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UN World Court acquits Serbia of genocide in Bosnia; finds it guilty of inaction

26 February - The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the main United Nations judicial organ, today overwhelmingly acquitted Serbia of committing genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Balkan war of the 1990s, but found it guilty of failing to prevent genocide in the massacre of more than 7,000 Bosnian Muslims in the town of Srebrenica.



At the same time the ICJ, also known as the World Court, rejected Bosnia's request for payment of reparations from Serbia, successor to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) of the 1990s, for the worst massacre in Europe since World War II. The judgment, which is binding and not open to appeal, called on Serbia to transfer Ratko Mladic and others indicted for genocide to the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), a separate judicial body with a mandate to try individuals.

"The Court observes that the FRY was in a position of influence over the Bosnian Serbs who devised and implemented the genocide in Srebrenica, owing to the strength of the political, military and financial links between the FRY on the one hand and the Republika Srpska (the Serb component of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the VRS (Republika Srpska's army) on the other," the Court ruled by 12 votes to 3.

"The Court further recalls that although it has not found that the information available to the Belgrade authorities indicated, as a matter of certainty, that genocide was imminent, they could hardly have been unaware of the serious risk of it.

“In the view of the Court, the Yugoslav federal authorities should have made the best efforts within their power to try and prevent the tragic events then taking shape, whose scale might have been surmised. Yet the Respondent has not shown that it took any initiative to prevent what happened, or any action on its part to avert the atrocities which were committed” as required by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The court also found, by 14 to 1, that Serbia violated its obligations under the Convention by having failed to transfer Mr. Mladic, indicted for genocide and complicity in genocide in Srebrenica, for trial by the ICTY.

But on the overall charges brought by Bosnia, the Court ruled by 13 to 2 that Serbia had not committed genocide, nor had it conspired, through its organs or persons whose acts engage its responsibility under customary international law, in violation of its obligations under the Convention. It found by 11 votes to 4 that Serbia had not been complicit in genocide.

While there is overwhelming evidence that massive killings throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina were perpetrated during the conflict, the Court said it was not convinced that these were accompanied by “the specific intent on the part of the perpetrators to destroy, in whole or in part, the group of Bosnian Muslims,” although they may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

But with regard to Srebrenica, the Court concluded that the Main Staff of the VRS had “the necessary specific intent to destroy in part the group of Bosnian Muslims (specifically the Bosnian Muslims of Srebrenica) and that accordingly acts of genocide were committed by the VRS.”

It noted that while there is little doubt that the atrocities in Srebrenica were committed, at least in part, with the resources which the perpetrators possessed as a result of the general policy of aid and assistance by the FRY, one of the very specific conditions for Serbia’s legal responsibility was not met since “it has not been conclusively established that, at the crucial time, the FRY supplied aid to the perpetrators of the genocide in full awareness that the aid supplied would be used to commit genocide.”

But the FRY was in a position of influence over the Bosnian Serbs who devised and implemented the genocide in Srebrenica, owing to the strength of the political, military and financial links between the FRY on the one hand and the Republika Srpska and the VRS on the other.

On the issue of reparations the court determined that its findings “constitute appropriate satisfaction, and that the case is not one in which an order for payment of compensation... would be appropriate.”

Since it had not been shown that the genocide would in fact have been averted if the FRY had tried to prevent it, “financial compensation for the failure to prevent the genocide at Srebrenica is not the appropriate form of reparation,” the judgment said.

“The Court considers that the most appropriate form of satisfaction would be a declaration in the operative clause of the Judgment that the Respondent has failed to comply with the obligation to prevent the crime of genocide.”

Much more needed to achieve goals of gender equality, warns Deputy Secretary-General



Asha-Rose Migiro

26 February - Much work remains to be done before goals of gender equality – and their resulting positive impact on primary-school enrolment, maternal mortality rates and women’s economic independence – are reached, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General told the opening of the 51st session of the UN’s women’s commission today.

“Most egregiously, violence against women and girls remains pervasive – perpetrated by family members, strangers and agents of the State in all regions of the world, in the public and private spheres, in peacetime and during conflict,” warned Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro, the highest-ranking woman in the Organization.

This year the Commission on the Status of Women is introducing new work methods, by focusing on one key theme, and

she hailed the decision to concentrate on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls during this session, which will last from 2007 to 2009.

“Let me...encourage the Commission to take bold steps to improve the lives of girls everywhere,” said Ms. Migiro, herself a mother of two girls. Several girls have been invited to share their experiences with the Commission during its session at UN Headquarters.

In 2005, Member States found that, at the 10-year mark of the landmark 2005 Beijing Platform for Action, an extensive blueprint for promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, the goal of fully protecting girls had not been realized. Girls remained at high risk of being sexually abused and sexually exploited and trafficked for commercial purposes.

The two international legal instruments most linked to the rights of girls, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), are inadequate to address the problem for two reasons, according to a report by the Secretary-General.

Firstly, neither codifies laws that consistently address the plight of girls, while the failure of States to incorporate provisions from the two treaties has also led to the persistence of violence and discrimination.

“Ending this pandemic will require our individual and collective commitment,” Ms. Migiro said, listing several possible ways to solve the problem. “It will require us to create an environment where such violence is not tolerated; to work for the full implementation of existing legal norms and policies; to make focused efforts to prosecute and punish perpetrators; to dedicate sufficient resources; and to fully involve men and boys in changing stereotypical attitudes and behaviour.”

Last November, the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence recommended that the current UN agencies dealing with gender issues be merged into one unit. Ms. Migiro, who led her country’s delegation to the Commission in her previous capacity as Tanzania’s Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children, said that both she and the Secretary-General are much in favour of this, saying that “such an entity should mobilize forces of change at the global level, and inspire enhanced results at the country level.”

The Commission’s initial session, which spans two weeks, will conclude on 9 March. Close to 100 delegates, many of them holding Cabinet-level posts, from around the world are expected to attend, in addition to representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who will hold parallel panels and meetings during the session. Two high-level panels, one on policy initiatives and the other on capacity-building, on eliminating discrimination against girls were held this afternoon.

UN peacekeeping must remain flexible and adapt to meet rising demand – top official

26 February - United Nations peacekeeping operations must continue to evolve in a period of sustained high demand, with the number of blue helmets deployed around the world the highest in its history at nearly 100,000 and still rising and an annual budget that has more than doubled over five years to \$5.7 billion, the top UN peacekeeping official said today.



USG Jean-Marie Guéhenno

“This capacity for innovation has been a lifeline for UN peacekeeping,” Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guéhenno told a General Assembly Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, detailing a slew of new arrangements, from UN military and police adviser support for an African Union force in Sudan’s war-ridden Darfur region to loaning staff from other missions as in Timor-Leste, Lebanon and Nepal.

“It is on that adaptability that we must now build. We must turn our capacity for evolution into a vehicle for creating a stronger, more professional and more effective UN peacekeeping, even in a period of huge operational demands.

“No matter how capable the individuals and how innovative our response in particular contexts over the past few years of surge, the demands facing us today require a more systematic, structural response,” he said.

He underlined the new structural reforms proposed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to split the current Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) into a Department of Peace Operations and a Department of Field Support, both headed by an Under-Secretary-General, the managerial level of the current DPKO chief. The two new departments are to be specialized and tightly-integrated.

“The development of peacekeeping doctrine will be consolidated in the Department of Peace Operation’s policy and best practices section where one of its core activities will be the development of guidance to support the functioning of integrated operations,” Mr. Guéhenno declared.

“A dedicated field support department will enable us to prioritize recruitment and outreach so as to ensure that personnel appointments, in particular those of senior leadership, reflects the gender balance and geographical diversity to which we are committed. And a consolidated field personnel capacity will assist us in swiftly taking forward the implementation of the proposal to establish a civilian cadre of peacekeepers, should Member States support this vital new initiative.”

There are vital operational needs that demand urgent attention and resources, he added. “On one point we are all agreed: if we are to manage our current tasks, and potentially take on new ones in 2007, we urgently require the reinforcement of planning, management and operational capacities across the span of UN peacekeeping.”

Beyond the need to strengthen military capacities, he stressed the importance of reinforcing the Police Division at UN Headquarters and, in parallel, the further expansion of the Standing Police Capacity, and he proposed establishing an integrated office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, headed by an Assistant-Secretary-General, to support the sustainable reform of security in countries after conflict has ended.

“I would urge all of us to keep uppermost in our minds our ultimate goal and objective,” Mr. Guéhenno said. “That goal is, in essence, a simple one. UN peacekeeping exists to enable men, women and children around the world to emerge from the scourge of war so as to pursue lives of dignity and basic humanity. It is to these individuals that our greatest obligation lies.”

Somalia: UN envoy appeals to Muslim States to help bring peace and reconciliation



Special Representative
François Lonsény Fall

26 February - The top United Nations envoy for Somalia today called on Muslim countries to redouble their efforts to promote stability and reconciliation in the war-ravaged State which has seen a sharp rise in fighting, especially in Mogadishu, since the Transitional Government ousted Islamist groups with Ethiopian help two months ago.

At a meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Contact Group on Somalia in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Representative François Lonsény Fall urged OIC States with contacts with the leaders of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), especially Yemen, to encourage the Islamist leaders to accept the Transitional Federal Charter and join in national reconciliation.

Since the ouster of the UIC, which had seized control of Mogadishu in June and progressively extended its control, UN officials from Secretary-General Ban and Mr. Fall on down have underscored the historic opportunity the various parties now has to restore peace and stability to a country that has had no functioning central government since the regime of Muhammad Siad Barre was toppled in 1991.

But just 10 days ago, the UN reported that a steady flow of displaced persons was leaving Mogadishu to escape insecurity and violence.

Condemning recent attacks on school and mosque, UN envoy calls for justice

26 February - Strongly condemning this weekend's bombings of a university and a mosque which killed and injured hundreds of innocent civilians in Iraq, the top United Nations envoy to the country today called for those responsible for the criminal attacks to be brought to justice.



The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Ashraf Qazi, decried the bombings of Mustansiriya University in Baghdad and the Hay al-Umma Mosque outside the capital, saying that they are "intended to tear apart the Iraqi sense of community and national denominators that are essential for maintaining national unity."

Mr. Qazi also said that "the targeting of higher education centres and places of worship by violent groups seeks to exacerbate sectarian tensions, and undermine the prospect for a better future together for all Iraqis."

These bombings are the latest in a wave of attacks targeting civilians. Less than two weeks ago, more than 100 people were killed in a series of attacks, including the coordinated bombing of a crowded market in Baghdad.

The envoy urged the Government to apprehend those behind the attacks, and also advised Iraq's political, religious and civil society leaders to ensure the sanctity of educational institutions and places of worship.

Pirates hijack UN food ship off Somalia



The MV Rozen

26 February - Pirates off the coast of Somalia have hijacked a United Nations-chartered ship with its 12-member crew shortly after it unloaded 1,800 metric tonnes of food aid and equipment - the fourth such attack on UN supply vessels off the East African country in 20 months.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) "is highly concerned about the safety of crew members and the vessel," Peter Goossens, the agency's Country Director for Somalia said today of yesterday's seizure of the MV Rozen. "Such acts of piracy might undermine the delivery of relief food to vulnerable people in Somalia and could further worsen the prevailing precarious humanitarian situation."

WFP is currently in close contact with Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the authorities in Puntland in the north of the country, and with the vessel's agents, to obtain the most accurate information and to ensure the earliest release of the vessel and crew – six Sri Lankans, including the captain, and six Kenyans.

In 2005, after two earlier hijacks, WFP temporarily had to suspend deliveries of food aid by sea for some weeks, but since then sea deliveries have been uninterrupted, even during the worst days of the conflict between the TFG and the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) at the end of last year. The MV Rozen itself escaped an attempted hijack in southern Somali waters last year.

This time the ship had just delivered WFP food and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) equipment in Berbera and in Bossaso in Puntland and was sailing empty back to Mombasa, from where it was chartered when it was hijacked. It is now reported to be anchored off Bargal, in Somali waters.

Pirates hijacked a sister vessel, the MV Semlow, in June 2005 with WFP relief food on board for 28,000 victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami and held it for more than 100 days in Somali waters in June 2005. The crew was released unharmed. Another vessel with WFP food aid, the MV Miltzow, was hijacked for 33 hours in October 2005 while it was in the process of unloading food in the port of Merka.

In 2006, WFP delivered some 78,000 metric tonnes of relief food to 1.4 million people affected by drought and floods in

southern Somalia.

Community-based interventions can halt violence against women, UN study says



26 February - A new study by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) shows that community-based interventions aimed at halting violence against women can yield significant results, the agency said today.

Rape in Mauritania, domestic violence in Mexico and Romania, child marriage in Bangladesh, and female genital mutilation or cutting in Kenya are just a few of the abuses explored in “Programming to Address Violence Against Women,” which offers 10 case studies that show how carefully targeted and planned interventions can actually reduce gender-based violence, the agency said.

“What is unusual about this manual is that we have actually demonstrated how entire communities can change their attitudes to violence against women as a result of a few, specifically targeted interventions,” said UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid in a news release.

“In many of these cases, the extent of violence against women was so prevalent and so entrenched that it first seemed impossible to budge the prevailing mindset,” she said. “What we learned is that persistent advocacy targeting community leaders and the larger public can bring about huge changes in a relatively short time.”

The lessons from the 10 case studies are distilled in a companion booklet, *Ending Violence Against Women: Programming for Prevention, Protection and Care*, as well as an online multimedia exhibit.

“Communities can and will change, but the dire consequences associated with gender-based violence constitute a human emergency that requires global and local action,” said Ms. Obaid. “We need to treat it as such.”

UN group concerned about involvement of private security companies in conflicts

26 February - The United Nations Working Group on the use of mercenaries today expressed concern about the increasing involvement of private military and security companies in countries facing conflict, including their work protecting mining companies and the effect this has on local communities.

During a week-long session, which ended last Friday, the Working Group addressed a whole range of issues, including emerging trends regarding mercenaries or mercenary-related activities and the impact of private companies offering military assistance, consultancy and security services on human rights.

“The group expressed concerns on the effects of the increasing phenomenon of the recruitment of nationals from countries in many regions by subsidiaries of transnational private military and security companies with legal personality in another country, and providing services in countries experiencing violent conflict,” it said in a press release.

“It expressed concern also on the phenomenon of conflicts involving private companies that provide security to installations and facilities of extractive industries and the effects on local communities and the enjoyment of land rights and a clean environment.”

It also commended Honduras and Ecuador for moving towards acceding to the International Convention against the Use, Recruitment, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, and welcomed the fact that Peru will soon become the 29th State party to this Convention.

The Working Group was established in 2005 by the now -defunct Commission on Human Rights, which was replaced last year by the strengthened Human Rights Council. The Group’s mandate includes monitoring the impact of the activities of private military and security companies on the enjoyment of all human rights. It has also been requested to prepare draft



international basic principles that encourage respect for human rights on the part of those companies.

It is composed of five independent experts serving in their personal capacities, and headed by its Chairperson-Rapporteur, José Luis Gómez del Prado (Spain). The other experts are: Najat al-Hajjaji (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Amada Benavides de Pérez (Colombia), Alexander Nikitin (Russian Federation) and Shaista Shameem (Fiji).

Myanmar: UN expert urges immediate aid to areas affected by military operations

26 February - Expressing concern about the humanitarian and human rights implications of ongoing military operations in Myanmar's southeastern Kayin State, a United Nations human rights expert has urged the country to grant aid groups immediate access to affected civilians.



Paulo Sergio Pinheiro

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said in a statement last Friday that "humanitarian assistance should not be made hostage of politics," but rather it "must only be guided by the best interests of the affected communities."

Mr. Pinheiro made his recommendations after hearing testimonies of villagers who had fled fighting in Toungoo District and Eastern Bago Division. These people, who had already been forced to leave their homes on several occasions, confirmed allegations the Special Rapporteur had heard last year of human rights violations and lack of humanitarian assistance in these areas.

He called on the Government to immediately grant access to and guarantee the safety and freedom of movement to the UN, as well as other aid workers, as these groups seek to assist those in need.

"It would be a terrible mistake to wait for the political normalization of Myanmar to help and to empower the affected communities and their representatives," the Special Rapporteur said.

UN envoy to Nepal calls into question June polls unless political consensus reached soon



26 February - Amid violence in the Terai region of southern Nepal, Maoist combatants leaving their cantonment sites and a continuing lack of agreement among the country's political parties, the United Nations envoy to the Himalayan country today warned that June's scheduled elections may have to be postponed unless some form of consensus is reached "very soon."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative, Ian Martin, who heads the UN Political Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), also acknowledged the "striking difference" between the relatively small number of Maoist arms given up for registration and the large number of combatants in the seven main cantonment sites.

"Unless a consensus can be reached very soon on the electoral arrangements for the constituent assembly election then the intention to hold that election by mid-June will be called into question," he told a press conference at UN Headquarters in New York, adding that Nepal's eight main political parties are currently discussing the issue of the electoral system.

"The chief election commissioner has stated publicly and for the political parties that the legislative basis for the elections needs to be in place very soon if the time-table is to go forward. Now already the process has begun, the updating of voter rolls has already taken place in much of the country but there isn't yet a final decision on the electoral system."

Turning to the issue of the registration of Maoist arms and combatants, as stipulated under the November peace agreement that also calls for Government troops to be confined to their barracks, Mr. Martin acknowledged the discrepancy between over 30,000 combatants but less than 3,500 weapons registered.

"There hasn't yet been a definitive statement on the part of the Government...there certainly is a striking difference between

the number of weapons registered, a little less than 3,500 and the number of combatants, over 30,000," he said.

"There's undoubtedly going to be a continuing argument as to whether the numbers do or do not show that the Maoists have complied with their commitments to register all their weapons. The UN can't make a definitive judgment, we can only make available the information as to what has been registered to the Government for it to scrutinize and...that's what they're doing now."

Last week, Mr. Martin announced that the first stage of registration of Maoist arms and weapons had been completed at seven main cantonment sites, but he also expressed "grave concern" because some combatants had left these areas. UNMIN has also called on the Government and the Maoists to cooperate in improving conditions at these sites.

The Security Council established UNMIN late last month to assist with the follow-up to the landmark Nepalese peace deal, reached between the Government and the Maoists, and also to support this year's planned elections in the impoverished country where 10 years of civil war killed around 15,000 people and displaced over 100,000 others.

Child mortality declining in Ethiopia but more progress needed – UNICEF chief

26 February - Child mortality in impoverished Ethiopia has fallen over the past 15 years and steady development progress is being made in other areas as well, the visiting head of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said, while stressing that more work is needed to build on these successes.



Ann Veneman at Plumpy'Nut factory

Under-five mortality rates have steadily declined to 123 out of every 1,000 live births, down from peak levels in 1990 when 204 out of every 1,000 children died before the age of five. However with close to 400,000 children under five still dying from preventable causes each year, Ethiopia continues to have one of the highest child mortality rates in the world.

"Child mortality in Ethiopia has declined by 40 per cent in the last 15 years. We must build upon these gains to further improve the lives of children," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman, while highlighting the importance of the Government, affected communities, donors and UN agencies working closely together for development.

"Partnerships are essential for Ethiopia's success against the challenges of poverty, disease, nutrition, protection and education. We must act with urgency and build on our achievements so that Ethiopia's children not only survive, but thrive."

The Enhanced Outreach Strategy for child survival – the largest ever collaboration between the UN and the Government of Ethiopia – and the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) campaign, are two examples of these partnerships.

Ms. Veneman's trip to Ethiopia, which included visits to a commercial flower farm and a coffee cooperative, also saw her participate in the opening of the Plumpy'Nut factory in Addis Ababa, which is producing a ready-to-use-therapeutic food.

"Therapeutic foods such as Plumpy'Nut will help save the lives of severely malnourished children and help fight malnutrition across the country," she said.

Runners complete monster Sahara marathon in UN bid to focus on global water crisis

26 February - Exhausted, sore, sun-scorched, dehydrated, satisfied and proud, three young athletes have completed a remarkable ultra-marathon across the Sahara Desert, running the equivalent of two traditional marathons a day for 111 days over 7,300 kilometres (4580 miles) in a United Nations-backed bid to raise awareness of the burgeoning global water crisis.

"I'm tired and stiff, but happy to be done; it was an incredible experience," Ray Zahab of Canada said after reaching the Egyptian Red Sea coast last week with his two fellow-runners, Charlie Engle of the United States and Kevin Lin from

Taiwan, province of China, after pounding over endless sands and camel tracks, past towering dunes, stark rock mountains and mud-brick mosques, through oases and nomad settlements.

The odyssey of the three, who left St. Louis in Senegal in early November and passed through Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Libya before entering Egypt, will be the subject of a feature documentary film, "Running the Sahara," directed by Oscar winner James Moll and narrated by another Oscar laureate, Matt Damon, who is also executive producer, with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) as co-producer. The 90-minute film is slated for international release in late 2007.

In addition to the Saharan temperatures, the three battled blinding sandstorms, biting and stinging insects and other pests, and the many physical afflictions that accompany a run across an entire continent. UNDP supported the project, and the runners during their saga visited UNDP anti-poverty and community-development projects and Global Environment Facility work in North Africa.

These included water-management, governance and peace-building efforts in Mali and Niger, a conservation project for medicinal plants in Egypt, dam construction in Mauritania, and a school in Senegal. The three stopped to talk to villagers and nomads about the challenges they face living with the scarcity of water live in the 5.6 million square kilometres of the Sahara.

"For the runners, water is a daily necessity," Irena Mihova, a UNDP co-producer for the project, said. "For the people of the Sahara, and throughout the developing world, it is a lifelong concern."

According to UNDP's 2006 Human Development Report, lack of clean water and sanitation causes nearly 2 million child deaths every year. Mr. Damon is partnering with the H2O Africa Foundation to raise funds and awareness to address the scarcity of clean drinking water in Africa.

The report calls on the Group of Eight (G-8) developed nations to spearhead an urgent global action plan to resolve the world's growing water and sanitation crisis.

Global warming at North, South Poles comes under microscope in UN-backed research

26 February - The largest polar research programme in 50 years, with a major focus on global warming, gets under way this week with United Nations support as thousands of scientists from over 60 countries prepare to carry out 220 science and outreach projects in both the north and south polar regions.

The International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008, a programme of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO) officially beginning on 1 March, will be the fourth such event. The previous IPYs of 1882-83, 1932-33, and 1957-58, also known as the International Geophysical Year, all produced major increases in understanding the Earth system.

"IPY comes at a crossroads for the planet's future; February's first phase of the Fourth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown that these regions are highly vulnerable to rising temperatures," WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud said.

"However, meteorological and other regular environmental in-situ observation facilities at the poles are few and it is essential to install more and increase satellite coverage to gain a better overall picture of how rapidly these areas are changing, and of the global impact of these changes," he added.

The IPY projects will focus on learning about the past, present and future environmental status of the polar regions, while advancing understanding about the interactions between those regions and the rest of the globe. They will also investigate the frontiers of science in the polar regions, and use the unique vantage point of the polar regions and develop observatories from the interior of the Earth to the Sun and the cosmos beyond. In addition, the projects will investigate the cultural, historical and social processes that shape the sustainability of circumpolar human societies.

In order to ensure full and equal coverage of both the Arctic and the Antarctic, IPY will span two full annual cycles, from March 2007 to March 2009. Many national and regional IPY launch events are being organized over the next few weeks. The official international launch ceremony will take place on 1 March at the Palais de la Découverte in Paris.

“We face many challenges as we start: funding, data sharing, and, most importantly, the surprising and rapidly changing nature of the polar regions,” IPY International Programme Office Director David Carlson said.

But we have an enormous strength: international enthusiasm and cooperation, at a higher level and across a wider range of science than most of us will see at any other time in our careers. IPY will succeed because of this scientific urgency and energy.”