

In the headlines:

- Myanmar: Annan vows to fight on for Aung San Suu Kyi's release
- Fight against AIDS has achieved important but uneven global progress – UN
- Senior UN official 'hits ground running' in seeking to resolve Timor-Leste violence
- Concerned at Somalia clashes, UN relief official urges factions to act humanely
- Close cooperation among Security Council anti-terrorism panels urged by chairs
- UN peacekeeper in DR of Congo killed, bringing five-year total to 74
- Following deadly riots in Afghanistan, Annan pledges continued UN support
- UN health agency accelerates election of new chief, setting November timetable
- Guatemala must do more to assure security, justice – UN rights chief
- New donations boost UN food aid in Sudan but more contributions still urgently needed
- Cambodia: UN experts call for halt to eviction of up to several thousand families
- In message to Asian media summit, Annan urges respect for press freedom

More stories inside

Myanmar: Annan vows to fight on for Aung San Suu Kyi's release

30 May - United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan today vowed to continue working for the release of Myanmar democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, whose house arrest the authorities have extended.



Kofi Annan

“Despite this setback, the international community cannot abandon the search for improvements in the difficult situation in Myanmar,” Mr. Annan said in a statement issued by his spokesman, just four days after he appealed directly to the head of State, Senior General Than Shwe, to release Ms. Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 10 of the past 16 years. The authorities announced the extension a day after that.

“He believes Myanmar’s leadership has missed a significant opportunity to confirm, through concrete actions, its expressed commitment to move toward true national reconciliation and all-inclusive democracy, as well as improved relations with the international community,” the statement added.

It said Mr. Annan would continue not only to make every effort to secure the release of Ms. Suu Kyi and other political detainees, but also to urge the authorities to take other steps they discussed with Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari during his recent visit to the country.

These include improved safety and access for humanitarian assistance, restraint in military operations that have affected civilians, and - ultimately - the possibility of internal dialogue that could lead to national reconciliation.

Speaking to reporters himself today, Mr. Annan said the UN would continue to work with the Association of Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN) and with Malaysia, which holds the Presidency of ASEAN and the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) “and we hope that other governments with influence will bring pressure to bear.”

Last week Mr. Annan called Mr. Gambari’s visit, the first high-level contact in more than two years, a “welcome development.”

“Obviously, lines of communication have now been opened with Yangon following Mr. Gambari’s visit and we hope to exploit those lines to move the process forward,” spokesman Stephane Dujarric said told reporters today. “From where we stand, we can’t give up and we have to keep trying.”

Fight against AIDS has achieved important but uneven global progress – UN



Participants at AIDS Press Conference

30 May - In the most comprehensive report so far on the world’s progress in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the main United Nations agency combating the disease says most countries have built a strong foundation on which to mount an effective response but new infections are continuing to increase in certain areas.

The study, called “Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: A UNAIDS 10th Anniversary Special Edition” comes out on the eve of the 2006 High-Level Meeting on AIDS. A dozen heads of State, more than 100 cabinet ministers and about 1,000 representatives of civil society and the private sector are expected to gather in the General Assembly at UN Headquarters in New York from 31 May to 2 June to discuss its findings.

“After a tragically late and slow start, the world’s response has gathered strength – as we saw at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS five years ago,” Secretary-General Kofi Annan says in the preface to the 630-page report, which was produced by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

“Since then, there has been remarkable progress in rallying political leadership, mobilizing financial and technical resources, bringing antiretroviral treatment to people the world over and even reversing the spread in some of the world’s poorest nations.”

UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot says in his introduction: “Even though the pandemic and its toll are outstripping the worst predictions, for the first time ever we have the will, means and knowledge needed to make real headway.

“Goals that seemed impossible to achieve just five years ago have been realized. There is robust political commitment today. In 40 developing countries, the national AIDS response is now personally led by heads of government or their deputies. Total financing for the response in developing countries rose fivefold between 2001 and 2005, reaching \$8.3 billion in the last year.”

In more and more countries on every continent, AIDS epidemics are declining, proving concretely that “AIDS is a problem with a solution,” Dr. Piot says. “Thus, today the foundations exist for the world to mount a response commensurate with the challenge of stopping and reversing the pandemic.”

Noting that precise figures are impossible to collect, the report points out that, with 126 of the 191 UN member countries submitting data, an estimated 33.4 million to 46 million people were living with AIDS at the end of last year. An estimated 3.2 million to 6.2 million became newly infected and between 2.2 million and 3.3 million died of AIDS.

The proportion of people infected with HIV, or the prevalence rate, is believed to have peaked in the late 1990s and to have stabilized globally, even though several countries have been showing increases. But “the world’s failure to make proven prevention methods available to those who need them represents a remarkable missed opportunity.”

Some 25 years after the epidemic was first recognized, most people at risk of HIV infection have yet to be reached with HIV



prevention methods, "as many policy-makers refrain from implementing approaches that have been shown to work," the report says.

Globally, treatment alone would avert 9 million new HIV infections by the end of 2020, whereas simultaneous treatment and prevention would head off an estimated 29 million new HIV infections in the same time, it notes.

Courageous political leadership and strong prevention efforts have been successful in reversing the pandemic in Brazil, Thailand and Uganda and are now reducing the HIV prevalence rate in Cambodia, Zimbabwe, parts of Burkina Faso, Haiti, Kenya and Tanzania, the report says.

Building on the experience in Botswana, where the Government recommended in 2004 that diagnostic HIV testing become a routine part of medical checkups, UNAIDS advises offering the tests in clinics treating sexually transmitted infections (STIs), maternal health clinics, and at community-based health service settings where there is access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs).

Among the geographical regions, Sub-Saharan Africa is still the worst affected, with an HIV prevalence rate of 6.1 per cent. Of that figure, Botswana's rate is estimated at 24.1, Lesotho's 23.2 per cent and South Africa's 18.8 per cent, compared to 0.9 in Senegal. Among young people, the female to male rate of infection is 3:1, and the report calls for several empowering measures for young women and girls, including an older minimum age for marriage.

The Caribbean, the world's second most affected region, has a rate of 1.6 per cent, with Haiti coming in at about 3.8 per cent. Cuba's rate, "an anomaly in the region," is 0.1 per cent, with mother-to-child transmission found in only 100 babies. Other regions' rates range from 0.3 per cent in Oceania to 0.8 per cent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

At the launch of the report at UN Headquarters, Dr. Piot was joined by the heads of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) representing the 10 co-sponsoring agencies of UNAIDS.

UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid noted that prevention remained the most effective line of defence, but situations in which women in some countries were powerless to refuse the demands of infected husbands had to be changed.

Saying that children were too often the missing face of the pandemic, UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman called for programmes to reduce mother-to-child transmission, as well as better treatment of paediatric AIDS.

Senior UN official 'hits ground running' in seeking to resolve Timor-Leste violence

30 May - With a senior United Nations official on the ground in Timor-Leste today seeking to defuse the violence that has torn through the small country in recent weeks, UN agencies have resumed food distributions to camps holding 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) but conditions in them are worsening due to overcrowding and rain.

"He hit the ground running and he's been in a series of meetings already," Secretary-General Kofi Annan said of Ian Martin, head of the UN Human Rights Mission in Nepal, whom he dispatched urgently to a country which the world body shepherded to independence from Indonesia in 2002.

Mr. Annan told reporters in New York the UN would need to carefully assess the lessons of the current unrest to see whether it had withdrawn its peacekeeping forces too soon.

The UN office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL) reported that although violence, which began last month with the dismissal of 594 soldiers (a third of the total armed forces), has decreased, looting continued and IDP camps had been attacked. Australian troops have already landed in the country at the Government's request to help restore calm.

According to an assessment completed today by UN agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, some



100,000 persons are being sheltered in IDP camps, including 65,000 around Dili, the capital, whose population is 150,000.

The UN World Food Programme says it has rushed to Timor-Leste five days worth of rations for 95,000 people, but warned that more help is needed, not only with food but with shelter, sanitation, and health care.

UNOTIL said the numbers of displaced persons were swelling because of continued lack of security. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is sending in an extra team to coordinate UN and NGO assistance.

Mr. Annan, who called the situation “sad and tragic,” said he is expecting a political assessment as to what went wrong from Mr. Martin, who was his Special Representative in East Timor in 1999, as it was called then, when the country voted for independence from Indonesia, which had occupied it after Portugal left in 1974.

Asked whether the UN had drawn down the peacekeeping force too quickly, Mr. Annan said: “There has been a sense that we tend to leave conflict areas too soon, and this is one of the issues that we hope the (newly formed) Peacebuilding Commission will help us address and get the message across - that when we get into these situations, we should be in for the medium to the longer term and take a longer term view, rather than a short-term view, believing that we can leave after elections.”

The world organization originally set up the UN Transitional Administration (UNTAET) in 1999 to usher the country to independence in 2002, after which it replaced it with a downsized operation, the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET). This in turn was replaced by the current residual UNOTIL.

“Would it have made a difference if the UN had stayed longer - if we had not drawn down our forces too quickly?” Mr. Annan asked. “This is something that I must assess and we have developed a follow-on mission, and I’m going to have to re-think our own proposal for the follow-on force.

“But we also need to be careful because of the way different missions are seen to be treated. Some sometimes tend to think that there is a racist content in official UN thinking, when we are dealing with some of these issues, but I don’t think that is entirely correct.

“But that is a perception that we also need to address,” he added, noting that the UN has been in Cyprus “for ages” as well as spending extended time in Bosnia and Herzegovina and still administering the Serbian province of Kosovo after taking it over in 1999.

Concerned at Somalia clashes, UN relief official urges factions to act humanely

30 May - Reacting to reports of indiscriminate shelling of civilian populations and medical facilities in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, where dozens have died in the last few days, a senior United Nations official today called on the warring factions to spare the lives of those not involved in the hostilities.

The Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Eric Laroche, voiced deep concern at the reports of violence against residents and said he was “shocked” at the targeting of hospitals, calling this a blatant violation of the basic rules of international humanitarian law in a statement released in Nairobi.

He urged the warring parties to “spare the lives of those not involved in the hostilities and to take all the necessary measures to prevent unnecessary human suffering.”

Since the beginning of the year some 1,500 conflict-related war-wounded have been admitted to Mogadishu’s two main hospitals, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Due to the intensity of the recent fighting, an increased number of civilian casualties have been unable to reach medical facilities.

Mr. Laroche reminded the warring factions that “any deliberate attempt to prevent wounded or civilians receiving assistance



and protection during fighting in the city may constitute elements of future war crimes.”

He further warned that the fighting has the “potential to spread into other areas of southern Somalia leading to further aggravation of the humanitarian crisis at a time when stability is needed for the success of the humanitarian drought response in the region.”

The Humanitarian Coordinator said it is “ethically unacceptable for fighting to be occurring in Mogadishu at a time when southern Somalia is experiencing a humanitarian emergency.”

Echoing Mr. Laroche’s concern, the UN Special Adviser on Internal Displacement today said the recent conflict in Somalia could accelerate into a major humanitarian and political disaster unless the international community ceased ignoring developments unfolding in the country.

Speaking in Nairobi after a week-long mission to Somalia, Dennis McNamara described the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as among the worst he had seen in Africa. “Their condition was sub-standard in every respect,” he said.



Dennis McNamara at press conference in Nairobi

The UN estimates that the country has between 370,000 and 400,000 IDPs.

Mogadishu is the only capital in the world where the UN does not have access for international humanitarian staff due to insecurity – this despite an estimated 250,000 internally displaced living in the city. The current fighting in and around the area has displaced thousands of people, many of whom have fled to more stable regions of the country or crossed the border into Kenya.

Mr. McNamara expressed disappointment in the neglect of Somalia and its IDPs by both the international community and the press. Describing the media as an essential tool in getting governments to act, he said, “If Mogadishu was Sarajevo, the world press would be clamoring to get there.”

Earlier in the month, Somalia made the 2006 list of the “Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About” released by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI).

Mr. McNamara also noted that only 40 per cent of the \$330 million international appeal for Somalia had been met by donor countries. With the bulk of that going to food aid and the remainder to be targeted for protection of IDPs, agriculture and education, Mr. McNamara said the sum was “insufficient to address these problems effectively.”

He also took Somali local authorities to task for not meeting their responsibilities with regard to the internally displaced in their regions. While acknowledging the need for the UN to be more actively involved with the internally displaced, he stressed that the Somali authorities had primary responsibility. “In some areas, the authorities were resisting agencies providing even sanitation in camps,” he said.

The Special Adviser had visited settlements for the internally displaced in Bossaso, Hargeisa, Baidoa and Merka – only 90 kilometres from war-torn Mogadishu. It was the first time in seven years a UN plane had landed on the Merka airstrip.

On Friday, Secretary-General Kofi Annan deplored the loss of life and suffering caused by the renewed violence and called on both sides to enter into an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

Close cooperation among Security Council anti-terrorism panels urged by chairs

30 May - Chairpersons of three major United Nations Security Council anti-terrorism committees today updated the 15-member body on their efforts to improve their operations in the fight against the scourge, including through increased cooperation on a variety of fronts.

Diplomats heading the committees, dealing with Al Qaida and the Taliban, counter-terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, said reporting procedures should be streamlined and country visits coordinated in order to maximize results.

Cesar Mayoral of Argentina, Chairman of the Security Council Committee on Al Qaida, the Taliban and their associates, known as the 1267 committee for the resolution that established it, stressed the importance of improving the quality of the list of individuals affected by sanctions. "This has been one of my main concerns since I took over the chairmanship," he said.

Describing recent visits to Qatar, Yemen and Saudi Arabia – the latter two having suffered from Al-Qaida attacks – he said all three had made "significant contributions" in the fight against that terrorist group.

Officials from all three countries "expressed concerns about certain aspects of the Committee's work," he said. "One area discussed was the need for greater consultation with relevant States prior to placing an individual on the list," he added. Officials said this type of consultations would not only improve compliance by Member States, but also serve as a way to improve the quality of the list.

Officials were also concerned about Al Qaida's use of the Internet. "Many officials commended the Committee's Monitoring Team for having organized meetings of heads and deputy heads of security and intelligence agencies to discuss the issue," he said, noting that the Committee was considering a report by that team on Al Qaida's Internet use.

Looking to further improvements, the Chairman said the Committee will continue to increase its dialogue with Member States, to strengthen links with global and regional bodies, and to work closely with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the experts supporting the other anti-terrorism committees.

Ellen Margrethe Løj of Denmark, the Chairperson of the Security Council Committee established to implement the 15-member body's landmark anti-terrorism resolution 1373 – adopted in 2001 in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States – described work underway to revise the reporting regime, enhance dialogue with Member States needing technical assistance, and deepen its relations with international, regional and subregional organizations.

She said the 1373 Committee had again contacted all States that were behind in their reporting and urged those needing assistance in preparing their reports to speak up. The Committee had adopted the CTED's implementation plan on facilitating technical assistance, while the Executive Directorate, in turn, was now working on creating results through the fulfilment of that initiative.

In the meantime, she voiced appreciation for potential donors who could provide assistance to countries in need. Besides discussions with potential donors in New York, the practice had also been established that the CTED would meet with potential donors specifically in connection with visits to States. The Committee would continue to discuss what more could be done to strengthen cooperation with donors, including by organizing an informal meeting with donors and assistance providers.

Peter Burian of Slovakia, the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution the Council's resolution 1540 (2004) on weapons of mass destruction, said continuous monitoring of and support to the efforts by all States to fully implement the resolution required a lasting effort by the Council.

So far, he said 129 States and one organization had submitted first national reports to the Committee, while 62 Member States had yet to submit their first report. In response to the Committee's examination of the first national reports, 83 States had provided additional information.

He said the Committee would continue to accord priority to facilitating reporting and the conduct of outreach activities to promote reporting. The Committee would also assist national authorities in the preparation of a first report, and it would continue to reach out to the members of all regional groups to discuss related issues.

At the same time, the Committee would maintain close cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the "1267"



Committee on Al Qaida and the Taliban, and its experts would continue to work closely with their colleagues, making every effort to maximize synergies between and among the experts of those three bodies.

During the discussion that followed, delegates addressing the Council stressed the ongoing threat posed by terrorism and backed the work of the three committees. A number of participants also concurred on the need for greater assistance with reporting and on the need to improve procedures for adding or removing names to the list of those subject to sanctions.

UN peacekeeper in DR of Congo killed, bringing five-year total to 74

30 May - The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) is searching for seven of their colleagues who disappeared during a confrontation between armed militias and UN-backed soldiers from the national army, which also left one UN peacekeeper dead and brought the six-year peacekeeping death toll to 74.

Three other peacekeepers, all from the Nepalese unit, were wounded. After being immediately evacuated to MONUC's Moroccan hospital in Bunia, they were now out of danger, the mission said.

"In the course of Sunday morning, 28 May 2006, a Nepalese peacekeeper died in combat during a clash occurring in the region of Tsupu (Ituri district), about 100 kilometres from Bunia, in the northeastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo" (DRC) it said in a release. "Seven other Nepalese soldiers faced difficulties during the clash and lost contact with their unit."

The clash occurred as MONUC blue helmets were helping the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) during their operation against the militias in Ituri on the eve of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

As the operations continued, some militiamen claimed they had captured the seven peacekeepers but failed to provide any evidence, the mission said.

The MONUC unit has been conducting a joint cordon-and-search operation with the FARDC in that sector since 27 May. On Sunday morning it contacted armed elements apparently belonging to Ituri warlord Peter Karim's militia, the Front des Nationalistes and Intégrationnistes (FNI).

Twenty peacekeepers of the Nepalese battalion were transported by air to the scene of the confrontation to reinforce the troops on the ground and add to the support provided by a MI-25 combat helicopter. A mortar platoon was also transported by helicopter from Bunia to Fataki, reaching the zone on the same day at noon.

The operation is codenamed Ituri Element III. It is part of the military operations in the Ituri district to force local militias operating in the region to lay down their weapons and join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. To date, more than 14,000 militiamen in the region have been disarmed through that programme.

Twelve MONUC peacekeepers have died on duty since the beginning of this year.

Following deadly riots in Afghanistan, Annan pledges continued UN support

30 May - Reacting to the recent deadly riots in Afghanistan reportedly sparked by a road accident involving a United States convoy, Secretary-General Kofi Annan today stressed that the United Nations would continue its assistance for stability in the war-wracked country.

"The United Nations has always been supportive of the Afghan effort and we've worked with them over the years as a reliable partner and we will continue to do so, with the international community, in ensuring that the country is stabilized, and we will continue our work to strengthen their institutions.," Mr. Annan told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York.



Describing the “tragic” road accident that reportedly set off the riots, he said: “Crowds gathered and led to even greater disturbances, leading to deaths and injuries of many people. Lots of properties were damaged, including UN and international humanitarian workers.”

The UN chief said he followed the development in Afghanistan with concern, adding that what happened in Kabul over the weekend was “symptomatic of perhaps deeper problems,” including the question of “drug cultivation and production” in that country.

Mr. Annan said he spoke with the Afghan President Hamid Karzai and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about measures to help restore calm. “President Karzai believes that the situation is under control,” said Mr. Annan. “But we will continue to monitor it very closely.”

The UN Secretary-General stressed the need to strengthen Afghanistan’s security forces and national institutions. “These (efforts) do take time and resources,” he said. “But we need to persevere.”

UN health agency accelerates election of new chief, setting November timetable

30 May - Accelerating the process of electing a new head of the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) following last week’s sudden death of Director-General Dr. Lee Jong-wook, the Agency’s Executive Board today set a November timetable for the selection.

WHO spokesperson Fadela Chaib told a news briefing in Geneva that if the agency went by the book, allowing a six-month nomination process, it would take up to one year to elect its new chief.

But the Board decided that it would nominate a new Director-General in a meeting from 6 to 8 November, followed by a one-day special session of the World Health Assembly on 9 November to vote on the appointment.

Pressing tasks facing the new Director-General will include not only long-standing campaigns such as the battles to control HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis but also the newly emerging threat of a flu pandemic, possibly linked the current outbreak of bird flu.

Acting Director-General Anders Nordström, who will continue in office until the election, will notify Member States that they may propose candidates from 1 June. Proposals will be accepted by WHO until 5 September, and the agency’s secretariat will dispatch these to Member States within a month from that date.

Guatemala must do more to assure security, justice – UN rights chief

30 May - Although Guatemala has launched important initiatives and made undeniable progress since a peace agreement almost 10 years ago ended decades of civil war, reforms are moving too slowly and there has been no significant advance in combating impunity or eliminating clandestine groups, according to the top United Nations human rights official.

“It is cause for concern that not only reforms are progressing slowly, but that more and more people are becoming increasingly frustrated with the State’s inability to deliver the promised security, equality and justice,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said in a weekend press statement at the end of an official visit to the Central American country.

“Nothing can exemplify this better than the delay encountered by victims of the armed conflict in obtaining justice and reparation. Where impunity is the rule for past violations, it should come as no surprise that it also prevails for current crimes,” she stated, calling for reform of the police, including dismissal of officers with poor human rights records and criminal prosecutions where required.



“This has led Guatemala earning the dubious distinction of being one of the most violent countries in the region,” she added, noting that according to the Ombudsman, homicides have risen 60 per cent from 2001 to 2005, with a homicide rate of 40 per 100,000 people.

Ms. Arbour also called for speedy and thorough modernization of the judicial sector, stressing that a functioning correctional system is essential to this process.

“I have been reassured by several officials that the Government is fully supporting the much needed reforms. But given the deep-seated nature of the problems, progress will require a sustained commitment over a number of years as well as additional funding for implementation,” she said.

In general terms, Guatemala suffers from the region's lowest public investment in social services and lowest tax collection base at 10 per cent of gross domestic product. It scores consistently low on the UN Human Development Indices including on infant mortality, life expectancy and literacy. “Security cannot be achieved without a sustained attention to the social and economic challenges that the country faces,” Ms. Arbour declared.

She also emphasized the isolation and discrimination faced by the indigenous peoples, who, particularly in the case of women, remain disproportionately poor, and suffer high rates of illiteracy as well as health and social problems – largely as a result of lack of access to health care, education, decent housing, employment and social services.

Guatemala should ensure the indigenous communities’ full participation as actors in the development of the country, she added.

Ms. Arbour had positive comments, too. “It should be noted that Guatemala is a different country today than it was at the conclusion of the conflict,” she said. “The end of authoritarian, repressive and violent State practices associated with the internal armed conflict, have brought undeniable benefits to the country as a whole, but especially to those areas in the countryside that bore the brunt of the conflict.”

She cited important initiatives in a number of areas, particularly the adoption of an anti-discrimination law; the establishment of the National Reparations Commission; programmes to improve access to justice for indigenous communities; and the President’s public recognitions of atrocities committed during the armed conflict.

New donations boost UN food aid in Sudan but more contributions still urgently needed



Darfur, Sudan

30 May - Food rations that were recently reduced by half for more than 3 million people in Sudan will be increased to 84 per cent of minimum daily requirements from June to September in the war-torn Darfur region thanks to new donations to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) emergency operation, but more aid is still urgently needed.

“We greatly appreciate the donations received so far, which provide an urgent boost to people’s daily diet,” WFP Executive Director James Morris said according to the Agency’s latest update. “However, continued contributions, preferably in cash, are still crucial to help address urgent needs in the months ahead.”

At the beginning of May, the United States announced it would divert to Sudan food aid shipments valued at \$46.2 million. Other donors, including Canada, the European Commission, Australia, Germany and Denmark, have also offered funds and pledges which, together with an announced Sudanese contribution of cereal, will enable WFP to raise the number of kilocalories per person per day in Darfur to 1,770 (the minimum daily requirement is 2,100 kilocalories).

The Sudan Government’s donation of 20,000 metric tonnes of cereals will allow WFP to distribute a full ration of cereals for the next three months in Darfur, where fighting between the Government, pro-government militias and rebels has killed scores of thousands of people in Darfur and uprooted 2 million more in the last three years.

For about 370, 000 people in the East and Central areas, rations remain at 64 per cent of the required minimum energy

content.

“We are now in a race against time to deliver more food both to the people of Sudan and to people in Darfur, as the onset of the rainy season in June makes roads inaccessible,” Mr. Morris said. “The average time it takes for pledges to arrive as food aid in the country is four to six months.”

The earliest WFP could hope to restore complete rations across Sudan is October, but this still depends on the flow of contributions. A critical shortage of donor funds forced WFP to announce in April - and distribute in May - half rations in Darfur and the East of Sudan, a decision which Mr. Morris described as one of the hardest he had ever made.

WFP has been warning since November 2005 that it would need significant donations, \$600 million by May, to guarantee a continued flow of food aid to more than 6.1 million hungry people in Sudan. But five months into 2006, WFP's emergency operation is only 42.6 percent funded. So the agency needs donors to provide contributions now to cover requirements for the last quarter of the year.

“The world has a deep obligation to do its utmost to assist the people of Sudan, many of whom have already suffered immense trauma as a result of brutal conflict,” Mr. Morris said.

Cambodia: UN experts call for halt to eviction of up to several thousand families

30 May - United Nations human rights experts today called for a halt to evictions of up to several thousand families in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, as part of a plan to redevelop land claimed to be the property of a private company, where hundreds of families have already been rendered homeless.



“There are concerns that the authorities may resort to force to evict these families,” the two experts said in a statement on the operation in the Bassac river area where the families have been living since the early 1990s. “Moreover, allegations of intimidation, threats and corruption have marred the process of registration and resettlement of the persons affected by the eviction.”

They urged the Government and Phnom Penh Municipality to ensure that appropriate consultations take place with those affected, that no evictions result in homelessness and that every effort is made to prevent the use of force. They also called for compensation and rehabilitation, basic services in relocation sites and the possibility for the relocated people to earn a living.

“There are disturbing allegations that municipal authorities have intervened to stop non- governmental organizations (NGOs) from distributing tents and humanitarian aid to the families who had become homeless,” they said. “In some cases, security forces have allegedly pulled down tents and destroyed personal belongings.”

The experts are Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative on human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, Miloon Kothari.

They noted that several hundred evicted families now living in the open air face serious health risks, especially with the advent of the rainy season. While some have been offered relocation, the new site is far away from possible jobs, lacks basic services such as electricity and running water, and is reportedly prone to flooding.

They called for NGOs to be allowed to offer aid and protection to the families affected, that measures be adopted to ensure registration of those affected by the eviction and that monitoring of their relocation be carried out fairly and transparently.

So-called development-based evictions often contravene recognized human rights standards and affect the poorest, the socially and economically most vulnerable and marginalized people in society, the experts stressed.

In message to Asian media summit, Annan urges respect for press freedom



Secretary-General Kofi Annan

30 May - In a message to participants at an Asian media summit in Malaysia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has urged governments to reaffirm their commitment to press freedom while calling on media professionals to exercise their rights responsibly.

He noted that new technologies and new ways of distributing content, such as blogs, have made information more accessible than ever before. "But as media and journalism evolve, certain bedrock principles remain paramount," he emphasized, citing the right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," enshrined in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights.

"I declare my firm support for this right, and urge all governments to reaffirm their commitment to it as well," the Secretary-General said in his message to the Asia Media Summit meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The message was delivered by Kim Haksu, Executive Secretary of the Bangkok-based UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

"At the same time, I appeal to everyone to exercise that right responsibly and, where possible, proactively," he added, stressing that media should not be vehicles for incitement or degradation, or for spreading hatred.

The Secretary-General also deplored the fact that members of the press continue to be killed, maimed, detained or targeted in other ways for exercising their rights. "This is tragic and unacceptable," he said, urging all concerned to exert efforts to enable the press to do its work.

Developing countries need better fisheries management, UN agency says

30 May - The increase in fish exports has proved helpful in fighting hunger in the developing world, according to a new study carried out by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which, however, urges poor countries to adopt better management techniques to reap long-term benefits.



More than 1 billion rely on fish as source of protein

The report released today to coincide with a weeklong meeting on the international trade in fish products being held in Santiago de Compostela in Spain said that fish trade was so far having no detrimental effect on the amount of fish available for consumption as food in poor countries.

The UN agency told delegates from the 60 countries attending the Tenth Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade that growing exports earning had increased employment, raised incomes and improved government services.

The value of the international fish trade increased from more than \$15 billion in 1980 to over \$71 billion in 2004, according to FAO.

But the agency cautioned that good management of fisheries by developing countries is essential if they are going to continue to benefit over the longer term.

"The fish trade helps poor countries shore up their food security situation," said Grimur Valdimarsson, FAO's Director of Fisheries Industry Division. "But increasing international demand can at times result in executive fishing pressure, leading to the over-fishing and wasteful use of stocks."

Mr. Valdimarsson stressed that meeting demands must be balanced with sustainable development if poorer countries want to continue to "benefit this way."

Currently, about 77 per cent of fish consumed worldwide as food is supplied by developing countries. Wealthy developed



countries account for 81 per cent of all imports of fish-based products. The top importing nations include Japan, the United States, Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

FAO said at this week's meeting it will present a draft text aimed at giving authorities in both developed and developing countries guidance on making the international trade in fish products more sustainable. The guidelines includes the use of "eco-labels" and fish tracking systems

Comprising 77 FAO members, the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade meets every two years to share information, discuss policy issues related to fish trade, and make recommendations to the agency regarding its related work.

Colombia: UN refugee agency 'extremely concerned' at new violence against civilians

30 May - Expressing new alarm at the impact of more than four decades of conflict on Colombia's civilians, the United Nations refugee agency today voiced "extreme concern" at increasing violence over the past two weeks in the south of the Andean country, where 15 people have been killed, some of them in fighting between irregular armed groups.



IDPs in suburbs around Bogota

"There are credible reports of several other deaths and disappearances," UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Ron Redmond told a news briefing in Geneva. "UNHCR is also alarmed that new irregular armed groups appear to be forming in the area."

By Saturday, 15 bodies had arrived in the town of Policarpa from nearby villages, five of them civilians killed in fighting between irregular armed groups on Friday. The other 10 had been murdered and although no one has claimed responsibility, the manner of their killing was consistent with murders committed by irregular armed groups, he said.

He added that the Agency, together with along with other UN agencies, the Colombian Ombudsman's office and the Norwegian Refugee Council, had also reluctantly agreed to accompany more than 2,200 displaced people who insisted on returning on Friday to the Policarpa of Nariño department.

UNHCR had strongly urged them to postpone their return because of threats from an irregular armed group that they would be killed if they returned home, but they insisted on going without delay, even if they had to go alone. However, they urgently requested that UNHCR and other international organizations accompany them to avoid retaliation by irregular armed groups.

"Faced with the difficult choice of having to accompany their return in potentially dangerous conditions or leaving more than 2,200 people completely without protection, UNHCR agreed to help, and on Friday a convoy of some 100 vehicles carrying more than 2,200 people went back to the Policarpa region," Mr. Redmond said.

"UNHCR remains extremely concerned about the medium- and long-term protection of those who have returned to northern Nariño," he added. "We will send missions this week to both (the villages of) Sanchez and Santa Rosa and hope to be able to put in place with other organizations a programme enabling a regular presence in the area. "Nevertheless, the presence of humanitarian staff will not in itself be enough to guarantee the security of thousands of people at risk in the region."

UNHCR has also voiced mounting concern in recent months over the disproportionate impact on Colombia's indigenous communities of the fighting between Government forces, leftist rebels and rightist paramilitaries that has displaced 2 million people overall. Forced displacement is especially hard on indigenous people, whose culture and traditions are closely linked to their ancestral lands.

New Kyrgyz rules could violate refugee convention, UN agency says

30 May - Amendments to Kyrgyzstan's refugee law could violate the 1951 Refugee Convention, which the Central Asian

country has ratified, if they deny access of illegal foreigners to refugee status determination procedures, the relevant United Nations agency said today.

The amendments were adopted without taking into account comments by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on various aspects of the changes despite ongoing discussions since last year, agency spokesman Ron Redmond told a news briefing in Geneva.

He cited specifically a new 'asylum seeker' definition, which does not include foreigners who stay in the country illegally and which therefore could breach the Convention if it denied status determination procedures.

Another important amendment concerns the freedom of movement of asylum seekers, who under the new rules will no longer be able to choose their place of residence in the country, Mr. Redmond noted. Lawmakers explained to UNHCR that this change was intended to avoid spontaneous settlement of asylum seekers in situations of mass arrival.

"We have prepared comprehensive comments on our concerns about the new amendments which we will shortly share with the relevant ministries," Mr. Redmond said. "Our office is ready to work with the Kyrgyz government in order to bring the national legislation closer to international refugee protection standards."

At the same time he reiterated UNHCR's appreciation for the Kyrgyz Government's commitment to asylum principles, noting that the country was one of the first regional signatories of the 1951 Convention.

'Alliance of Civilizations' group advances work at Dakar meeting

30 May - A meeting of experts on the Alliance of Civilizations – an initiative aimed at bridging the gap between Islam and the West – concluded today in Dakar, Senegal, having advanced preparations for a report on actions to tackle the problem that will be presented to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan later this year.

During the Dakar meeting, the High-Level Group of eminent personalities continued their work in four key areas – education, media, youth and integration – that were identified at their second session, held in Doha, Qatar, in February.

The opening of the Dakar meeting was presided over by the President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade. Iqbal Riza, Special Adviser of UN Secretary General for the Alliance, delivered a message from Kofi Annan, in which he stated that diversity among religions, cultures, societies and people should not only be accepted but also respected, referring to Senegal as an example of tolerance and cohabitation.

In his opening remarks, President Wade hailed the Alliance initiative at the current time when ignorance and intolerance was feeding conflicts in the world.

At the end of the three-day Dakar meeting, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, the Co-Chairman of the High Level Group, said it had been marked by substantive discussions on the causes of extremism in the world.

Mehmet Aydin, the other Co-Chairman of the Group, in his closing remarks, said participants had given guidance to the Alliance secretariat for drafting the report to be presented to the Secretary-General in November.

The concluding meeting of the High Level Group will take place in the fall of 2006 in Turkey before the report, containing a Plan of Action on the concept of an Alliance of Civilizations, is given to Mr. Annan.

The Alliance, which was proposed by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey and whose launch Mr. Annan announced in 2005, aims to address the hostile perceptions that foment violence and to bring about cooperation on the various efforts to heal divisions.

Participants in the High-Level Group range from such renowned theologians as Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Karen



Armstrong of the United Kingdom, Arthur Schneir of the United States and Mehmet Aydin of Turkey, to administrators of cultural institutions, such as Ismail Serageldin of Egypt's Biblioteca Alexandria and Mr. Mayor, a former Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

UN refugee agency joins forces with Norwegian humanitarian group

30 May - The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and a prominent Norwegian humanitarian group will make joint efforts to protect displaced people worldwide, according to an agreement signed between the two organizations working for the protection of refugees.

Under the agreement, the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) will pursue further strategic partnership at the global level as well as in specific operations, with emphasis in closer cooperation in the field to protect and assist internally displaced people (IDPs).

“NRC’s systematic approach to working with IDPs globally makes them an essential partner for UNHCR,” said High Commissioner António Guterres after signing the agreement Monday, adding that similar alliances with other organizations are also in the offing.

“This agreement will further enhance the close cooperation between our two agencies,” added NRC Secretary-General Thomas Colin Archer.

The two agencies are now due to cooperate in many countries, including Colombia, Uganda and Sudan. In Liberia, UNHCR and NRC are already making joint efforts in monitoring the situation of returning IDPs and refugees.

New UN study highlights women’s role in restoring drylands

30 May - The world’s rural women can play a crucial role in efforts to restore drylands, according to a new study released by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) at a major UN conference on women and desertification being held in Beijing this week.

The report entitled, “Gender and Desertification: Expanding roles for women to restore drylands,” highlights the role of women in managing natural resources and the disempowering constraints they face while dealing with desertification of land.

Desertification is a process of land degradation in dryland areas, which is caused by poverty, unsustainable land management and climate change. Experts say it affects women and men differently due to their “strictly gendered division of labour.”

Through their daily work, rural women have acquired extensive knowledge on managing natural resources, which enable them to play a crucial role in combating desertification, according to the report’s authors who note that women often do not have decision-making authority and thus are excluded from dryland development projects.

“We need to have a long-term focus on women affected by desertification, extending beyond this International Year of Deserts and Desertification,” said Sheila Mwanundu, an IFAD official responsible for technical advice. “Women need to be empowered to take control of their own lives and their own development.”

According to IFAD, currently one-third of the earth’s land surface is threatened by desertification, a phenomenon that poses a risk to the survival of over one billion people in more than 100 countries. Over the past 23 years, the UN agency has spent over \$3 billion to support dryland development projects in a number of developing countries.



UNESCO chief condemns murder of Iraqi educator, CBS crew members

30 May - The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today condemned the assassination of a senior Iraqi Education Ministry official and denounced the growing number of attacks against educators in the country while also deploring the killing two CBS television crew members, the latest media professionals to die while covering the war.

“I categorically condemn the murder of Sabah al-Jaf,” UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura said in a statement. “The escalating violence against Education Ministry officials and academics is intolerable. By targeting educators, the perpetrators are of such violence are undermining the reconstruction of Iraq and the future of the country and the democracy.”

Mr. al-Jaf and one of his guards were killed by unidentified gunmen in the Al-Karradha district of Baghdad on May 22. Another of his guards is reported to have been seriously wounded in the attack.

According to the Geneva-based Study and Research Centre for the Arab and Mediterranean World, nearly 200 academics have been killed in Iraq since 2003 and thousands have been forced into exile.

Last month, the UNESCO Director-General appealed to the international community to support Iraqi academics and intellectuals.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, Mr. Matsuura also deplored the killing of two CBS television crew members in Baghdad and called for improved safety for journalists in Iraq.

“I urge all authorities concerned to spare no effort in seeking to improve the safety of journalists, media workers and support staff committed to the fundamental human right of freedom of expression in Iraq,” he said.

CBS cameraman Paul Douglas and soundman James Brolan died when a United States military unit came under attack Monday. Both Mr. Douglas and Mr. Brolan were accompanying the US military unit.

According to the International Federation of Journalists, as many as 127 reporters have been killed in Iraq since 2003.

Liberian corrections officers complete 12 months of intensive training – UN



Newly-trained Liberian corrections officers

30 May - A group of 25 Liberian corrections officers have been certified after completing a year of training, bringing to 49 the total number prepared by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Government to uphold human rights while dealing with prisoners.

“This will not only bring honour to you, but also to your Government and your country,” the head of UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit, Marjo Callaghan, told the graduates on Friday.

“Human rights standards provide invaluable guidance for performance of your functions, which is vital to the good functioning of a democratic society and the maintenance of the rule of law,” she said.

Expressing UNMIL’s appreciation for joint efforts undertaken with the Government to create a better trained, more effective and efficient Liberian Correctional Service, she said this “will contribute to the reintegration of offenders and the protection of communities and law abiding citizens around Liberia.”

Speaking on behalf of the Liberian Government, Solicitor General Counsellor Tiawon Gongloe expressed appreciation for

the UN's assistance, describing how the country's Corrections Service had greatly suffered since the 1970s.

He called on the newly trained officers to help in Liberia's transformation. "For a stable order in society, those who are accused or convicted are to be given decent treatment. That is why you have been trained," the Liberian Solicitor General pointed out.

UNMIL has been providing assistance through its 'quick impact projects' and through funding from other partners such as the US Government to improve conditions of prisons in the country.

In another development, a five-day training programme for 45 Magistrates and 50 Justices of the Peace started today at the Supreme Court of Liberia, according to UNMIL, which organized the initiative with the Government.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the Director of UNMIL's Legal and Judicial System Support Division, Alfred Fofie, reminded the participants of their future role in upholding and promoting the rule of law in their communities. "You must take up the challenge with dignity and professionalism for the benefit of the people you serve and for the betterment of the Liberian society as a whole," he said.

The development challenges facing Liberia was on the list of the "Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About" released by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) on 15 May.

UN health agency rushes aid to quake-struck parts of Indonesia



Indonesian quake survivor

29 May - As rescue teams search for survivors following Saturday's devastating earthquake on the island of Java, Indonesia, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today announced that it is sending emergency equipment to the area and will help to support vaccination campaigns while setting up a disease surveillance system there.

The latest available figures show that an estimated 5,000 people died and several thousand were injured, including some 1,500 very seriously injured patients who need urgent medical evacuation and care, the Geneva-based agency said. About 200,000 people are displaced from their homes.

WHO has sent vehicles loaded with medicines and communications equipment into the area, including with emergency health kits containing drugs and medical supplies for 50,000 people for three months, along with surgical kits to support 600 operations.

The agency will also help to set up a surveillance system in order to detect and control outbreaks of communicable diseases similar to that which was used to prevent outbreaks in Aceh following the tsunami. WHO will also help to organize vaccination campaigns against measles, which can be a major killer and spreads rapidly in crowded areas.

Bantul District, south of Yogyakarta, with a population of about 790,000, is reported to be the worst hit with the majority of houses destroyed. At least one of the six hospitals in the there has been destroyed and the others are overcrowded.

Prior to the earthquake there were 29,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the province who had been moved out of their communities as a precautionary measure against the possible eruption of Mt. Merapi. Clean water, safe sanitation and waste removal will rapidly be needed, WHO warned, particularly for IDPs, in order to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases.

UN brokers cessation of hostilities after clashes at Israel-Lebanon withdrawal line

29 May - Secretary-General Kofi Annan today commended the Governments of Israel and Lebanon for avoiding a further escalation along the withdrawal line between their countries after the United Nations brokered a cessation of hostilities following serious clashes there.



A spokesman for Mr. Annan issued a statement in New York voicing concern at the incidents across the so-called Blue Line yesterday.

“The Secretary-General is pleased that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and his senior representatives in the area were able to broker a cessation of hostilities” which the United Nations is continuing to investigate, the spokesman said.

Mr. Annan also commended the Israeli and Lebanese Governments for "avoiding further escalation."

Through his spokesman, the Secretary-General called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and respect fully the Blue Line. “He particularly urges the Government of Lebanon to make every effort to exercise its control over the use of force from its territory,” the statement said.

Afghanistan: UN urges calm after unrest apparently sparked by US convoy accident



29 May - Reacting to violence in Kabul apparently sparked by a road accident involving a United States convoy and local people, the United Nations operation in Afghanistan today urged calm in the face of what a spokesman for the world body termed a “tragedy.”

“The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is greatly saddened by the violence we have seen in Kabul today,” spokesman Adrian Edwards said in a formal statement, calling for a determination of the facts.

The statement pointed to “widespread destruction? including in some instances against UN and related premises” and said this “suggests the need for a very thorough investigation into all aspects of the day's events.”

Mr. Edwards said the UN family's thoughts “are with those who died today, with those who have been hurt or otherwise harmed, and with the families of all those affected” and called on all concerned “to respect the need for calm, and to recognize that one tragic incident must not be allowed to lead to another.”

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Edwards said the events were triggered by a serious traffic incident in Kabul “involving a US convoy and local people.”

Asked about a reported 30 people killed during rioting and killing following the road accident, the spokesman said there had been civilian casualties, adding that “the priority here must be on providing proper care for the injured.”

He pointed out that, “With incidents like this people will understandably be upset, but this makes it all the more important that there be calm. One tragedy must not be allowed to translate into another.”

“People are upset, but it's very important for everyone's sake that calm and sensible minds prevail,” he said.

UN and Non-Aligned Movement must advance towards shared goals – Annan

29 May - The Non-Aligned Movement, which exists to give voice to developing countries and advance a more democratic international order, must move forward with the United Nations towards their shared goals, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said today.

In a message to the Non-Aligned Movement Coordinating Bureau Ministerial Meeting held in Putra Jaya, Malaysia, Mr. Annan said he counted on the Movement's support for UN reform. Its backing for the recent peace agreement in Sudan and for elections in Haiti “illustrates the crucial and constructive role you can and must play in promoting peace and security in

our world,” he added.

Stressing that the UN exists to “give voice to the principles of the Charter,” he said: “It is in your Movement's interest to see the UN work efficiently and effectively towards this goal. Working together, we can achieve great progress, and make a real difference in the lives of those who need it most: the peoples whom the Non-Aligned Movement represents.”

He said despite great changes in recent decades on the global scene, the Movement's underlying goals of giving voice to the developing world, and advancing a just and democratic international order remain as relevant as ever.

“You are fighting poverty and underdevelopment. You are concerned about the spread of infectious disease and environmental degradation. You are committed to ending conflict and to securing your independence, as well as to checking the spread of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction,” he told participants.

The message was delivered by the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Vijay Nambiar.

Fallen blue helmets honoured on International Day of UN Peacekeepers

29 May - The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers was marked across the world today as observances were held to honour those serving in UN operations while paying tribute to the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.

In his message on the Day, Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that more peacekeepers died in the service of the UN in 2005 than in any other year in the past decade, with 124 peacekeepers from 46 countries losing their lives to violence, disease and accidents.

A further 32 have fallen in the line of duty so far in 2006, including eight Guatemalan soldiers who died while striving to bring peace to the troubled eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he noted.

At the same time, the number of peacekeepers exposed to risk has increased exponentially. More than 72,000 uniformed personnel and 15,000 civilians now serve in 18 peace operations administered by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, making the United Nations the largest multilateral contributor to post-conflict stabilization worldwide, according to the message.

“The demand for United Nations peacekeeping reflects growing confidence in the Organization's ability to calm tensions and restore stability,” Mr. Annan said, noting that 108 countries now contribute uniformed personnel, including a 71-nation mission in the Sudan – the most diverse coalition ever assembled.

General Assembly President Jan Eliasson of Sweden said that over the decades of UN peacekeeping, “countless lives have been saved thanks to the bravery” of UN personnel.

“Invariably, the presence of blue helmets has eased tensions, spurred progress and sent an important signal to the affected populations that the United Nations supports their efforts to restore peace in their country,” he said.

“Even as we mourn our fallen colleagues, we are all uplifted by their unflinching commitment and are inspired to strive even harder for the collective cause so eloquently envisaged in the UN Charter: a world free from the scourge of war,” the President said.

Among the events held to mark the Day, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) organized a solemn wreath-laying ceremony with the participation of Liberian Vice President Joseph Boakai and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss.

To demonstrate UNMIL's support towards the recovery and development of Liberia, peacekeepers deployed throughout the



country took part in a number of activities, including free medical camps for local communities, as well as cleaning up and painting school buildings, side walks, community centres, health centres and local markets, and rehabilitating roads and bridges.

Wielding a broom himself at a high school in Monrovia, Mr. Doss encouraged Liberians to play an active role in the recovery and development of their country. "Liberians have a collective and individual responsibility to keep their city clean and contribute towards the development of the country in every way possible," he said.

Meanwhile in Vienna, a formal military ceremony signaled the beginning of the event attended by the Austrian Chief of Defence Staff, General Roland Ertl, and a contingent of some 40 peacekeepers from the Austrian Armed Forces who are about to go on mission to the UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.

Commemorative medals from the UN Association of Austria were also presented to Austrian peacekeepers by the Vice-President of the UN Association of Austria and former Foreign Minister, Willibald Pahr, along with General Ertl and the President of the Austrian Blue Helmets Association, General Greindl.

UN Peacekeepers' Day was established in 2002, when the General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 29 May – when in 1948 the UN set up its Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East – as the date to pay tribute to all blue helmets.

The Day will be commemorated on 31 May at UN Headquarters, because 29 May is an official holiday this year. Among the activities, medals will be awarded posthumously to military, police and civilian personnel (both international and national staff) who lost their lives serving in UN peacekeeping operations.

UNESCO chief condemns murder of another Filipino journalist



Koichiro
Matsuura

29 May - Just 10 days after deploring the death of a Filipino press photographer, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today condemned the murder of Fernando "Dong" Batul, an outspoken journalist working in the Philippines who was shot dead earlier this month.

Koichiro Matsuura's statement about the reporter working for the Palawan-based radio DYPR in Puerto Princesa who was killed on 22 May came on the heels of his condemnation of the killing of Albert Orsolino, who was shot and killed by in his car in Calooncan City by two unknown assailants on 16 May.

"I condemn the murder of Fernando "Dong" Batul," the Director-General declared. "I trust that the Philippines authorities will find the culprits of this heinous crime and bring them to justice. This is all the more important in view of the number of journalists assassinated in the country.

"It is completely unacceptable that murder be used to silence opinions," Mr. Matsuura added. "Such violence targets not only its individual victims but society as a whole, because open debate and the basic human right of freedom of expression are indispensable fundamental components of democracy and rule of law."

The Manila-based Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility reported that Mr. Batul was shot dead by two men just one month after receiving death threats. It also said the 34-year-old was the fifth journalist killed in the Philippines this year, bringing to 59 the number of journalists who have died in the line of duty since the restoration of democracy in the Philippines in 1986.

Mr. Matsuura has issued frequent condemnations of the murder of journalists around the world in recent years as part of his mandate as UNESCO chief to defend press freedom and freedom of expression.



On eve of UN peacekeepers day, Annan pays tribute to those serving across world

28 May - Looking back on a year when more blue helmets died in the service of peace than any other over the past decade, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan paid tribute to their sacrifice on the eve of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

In a message marking the occasion, formally observed on 29 May, Mr. Annan noted the growing complexity of peacekeeping operations, which often include organizing elections, enacting police and judicial reform, promoting and protecting human rights, conducting mine-clearance, advancing gender equality, achieving the voluntary disarmament of former combatants, and supporting the return of refugees and displaced people to their homes.

In the past year in particular, UN police have taken on an increasingly vital role, filling the gap between the role of UN military forces and local security institutions that are unable to fully maintain public order, he observed.

But this “invaluable work does not come without risk,” he added. More peacekeepers died in the service of the UN in 2005 than in any other year in the past decade, with 124 peacekeepers from 46 countries losing their lives to violence, disease and accidents. A further 32 have fallen in the line of duty so far in 2006, including eight Guatemalan soldiers who died while striving to bring peace to the troubled eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At the same time, the number of peacekeepers exposed to risk has increased exponentially, and continues to grow. More than 72,000 uniformed personnel and 15,000 civilians now serve in 18 peace operations administered by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, making the United Nations the largest multilateral contributor to post-conflict stabilization worldwide, according to the message.

“The demand for United Nations peacekeeping reflects growing confidence in the Organization's ability to calm tensions and restore stability,” Mr. Annan said, noting that 108 countries now contribute uniformed personnel, including a 71-nation mission in the Sudan – the most diverse coalition ever assembled.

The Secretary-General acknowledges the need for more professional and responsive institutional support for those serving in hotspots around the world. “We are determined to achieve this through critical management and oversight reforms, and through strict enforcement of the highest standards of conduct and of the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse,” he stressed. “We are also asking Member States and troop contributors to match our resolve on this critical issue.”

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers offers the opportunity to pay tribute to the men and women from countries across the world “who serve selflessly, tirelessly and fearlessly in United Nations peacekeeping operations,” Mr. Annan said, calling for remembrance of the “heroes who have laid down their lives in lands far from their own in the service of peace.”

Timor-Leste: UN relocates families of staff as security concerns heighten



27 May - The United Nations today announced that all UN families and non-essential staff members will begin to be relocated from Timor-Leste to a temporary safe haven in Darwin, Australia, because of heightened security concerns.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative in the troubled nascent country, Sukehiro Hasegawa, said in Dili, the capital, that “a temporary relocation for non-essential staff is the most judicious choice at this time.”

Mr. Hasegawa added that the UN will still maintain more than 100 international staff in Timor-Leste while others will

continue to work from Darwin. Stressing that this measure is a temporary one, he expressed hope that the arrival of Australian and other international security forces would allow a return to a secure environment for the Timorese people "many of whom are now living in a heightened sense of panic and fear."

He expressed his appreciation to the Australian Government for providing Australian security personnel to protect the UN compound where several hundred UN personnel are working and staying overnight.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting and assisting the people of Timor-Leste, officials with the UN office there, known by the acronym UNOTIL, said.

On Thursday, army soldiers in Dili opened fire on unarmed police, killing nine and injuring 27 others, including two UN police officers. The violence had begun when army elements launched an attack on national police headquarters in the capital city. After an hour, UN police and military advisers negotiated a cease fire that was agreed to on the condition the police surrender their weapons and leave unarmed.

Unrest started last month when five people were killed and 60 injured in clashes after the dismissal of 594 soldiers - a third of the total armed forces.

The Secretary-General has dispatched Ian Martin, currently the head of the UN Human Rights Mission in Nepal, to Dili to assess the situation first hand.

Mr. Martin was Mr. Annan's Special Representative in East Timor in 1999, as it was called then, when it voted for independence from Indonesia, which occupied the country after Portugal left in 1974.

UN ready to respond with aid to quake-struck parts of Indonesia

27 May - Following an early morning earthquake in Indonesia measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale that has reportedly killed thousands of people, the United Nations is gearing up to provide emergency assistance to the affected areas, top officials from the world body said today.

"The Secretary-General is deeply saddened by the loss of life, the hundreds of injuries and the destruction suffered by the people of Indonesia after the earthquake that struck Yogyakarta on the southern coast of Java," a spokesman for Mr. Annan said in a statement released in New York, extending condolences to the families of those who have been killed or injured in the earthquake.

UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams have been "alerted and stand ready to lend their assistance to efforts to respond to humanitarian needs created by the disaster and to mobilize international support for that response as required," the spokesman reported.

"The earthquake struck so early in the morning found most people still inside their homes. We are very concerned that this may result in increasing numbers of casualties and injured people," said Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Preliminary reports suggest that up to 2,900 people have perished in the earthquake, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said. The epicentre of the earthquake was in the Indian Ocean some 25 kilometres south-southwest of Yogyakarta.

In the district of Bantul 70 to 80 per cent of houses have completely collapsed, as have various large buildings, including the public hospital, according to OCHA. In Prambanan, the railway station collapsed and the railroad was damaged, disrupting the railway service from Jakarta to Surabaya. The Yogyakarta international airport was also damaged, and flights are being redirected to Surakarta or Semarang.

While the Government of Indonesia has not requested international assistance, the UN "stands ready to lend assistance to



efforts to respond to humanitarian needs created by the disaster and to mobilize international support for that response as required," OCHA said, noting that a UN plane is on stand-by

Yogyakarta is in the heartland of Indonesia's main island of Java near Mount Merapi, a volcano that has been on top alert for a major eruption this month. OCHA's Regional Disaster Response Advisor for Kobe is in Yogyakarta, where he is liaising with the Governor and other authorities. The UN official was in the region in response to the Mount Merapi volcano.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said it is preparing emergency supplies to be sent to help victims and has deployed staff to Yogyakarta to assess the immediate needs of victims.

UNICEF has emergency supplies of tents, hygiene kits, health kits and school supplies ready to be transported to the earthquake zone.

The agency's chief, Ann Veneman, echoed the Secretary-General, sending condolences to those affected by the disaster. She also noted that "often in natural disasters children and the elderly suffer disproportionately because they are least able to react quickly."

Shadowed by death of UN health agency chief, Assembly ends session



Dr. Lee Jong-wook

27 May - The World Health Assembly, the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), wrapped up a session in today in Geneva that was held in a sombre atmosphere because it immediately followed the sudden death of WHO chief Dr. Lee Jong-wook.

More than 2200 people from WHO's 192 Member States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other observers attended the meeting which took place from 22 to 27 May. The 61-year old WHO chief fell ill the weekend before and died after a blood clot was removed from his brain.

Opening the formal proceedings of the Assembly, the Minister of Health of Spain, Elena Salgado, paid tribute to the late leader. Hundreds of delegates signed books of condolence, adding to hundreds of tributes and messages which came in from people around the world.

Despite the loss, the Assembly conducted its business, hearing a keynote address from the Prince of Wales who stressed the importance of an integrated approach to nutrition, medicine, agriculture, the environment and social policies.

A special session of the Executive Board on 23 May appointed Dr Anders Nordström, previously Assistant Director-General for General Management, as Acting Director-General until a new Director-General is appointed and takes office.

In his closing remarks today, Dr. Nordström remembered Dr Lee's determination to see polio eradication completed. "In his memory, and in honour that all of that he stood for, let us commit with absolute dedication to see that goal quickly accomplished."

To support this goal, the Assembly adopted a resolution calling for increased focus on interrupting transmission in polio endemic areas, adherence to rapid response standards in case of importation of poliovirus and technical advice on planning for a post-eradication world.

Other decisions during the session concerned the fight against HIV/AIDS – another hallmark of Dr. Lee's tenure – as well as infant and child nutrition; control of sexually transmitted diseases; and the training of health workers, among other topics.

As new forms of tobacco use proliferate, UN health agency calls for broader regulation

30 May - Confronting the rapid spread and growing variety of smoked and smokeless tobacco products and their increasing use by young people, the United Nations health agency today called for urgent and broader regulation of what is the leading preventable cause of death globally, killing 5 million people each year.



“Tobacco can kill in any guise, regardless of whether you smoke it, chew it or inhale it through a water pipe, and that is why all products containing tobacco need to be regulated immediately, in all forms, worldwide,” the Director of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) Tobacco Free Initiative, Yumiko Mochizuki-Kobayashi, said in a statement on the eve of this year’s World No Tobacco Day.

“We are faced with a unique public health challenge, as many tobacco products remain unregulated,” she added.

The variety of tobacco products manufactured and marketed worldwide continues to expand. New types of flavoured, “natural” or “organic” and roll-your-own cigarettes are often advertised and marketed with names and packaging that might mislead consumers into believing that they are less dangerous than conventional cigarettes.

Smokeless tobacco products, such as snus and snuff, previously popular in a limited number of countries, are being marketed heavily elsewhere to specific target groups.

These include women in cultures where it is not socially acceptable for them to smoke; young people presented with flavoured and milder-tasting “starter” products); and smokers as an alternative in smoke-free environments. At the same time, forms of non-cigarette smoking, such as water pipes, are gaining wider acceptance around the world, especially among young people in cafés and on college campuses.

Dr. Mochizuki-Kobayashi stressed the urgent need for countries to implement stricter regulation of all forms of tobacco products, as required by the global tobacco treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

Results from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey, a joint WHO and United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative, show that in many countries the prevalence of use of tobacco products other than cigarettes (11.2 per cent) among adolescents is higher than that of cigarette use (8.9 per cent). In addition, in many countries adolescent girls are reporting similar rates of tobacco use to adolescent boys.

This is different from adult data, which generally show higher rates for males than females. These findings suggest that countries should enforce comprehensive control programs focusing especially on girls, and on all forms of tobacco use.

Cigarettes are the only legal product that kills half of its regular users when consumed as intended by the manufacturer. But for all tobacco products, including cigarettes, information on ingredients and toxin deliveries remains inadequate. This gap needs to be filled with appropriate country-level regulation and further research, WHO said.

Tobacco use is the cause of 90 per cent of lung cancer cases and is linked to many other types such as cervical or kidney cancer, as well as emphysema, bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory diseases. Health risks also include oral, throat and neck cancer, as well as heart attacks, stroke, other cardiovascular diseases and infertility.

Tobacco use continues to expand most rapidly in the developing world, where half of tobacco-related deaths occur. By 2020, if current trends continue, 7 out of every 10 tobacco-related deaths will be in the developing world.

“Tobacco use is the major contributor to what is now a global chronic disease epidemic,” Catherine Le Galès-Camus, WHO’s Assistant Director-General, Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health, said. “Regulating all forms of tobacco

products cannot be delayed. It is vital to any effective tobacco control programme, and a must if we are to control this epidemic.”