for the now defunct newspaper Hiru, may have gained financially from their contacts with the LTTE, which is engaged in a long-running war with Sri Lankan government forces. Hiru, which stopped publishing in early 2005, was a Sinhala language weekly known for its editorial line advocating a political solution to the country's ethnic conflict.

According to the Free Media Movement (FMM) the allegations create a serious hazard for the named journalists and potentially pose a threat to their lives.

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

PHILIPPINES: Relatives and friends of four journalists in the Philippines have received menacing text messages claiming falsely that three of the journalists had been killed and the other seriously injured in an accident in Capiz, the IFJ reported (3/9/08).

According to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJ P), the message sent on August 31 said NUJ P Capiz chapter president John Heredia, Capiz Times editor Gerry

Pagharion and Capiz Chronicle publisher Edward Basilonia were declared dead at Capiz Emmanuel Hospital while Inquirer correspondent Felipe Celino was in a critical condition.

The four journalists issued a statement on September 1 denouncing the text message as false and a menacing act that was "uncalled for and malicious". All four had been reporting on the murder of another Capiz journalist, Martin Roxas, who was shot dead in Roxas City on August 7. The text message, from an unknown sender, was also sent to Roxas City dyOW station manager Cyril Simpas and the Governor of Capiz.

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

SEPTEMBER IFJ ASIA -PACIFIC E-BULLETIN

The September e-bulletin includes:

1. Two Journalists Murdered as NUJ P Marks 22 Years Defending Press Freedom
2. Fifth SAMSUN Meeting Will Reignite Cross-Border Solidarity
3. IFJ Calls on China to Extend Media Freedom After Olympic Games
4. Safety and Ethics High on the Agenda in Pakistan
5. Media for Democracy Handbook Launched for Afghanistan
6. Bitter Month for Sri Lanka Press Freedom Fighters
7. Stop Criminalising Defamation Campaign Setback at Indonesia Court Decision
8. Attacks Against Journalists Flare in Kashmir Region in India
9. Tensions Rise in Thailand ; Two Journalists Killed and TV station Stormed
10. IFJ Signs Joint Letter to UN to Release Burma Activists
11. Australian Journalists Strike Against Mass Redundancy
12. Australian Journalist Abducted in Somalia

[DETAILS](#): IFJ Asia -Pacific on +612 9333 0919; <http://asiapacific.ifj.org>; ifj@ifj-asia.org

SBS CALLS FOR MORE GOVERNMENT FUNDING

The head of SBS has called on the Federal Government to boost funding to the multi-lingual broadcaster by around \$70 million a year, the ABC reported (2/9/08). Shaun Brown said the funding boost was needed to address rising programming costs and growing demand for online content.

SBS received \$190 million in government funding this year, but Mr Brown says he is optimistic about an increase.

"When you consider that SBS has had no real increase in funds for many years now, more than most of us can count, and we currently operate on a government appropriation of about one fifth of the ABC's, to deliver more complex services on a national scale, we believe our ask is realistic," he said. He is hopeful that the Federal Government will recognise the importance of SBS in the Australian media.

30TH ANNIVERSARY MEDIA PEACE AWARDS Nominations OPEN

The United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Awards were established in 1979, and recognise those in the media whose work highlights and champions humanitarian and social justice issues.

This year, 2008, marks the 30th anniversary of these prestigious awards, the pre-eminent national awards program for media excellence in issues of peace.

Awards are presented in five major categories:

- Best Print (News, Feature)
- Best Television (News, Current Affairs & Feature)
- Best Radio
- Best Photojournalism
- Best Online

And in five special categories:

Promotion of Aboriginal Reconciliation
Promotion of Multicultural Issues
Increasing Understanding and Awareness of Children's Rights and Issues
Promotion of Positive Images of the Older Person
Increasing Awareness and Understanding of Women's Rights and Issues

For nomination forms, [please click here](#).

For nomination forms, [please click here](#) or

<http://www.unaavictoria.org.au/pages/awards-program/media-peace-awards/nomination-forms.php>

For entry criteria, [please click here](#).

For further information, please contact our office: office@unaavictoria.org.au

Media releases:

[Media Release: UNAA Media Peace Awards 2008 'Call For Nominations'](#)

» [Media Release: 'WANTED - Previous Winners of UNAA Media Peace Awards'](#)

» [Media Release: UNAA Media Peace Awards 2007 'Winners Announced'](#)

WHAT 14,500 JOURNALISTS COULD DO?

About 15 000 journalists have been involved in covering the US Democratic and Republican conventions, Forbes.com estimates. "What a waste." writes Jeff Jarvis. "The outcome of the conventions is known. There will be no news. Why are these news organisations sending so many staffers there?" Justin Peters at the Columbian Journalism Review agrees: "Only a small number of reporters actually have a reason to be here."

Imagine what 14,500 journalists could do if they concentrated for one week on civil liberties and human rights issues, says Bill Rowlings, CEO, Civil Liberties Australia; www.cla.asn.au; 0408 697 971; <mailto:secretary@cla.asn.au>.

REPORT: http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/the_15000.php?page=all and here:

<http://www.buzzmachine.com/2008/08/14/covering-conventions-is-an-waste>

G. OTHER NEWS

LIFE UNDER A DEATH SENTENCE

In an article, 'The Penalty is Death', Luke Davies talks with Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, two members of the Bali Nine who are on death row. Mr Davies went to Kerobokan Prison with Monthly editor Sally Warhaft for the interviews. Andrew Chan, Myuran Sukumaran and their families speak for the first time about life under a death sentence. The article appears in the September issue of The Monthly magazine.

"Myuran Sukumaran talks in a measured way, but it is clear his mind is racing. Andrew Chan, on death row for the same offence, talks like a bag of firecrackers going off, and somehow seems more at home. Where Sukumaran is rangy, considered and thoughtful, Chan is compact, more spontaneous in his replies, something of a scrapper ..." he writes.

The issue incorporates previously unpublished writings by Van Nyugen, the young Australian executed in Singapore in 2005. The essay reveals the human cost of capital punishment – which spreads far beyond the life of the individual rightly, or wrongly, convicted.

DETAILS: Elizabeth McKenzie on 03 9654 2000.

EX-INDONESIAN SPY PLEADS NOT GUILTY TO ALLEGED MURDER ORDER

A former Indonesian spy has pleaded not guilty to ordering the murder by poisoning of a celebrated human rights activist who had exposed military abuses, Radio Australia reported (3/9/08). Muchdi Purwo-pran-jono, an ex-deputy chief of the State Intelligence Agency is on trial, accused of plotting activist Munir Said Thalib's murder by arsenic poisoning.

Mr Munir had been on a plane from Jakarta to Amsterdam in 2004. Mr Muchdi's defence lawyer Muhammad Lutfi told the court his client rejected all charges.

Prosecutors have said the killing was an act of revenge after Mr Munir had uncovered the

kidnappings of 13 activists allegedly by special forces under Mr Muchdi's command in the late 1990s. The trial was resuming on Thursday. [REPORT: www.radioaustralia.net.au](http://www.radioaustralia.net.au)

UPDATE ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH/INFORMATION WORK

In a letter addressed to 'Dear friends of Israel and Palestine', Hanna Siniora writes (2/9/08),

'I am a Palestinian from Jerusalem who has been working for peace for more than 40 years. I am not a young man, now 71 years I have been living in this land which ironically is called "the land of peace". I was Co-Chairman of the Board of IPCRI since it was founded 20 years ago. In 2004 I became the Co-CEO together with Gershon Baskin because I wanted to invest all of my time in helping our two peoples to reach peace.

'This is very difficult work and the last years have seen a combination of despair and hope. There is great uncertainty in the air as permanent status negotiations are going on that many believe may be our last opportunity to reach peace on the basis of two-states for two peoples. I have believed in this solution for 40 years and I don't want to see another opportunity lost.

'IPCRI (Israel/Palestine Centre for Research and Information) is working harder than ever to impress upon people the urgency of the situation. We have always adopted a bottom-up and a top-down approach to peace building. It is necessary to create and to support constituencies for peace amongst both of our peoples. It is also important to provide our leaders and negotiators with the tools that they need to reach agreements. IPCRI is doing both of these. I would like to give you a few examples of what we have done over the past few months:

'In April and in August we held large conferences on peace and democracy education with more than 150 Israeli and Palestinian educators and activists taking part. The participants were the program, they presented more than 50 workshops, discussions, lessons, and lectures in each conference. We will be holding the fourth such conference this year in December.

'We just published a new policy paper examining options available to the Palestinian leadership and people if the current round of negotiations will not produce an agreement. We have been working very hard on this issue because we don't want another round of senseless and futile violence to emerge.

'We have several Negotiation Support Teams that have been working to enable negotiators to expand their "tool box" and in the next two weeks we will be submitting papers to the negotiators on both sides presenting sets of options and alternatives on two issues: the future of Jerusalem – focusing on the Old City and the Holy Places, and on fostering a Culture of Peace. It is noteworthy that IPCRI was largely responsible for the fact that there is an official negotiating team dealing with the question of how the two governments can foster a culture of peace.

'IPCRI has been working to help the two sides conclude agreements that will enable the breaking of ground in the border industrial estate project planned for the Jenin region.

'IPCRI has now founded the Israeli-Palestinian Business Forum – a new joint organisation aimed at providing assistance to the business community interested in conducting cross-boundary commerce and investments. The IPBF will be issuing within two weeks a practical business guide in Hebrew, Arabic and English and will be conducting two seminars on conducting cross boundary business in October.

'We have been conducting extensive lobbying efforts to get the governments of Israel and Palestine to call for the establishment of an international fund for Palestinian-Israeli peace which is based on the very successful work of the Fund for Ireland. This is being done as part of our being from the leadership of ALLMEP – the alliance for Middle East Peace based in Washington.

'IPCRI has also been working to bring about the establishment of Ministries of Peace in Palestine and in Israel as part of the peace process. IPCRI will soon be publishing documents that provide details of how these ministries could work and their importance in bringing about real peace.

'We have also been working very hard behind the scenes to help to secure the release of the Israeli soldier Gilead Schalit as part of a prisoner exchange with Hamas.

'We are fully committed to this work. We want to end the occupation and to create the State of Palestine that will live in peace with the State of Israel. The clock is ticking and there is so much work to do. Unfortunately at this time when our work is more important than ever, we do not have the financial resources to do what we need to do. We are living on a "shoe-string" budget barely making our payroll from month-to-month.

'We are waiting to hear from the government of the US and from the EU about two project proposals that we have submitted. Perhaps a few other governments will come to our assistance. The international donor community has become a huge disappointment and is not providing support for peace building activities in Palestine and Israel. In fact, IPCRI has not received any foreign government support this year with the exception of Canada which is supporting our Wednesday afternoons public debate series and the government of New Zealand which has provided some funds for the wetlands sewage project we are doing in Om el Rehan village in the West Bank.

'We need your support more than ever ..'

- **Hanna Siniora**

[DETAILS](#): IPCRI, PO Box 9321, Jerusalem 92092, Israel.

BOOKS IMPROVE LIFE OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Every effort should be made to improve poor literacy standards and overcome the educational disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said (3/9/08) on Indigenous Literacy Day.

Welcoming Indigenous Literacy Day and its efforts to raise money for books and other resources in remote Northern Territory communities and north-western New South Wales, Commissioner Calma said access to books was essential in turning back the tide of educational disadvantage.

"Many Indigenous children start school behind the eight ball having had little or no experience with books," he said. "In remote Australia, an assumption that many children simply don't go to school has created a chronic under-investment in educational infrastructure which we must move swiftly to address.

"While governments are responsible for providing education, there is a role for business and individuals to contribute to the betterment of Indigenous and Australian society. Efforts such as Indigenous Literacy Day should be applauded," he said. "Better education means better life opportunities and improved employment chances – all of which increase socio economic status."

Mr Calma said Indigenous literacy outcomes were directly related to an individual's access to their own culture, history and languages. To this end, he said we should also be producing books in Indigenous languages for students whose first language was not English.

"Bilingual programs which establish literacy in the child's first language before developing literacy in English are crucial," he said. "These programs break the pupil's initial learning tasks into two, enabling them to read and write in their first language before beginning to cope with English."

"Books in Indigenous languages also help to revitalise languages where they may be diminishing. If we are to educate children to live in two worlds, bilingual programs provide the means by which to bridge the divide."

Mr Calma said he envisaged a future where Indigenous language and culture in this country

was celebrated as the Maori language and culture is celebrated in New Zealand, where local languages are spoken and traditional land owners acknowledged with the opening of Parliament. **REPORT:** <http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

LOOKING AT INDIGENOUS MENTORS – THE KEY INGREDIENT

The House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee was travelling to Brisbane to hear from mentors, academics and Indigenous business owners operating in the dynamic region of South East Queensland on September 9.

Committee Chairperson Richard Marles said there was a high level of activity in Indigenous businesses in Queensland, with hubs of activity in the Cape region, mining areas and Brisbane.

“Research from the South East Queensland Indigenous Chamber of Commerce indicates that there are in excess of 200 businesses in South East Queensland that are either owned and/or managed by Indigenous Australians.

There has also been recognition of the opportunities presented by the mining boom with the Queensland Government and Queensland Resource Council developing a formal memorandum of understanding to encourage Indigenous employment in the Queensland resources sector and Indigenous enterprise development,” he said.

“At the Brisbane public hearing, the committee will hear from Australia’s first published Aboriginal business author, Neil Willmet, who is also a successful Indigenous business owner. Mr Willmet recently launched *How to Start a Successful Aboriginal Business in Australia* and has big ideas for Indigenous business, including filling the business gaps left by a non-indigenous shift towards the coast.

University of Queensland Professor Paul Memmott was to discuss possible collaborations between mining and the development of Indigenous tourism operations in northern Australia.

In a roundtable discussion Indigenous business mentors were scheduled to highlight some of the key issues for people in the region starting out in a wide range of business enterprises, including the arts. The idea that women are often the initiators of a business concept was also up for discussion. Barriers to setting up businesses and the possible role of a Minority Business Council were on the agenda.

“Researchers from the Queensland University of Technology have proposed that the lack of access by Indigenous Australians to most forms of capital, such as financial, human, physical, organisational and technological, has a significant constraint on their entrepreneurial activity. The proposers of this model consider that a Minority Business Councils model would seem to provide mechanisms for access to this capital and would therefore help to reduce the barriers to entrepreneurship,” Mr Marles said.

HEARING: September 9 AT 10.30am – 4pm, Ahimsa House, 26 Horan St, West End

DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia>.

BACKGROUND: Secretariat on 02 6277 4559; atsia.reps@aph.gov.au.

LAND, SCIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE

The House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee was scheduled to meet on Thursday in Canberra to explore the intersection between land title, environmental management and the role of government in building sustainable Indigenous businesses and communities.

The Committee Chairperson Richard Marles said the committee would hear from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) about Indigenous program delivery. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) was to speak about the importance of land title to enterprise development, and Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation (CSIRO) scientists were to outline the contribution Indigenous people make to the eco-management of Australia’s fragile remote regions.

DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/atsia>. BACKGROUND: Secretariat on 02 6277 4559; atsia.reps@aph.gov.au.

ACT STUDENT PETITIONS OVER PLIGHT OF CHILD SOLDIERS

At its first public hearing on September 1, the new House Petitions Committee was due to hear from an ACT school student about his petition to raise awareness of the plight of child soldiers in Uganda, Sudan, Somalia and Algeria.

He petitioned that the residents of Canberra, ACT wished to draw the attention of the House to the plight of child soldiers of Uganda, Sudan, Somalia and Algeria: "Your petitioners therefore request that the House take immediate action by increasing the awareness of the Australian community in regard to this issue by raising the matter in hopes that this grievous atrocity against children will cease."

The petition asked for items be broadcast about these "invisible" children on channels Ten, Prime, and Win; for an increase in news articles in the newspaper and a radio broadcast of people who have witnessed child soldiers.

Significant changes were made at the start of the year in the way the House of Representatives would deal with petitions. The new Petitions Committee, chaired by Julia Irwin (Member for Fowler, NSW), was established to ensure that all petitions presented to the House were responded to.

All petitions which comply with the rules of the House are referred to ministers and the rate of responses under the new system have far outweighed the record of the past 10 years, it was reported.

"Positive feedback received by the committee to date suggests that these changes have been welcomed by Australians," Ms Irwin said. "Greater involvement and linkages between the people and their House is now possible."

The committee has decided to conduct public hearings on issues raised in petitions. The committee will also hear from representatives of the federal departments of:

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, and Local Government (on issues including funding for sporting facilities and roads);

Health and Ageing (on issues including dental health, aged care and treatment for asbestos-related disease);

Foreign Affairs (on issues including cluster munitions, policies in the Middle East and Iraq, and the plight of child soldiers).

BACKGROUND: Secretariat on 02 6277 2152;

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

TEENAGE IRAQI REFUGEES FOCUS ON A CAREER IN DAMASCUS

Threading his way through the streets of old Damascus, the bicyclist suddenly faced an unexpected obstacle – a group of energetic teenagers trying to capture movement on camera, UNHCR reports (3/9/08).

"Look, look what I got," an excited 17-year-old Samer shouted to his friends, before showing them the image of the passing biker captured on his digital camera. The group of young people laughed a lot as they shared their efforts, ranging from dire to excellent. But this was not a game. Samer and his nine colleagues, aged 15-17, are Iraqi refugees engaged in a course run by British photographers to give them skills to become wage-earning photojournalists.

"It is hard to get it right, but I am learning," the budding photojournalist Samer said, as Tom Saunderson and Guy Bower monitored their charges from a distance. Henderson and Bower, together with Tim Smyth, are behind New Exposure, the organisation conducting the course.

The agency was set up to help find and provide hands-on tuition to young photojournalists who do not have easy access to equipment or training. In Syria, they have just completed a

four-week workshop with the 10 Iraqi refugees, who were chosen by the UN refugee agency for the training, part of a New Exposure project titled, 'Berlin to Baghdad: Children of Conflict.'

Under the Berlin to Baghdad project launched in May in Kosovo, New Exposure's photographers will be working with young people affected by conflict in countries along the route of the historic railway line between the German and Iraqi capitals.

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

PROTESTERS ON COURSE TO KILL DEMOCRACY

Sitting in deckchairs, eating snacks and clapping along to live music, Thailand's new revolutionaries look like picnickers at a free concert, Thomas Bell writes in the Sydney Morning Herald (4/9/08). Judging by the crowd, it is easy-listening for all ages. It is packed at the front of the stage, on the Prime Minister's muddy lawn, but there are huge video screens for everyone else. Hot food and iced water for thousands of people has been supplied free, 24 hours a day for the past 10 days and counting. This is an epic love-in to end democracy. The problem for the middle-class protesters camped out at Government House, Bangkok, is that the poor who dominate the electorate keep choosing the wrong government ... At root, Thai political analysts say, the metropolitan elite is threatened by the electorally popular Thaksin Shinawatra, who was overthrown as prime minister in a coup in 2006. His protege, Samak, was elected by a clear margin as soon as the people were given another chance to vote last year.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/09/03/1220121329579.html>

TIME TO APPLY BLOWTORCH TO AFP LEADERSHIP

The announcement by the Australian Federal Police that Dr Mohamed Haneef is no longer a person of interest turns the spotlight in this saga even more firmly on the AFP itself, a Sydney Morning Herald editorial stated (1/9/08). Until now, the continuing investigation into Dr Haneef seemed long and expensive, but many citizens assumed the police must have known things that could not be revealed to the public. There were grounds, despite the AFP's bungling of the first stage of its investigation in July 2007, to give it the benefit of the doubt. With the termination of the investigation, those grounds no longer exist. Given the AFP's past record in this matter, the public has a right to know what it has been doing for the past year, and why.

EDITORIAL: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/08/31/1220121046854.html>

US BUILDS DATABASE ON HOME AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLERS

The US federal government has been using its system of border checkpoints to greatly expand a database on travellers entering the country by collecting information on all US citizens crossing by land, compiling data that will be stored for 15 years and may be used in criminal and intelligence investigations, the Washington Post reported (20/9/08). Officials say the Border Crossing Information system, disclosed by the [Department of Homeland Security](#) in a Federal Register notice, is part of a broader effort to guard against terrorist threats. It also reflects the growing number of government systems containing personal information on Americans that can be shared for a broad range of law enforcement and intelligence purposes, some of which are exempt from some Privacy Act protections. While international air passenger data has long been captured this way, Customs and Border Protection agents only this year began to log the arrivals of all US citizens across land borders, through which about three-quarters of border entries occur.

ARTICLE: http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080820/us_nm/usa_security_checkpoints_dc

TERRORISTS DON'T COME FLAGGED, NOR ARE THEY 'MAD AND BAD'

Britain's MI5 has concluded that there is no easy way to identify those who become involved in terrorism. A sophisticated and classified internal research analysis, based on hundreds of case studies by the security service, says there is no single pathway to violent extremism. It concludes there is no typical profile of the 'British terrorist' as most are "demographically unremarkable" and simply reflect the communities in which they live. The restricted MI5 report takes apart many of the common stereotypes about those involved in British terrorism. They are mostly British nationals, not illegal immigrants and, far from being Islamist fundamentalists, most are religious novices. Nor, the analysis says, are they "mad and bad". Those over 30 are just as likely to have a wife and children as to be loners with no ties, the

research shows. The security service also plays down the importance of radical extremist clerics.

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1>

FORMER UK ANTI-DRUGS SUPREMO CALLS FOR LEGALISING THE TRADE

A former senior civil servant who was responsible for coordinating the government's anti-drugs policy now believes that legalisation would be less harmful than the current strategy. Julian Critchley, the former director of the Cabinet Office's anti-drugs unit, also said that his views were shared by the "overwhelming majority" of professionals in the field, including police officers, health workers and members of the government ... Mr Critchley - not to be confused with the late Tory MP of the same name - was director of the UK Anti-Drug Coordination Unit in the Cabinet Office, with the job of coordinating government policy across departments and supporting the then drugs Tsar, Keith Hellawell ... Mr Critchley wrote in a blog: "I joined the unit more or less agnostic on drugs policy, being personally opposed to drug use, but open-minded about the best way to deal with the problem. I was certainly not inclined to decriminalise. However, during my time in the unit, as I saw more and more evidence of 'what works', to quote New Labour's mantra of the time, it became apparent to me that ... enforcement and supply-side interventions were largely pointless. They have no significant, lasting impact on the availability, affordability or use of drugs."

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/aug/13/drugs.legislation>

I. ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

AT LEAST 3 MILLION AFFECTED BY DEADLY FLOODS IN INDIA AND NEPAL: UN

More than 3 million people have been uprooted and 60 people killed by the worst flooding to hit north-east India in five decades, the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) reported (2/9/08).

The flooding began when heavy monsoon rains caused a dam to break, breaching the eastern embankment of the Kosi River, which straddles the India-Nepal border.

The Sunsari district of Nepal, where 70,000 people have been displaced, and 16 districts in India's Bihar state – one of the country's poorest – have been the areas struck hardest. The Kosi River appears to have altered its course, flooding areas of Bihar not prone to inundation and damaging over 220,000 houses.

WHO expressed concern over the possibility of the spread of communicable diseases.

"No outbreaks have been reported in India nor Nepal, but the flooding, risk for water- and vector-borne diseases due to the massive population displacements, hot climate, stretched hygiene and sanitation levels and eventual pools of stagnant water... left behind by receding flood waters," said Poonam Singh of the agency's South-East Asian Regional Office.

Working together with the Indian Ministry of Health, WHO is supplying 100 chloroscopes to assess water quality and is raising awareness on measles immunisation. In Nepal, the agency has sent enough medicine to treat over 120,000 people for one month. It has also dispatched anti-malaria and anti-diarrhoea supplies.

Along with WFP, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program (WFP), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have all dispatched staff to the areas in Nepal affected by the floods.

UN agencies have appealed for more than \$5 million for relief needs in Nepal for activities such as providing food, shelter and hygiene kits.

"With so many people forced from their homes into extremely challenging conditions, all effort must be made to ensure the supply of safe drinking water, food, sanitation and accommodation facilities, as well as essential medicines," said Eric Laroche, Assistant Director-General for WHO's Health Action in Crises Cluster.

8,000 SOLDIERS DEPLOYED AFTER EARTHQUAKE IN CHINA

China has deployed more than 8,000 soldiers and military reservists to help search and rescue efforts in the south-west after an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8 killed 38 people, the ABC reported (2/9/08).

The weekend quake in a mountainous region spanning the Sichuan and Yunnan provinces has destroyed or damaged more than a quarter of a million homes and injured nearly 650 people. Aftershocks continued.

The China Earthquake Administration says an inter-ministerial command post has been set up in the quake zone to coordinate communications and the rescue and relief work. Food, water, medical supplies and tents were being rushed to the area.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/09/01/2352532.htm>

RECORD LOW INFLOWS KEEP MURRAY BASIN IN SERIOUS DROUGHT

The outlook for the Murray system remains grim with winter inflows of 670 GL the equal fifth lowest in 117 years of records, according to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) latest Drought Update (2/9/08).

Chief Executive Dr Wendy Craik said August rainfall was below average and inflow during the month of 275 GL was less than a fifth of the long term average of 1,550 GL.

"In the two years ending August, Murray system inflows were 3,540 GL – a new record low. "Storage levels are extremely low. Active storage in the Murray system is only 1,690 GL or 20 per cent of capacity. This is well below the August long term average of 5,600 GL or 62 per cent capacity. (Active storage is water which can be released using only gravity).

"Persistent low rainfall during the past seven years, particularly in the alpine areas, has been the main cause for the record low inflows to the Murray system, with above average temperatures exacerbating the situation."

Dr Craik said a flow of 900 ML a day into the Lower Lakes, along with local rainfall had reduced evaporative losses during winter and caused the water level in Lake Alexandrina to gradually rise to its current level of -0.26 m, or 1.0 m below full supply level.

"This has provided some short term relief and has delayed the potential for acidification. However, with the arrival of warmer weather in spring, evaporative losses will start to increase, and the water level is expected to start falling again.

"This will be closely monitored while short and longer term management strategies are developed to maintain the lakes above acidification thresholds." Dr Craik said prospects for the coming season would depend on rainfall and run-off. But even with above average rainfall in the coming months, inflows would likely remain well below average.

The Bureau of Meteorology's prediction for spring rainfall is neutral for much of south-eastern Australia.

"So the outlook for the Murray system remains very serious. Critical human needs can now be met through to next winter but water availability for irrigation remains very low," Dr Craik said. "Recovery of the system is likely to take several years of above average rainfall."

Dr Craik said the northern part of the Basin was still benefiting from last summer's good rainfall and flooding, though water levels at the Narran lakes were dropping and most wetlands and lakes along the Warrego and Paroo Rivers were also drying up.

LATEST DROUGHT UPDATE; www.mdbc.gov.au

REPORT: http://www.mdbc.gov.au/_data/page/1366/Drought_Update_Issue_15_-_September_2008.pdf; DETAILS: Sam Leone on 0407 006 332.

SPOTLIGHTING THE WATER CRISIS

The Geographical Research has launched a themed issue spotlighting the water crisis in Australia. Published by Wiley-Blackwell, the journal presents a collection of papers highlighting the spatial challenges of water management – providing an opportunity for the reconsideration of social and cultural dimensions around water and river management.

The five papers look into the risks associated with changing environmental conditions, the evaluation and improvement of water resource governance at the regional scale, and water sustainability in cities and homes.

“The Australian drought of the early twenty-first century threw long-standing chasms between use and realities of water supply into relief. The issue of water scarcity in Australia has always existed, but as a nation, we have always managed to ignore it. However, these present conditions have created increasing pressure for water users and managers to ensure adequate supplies for consumption”, says guest editor and author, Kathleen Broderick, from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia. [DETAILS](#): Alina Boey on +65 9656 5580; aboey@wiley.com.sg

GREENS DEPLORE 4 MILE IN-SITU LEACH NUKE APPROVAL

The approval by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett of the in-situ leach uranium mine at 4 Mile (Beverley) was deeply disappointing, and reinforces South Australia's reputation for being an easy target for sub-standard mining environmental practices, the Greens said in a media release (28/8/08).

The 4- Mile site overlaps the internationally renowned Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary.

The decision by Peter Garrett rubber stamped the deliberate infusion of sulphuric acid into a publicly owned water aquifer without any need for the mining company to rehabilitate the aquifer after they have finished," said Greens Mark Parnell.

"The in-situ leaching process is highly controversial - with very good reason. Pumping acid into the soil and aquifers will leave behind acid and radioactive wastes for many years," he said. "Not only will today's decision mean even more South Australia uranium will hit the international nuclear market, we are wrecking our environment as we mine it."

[DETAILS](#): Craig Wilkins on 0434 007 893.

INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES TO PROTECT DEEP SEA FISH

Two years of negotiations have resulted in the adoption of new international guidelines to limit the impact of fishing on fragile deep sea fish species and habitats, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) announced (3/9/08).

Managing deep sea fisheries in high seas areas outside of countries' exclusive economic zones has always been difficult, according to FAO. It requires multilateral solutions involving not only nations whose vessels are engaged in deep sea fisheries but other interested countries as well.

“Until now, there really hasn't been an international framework for tackling this issue,” said Ichiro Nomura, Assistant Director General of FAO's Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. “These guidelines represent one of the few practical instruments of this nature, and are a breakthrough in that they address both environmental and fisheries management concerns in an integrated manner,” he said.

[REPORT: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27909&Cr=fishing&Cr1=](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27909&Cr=fishing&Cr1=)

FURTHER 3000SQ MILES OF AMAZON JUNGLE RAZED

Concerns over the destruction of the Brazilian rainforest have resurfaced after it emerged that deforestation jumped by 64 per cent over the last 12 months, according to government data.

Brazil's National Institute for Space Research said that around 3,145 square miles - an area half the size of Wales - were razed between August 2007 and August 2008, the London Guardian reported (1/9/08).

With commodity prices hitting recent highs and loggers and soy farmers pushing ever further into the Amazon jungle, satellite images captured by a real-time monitoring system, known in Brazil as Deter, showed that deforestation was once again on the rise after three years on the wane. **REPORT:** <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/sep/01/forests.brazil>

ASIA-PACIFIC IS LARGEST BROADBAND MARKET- BUT WIDE GAP IN ACCESS: UN

While some countries in Asia and the Pacific – the world's largest broadband market – have high speed and affordable Internet access, the same cannot be said for most of the region's poorer nations, the United Nations International Telecommunications Union (ITU) said (2/9/08).

In its Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Indicators Report for Asia and the Pacific, the ITU states that Internet access in the region's poor countries remains limited and predominantly low speed.

The report, released at the ITU Telecom Asia 2008 **conference** which **kicked off** today in Bangkok, also points out that the region is the world's largest broadband market with a 39 per cent share of the world's total at the end of 2007.

In terms of access, it notes that the region has made remarkable progress in the past few years, with subscriber numbers growing almost five-fold in five years, from 27 million at the beginning of 2003 to 133 million at the start of 2008.

The Republic of Korea leads the world in terms of the percentage of households with fixed broadband access. Along with Hong Kong and Japan, it also leads the world in terms of the proportion of households with fibre optic connections, which are essential for supporting the next generation of ultra high speed Internet applications.

Meanwhile, in most of the region's low- and lower middle-income economies, high speed Internet access "is limited to urban areas at best, typically expensive, and often not available at all," says the ITU. **REPORT:**

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27891&Cr=telecommunication&Cr1=>

EFFORTS TO BRIDGE AFGHANISTAN'S DIGITAL DIVIDE GETS BOOST FROM UN

A new agreement between the UN and the Afghan Government will help boost efforts to narrow the gap between those in the South Asian nation who benefit from the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and those who do not (29/8/09).

The agreement marks the start of collaboration between Afghanistan's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) and the UN Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (UN-APCICT), a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

UN-APCICT is tasked with strengthening the efforts of ESCAP member countries to use digital technology in their socio-economic development by building up human and institutional capacity for ICT.

The signing, at APCICT's office in Incheon, in the Republic of Korea, also marks the first time an agreement has been made to have the institute's training curriculum – known as the Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders Program – implemented nationally.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27868&Cr=technology&Cr1=>

SUPPORTS FOR PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED FAUNA AND FLORA

In its 93rd report tabled this week, the Federal Parliament's Treaties Committee has supported amendments to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora subject to a number of recommendations. The convention, known as CITES, provides for international cooperation to protect and conserve species of fauna and flora from over-exploitation due to international trade.

The amendments will alter the level of control imposed upon trade in a number of species that are either endangered or at risk of becoming endangered. In particular, the convention now affords protection to Australian species of sawfish for the first time. The committee examined the impact of this listing upon one species, freshwater sawfish, which is found in northern Australia and exported in small numbers to overseas aquaria.

The committee has recommended that the Australian Government continue to monitor and assess the impact of trade in this species, which is considered critically endangered internationally. It has also made several recommendations concerning the policies and procedures associated with the protection of the species under Australian domestic law.

The committee has also recommended that Australia take binding treaty action in relation to the 2006 International Tropical Timber Agreement. This agreement succeeds similar agreements dating back to 1983 and will promote the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests.

The committee has recommended that any future agreement on sustainable trade in tropical timber should specifically include consultation with environmental groups.

REPORT 93: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/12march2008/report2.htm>;

DETAILS: Secretariat on 02 6277 4002;

BACKGROUND: Secretary on 02 6277 4002.