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Annan vehemently condemns attacks on international diplomats in Iraq



Kofi Annan

5 July - Vehemently condemning the recent spate of attacks against diplomats in Iraq, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan today said he hoped the incidents would not weaken the resolve of the international community to stand with the Iraqi people at this critical juncture in their history.

"The Secretary-General is deeply dismayed by the rash of attacks in recent days against representatives of the international diplomatic community in Iraq," spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said in a statement condemning the incidents, including the kidnapping of the chargé d'affaires of Egypt, as well as the attempted assassinations of diplomats from Bahrain and Pakistan.

"There can be no justification for the targeting of diplomats," Mr. Dujarric said, adding that the Secretary-General expected that the perpetrators of these acts would be quickly apprehended and brought to justice.

Situations in Africa key topics for Security Council in July, President says

5 July - The Security Council will devote a considerable amount of its time this month to various situations on the African continent, and will also spotlight the Council's role in humanitarian crises, the new President of the 15-nation body said today.

Briefing the press on the Council's work programme for the month of June, Ambassador Adamantios Vassilakis of Greece said that once again a large number of African issues would be at the forefront of the discussions.

Earlier today, the Council had been briefed on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR), and the members' main concerns following successful elections in that country were respect for human rights, institution-building, restructuring of the national military forces and economic reconstruction, Ambassador Vassilakis said.

On 11 July, the Council would discuss the situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea, including exploring every option help the Horn of Africa nations break their ongoing boundary deadlock, including a Council mission to the region.

Later in the month the Council would also hear an oral briefing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which demanded urgent attention as preparations were underway for the holding of elections – the first to take place in the country in over 40 years, Ambassador Vassilakis said.

On 14 June, the Council was set to address the situation in Somalia, he said, adding that there was an impasse regarding the Somali Government's relocation, which was causing concern. There was a need for dialogue among the country's leaders to ensure that their location plan was implemented and that the country's reconstruction was allowed to begin.

On the 22nd, the Council would be briefed by the head of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Jan Pronk, hopefully along with a representative from the African Union (AU). Mr. Vassilakis said the situation in Sudan's Darfur region remained worrying, requiring political will to move forward on both political and humanitarian fronts.

Concerning the Middle East, Council members would hear the regular monthly report by Alvaro de Soto, in his first briefing to the Council in his capacity as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Also coming due was the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

On 12 July, Greece's Foreign Minister was expected to head up a public meeting on the Security Council's role in humanitarian crises. Mr. Vassilakis said that Greece expected the discussion to focus on how, in maintaining peace and security, the Council tried to break the conflict cycle and prevent situations from deteriorating further.

UN-backed conference seeks to close loopholes against nuclear terrorism



David Waller
addressing conference

5 July - Seeking to close loopholes that could help terrorists get their hands on nuclear material, hundreds of delegates from 90 countries are meeting in Vienna this week to strengthen a United Nations-backed treaty with amendments to avert theft and smuggling of such materials and sabotage of nuclear facilities.

“In short, the amendments now before this conference are vitally important and, if adopted, will take another significant step in reducing the vulnerability of States Parties, and, indeed, the entire world,” UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Deputy Director General David Waller told the opening session yesterday.

He noted that the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM), drawn up in 1980, is not sufficiently comprehensive for today's world since it protects nuclear material used for peaceful purposes while in international transport, but “most fundamentally” covers neither the physical protection of nuclear material in peaceful domestic use, storage and transport, nor nuclear facilities themselves.

“The proposed amendments would remedy these shortcomings,” Mr. Waller said. “They would also provide for expanded cooperation between and among States regarding rapid measures to locate and recover stolen or smuggled nuclear material, mitigate any radiological consequences of sabotage, and prevent and combat related offences.”

The Vienna-based IAEA is the depositary of the CPPNM, which currently has 111 States Parties. It is the only legally binding international treaty providing physical protection of nuclear material and ensuring improved security in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. Since then a group of experts has been working on strengthening its safeguards.

Ahead of rains, UN staff rush to relocate refugees in southern Chad

5 July - United Nations staff in remote southern Chad are rushing to relocate an estimated 10,000 refugees who fled unrest in the Central African Republic (CAR) over the past month, and are already showing signs of malnutrition, as the onset of the rainy season threatens to cut them off from all aid.



Central African refugees in Maro, Chad's Gore region

“Our Chadian partners say that by mid-July, wide areas will likely be cut off by flooding,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Ron Redmond told a news briefing in Geneva today. “So we will need to move fast.”

UNHCR is deploying 11 logisticians, field officers, protection officers and extra drivers to relocate the 10,000 refugees, many of whom fled with nothing and are now scattered among 17 villages near the Chadian town of Gore. One option being considered is to move them to Amboko camp near Gore, which already hosts some 13,000 CAR refugees, could hold up to 27,000 people and could provide health care services, water and sanitation facilities.

Pending relocation, UNHCR has been distributing emergency plastic sheeting, blankets and high-protein biscuits provided by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Local villagers are also offering what help they can. The refugees have been living in flimsy, makeshift shelters built of leaves and sticks.

They brought no food with them, and many children and women are showing signs of malnourishment. They are eating whatever they can find in the bush – mainly roots, wild fruit and leaves. They are drinking local river water and there is no proper sanitation.

The latest refugees fled northern CAR during the first three weeks of June following an incident between Government forces and unidentified armed groups. Although no new attacks have been reported since 3 June, they say they have no intention – at this point at least – of returning anytime soon, citing fear of further violence.

There are already 30,000 CAR refugees in southern Chad. The majority of them arrived in 2003 after a military coup. Chad is also hosting more than 200,000 refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan who are currently housed in 12 camps in the eastern part of the country.

UN suspends food shipments to Somali tsunami victims after ship is hijacked



5 July - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has suspended all shipments of humanitarian assistance to Somalia following the hijacking of a chartered vessel carrying food aid for 28,000 tsunami survivors, the first time in the agency’s history that a ship carrying relief food has been commandeered.

The decision, taken because of the insecurity of Somali waters, will be reviewed depending on the release of the food, vessel and crew, who are apparently being held for \$500,000 ransom. WFP assists some 275,000 Somalis with 3,000 tons of food each month and currently has about two weeks’ worth of food stocks in the country.

“If there is a quick, favourable solution, we hope there will be no major interruption of WFP operations in the country,” WFP Country Director Robert Hauser said yesterday. “But for now, the waters off the Somali coast present too great a threat to send further shipments.”

The St. Vincent and the Grenadines-registered MV Semlow, with 10 crew and 850 tons of rice on board, was hijacked on 27



June about 300 kilometres north-east of the capital Mogadishu, some 60 kilometres off the coast, while en route to the Puntland. The company hiring the boat has indicated that the pirates are asking for a \$500,000 ransom.

“We remain hopeful that the humanitarian cargo on the MV Semlow will be allowed to continue its journey to Bossaso in the north-east of the country unconditionally,” Mr. Hauser said.

WFP has been in regular contact with community elders and local authorities and a Transitional Federal Government mission went yesterday to Harardheere District to facilitate the release.

The agency regularly ships humanitarian cargo by sea from Mombasa in Kenya to various destinations in Somalia, totalling some 22,000 tons since January. The seized cargo would feed 28,000 Somalis whose lives were devastated by the December tsunami for two months.

WFP chartered the ship from Motaku Shipping Agency in Mombasa. The crew includes a Sri Lankan captain, a Tanzanian engineer and eight Kenyan crew members.

At African summit, Annan announces creation of 'Democracy Fund'



Annan at the opening of the African Union Summit

4 July - Addressing leaders of the African continent meeting today in Libya, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the launch of a new initiative to financially support States undergoing the democratization process.

Mr. Annan told the African Union (AU) Summit in Sirte that the new UN Democracy Fund will provide assistance to countries seeking to establish or strengthen their democracy. “A number of Member States have already indicated their intention to contribute,” he said, voicing hope that others would follow their example.

“Almost all of you have made clear your commitment to the democratic process, and your willingness to be guided by the will of your people, as expressed in regular and fair elections, and through open, participatory governance,” he told the assembled participants. The Fund, he said, would help alleviate the strain that maintaining democratic institutions can place on poor countries' resources.

The creation of such a fund is one of the proposals that the Secretary-General made in his report “In Larger Freedom,” which forms the basis for negotiations on decisions to be taken by national leaders attending the World Summit at UN Headquarters in September.

The Secretary-General said with record number of national leaders expected to attend, the Summit would offer “a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the world to come together and take action on grave global threats that require bold global solutions.”

Because Africa's problems are so acute, that continent stands the most to gain, he said, explaining how the proposals are of particular importance for Africa. These include recommendations for tackling the debt problem, promoting fair access to global trade, controlling the spread of malaria and fostering education for all.

On security, he pointed out that almost 80 percent of all UN peacekeepers are deployed in Africa. “The September Summit must strengthen the UN's own peacekeeping capacity,” he declared. “And it must address the peacebuilding gap, in which too many countries emerging from conflict are left to lapse back into violence, for lack of international support for disarmament and other steps toward recovery and reconstruction.”

Mr. Annan said his proposal for a new Peacebuilding Commission has elicited support from many African countries and urged them to help bring it into being.

Another central proposal in the report relates to the responsibility to protect civilians caught in conflict. The Secretary-General acknowledged that some countries “are concerned that the concept could be used as a fig-leaf for unwarranted interventions,” but emphasized that inaction in the face of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity is unacceptable.

To promote human rights generally, the report advocates transforming the current Commission on Human Rights into a Human Rights Council. “The new Council would not exclude any regional or other group of States,” he said. “Rather, it would promote respect for all human rights in all countries, north and south.”

Reform of the Security Council is also of paramount importance to Africa, and the Secretary-General noted that he has suggested two options for reforming that body. Both involve an increase in the membership from 15 to 24, though with different configurations. “I know you are discussing this issue at this Summit. I urge you to seize this precious opportunity,” he said.

“As the World Summit nears, I urge you to engage fully. I hope a spirit of compromise will prevail,” he said. “And I hope you will all recognize that the better the United Nations works, the more all people will benefit, within and beyond Africa.”

G8 adoption of development measures would mark step towards greater progress – Annan

4 July - Leaders of the Group of Eight industrialized countries are expected to back a number of development initiatives that can constitute a step towards greater progress for the world's poor, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said today in Libya.

Speaking to reporters in Sirte, where he attended the African Union (AU) Summit, Mr. Annan voiced hope that the G8 will back trade initiatives at their meeting later this week in Gleneagles, United Kingdom.

“I hope the leaders will commit to ensuring the trade round, the Doha Round, is really a development round and it levels the field for the developing countries to be able to gain access to markets and compete without richer countries giving subsidies to their producers, which really undermines the competitiveness of goods from the developing world.”

Most developing countries, given the chance, “would prefer to trade themselves out of poverty rather than live on handouts,” he said.

The adoption of development initiatives by the G8 would mark an “important step forward, and we should be grateful for that,” the Secretary-General said, adding, “but it is not the whole story.”

Moving forward, he said it would be necessary to intensify the partnership between the North and the South “and really make it work for the benefit of the poor.”

For their part, he added, many African governments “are trying to improve governance and transparency and we should support and encourage them to do it.”

Looking to the 2005 World Summit to be held at UN Headquarters in September, Mr. Annan said some 175 national leaders planned to attend, making it potentially the largest summit meeting in history. “They have important decisions to take on development issues and on UN reform,” he said.

The Secretary-General has presented a set of proposals as a basis for discussion which aim to promote development, security and human rights for all. They range from reaching globally agreed targets for development assistance to expanding the Security Council to replacing the Commission on Human Rights with a Human Rights Council whose members would be elected by the General Assembly.



Spotlight on Africa's problems is welcome, UN officials say

5 July - Welcoming the spotlight thrown on Africa's problems by this week's Group of 8 (G8) Summit in Scotland, United Nations officials today said Africa had never faced such vast challenges.

At a news briefing in Geneva, UN World Food Programme (WFP) spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume asked "Why does Africa need help?" and answered, "Because Africa has never been worse off."

She noted Africa had received publicity from both last Saturday's Live 8 concerts and the 6 to 8 July summit in Gleneagles, and she expressed the hope that the G8 meeting would raise the financial support and the level of engagement from the participating countries.

While the rest of the developing world had made progress in the fight against poverty and hunger, she said, the situation in Africa continued to deteriorate, with one-third of the 852 million Africans suffering from malnutrition, two-thirds of the world's AIDS cases occurring on that continent and with the capacity of its governments weakening.

Each year 6 million Africans died from preventable causes, such as malnutrition, unsafe water, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, she added. HIV/AIDS had taken the lives of one-third of health workers in Lesotho and was killing 2,000 teachers each year in Zambia, while a total of 8 million African farmers, more than the total number of farmers in Europe and North America, had died in the pandemic.

Despite the alarming numbers, WFP had received only \$67 million out of the \$405 million it needed for Africa this year, she said.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), welcoming the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, saw a mixed picture on the continent, with most sub-Saharan countries likely to miss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing or eliminating a large number of social ills by 2015, but with many countries having put in place improved governance, accountability and aid management and being on track to meet some of the targets.

"The introduction of more rigorous expenditure and tracking systems in several countries has improved the quality of social spending, boosting, for example, school enrolment in places such as Tanzania, Ghana, Zambia, Uganda and Mozambique," it said.

Over the past decade African economies had grown at an annual average rate of 3.7 per cent, "the highest in the world," but the continent needed an annual average growth rate of 7 per cent to produce a sustainable effect on poverty reduction, it said.

Reducing poverty in Africa was not just a question of doubling aid. While its value in meeting the MDGs could not be minimized, the quality of aid had been compromised by donors' restrictive delivery methods and by poor governance on the part of beneficiary countries, ECA said.

"Regional integration could help to overcome some of these problems," it added.

Zimbabwe: UN envoy on housing evictions continues tour

5 July - The United Nations Special Envoy looking into humanitarian aspects of the evictions of thousands of poor Zimbabweans from illegal housing and businesses today extended her visit to the southern African country by almost a week until Friday and was setting out for the southern African country's second city.

On her way to Bulawayo by road, Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka, who is also the Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), was scheduled to stop in Midlands Province. She also planned to visit the western Victoria Falls district, her agency said.



Ms. Tibaijuka, who arrived on 26 June for about a week, has been reviewing the Government's arrangements for the displaced, its provision of alternative housing and basic needs during the southern African winter, as well as the response of UN agencies in the country, it said.

Last week, the Special Envoy met with Zimbabwe's Ministerial Task Force coordinating Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) and was present at the official launch at Whitecliff Farm of the new GariKai housing reconstruction programme. She was shown many resettlement sites the Government and local authorities had prepared for new homes and markets.

She talked with local authority officials and the affected communities in Headlands and Rusape, as well as in Mutare. She also held talks with Manicaland Province Governor Tinaye Chigudu and talked to displaced families camped in a local sports ground.

Ms. Tibaijuka has been hearing reports from ordinary citizens and representatives of faith-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the capital, Harare, she met with international and local NGOs and women's groups as she visited sites where people has been evicted, such as Mbare, Hatcliffe Extension and Porta Farm.

Ten United Nations special rapporteurs on several human freedoms and rights issued a 24 June statement expressing concern about the "recent mass forced evictions in Zimbabwe and related human rights violations" and raising questions about the negative effects on supplies of water and food, education and health care, including HIV/AIDS treatment.

UN envoy assessing mass evictions in Zimbabwe to visit Victoria Falls region



Anna Tibaijuka

4 July - After a week of meetings in Zimbabwe with the President as well as ordinary citizens who have been evicted from their homes, a United Nations special envoy plans further travels in the country as part of her fact-finding mission on humanitarian needs there, a spokesman for the world body reported today.

Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka, who is also the Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), will continue to hold meetings both in the capital, Harare, and in other parts of the country in the days ahead.

A spokesman traveling with Ms. Tibaijuka said she is scheduled to go to Bulawayo by car today with stops along the way in the Midlands province. While in Zimbabwe, the Special Envoy will also visit the Victoria Falls region.

Last week, Ms. Tibaijuka met with President Robert Mugabe, who gave her free access to visit any site and speak with anyone. She and her team have held numerous meetings with people affected by recent mass evictions in a number of locations, including the Caledonia Farm where over 4,000 evictees are waiting to be resettled.

The Special Envoy is in Zimbabwe on a fact-finding mission to assess the scope and extent of the recent mass evictions. She is also studying the adequacy of the Government's arrangements for the displaced and its capacity to address the basic needs of the affected population, along with the ability of the UN and its partners to respond to their humanitarian needs.

Kosovo: UN envoy strongly condemns attacks in Pristina



Soren Jessen-Petersen (file)

4 July - The senior United Nations envoy to Kosovo has strongly condemned three attacks carried out Saturday evening in downtown Pristina, while expressing relief at the fact that no one was injured by the explosions.

"Such actions, which I know are not supported by the people of Kosovo, will not be allowed to damage the democratic process," Søren Jessen-Petersen said in a statement released on Sunday.

He stressed that violence would not diminish the UN's support for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. The



citizens of Kosovo, he said, will persist “in their strong efforts to build a peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic” society.

One of the explosions caused damage to three UN vehicles, while another occurred at a commercial building opposite the offices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The third caused minor damage to a Government building.

The envoy expressed his appreciation to the UN Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) Police and the Kosovo Police Service for their prompt response to the attacks. As investigations are being carried out, he appealed to the public to come forward with information to assist in efforts in bringing the perpetrators to justice.

UN refugee agency urges Kazakhstan not to forcibly return Uzbek rights activist



5 July - The United Nations refugee agency today urged authorities in Kazakhstan not to forcibly return a well-known Uzbek human rights activist, who was arrested along with his family yesterday in the Kazakh capital, Almaty, after having fled there following the recent military crackdown in his own country.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Lutfullo Shamsuddinov was arrested Monday following a request by the Uzbek authorities to extradite him.

“UNHCR is extremely concerned at the arrest of a refugee under its mandate, and is urging the Kazakh authorities not to forcibly return Mr. Shamsuddinov to Uzbekistan. Under the 1951 Geneva Convention, it is forbidden,” said UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond in Geneva today.

Mr. Shamsuddinov arrived in Kazakhstan on 25 May and was registered at UNHCR two days later. After a thorough refugee status determination process, he and his six dependent family members were recognized as mandate refugees on 24 June. “His case was submitted to a third government for urgent resettlement and we have now received word from that government that in principle, it is willing to accept the request, Mr. Redmond said.

The arrest in Kazakhstan comes as 29 Uzbek refugees in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan are also in detention following a request for extradition by the Uzbek authorities.

“As you know, UNHCR organized a meeting with governments here in Geneva last Friday for urgent resettlement of the 29, as well as for humanitarian evacuation of some 450 other Uzbeks who have sought refuge in Kyrgyzstan and are currently at the Sasik camp near Jalal-Abad,” said Mr. Redmond, adding: “Our bureau for the region indicates there has been a positive response so far from a number of governments, but I cannot at this time give you specifics.”

Annan urges Caribbean leaders to be bold about policies for reaching MDGs

5 July - United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has urged the leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to devise national development strategies “bold enough to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” aimed at reducing or eliminating socio-economic ills by 2015.

In a message delivered by Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury to the meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government in St. Lucia on Sunday, Mr. Annan said to reach those goals developing countries should have the implementation of their plans well in hand by next year and rich countries should support them on aid, trade and debt relief.

The Secretary-General also called on the Caribbean leaders for support in several areas, including UN reform, assistance to Haiti, a CARICOM member, and strengthening international human rights activities.



2005 World Summit must consider ways to protect, promote women's rights – UN official

5 July - With many competing interests and expectations vying for attention in the run up to the 2005 World Summit, world leaders must make sure that any decisions they take in September will ultimately promote and protect the rights of women, the top United Nations adviser on women's issues said today.

Addressing the opening meeting of the 33rd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Rachel Mayanja, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Adviser to the on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women stressed the 23-member expert body's tireless commitment to that aim – ensuring that real-life benefits were the guiding principle in gauging how women could gain from decisions taken by the international community.

The 23-member Committee of experts, which monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, also worked diligently to highlight the specific areas of concern in each of the States parties that came before it for a constructive dialogue about their compliance, Ms. Mayanja said.

She added the Committee's approach to gender equality, as reflected in its general recommendations, statements and concluding comments, made it very clear that States parties to the Convention were obliged to tackle the structural causes of discrimination against women. Only by challenging the ingrained and systemic roots of women's inequality would true equality with men be realized, she said.

Heads of peacekeeping missions meet in Senegal to review progress and needs

5 July - Reviewing the progress made by West African peacekeeping missions, their chiefs today called on the international community to redouble its efforts to strengthen humanitarian assistance for all needy countries in the region, especially for the drought-stricken Sahelian countries facing famine, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) said.

In their one-day meeting in Senegal's capital, Dakar, the five Special Representatives of Secretary-General Kofi Annan (SRSGs) noted that the Consolidated Appeals Processes had brought in funding that was well short of what was required.

Meeting under the chairmanship of SRSG Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the UNOWA head, were Daudi Mwakawago of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Pierre Schori of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Abou Moussa of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and Joao Honwana of the UN Peace-Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) to update the developments in their missions.

The Special Representatives stressed the importance of steady progress towards the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections in Liberia and the reform of its security sector, and said they also hoped for early finalization of the Economic Governance Action Plan, UNOWA said.

The five noted with satisfaction the supplementary accord for Côte d'Ivoire of 29 June, called the Pretoria Declaration, and said it had given renewed impetus to the peace process, "failing which individual sanctions might be invoked," UNOWA said.

They also expressed the hope that political leaders in Guinea-Bissau would do everything to ensure that the second round of elections would take place in the same calm conditions as the first round and that they would commit themselves to accepting the results.

Though Togo has no peacekeeping mission, the SRSGs called on the Government to continue its efforts towards reconciliation after the disputes over its April elections scattered thousands of refugees into neighbouring countries.

With UNAMSIL withdrawing at the end of the year, they also discussed residual problems in Sierra Leone, the future UN presence there and the possible impact on peace-building efforts in nearby countries, UNOWA said.

Meeting after the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) conference that took place in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in late June, they called on their Intermission Cooperation Working Group to explore a regional DDR approach that would include countries that do not host UN peace missions.

Palestinian refugees get new homes after Israeli demolitions thanks to UN agency

5 July - With the homes of nearly 30,000 people in the Gaza Strip demolished or damaged beyond repair by the Israeli military since the start of the most recent outbreak of violence, the main United Nations agency helping Palestinian refugees has handed over 109 new homes to 116 families from Rafah refugee camp, the last part of a five-phase project.



"These homes are the visible expression of UNRWA's pledge to provide shelter for all these refugees made homeless by the conflict that has raged since September 2000," the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) said in a statement.

The 72 buildings opened yesterday will house some 670 refugees. The overall project has provided a total of 431 new homes, and this last phase was funded by donations from Spain, Ireland and un-earmarked contributions to UNRWA's emergency appeals for a total cost of \$2.2 million.

Plans for an additional 1,210 funded shelters for 1,285 families are currently underway in Rafah but UNRWA still needs some \$28 million to cover the backlog requirement for a further 1,263 new shelters to house 1,352 homeless refugee families throughout the Gaza Strip.

UNRWA Commissioner General Karen Koning AbuZayd has urged the international donor community to increase its financial support for the Agency's re-housing activity and its plans for the post disengagement era after Israel's projected withdrawal from Gaza later this year.

These plans include major improvement of the refugee camps, major infrastructure development projects and expanding the Agency's current Job Creation and Microfinance and Microenterprise programmes. "These projects are aimed at making the refugees feel a tangible difference in their lives, which should help to put the peace process in the region back on the right track," Ms. AbuZayd said.

According to UNRWA statistics, by end of December 2004 a total of 2,991 shelters, home to over 28,483 people, had been demolished or damaged beyond repair in the Gaza Strip since the violence began in 2000. There has been a halt in house demolition since the beginning of this year, the agency said.

UN urban development programme chief urges architects to help improve slums

5 July - With major cities becoming more and more crowded, the head of the United Nations programme for sustainable housing and urban development has challenged architects to use their expertise and take the lead in the global race to improve living conditions of nearly 1 billion slum dwellers around the world.

"Despite significant efforts by the international community, governments, the private sector, civil society and professionals, living and housing conditions, particularly in developing countries, have not improved," said Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

There were now more slum dwellers in the world today than three decades ago, and their number was rapidly increasing, she said in a statement delivered on her behalf by the head of UN-HABITAT's Global Division, Mr. Lars Reutersward, at the

22nd World Congress of the International Union of Architects, in Istanbul, Turkey.

"This is the great challenge for us all. UN-HABITAT considers architects and planners, both in their policy-making and professional capacities, as key partners in taking up this challenge," she said, adding: "We believe that the International Union of Architects, representing nearly one-and-a-half million professionals worldwide, has a significant role and contribution to make in raising awareness of these trends and in bringing about change."

Ms. Tibaijuka said that the challenges of a rapidly urbanizing world were not limited to developing countries. Many cities in the North were also witnessing inner city decline, persistent unemployment, social exclusion, and urban sprawl. These issues could not be taken lightly because they undermined decades of achievement and social and economic progress. They represented patterns in the use of land, water and energy that were simply unsustainable.

UN agencies bring assistance to flood-hit Indian state of Gujarat

5 July - United Nations agencies are providing aid to the Indian state of Gujarat, where the situation in several districts is reported to be critical after unprecedented heavy rains and flooding killed more than 130 people, led to the evacuation of half a million more, and affected power and water supplies to several thousand villages.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is assisting the state government by supplying emergency items such as oral rehydration salts, a treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhoea, vomiting and heat exhaustion, and chlorine tablets for water purification.

UN World Health Organization (WHO) staff at field offices are monitoring the health and sanitation conditions in the affected districts. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), whose concerns include reproductive health issues, is also monitoring the situation closely.

On 10th anniversary of Srebrenica massacre, UN recommits to rehabilitation

5 July - As the United Nations prepares to mark the 10th anniversary of the fall of Srebrenica during the Balkan wars, a senior official has reaffirmed the UN's commitment to help heal the wounds in the town that was the site of a massacre of Muslim men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces after they took over the town designated by the Security Council as a "safe area."

Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and Communications, said he hoped that the tragedy of Srebrenica, the worst massacre in Europe since World War II, had taught the global community an important lesson on the need to respond resolutely to systematic attempts to terrorize, expel or murder an entire people.

"As the Secretary-General Kofi Annan stressed in his 1999 report on the Fall of Srebrenica, the international community as a whole must accept its share of responsibility for its response to the ethnic cleansing campaign that culminated in the murder of some 7,000 unarmed civilians in Srebrenica," Mr. Tharoor told the UN News Service after meeting at UN Headquarters in New York with two survivors of the massacre.

"Ten years after those tragic events, they continue to haunt us and serve as a reminder that such atrocities must be met with all necessary means and that there must be the political will to carry the policy through," said Mr. Tharoor, after discussing UN rehabilitation efforts in Srebrenica with Munira Beba Hadzic, Director of Bosfam, a Bosnian non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in an income-generating project for female war victims in the Srebrenica region, and her colleague Magbula Divovic, both survivors of the Srebrenica tragedy.

"You will see; we will succeed," were Ms. Hadzic's parting words to Mr. Tharoor after the meeting.

Today, various international development projects are underway in the Srebrenica region, including a UN Development



Programme (UNDP) regional project which aims to improve local governance and the general socio-economic environment. These projects are being undertaken in close cooperation with the local authorities with an understanding that it is upon the people of the region now to make these international assistance and resources productive and functional.

Founded during the war in 1994, Bosfam promotes reconciliation and strives to improve the quality of life for the local population by setting up income-generating projects. It began with knitting and weaving programmes to provide occupational therapy for women victims of the war.

Bird flu still of critical concern, needs more international attention – UN official

5 July - Bird flu, which health officials fear could mutate into a deadly human pandemic, in a worst-case scenario, remains a critical concern in many Asian countries and requires more attention by both affected states and the international community, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).



Avian Influenza

“Eradication of the virus from the eight affected Asian countries will not be easily achieved,” FAO Chief Veterinary Officer Joseph Domenech told an international conference on bird flu in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday. The meeting is jointly organized by FAO, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) and the intergovernmental World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

“We notice with considerable relief that a recent joint WHO/FAO/OIE mission to Viet Nam concluded that there is currently no evidence of virus change and that the virus is not as widely spread among humans as initially thought,” he added, noting that there was therefore no need at the moment to raise the level of pandemic alert.

“But there is also no reason for complacency,” he declared. “The virus continues to circulate in poultry and wild birds and requires highest attention. Many questions remain unanswered and more research and major investments for national and regional control operations are required.”

WHO is concerned that continuing transmission from birds to humans might give avian and human influenza viruses an opportunity to exchange genes, facilitating a pandemic that in a worst case scenario could kill tens of millions of people worldwide. The so-called Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920, unrelated to the present virus, is estimated to have killed between 20 million and 40 million people around the world.

Mr. Domenech called upon affected countries to share information openly about their prevention and control strategies and stressed that in some countries, such as Viet Nam, where the virus is widely spread, massive vaccination could be the only way to reduce infection in poultry to protect humans.

He advised against the use of antiviral drugs such as amantadine, an important anti-flu drug meant for humans, following its reported use by Chinese farmers to treat major bird flu outbreaks among chickens. “The use of an anti-viral drug in poultry will create drug resistance and will hamper the treatment of avian flu in humans,” he said, calling on the Chinese authorities to be more transparent about their control strategies.

There have been more than 100 reported human infections, about 50 of them fatal, since the first case linked to widespread poultry outbreaks in Viet Nam and Thailand was reported in January last year. Nearly 140 million domestic birds have died or been culled over the past year in South-East Asia in an effort to curb the spread of the disease.

UN Children's Fund appeals for nearly \$1 million for Togolese refugee children

5 July - With 8,000 Togolese children living with Ghanaian host families, after they and their relatives fled the violence that followed Togo's disputed April elections, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today issued a crisis appeal for nearly \$1 million to fund local education, sanitation and special medical care.

UNICEF Ghana sought funding of \$946,000 to "ensure that at least 90 per cent of the 8,000 child refugees of Togolese origin in Ghana and 4,000 of the host communities' children access an 'integrated' education package of early childhood care, primary schooling and psychosocial support" over the next 18 months, the agency said.

The funds would also be used to halt the transmission of Guinea Worm in Ghana's Volta Region and in the border areas by strengthening surveillance, training local health workers and improving school sanitation facilities in the endemic communities, as well as in communities which risk becoming endemic, it said.

The money would also pay for monitoring the Togolese child refugees in Ghana and ensuring that they have a protective environment, UNICEF said.

Most of the refugees and their hosts share a common local language, Ewe, but the level of poverty is high and the social infrastructure is poor, it said.

UNESCO chief deplores journalist's murder in Russia as blow against democracy



5 July - Raising his voice yet again in defence of freedom of the press, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has condemned the murder of a journalist in the Russian Federation republic of Dagestan as another blow against an essential component of democracy.

Magomedzarid Varisov was killed in his car on 28 June in Makhachkala, capital of Dagestan. Director of the Republican Centre of Strategic Initiatives and Political Technologies, he wrote a column of political analysis in the newspaper *Novoye Delo*. According to the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations (CJES, Moscow), the newspaper had received repeated phone call threats against him.

"A well-known journalist and political analyst, he paid with his life for his commitment to reporting and disseminating information," UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura said in a statement.

"Everywhere in the world, the existence and safeguarding of a free and independent press are essential components of democracy, crucial for informed debate in every society that respects the rule of law and promotes the universal values of the Declaration of Human Rights. I trust that authorities will investigate this crime and bring the perpetrators to justice," he added.

Mr. Matsuura's statement was the latest in a long series of condemnations he has issued recently over attacks on journalists around the world. UNESCO's mandate includes the defence of freedom of expression and press freedom.

Australian park administration, Mexican conservationist win UN-backed awards

5 July - An Australian marine park administration that seeks to preserve the world's largest collection of coral reefs and a Mexican champion of nature and wildlife conservation have won a United Nations-administered environmental prize.

This year's Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Protection, a biennial award made possible through a donation to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) by Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al-Said of Oman, went to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and Ernesto C. Enkerlin-Hoeflich.

They were chosen by the Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme.

The GBRMPA, principal adviser to the Australian Government on managing the park, received the prize for its crucial contributions to the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef, a critical global resource. Guided by the principle of balancing



conservation and sustainable use, the GBRMPA has created an innovative framework that, whilst allowing for reasonable human use, will still ensure the healthy survival of the coastal and marine ecosystems.

Enkerlin-Hoeflich (Mexico), President of the National Commission on Natural Protected Areas of Mexico (CONANP) was honoured for his outstanding contributions to nature and wildlife conservation, ecological research and environmental education. During his four-year tenure at CONANP, which is charged with the conservation of all protected areas in Mexico, five new sites have been incorporated in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

UN-backed generic medicines factory being set up in Afghanistan

5 July - A project, co-sponsored by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), got under way in Afghanistan today with the arrival in Kabul of donated production machinery for the country's first-ever generic medicine factory, which will eventually produce 300 million to 400 million tablets of safe, urgently needed analgesics and antibiotics for local use.

The machinery will equip a newly-constructed factory named Baz International Pharmaceutical Company Limited. The locally produced generic medicines will significantly improve the availability of safe, effective and affordable medication in the country, UNDP said.

The plant will be fully Afghan-owned and will be managed by Dr. Karim Baz, an experienced local doctor. Approximately 40 local employees will be taught relevant operating skills and production technology.

The "Afghan Generic Medicines Project," initially launched in 2002, brings together private and public partners, including the Swiss non-profit organization Business Humanitarian Forum (BHF), the Brussels-based European Generic Medicines Association (EGA) and the UNDP Country Office in Afghanistan.

Currently, one-quarter of all Afghan children die before the age of 5, often due to the lack of proper medication for treatable infectious diseases.

Agreed themes, but no common statement, emerge from Economic and Social Council ministerial session



Ambassador
Munir Akram

3 July - The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has concluded its annual ministerial meeting with broad agreement on key issues but no common statement reflecting a shared position, its President said.

Addressing the Council at a session which wrapped up late on Friday, Pakistan's Ambassador, Munir Akram, explained that since efforts to produce a ministerial declaration had not been successful, he would prepare and circulate a Chair's summary of the high-level segment, reflecting the discussions that had taken place during the three-day meeting.

Highlighting some broad themes that had emerged during the discussions, he noted that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of anti-poverty targets adopted at a UN summit in 2000, together with the outcomes of other major UN conferences, constituted a comprehensive development agenda for the international community. The challenge was not devising a plan but acting on it, he said.

While pointing out that overall progress in reaching the Goals had been uneven, he said a new spirit of shared responsibility was emerging. At the same time, he cautioned that this positive atmosphere must be maintained to give rise to concrete achievements at the 2005 World Summit to be held at UN Headquarters in September.

Drawing another lesson from the high-level meeting, Mr. Akram said it served to highlight ECOSOC's important role as the sole body bringing together governments, international agencies, civil society and business to conduct a comprehensive and open dialogue on how to reach common agenda.

'This generation can make poverty history,' Annan says in message to Live 8

2 July - United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan today joined people across the world who are supporting the 'Live 8' concert events which advocate the adoption of anti-poverty measures by a summit of the Group of 8 (G8) industrialized countries later this month.

Mr. Annan, who will attend the concert at Hyde Park in London today, said his aim in doing so is “to show support for all the millions of people in the world who stand to benefit if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are reached – especially the children who will be saved from malaria or AIDS, who will grow up healthy, go to school and have the chance to earn their living and enjoy life.”

In a message to the event, he voiced appreciation to the artists “who are devoting their time and talents to such a vital cause” and stressed that ordinary voters have influence over important decisions taken by governments. “This generation – with its voice, with its votes, with its hard work – really can make poverty history,” he said.

According to the organizers, Live 8 is part of a “day of action across the world which kick-starts The Long Walk to Justice that calls on the leaders of the world's richest countries to act when they meet in Gleneagles on 6-9 July.”

Events today in London, Edinburgh, Philadelphia, Berlin, Paris and Rome, as well as other locations around the world, aim to bring millions of people together to call for complete debt cancellation, more and better aid and trade justice for the world's poorest people, the organizers say.

Among the artists taking part in London are the African Children's Choir, Annie Lennox, Bob Geldof, Coldplay, Dido, Elton John, Joss Stone, Keane, the Killers, Madonna, Mariah Carey, Ms. Dynamite, Paul McCartney, Pink Floyd, Razorlight, REM, Robbie Williams, Scissor Sisters, Snoop Dogg, Snow Patrol, Stereophonics, Sting, Travis, U2, UB40 and Velvet Revolver.