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Report submitted by the United Nations University*Summary*

The United Nations University (UNU) functions as an international community of scholars devoted to advancing knowledge for human security, peace and development. UNU's outputs are intended to be directly relevant to the role and work of the United Nations and to its formulation of sound principles, policies, strategies and programmes for action. The special nature of UNU is that it not only combines research, policy studies, capacity development, dissemination and outreach, but also incorporates to its work a global perspective with both theoretical and practical approaches. Over the past two years, the University has been particularly successful in contributing to major UN conferences, realizing new initiatives. UNU has also been working to enhance coordination with the priorities of the UN system as a whole. This report focuses on selected key topics, activities and programmes for 2004 and 2005.

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I. Introduction

1. The mission of the University, as evidenced by the provisions of its Charter, is “to contribute, through research and capacity development, to efforts to resolve the pressing problems that are a concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States”. In fulfilling this mission, UNU plays five basic roles, functioning as: an international community of scholars; a bridge between the United Nations and the international academic and research community; a think tank for the United Nations system; an instrument for capacity development; and a platform for dialogue and innovative ideas. These are highlighted in the UNU strategic directions 2005-2008, which articulate the vision to make the University a more effective research and capacity development organization that makes relevant, timely and beneficial contributions to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the United Nations. Within this overall framework, enhancing relationships with other organizations of the United Nations system, while concurrently preserving the autonomy of the University, is a key policy objective of UNU. Next to existing close cooperation with UNESCO, UNEP and nearly 40 other United Nations organizations, UNU has strengthened its cooperation within the United Nations system by entering into specific memoranda of understanding with such partners, as with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2004 and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 2005.

2. The present report is intended to be read in conjunction with the report of the Council of the United Nations University (UNU) on the work of the University in 2004 and 2005ⁱ as well as with General Assembly resolution 59/253 of 22 December 2004, in which the Assembly requests the Secretary-General to encourage other bodies of the United Nations system to utilize more fully the capacity of the University for mobilizing a worldwide network of applied policy researchers to assist the United Nations, through research and capacity development, in resolving pressing global problems. The report of the Council contains a comprehensive section on interactions between UNU and the United Nations system.

II. Contribution to United Nations conferences and other international events

3. Enhancing its connections with, and contributions to, the various entities within the United Nations system is a continuing priority of UNU. For example, policy studies are prepared to support the works of preparatory bodies of United Nations conferences or are submitted to the conferences themselves. Furthermore, UNU organizes special events related to themes raised in United Nations conferences, or initiates work related to their follow-up. Over the last two years, UNU has made important progress in the follow-up of the WSSD, WCDDR and WSIS. Its mobilizing actions to create a worldwide network of Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) on Education for Sustainable Development has met with great enthusiasm. Today, there are 12 such RCEs around the world. It is expected that by the end of 2006 the number of officially acknowledged RCEs will have grown to approximately 30. All RCEs are based on existing capacities, strengthening them by enhancing focused cooperation.

4. In addition to undertaking its ongoing agenda of research, policy study, capacity development as well as communication and dissemination activities, UNU actively and substantively contributed in 2005 to several major international events. Among these was the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan (January), for which UNU organized sessions on risk assessment and early warning. UNU presented its findings from a detailed field survey of three Sri Lankan cities, which was used as a basis to prepare a tsunami-hazard map, and from a case study of catastrophic flood risk assessment programmes implemented in Hanoi, Viet Nam. UNU also had a significant presence at phase two of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Tunisia (November). At WSIS, UNU Online Learning presented several of the University's open educational resources and distance education initiatives, while the Online Learning Initiative, UNU-IIST and UNU-MERIT (formerly UNU-INTECH) hosted parallel events on open educational resources, e-government, and the impact of information and communication technologies on economic development, respectively.

5. The United Nations University Centre in Tokyo and UNU Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) in Yokohama continued to jointly organize the U Thant Distinguished Lecture Series. Between 2004 and 2005, four lectures were organized, two by Nobel laureates (Dr. Robert Laughlin, 1998, Physics; and Ms. Shirin Ebadi, 2003, Peace;) and two by a currently serving head of state and a former head of government (respectively Ms. Tarja Kaarina Halonen, Finland, and Mr. Anand Panyarachun, Thailand). In 2006, U Thant Lectures were given by Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and Mohammad Khatami, former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many other important speakers gave lectures within UNU's U Thant International Conference Hall in Tokyo during 2006 including Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Alpha Oumar Konare, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union and former President of Mali, Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan African Parliament, and Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, illustrating UNU's success in achieving its goal to become an important platform for new ideas.

III. United Nations standing processes and United Nations University

6. As in the past, UNU continues to provide support to the Second Committee of the General Assembly and to the works of the Economic and Social Council, by enhancing interaction with experts and with knowledge-related institutions to facilitate efficient and effective decision-making by providing substantive knowledge to ensure relevant impact of policy deliberations. From September 2004 to September 2006, for example, the UNU organized 22 expert panel discussions as well as numerous training sessions, workshops, book launches and seminars to make available the results of UNU policy research and training activities. The topics of these events ranged from Curbing Human Trafficking to Food Security and Gender, from New Standards of Growth for Infants and Young Children to the Integration between Regional Trade Agreements and Multilateral Regimes and from International Migration and Development to Measuring Vulnerability to Hazards of Natural Origin. These events also served as opportunities to receive input from key constituents within the UN system and through dialogue to identify strategic issues that should become part of UNU's research agenda.

During the reporting period, UNU published almost 60 peer reviewed books on outcomes of its work on topics as indicated in the previous paragraph. In order to make the results of its work more easily accessible, the UNU initiated a series of policy and research briefs, as well as panels, workshops and book launches held at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

IV. United Nations University research programmes

7. To ensure that, wherever possible, the operational activities of the United Nations are guided by in-depth analytical research, UNU mobilizes its global network of researchers for projects that bear directly on some of the core mandates of the United Nations. The convening power of UNU is very high thanks in part to the challenging topics it addresses as well as the quality of its work. In 2005, for instance, the seven academics working in the Peace and Governance Programme of the UNU Centre in Tokyo cooperated in different projects with more than 700 experts from around the world. The “programme space” of UNU research is defined by the major processes that are rapidly and profoundly changing our world, the institutions that are effecting these changes (as well as being affected by them), and the topics that are most relevant to UNU’s mandated mission. Based on an analysis of the issues mentioned in Article I (3) of the UNU Charter, as well as the evolving policy agendas and concerns of the United Nations, the work of the University is currently clustered into two overarching themes: peace and governance, and environment and development. Specific activities and projects are selected based on such criteria as their relevance to UN priorities (and to the concerns of developing countries, in particular); their relevance to achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals; the extent and severity of the problem; the potential for developing replicable solutions; the identification of a critical gap in knowledge or capacity; and the extent to which UNU can bring a distinct comparative advantage to the problem. The following examples drawn from recent activities are representative samples.

8. **UN reform.** A UNU studyⁱⁱ examined the changing role and structure of UN operations, and argued that the growing gulf between legality and legitimacy is evidence of an eroded sense of international community. It analyzed recent tensions that have been at the forefront of United Nations deliberations and asserted the centrality of the rule of law and of a rules-based international order anchored in the United Nations system.

9. **Peacebuilding and peacekeeping.** A UNU conference held in February 2004 analyzed the credibility and relevance of recent peacekeeping operations, discussed the possible implications for Indian and Japanese peacekeeping operation policies, and examined the importance and impact of the Brahimi Report and the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. A further UNU studyⁱⁱⁱ examined the critical roles of military forces, and warned that they could be counter-productive if not tied into overall peacebuilding; although military and police forces play a crucial role in rebuilding post-conflict societies, the internal security structures of such societies often lack civilian and democratic control, internal cohesion, effectiveness and public credibility.

10. **Making States Work.** A UNU study^{iv} jointly undertaken with the International Peace Academy examined how various actors have responded to crises

regarding the legitimacy and viability of state institutions, with a particular emphasis on those situations in which the state has been salvaged or at least kept afloat. The project focused on how political power as defined through territorial boundaries is changing, and what this means for the international security system (especially where the weakness of state institutions is a matter of international concern). The research encompassed a range of crises, from states where basic public services have been neglected to the total collapse of governance. Constructive engagement rather than an analysis of failure was a key emphasis of the research activities.

11. **Spatial Disparities.** UNU-WIDER's work on spatial disparities — a measure of the unequal distribution of income, wealth, power and resources between peoples in different locations — focused on a key issue of poverty and inequality that is related directly to the Millennium Development Goals. A UNU-WIDER study^v highlighted the need for accurate measurement of such disparities and for the analysis of their causes and consequences in relation to dealing with divisions and political and ethnic tensions that can undermine social and political stability.

12. **Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.** The Director of UNU-IAS served as the co-chair of this four-year assessment released in March 2005 which involved more than 1,300 scientists from around the world with a substantive participation of UNU staff, for example, with regard to the management of marginal land in dryland areas. The Assessment provided a comprehensive study of the status of ecosystems worldwide (31 in total) and their services to human beings dependent on these ecosystems. The assessment concluded that poverty cannot be measured by income alone. It was one of the first studies to make a concrete link between the environment and poverty. The study received the [Zayed International Prize for the Environment](#) in 2005.

13. **Water Crises.** UNU continued to undertake projects related to water crises with the aim of promoting sustainable environmental and political management of critical water resources to ensure adequate quality and quantities of water for all. The results of a comparative study of international rivers and lake basins were published by UNU in 2005.^{vi} These studies came to the conclusion that when governments want to manage increasingly scarce water resource in ways that are efficient, equitable and environmentally sound, they must provide the public with a voice in watershed management decisions that directly affect them. E-government strategies can be helpful to give voice to people. Public involvement holds not only the promise of improving the management of international water sources but also of reducing the potential for conflict over water issues. An important step here was the development by UNU-INWEH of the UN Water Virtual Learning Centre (WVLC) as commissioned by UN-DESA which now has a global outreach with regional centres in Canada, Fiji, Ghana and Thailand.

14. **Sustainable Development.** A UNU-IAS study^{vii} on the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Sustainable Development presented a number of policy options meant to contribute to more coherent and mutually supportive action on the part of governments relating to issues of both trade and sustainable development. The study pointed out the increasing attention paid to policies designed to achieve sustainable development and the resulting overlap between trade policies and policies that are meant to promote sustainable development. It also identified the

need for a clearer mission for the WTO to support sustainable development, and some possible institutional reforms that might be required.

15. **Land Management.** A UNU project involving national partners in China, Laos and Thailand focused on identifying ways to incorporate local knowledge and actions in policies that can reduce the deleterious effects of some natural resource management practices. UNU-INRA developed jointly with the University of Namibia conservation strategies for Devil's Claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*), through its cultivation as a domesticated cash crop. The approach has also made it possible for Namibian farmers to benefit from the use of the crop as marketed by the international pharmaceutical industry. In a project jointly undertaken with UNEP and the Global Environment Facility, UNU is currently addressing the interlinkages between land degradation and poverty in the High Pamir and Pamir-Alai Mountains — a critical source of water and biodiversity in the region.

16. **Implementing an Ecosystem Approach in Open Ocean and Deep Sea Environments.** A UNU-IAS study^{viii} emphasized that knowledge of “who does what” in the oceans, especially in open ocean and deep sea environments, is a prerequisite for any constructive debate on ocean management and governance. It brought into clearer focus the main ingredients of ecosystem approaches and why they require an integration among sectoral policies and their possible impact on individual policies. The study was a first step towards a more comprehensive survey and dialogue on mapping stakeholders' interests with the ultimate goal of improving conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of the benefits derived from ocean spaces and their resources.

V. United Nations University capacity development programmes

17. A substantial portion of UNU activities is devoted to capacity development, in particular of young academics and especially in developing countries, working in cooperation with strong partner institutions to provide training to enhance the capacity for learning, development and governance. Fellowships are provided to deserving young scholars who need financial assistance to participate in postgraduate training courses in UNU network institutions. UNU seeks to obtain a “multiplier effect” by upgrading not only the capabilities of individuals but also the capacities of participants' “home” institutions. Three types of specialized training are provided: short-duration training courses and workshops (of up to two months duration) for postgraduate academics and professionals; long-duration training programmes (of up to twelve months' duration) for postgraduate academics and professionals; and degree-oriented study programmes, including new postgraduate degree-oriented programmes organized in Japan. During 2005, 172 academics and young professionals took part in UNU's advanced training programmes.

VI. Coordination and interaction within the United Nations system

18. As an academic unit within the UN system, UNU is uniquely positioned to contribute to the generation and sharing of knowledge relevant to the roles and work

of the United Nations, and to the application of that knowledge in formulating sound policies, strategies and programmes for action. The University continues to give high priority to enhancing its interactions within the United Nations, and works with a broad range of UN system agencies, programmes, commissions and convention secretariats through formal agreements of cooperation as well as through joint activities based on functional links. Informal substantive consultations and information sharing take place routinely between the Rector and senior academic staff of UNU and United Nations senior officials, as do similar interactions at the working level. There are also continuing interactions between UNU and the Strategic Planning Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General; a senior official from the Unit attends UNU Council sessions on behalf of the Secretary-General and maintains ongoing working relations with the UNU liaison office in New York.

19. The Rector of UNU, in collaboration with the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, has also been enhancing the coordination and rationalization of research activities within the United Nations system by convening a research and policy dialogue in Geneva among the research institutions of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. In 2004, the fifth Geneva dialogue focused on new security threats and disarmament; good governance and reconciliation in post-conflict situations; and freshwater and coastal water management. The format of the Dialogue has been revised to bring closer together supply and demand for research. A further step must be to integrate in the Dialogue think tanks from outside the United Nations that are working on key issues of concern to the UN system.

20. During 2004 and 2005, UNU continued to work on individual research, policy studies or capacity development initiatives involving some 40 UN system partners. Many officials of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions participate in the research work of different parts of UNU as well as in various conferences, such as those at UNU-WIDER on alternative sources of development finance, or on the impact of regional integration at UNU-CRIS or to scope possible future research and capacity development activities in the area of traditional knowledge in cooperation with UNU-IAS. UNU continues to explore ways and means to strengthen its think tank role for the United Nations system through the delivery of specific research efforts and policy studies and by providing analyses and policy advice to UN Secretariat departments.

Meetings of United Nations senior officials in the economic and social fields

21. Through the Rector, the United Nations University contributes to meetings of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). This collaboration enables UNU to be aware of the changing policy concerns of the system, and to identify research topics for inclusion in the UNU agenda. Over the past two years, UNU has strengthened its involvement in the work of the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the CEB and has begun to engage in the work of the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM), as well.

Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

22. UNU has also been fully involved since the very beginning in the activities of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. It continues to participate regularly in the Committee's deliberations, the elaboration of consolidated proposals to the Secretary-General and to the preparation of reports for the intergovernmental organs, and to submit specific inputs to different Committee projects. In addition, UNU-WIDER continues to cooperate with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on issues such as alternative sources of development finance. UNU-CRIS continues to provide background studies for input into the work of the Regional Commissions (ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA).

Cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

23. The University continues to collaborate with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to the organization of the annual conferences on "globalization with a human face". While the 2004 conference focused on the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, in 2005 the conference focused on globalization and education for sustainable development; a third conference in 2006 focused on "Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities for Science and Technology." Speakers included Mr. Koji Omi, current Minister of Finance of Japan and initiator of the prestigious Science and Technology Summit, (STS), Prof. Goverdhan Mehta, President of the International Council for Science, and Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand.

24. UNU and UNESCO continue to collaborate on initiatives to enhance quality of higher education, such as the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), which includes in its membership several UNESCO Chairs in Higher Education, universities and research institutes. GUNI publishes, with UNU support, annual reports on core issues for higher education. In 2005, the report addressed the issue of the financing of higher education; in 2006, the report was addressed to accreditation, both being dealt with from an international perspective.

VI. Conclusion

25. The United Nations University continued to make important progress during 2004-2005 in improving its outreach and networking, particularly in developing countries and countries in transition. The UNU Online Learning Initiative, for example, established functional links with partner institutions in three regional networks in Africa, Latin America and Asia and the Pacific. The University has also launched a major new initiative to recognize regional centres of expertise (RCEs) working in the area of education for sustainable development. During the same period, specific efforts have also been made to revamp the University's communications strategy and activities and to enhance the dissemination of its research output as a means to ensure that the knowledge gained from UNU research is made available to those who need it most. It continues to make specific policy-relevant inputs into the work of the United Nations system and to come up with practical solutions and advice concerning the current set of issues on the agenda of

the United Nations and to identify critical emerging issues which will soon be confronting the international community and the work of the Organization.

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- ⁱ *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 31 (A/61/31).*
 - ⁱⁱ Ramesh Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Albrecht Schnabel and Hans-Georg Erhart, *Security Sector Reform and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, UNU Press, 2005.
 - ^{iv} Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance*, UNU Press, 2005.
 - ^v Ravi Kanbur, Anthony J. Venables, and Guanghua Wan (eds.), *Spatial Disparities in Human Development*, UNU Press, 2005.
 - ^{vi} Carl Bruch, Libor Jansky, Mikiyasu Nakayama and Kazimierz A. Salewicz (eds.), *Public Participation in the Governance of International Freshwater Resources*, UNU Press, 2005; Libor Jansky, Martin J. Haigh, and Haushila Prasad (eds.), *Sustainable Management of Headwater Resources Research from Africa and India*, UNU Press 2005; and Libor Jansky and Juha I. Uitto (eds.), *Enhancing Participation and Governance in Water Resources Management*, UNU Press, 2005.
 - ^{vii} Gary Sampson, *The WTO and Sustainable Development*, UNU Press, 2005.
 - ^{viii} Marjo Vierros, Fanny Douvere and Salvatore Arico, *Implementing the Ecosystem Approach in Open Ocean and Deep Sea Environments: An Analysis of Stakeholders, their Interests and Existing Approaches*, UNU-IAS, 2006.