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Ban Ki-moon urges calm after Lebanon postpones presidential election again



23 November - Reacting to the fifth postponement of the Lebanese presidential election beyond the term of the current incumbent, Emile Lahoud, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged all parties to maintain calm and further intensify efforts to reach a compromise as soon as possible.

“The Secretary-General urges all parties to live up to their responsibilities and to act within the constitutional framework as well as in a peaceful and democratic manner,” a spokesperson for Mr. Ban said in a statement released in New York voicing regret at the postponement of the election, which was to have been held tomorrow.

“The Secretary-General is deeply concerned at the fragility of the situation in Lebanon and is following events very carefully.”

Mr. Ban and his Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Geir O. Pedersen, are in close touch with key players in the country, the region and beyond, according to the statement.

Appointment of Somali Prime Minister should spur reconciliation – Ban Ki-moon

23 November - The appointment of a Colonel Nur Hassan Hussein as Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia should spur efforts to promote reconciliation in the country, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.



Ban Ki-moon

In a statement released by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban applauded the concerted efforts of members of the Transitional Federal Institutions that led to appointment and voiced hope that it would “increase the momentum among Somalis to unite their efforts and complete the implementation of the key tasks of the Transitional Federal Charter.”

“This will be an important step towards making reconciliation and reconstruction a reality,” the spokesperson said. Somalia, which has lacked a functioning government since 1991, has been wracked by violence in recent months which has displaced a total of 1 million people.

Mr. Ban welcomed Mr. Nur Hussein’s background and experience in humanitarian operations in Somalia and “thus his unique understanding of the challenges confronting his country.”

He pledged the UN’s continued assistance in promoting “an inclusive political process and reconciliation in Somalia.”

Approved by a 2004 National Reconciliation Conference, the Transitional Federal Charter envisages an all-inclusive political process in Somalia producing broad-based and representative institutions and calls for the drafting of a new constitution to be adopted by popular referendum.

UN refugee agency cautious about returns to Iraq



Iraqis at crossing point with Syria

23 November - Responding to recent public reports about refugees returning to Iraq in limited numbers, a spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today cautioned against an organized effort to send civilians back to the war-ravaged country.

“We welcome improvements to the security conditions and stand ready to assist people who have decided or will decide to return voluntarily. However, UNHCR does not believe that the time has come to promote, organize or encourage returns,” agency spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis told a press briefing in Geneva.

“That would be possible only when proper return conditions are in place – including material and legal support and physical safety,” she said, pointing out that there is currently “no sign of any large-scale return to Iraq as the security situation in many parts of the country remains volatile and unpredictable.”

UNHCR staff in Syria who surveyed over 100 Iraqi families said most of the refugees report that they are returning because they are running out of money and/or resources, face difficult living conditions, or because their visas have expired.

Recent visa restrictions are preventing a number of Iraqis from shuttling back and forth between Iraq and Syria to get additional resources, make money or collect food distributions or pensions.

The incentives offered by the Iraqi government of some \$700-\$800 to return home, as well as free bus and plane rides, have also played a role in returns, according to the UNHCR survey, which noted that Iraqi refugees are discussing return for the first time in years.

Returnees in Baghdad, interviewed by the agency’s staff, cited economic difficulties caused by their long displacement as a



major reason for going home. "Many had run out of or nearly depleted their savings. Some returned as it was the last chance to get their children back into Iraqi schools before the end of the first term," said Ms. Pagonis.

"Some were indeed encouraged by the reports regarding improvement of security, but many expressed concern about longer-term security, citing the fact that militias are still around and many areas remain insecure," she added. "People have mainly been returning to areas where they feel that local security forces are working properly and are maintaining control."

Although the agency cannot monitor borders full-time, it has noted more returns to Iraq than arrivals in Syria, with a fluctuating average of 1,500 departures to Iraq and 500 arrivals in Syria per day.

Inside Iraq, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) increased slightly over the last few months, Ms. Pagonis said, citing figures received by UNHCR from its partners estimating that over 2.4 million Iraqis are displaced inside Iraq.

"Reasons for the increase include better registration of the displaced, but also recent visa restrictions in Syria, which meant more people moved inside Iraq rather than seeking refuge outside," Ms. Pagonis said.

Some displaced people are returning home, in part because of financial incentives.

Displaced Iraqis say access to shelter, food, work, water/sanitation and legal aid remain the most common needs.

According to government estimates, some 2.2 million Iraqis live outside Iraq - with some 500,000 to 700,000 in Jordan and up to 1.5 million in Syria.

UN's top envoy to Côte d'Ivoire discusses peace process with president

23 November - The new United Nations envoy to Côte d'Ivoire and the country's president have held their first talks on the peace process healing the divide between rebel-held north and government-controlled south.

"We discussed the peace process and the elections," said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative, Y.J. Choi, following his meeting with Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo at the Presidential Palace on Thursday.



Y.J. Choi and President Gbagbo

Elections are planned for 2008 in Côte d'Ivoire under a peace accord signed by leaders of the Government and rebel Forces Nouvelles in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Mr. Choi, who arrived in Côte d'Ivoire earlier this week, later discussed the same issues with the President of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire, Henri Konan Bédié, at the latter's residence, according to the UN Mission in the country (UNOCI).

In another development, UNOCI's Abidjan-based Jordanian battalion recently organized a medical day in Marcory town hall, where five doctors, a dentist and six nurses provided health care to more than 500 patients, about 300 of whom received free medication to the value of several million CFA francs.

Speaking at the 20 November event, Jordanian Contingent Commander Colonel Mohammad Mahasneh explained that the humanitarian operation was within the framework of the "directives of the Jordanian command and the support of UNOCI, which encourages actions aimed at alleviating the suffering of the neediest populations."

Secretary-General reports 'grave violations' of children's rights in Myanmar

23 November - Grave child rights violations, including recruitment into armed groups, continue in Myanmar, United

Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in a new report, calling on the Government to take measures to address the problem which is common to both State and non-State actors.

“Although there has been progress in terms of dialogue with the Government of Myanmar and two non-State actors, the report notes that State and non-State actors continue to be implicated in grave child rights violations,” Mr. Ban writes in a summary of his report to the Security Council.

He notes progress in a number of areas, including the commitment by the Government that no child under the age of 18 will be recruited and the signing by two non-State actors – the Karen National Union and the Karenni National Progressive Party – of Deeds of Commitment to cease the recruitment and use of children.

The report documents “patterns of underage recruitment” by the Government, including those involving “poor and unaccompanied street children who are vulnerable to promises of food and shelter.” Other children picked up by the police for not having a national identification card are offered the “choice” of either being arrested or going into the army.

“Also of grave concern are the reliable reports of a number of incarcerated children/minors who have been convicted of desertion and sentenced to prison terms of up to five years,” Mr. Ban writes, noting that international practice and principles stipulate that children who have been unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces should not be treated as deserters.

Other actors cited in the report in connection with the recruitment of children include the United Wa State Army; the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation National Progressive Party/Karenni Army; Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army; Karenni National People’s Liberation Front; Democratic Karen Buddhist Army; Shan State Army-South and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army; and the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council.

The UN has received “credible but unverified reports of rape perpetrated by Government forces and armed groups, which the country task force on monitoring and reporting is not in a position to confirm owing to limited access to conflict-affected areas.”

The Secretary-General recommends that the Government of Myanmar to take into account its responsibilities to ensure that all armed groups with which it shares a ceasefire accord are made accessible to monitoring.

He urges the Government to continue taking disciplinary action against those responsible for aiding and abetting the recruitment of children, and to systematize and institutionalize this disciplinary process.

The Government of Myanmar is encouraged to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to adjust national legislation accordingly.

Mr. Ban also recommends that the Myanmar Government allow international and humanitarian organizations access for delivery of humanitarian services, and to accept the proposal of the UN refugee agency’s Assistant High Commissioner for Operations for an inter-agency humanitarian needs assessment in the country.

Ban Ki-moon welcomes decision by tourism meeting to focus on climate change

23 November - As preparations build for next month’s landmark conference on climate change in Bali, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the decision by the World Tourism Organization’s General Assembly to focus on the issue.

In a video message to the Assembly’s meeting in Cartagena, Mr. Ban pointed out that tourism is becoming increasingly important to the world economy and global community. “It is more and more connected with issues at the top of the United Nations agenda, from terrorism and conflict to natural disasters, epidemics, poverty and climate change.”

He commended the Assembly for the themes it has chosen to discuss during its session, including adapting to the impact of climate change, and limiting tourism's own contribution to greenhouse-gas emissions. "I particularly welcome this focus as we prepare for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali next month."

Delegates at the Bali conference are expected to negotiate a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, a legally binding pact limiting greenhouse gas emissions which is set to expire in 2012.

Mr. Ban also welcomed the Assembly's decision to discuss risk prevention and crisis management, including preparing for the possibility of a flu pandemic, and sustainable tourism as a tool for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a set of eight antipoverty targets adopted by a 2000 UN summit.

UN releases another \$6 million in emergency funds for cyclone-hit Bangladesh



23 November - The United Nations today announced that it would disburse an additional \$6 million to support relief efforts for hundreds of thousands of cyclone survivors in Bangladesh, as UN agencies continued rushing aid to the affected population.

The new disbursement comes atop \$9 million already granted by the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) after the disaster hit on 15 November, said the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), meanwhile, today reported that a recent mission to the hardest-hit areas in Bangladesh showed that damage was worse than expected.

"The cyclone has predisposed thousands of children and women to the increased risk of illness and death due to malnutrition," said Dr. Iyorlumun Uhaa, Chief of Health and Nutrition for UNICEF Bangladesh. "Of the estimated 5 million people affected, half are children and one eighth or 600,000 are under the age of five. The cold weather and vulnerability to cold, hunger, trauma, diarrhoea and other communicable diseases will increase many times over unless urgent life-saving assistance is provided to children and women immediately."

The agency is procuring 100,000 blankets, 60,000 articles of children's clothes, 60,000 family kits, and 60,000 plastic sheets for use in cyclone-stricken areas, and has moved two mobile water treatment plants to hard-hit districts.

UNICEF is also working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to identify separated, unaccompanied and distressed children who are being registered with the local government authorities.

"Separated and unaccompanied children are living without care, security and support facilities," said Aissa Sow, UNICEF Child Protection Officer. These children are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In other cases, it is hard for the affected families that lost everything to adequately care for children."

The World Food Programme (WFP) is continuing to distribute food, including high-energy biscuits, by helicopters, boats and trucks. A second distribution to 465,000 survivors has taken place, and WFP will now start distributing 750 tons of rice to more than 2 million people.

"WFP is working very closely with the Bangladesh Air Force to ensure ready-to-eat foods get to those people who need our help the most," said Douglas Broderick, WFP Country Representative.

"In addition to high energy biscuits which continue to be air-delivered by Air Force helicopters, today we have begun the road and boat transport of 750 tons of rice for the five worst-affected districts."

Following the present and continuing distribution of dry, ready-to-eat foods to hundreds of thousands of Cyclone victims, WFP will provide longer term monthly food rations including rice, lentils and oil to more than 2.3 million persons in the

nine worst affected districts in Southern and coastal Bangladesh.

“From the biscuits to the rice to more balanced food rations for entire families, we are working urgently to provide the critical food assistance needed by the most vulnerable people living in the Cyclone-hit areas,” said Mr. Broderick.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is helping to prepare a needs assessment of emergency drugs that would be required for the next six months, while the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has established an emergency coordination and rehabilitation unit in Bangladesh, where agriculture, livestock and fisheries sectors in the southern part of the country have suffered enormous losses.

UN, African mediators continue pressing for progress in Darfur peace process



23 November - Mediators from the African Union and the United Nations aiming to advance the Darfur peace process have wrapped up a two-day visit to North Darfur after holding a meeting with the Sudan Liberation Army-Unity leadership there.

The AU’s Sam Ibok and the UN’s Tayé-Brook Zerihoun briefed the leadership about the Sirte peace process, which began last month in the Libyan city.

Commending the SLA-Unity for their unification efforts, the mediators encouraged the Movement to engage in the peace process, according to a UN spokesperson.

Mr. Zerihoun said the objective of the Sirte Talks is to stop the killings in Darfur, and to help allow the people organize their lives and live in peace. “To obtain peace, you have to negotiate,” he told them.

The Chief Mediators also said that they were encouraged by the efforts that the Movements are making to unite, because any form of unification will make the mediators’ tasks easier, according to the spokesperson.

The UN Special Envoy for Darfur, Jan Eliasson, is scheduled to be in New York next week to brief the Security Council and for internal consultations.

Security incidents drive more Sri Lankans to flee their homes – UN agency



23 November - Security incidents in eastern Sri Lanka are driving recently returned displaced people to flee their homes once again, a spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said today, calling on the Government to take measures in response.

“We are seriously concerned about the deteriorating security situation and various incidents reported from return areas in eastern Sri Lanka,” Jennifer Pagonis told a press briefing in Geneva.

“We urge the Government to strengthen the return process and build confidence among the returnees. We warn against any further moves towards premature return until these issues are resolved.”

The agency estimates that some 250 displaced people, who returned to their villages of origin in the Trincomalee district a few weeks ago after fleeing escalating violence in 2006, fled their homes again this week back to welfare centres in Batticaloa district after “serious security incidents” in their villages.

Ms. Pagonis cited reports of “a number of killings, abductions, incidents of harassment and general insecurity in these areas” which have prompted those who have fled to decide against any return to their villages of origin. “They said their homes have been looted and damaged, and they now have nothing to return to.”

The agency also drew attention to incidents of involuntary returns to Chenkalady in Batticaloa West, where the authorities reportedly told internally displaced people (IDPs) who were unwilling to return that their assistance would be withdrawn if they opted to stay behind.

“We reiterate our call to the Government to ensure that the returns are voluntary, safe and in line with international standards,” said Ms. Pagonis.

Emphasizing that UNHCR should be fully engaged in the process, she urged the Government to work with experts in this field to ensure the rights of IDPs, as stated in international humanitarian law, are safeguarded at all times.

UN refugee agency registers refugees, asylum seekers in Malawi



23 November - The United Nations refugee agency is working with the Government of Malawi on a registration exercise aimed at improving the protection, management and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

“This registration is a vital part of helping refugees,” said Matewos Beraki, acting head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Malawi. “It will provide us not just with numbers but with the details about the people in the camp that would help us to find permanent solutions to their situation.”

The joint exercise covers the Dzaleka camp, where almost all of the country’s thousands of refugees and asylum seekers live, said UNHCR, which is planning a subsequent registration of refugees who are allowed by the authorities to live in the nearby capital, Lilongwe, and elsewhere in Malawi.

“We are realizing during this registration that the existing data were poor – often incomplete and inaccurate,” said Andrew Hopkins, UNHCR registration officer for southern Africa, who directed the exercise. “The questions we are asking now should lead to profiling that allows us to understand each individual better and lead to solutions.”

Individuals needing special protection, such as unaccompanied children who had been staying with other families, have been identified. There have also been divorces, marriages and births that had gone unrecorded since the last time the data was checked in 2004.

The household profiling information being entered into the UNHCR database this time includes job skills, education, languages spoken and many details of local connections like work permits, marriage and bank accounts.

The agency said this could strengthen a case for local integration – an option currently unavailable for refugees in Malawi.

UNHCR is conducting similar registrations across southern Africa.

UN trains Congolese traffic police in Ituri

23 November - Aiming to reduce traffic accidents and foster respect for the rules of the road, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) has completed training of nearly 50 police officers in Ituri province.



The group of 49, including four women, earned certificates after completing a training programme in road traffic policing which covered human rights, ethics, gender, child welfare and key legislation.

The training, held from 30 October to 22 November, was organized by the MONUC Ituri senior police officers and their colleagues in Kinshasa, with support from the mission’s Human Rights Division and the local Red Cross.

“More work needs to be accomplished with our local partners,” said Ndzie Ngoumou, head of MONUC police. “It is

important that they understand the need for good co-operation with police officers by the installation of traffic lights and traffic control measures on the principal crossroads.”

Over 100 Congolese police have also recently received training in law and order and professional intervention techniques, according to MONUC.

DR Congo: UN refugee agency opens new office in North Kivu amid fighting

23 November - The United Nations refugee agency has opened a new field office to help displaced Congolese in the volatile province of North Kivu amid a fresh outbreak of fighting in the area.



Camp at Nyongera

The clashes close to the centre of Rutshuru town forced thousands of people to flee their homes in search of safety and hampered plans by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to launch new camp management and coordination operations in the area.

The new office will oversee assistance and protection operations for the estimated 45,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Rutshuru area, the agency said. About half of them live in five camps while the rest stay in community buildings or with family and friends.

“It has been difficult to operate from Goma and provide regular assistance and protection to the IDPs in Rutshuru,” Masako Yonekawa, head of the UNHCR office in the provincial capital Goma, which is located some 70 kilometres to the south of Rutshuru.

The agency warned that fighting Wednesday would delay the launch of a UNHCR operation to move some 2,000 displaced people from several schools and a local stadium to the a new site.

This group fled their villages in October to escape fighting between government forces and renegade troops. Many sleep in classrooms, which they must vacate in the morning when pupils arrive for their lessons. The planned transfer aims to “relieve IDPs from the stress of having to move out of their temporary shelters on a daily basis and normalize community life,” the UNHCR official said.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced by the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) North Kivu province in recent weeks. Many of the IDPs are living in precarious conditions without regular humanitarian assistance, including food, health care, clothing, potable water and shelter materials such as plastic sheeting and blankets.

Recent UNHCR assessment missions to Rutshuru have voiced concern over the proximity of IDP sites to military bases, which they say could expose females to the risk of sexual abuse.

Germaine Bationo, head of UNHCR's emergency team in North Kivu, said there were other obstacles to aid and protection operations, noting that some of the IDP sites are in rebel-controlled areas. “This will seriously restrict our movements and will require the use of military escorts from the UN peacekeeping mission,” which is known as MONUC.

The build-up of military forces and repeated clashes in North Kivu since December 2006 have led to the worst internal displacement in the area since the end of the civil war in 2003, according to UNHCR. Some 375,000 Congolese have been forced to leave their homes in the province since last December, including more than 160,000 in the last two months alone. There are some 800,000 IDPs in the province.

The agency is urging all parties to refrain from attacks on internally displaced people and civilians, and to find a negotiated solution for the prolonged violence that continues to plague North Kivu and its population.

UN urges Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist to cooperate on minors



Richard Bennett

23 November - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal has voiced concern at growing reports that the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) and associated organizations have coerced or forced persons who were under 18 years old at the time of their recruitment to return to cantonment sites of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) after they had voluntarily left.

“Forcing or pressuring young people under 18 to return to cantonment sites violates the rights of children, as well as the commitment made by the CPN-M, and the Government of Nepal, in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement to immediately release minors who had been associated with a fighting force, and to provide 'necessary and proper cooperation' for their rehabilitation and reintegration,” the Office said in a statement.

In one of the cases documented by OHCHR-Nepal, two minors who left a cantonment site in Chitwan in May and returned to their homes in Makwanpur District were pursued by CPN-M cadres in order to force them to return, according to the statement.

The UN and local non-governmental organizations intervened, and “the girls were not returned to the cantonment” but on 19 November, CPN-M cadres returned to the girls' home and abducted one of them, while the other escaped.

Police officers were unable or unwilling to prevent her abduction when informed by CPN-M cadres that she would be taken to the cantonment site in Chitwan for the verification process, which is due to start within one week.

In other cases reported to OHCHR-Nepal, pressure on minors to return to cantonments has also coincided with verification exercises.

The Office also voiced concern that CPN-M cadres have threatened human rights defenders and others working to reintegrate into society minors formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.

The Nepal Police have displayed “an unwillingness to compel the CPN-M to respect the law, despite OHCHR's intervention with officers at the district and regional levels.”

The CPN-M must abide by its peace agreement commitments, respect the rights of minors who have voluntarily started the reintegration process and not force them to return to cantonments, said the Office's Nepal Representative, Richard Bennett.

“The CPN-M must also speed up the process of formally releasing all minors still inside the cantonments so they can return to their families and civilian life,” he added. “It is also essential that the Nepal Police fulfil its obligation to protect minors who have voluntarily started the process of reintegrating into society, and to ensure security for organizations and persons working to assist the reintegration of these minors.”

UN and partners urge stepped-up efforts to foster reconciliation in Sierra Leone



23 November - The United Nations and Sierra Leone's Human Rights Commission have teamed up with civil society groups to urge the country's Government and the international community to intensify efforts to carry out recommendations made by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In a communiqué issued following a two-day consultation held in Freetown earlier this week, participants also called for the formulation of a comprehensive strategy with clear allocation of responsibilities to achieve this – and pointed out that the full support of donor countries is required for it to succeed.

The UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) said participants in the consultations encouraged civil society groups to raise public awareness about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations which "are critical for peace consolidation in Sierra Leone."

In 2004, the seven-member Commission made a number of recommendations to deal with past abuses and violations and foster reconciliation in Sierra Leone, which is consolidating peace following a brutal, 11-year conflict.

They included the payment of reparations by the Government to amputees and other wounded victims, those who were sexually violated, and the widows and children who suffered deprivation, displacement, or worse between 1991 and 2002.

Indonesia: UN expert hails progress in combating torture, urges further measures

23 November - Indonesia has made progress in addressing torture but the practice persists and must be criminalized, an independent United Nations expert just back from the country said today.

The Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak, was able to hold meetings in Jakarta and visit correctional institutions, pre-trial detention houses, police and military detention facilities as well as social rehabilitation centres during his visit from 10 to 25 November.

In a statement issued in Geneva, he voiced appreciation to the Government for having invited him but said in a number of instances, his unimpeded access to places of detention was compromised, including his ability to carry out private interviews with detainees.

Despite this, he was able to reach the broad conclusion "that given the lack of legal and institutional safeguards and the prevailing structural impunity, persons deprived of their liberty are extremely vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment."

The Government said that the process of including the crime of torture in Indonesia's Penal Code is under way, but Mr. Nowak voiced regret that this has not yet been done "in spite of many recommendations to this effect by both national and international observers."

He stressed that torture must be criminalized with several years of imprisonment without further delay, "as a concrete demonstration of Indonesia's commitment to combat this problem."

Pointing out that "bringing perpetrators to justice is the strongest signal that torture and ill-treatment is absolutely unacceptable," the Special Rapporteur said Government officials "could not cite one instance in which a public official was sentenced by a criminal court for committing torture or ill-treatment."

Legal safeguards for detainees, in particular at the pre-trial stage, "are virtually non-existent, in violation of applicable international norms and standards to which Indonesia has subscribed," he said, voicing particular concern about the prolonged period of police custody allowed under the law – at times up to several months and during which many detainees have no or very restricted access to courts.

Only very few detainees appear to have access to a defense lawyer, he said, noting that in this context, "given the lack of legal safeguards and doubts as to how confessions might have been obtained in a number of these instances," use of the death penalty is inappropriate.

He also noted that the secrecy with which executions are handled violates international human rights standards.

Mr. Nowak, who serves in an unpaid, personal capacity, said he was not informed of any effective mechanism for determining the legality of detention or for evaluating a complaint about ill-treatment or torture. "On the contrary, several interlocutors from the penitentiary system, the Attorney General's office and also medical doctors indicated to the Special Rapporteur that if persons with marks of torture or ill-treatment are transferred to their authority, they normally hand them



back to the police, apparently in order to avoid any additional administrative troubles.”

The Special Rapporteur commended the National Human Rights Action Plan, which foresees the ratification in 2008 of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture, which requires the establishment of an independent body to regularly monitor places of detention, with the authority to conduct unannounced visits.

The expert said detainees are more vulnerable to abuse while in police custody than in prison. “The problem of police abuse appears to be sufficiently widespread as to warrant immediate attention by the Government,” he added, citing reports, corroborated by expert medical analysis, of beatings by fists, rattan or wooden sticks, cable, iron bars and hammers.

In some cases, police officers had shot detainees in their legs from close range, or electrocuted them, according to the statement. Some detainees alleged to have had heavy implements placed on their feet. “In most instances, it appears that the purpose of this violence was to extract confessions,” Mr. Nowak observes.

The statement does note that he received only a limited number of allegations of ill-treatment and corporal punishment in both pre-trial detention houses and prisons, but cautions that there were allegations and evidence of several cases of beatings by guards.

Many of the prisons were very spacious, clean and well-maintained, and below maximum capacity. The Special Rapporteur welcomed the relative openness of detention places, most of which allow several visits per week by relatives and friends. He also commended the system for treating youth (persons between 18 and 21) as a separate category and holding them apart from adults when possible.

“Another best practice is the fact that pregnant women are often temporarily released from custody to be able to deliver their baby, and that women in police custody as well as in prisons can live together with their babies and are allowed to maintain very close contact with their older children,” he said.

At the same time, the Special Rapporteur said he is “extremely concerned that criminal responsibility in Indonesia starts at the age of eight and that therefore small children are put in detention facilities and prisons, very often mixed with much older children and adults.” Minors and children are at greater risk of corporal punishment and ill-treatment in detention.

While recognizing that positive steps taken by Indonesia to address problems, the expert recommended a series of steps, including official public condemnation of torture and ill-treatment and its criminalization. He also called for measures against impunity and the introduction of confidential complaints mechanisms. The Government, he said, should raise the age of criminal responsibility in accordance with international standards and abolish the death penalty.

The Special Rapporteur will submit a comprehensive report on the visit to the UN Human Rights Council.

UN agency warns that viral disease could spread in Sudan

23 November - Rift Valley Fever, a viral disease affecting people and animals, could spread in Sudan amid preparations for the Eid Al Idha Muslim holiday, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) warned today.

The disease, transmitted by mosquito bites, could escalate as millions of animals are moved around the country as part of traditions to mark the holiday.

More than 160 people have died so far of the disease, mainly in White Nile, Sennar and Gazeera states, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

The complex situation of the disease in livestock needs urgent monitoring, FAO said. The agency has offered to send a team of animal health experts to the Sudan for in-depth field investigations.

“We are ready to assist the veterinary authorities in developing a comprehensive monitoring and control programme,” said FAO Chief Veterinary Officer Joseph Domenech. “FAO could also assist in improving border quarantine and laboratory



facilities for monitoring livestock exports.”

In response to recent Rift Valley Fever outbreaks, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have banned livestock imports from Sudan.

People become infected through mosquito bites or direct contact with infected meat and blood during the time of slaughter, or other biological material and body fluids. Uncooked milk of infected animals may also pose a risk, according to FAO.

UN refugee agency urges Kenya to grant access to detained Somalis

23 November - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is urging the Kenyan authorities to grant the agency access to over two dozen Somalis being detained in Nairobi after a group nearly that size were forcibly returned to war-torn Mogadishu.

Spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis today in Geneva voiced concern about the fate of at least 26 Somalis being held at the Jomo Kenyatta Airport from among at least 49 Somalis, mainly women and children, who reportedly fled from Mogadishu to Nairobi and then on to Kampala, Uganda, but were returned to Kenya.

The remaining 23 were “forcibly returned to Mogadishu on Tuesday without being given the opportunity to request asylum as provided for under international and Kenyan laws,” she said.

Ms. Pagonis pointed out that Kenya’s own laws require the Government to refrain from forcibly returning people to a place where their lives are in danger – and grant the right to present their claim for asylum.

UNHCR had repeatedly requested access to the initial group of 49 but still has not received it.

All of the Somalis of the group expressed fear of persecution were they to be returned to Somalia, according to reliable sources, the agency said.

“We are now extremely concerned that the remaining group of 26 Somali nationals at the airport will be returned to the Mogadishu area, where continuing unrest and fighting would put them at extreme risk,” Ms. Pagonis said.

“We are urging the Government of Kenya to grant UNHCR teams access to the Somalis at the airport in order to determine their international protection needs and to halt their possible forced return to Mogadishu.”

Somalia: UN envoy hails nomination of new Prime Minister



22 November - Welcoming the nomination of Nur Hassan Hussein as the new Prime Minister of Somalia, the senior United Nations envoy to the country today voiced hope that this move would pave the way for unity.

In a statement, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah praised the concerted efforts of members of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) that led to the decision and said he was pleased that the process was carried out in a peaceful manner.

“I want to thank all those who contributed to this exercise being done peacefully,” Mr. Ould-Abdallah said. “I hope that this appointment will prepare the ground for a united approach.”

The new Prime Minister was nominated by President Abdullahi Yusuf.

Iraq: UN backs conference on human rights, civil society

22 November - Human rights and civil society in Iraq took centre stage at a conference attended by representatives from the country's Government, Iraqi civil society, dignitaries from Jordan, the European Commission and the United Nations, held in Amman.

Hosted by the EC and the UN Office for Project Services, the event capped an initiative aimed at promoting a culture of human rights in Iraq by strengthening Iraqi civil society organizations.

“Achievements of the project were presented and highlighted the successful and courageous work of Iraqi human rights defenders,” the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) said in a news release.

“The crucial role played by Iraqi civil society in establishing an effective human rights system in Iraq, and the relationship of civil society organizations with the Iraqi Government were debated, and the conference recognized the need for the international community to continue its support, both financially and technically to build on these achievements.”

The project focused on the rehabilitation of torture victims, the protection of detainees' rights and boosting the ability of civil society organizations to promote human rights education in Iraq, according to UNAMI.

Seoul gives over \$4 million to first environmental project between two Koreas



22 November - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Republic of Korea today agreed to set up a Trust Fund that addresses key environmental issues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Seoul will contribute \$4.4 million for the project, which UNEP said was the first venture of its kind on the environment between the two Koreas aiming to tackle forest depletion, declining water quality, air pollution, land degradation and biodiversity in the DPRK.

It will also support eco-housing initiatives as well as conservation and management of the Taedong watershed, environmental education, integrated environmental monitoring system, clean development mechanism and renewable energy technology, UNEP said.

“This multilateral cooperation with UNEP is of great significance for both South and North Korea and a huge step forward in addressing pressing environmental issues in DPR Korea,” said Lee Kyoo-Yong, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Korea.

“This agreement will build on the momentum that the DPRK has begun,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “It will also go a long way in strengthening the spirit of cooperation between the two countries.”

UN agriculture development fund supports microfinance in Pakistan



22 November - The United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has announced that it will provide a \$35 million loan to a new \$46 million programme making microfinance services available to about 160,000 new clients – at least half of them women.

“It is a pivotal time for microfinance in Pakistan,” says Nigel Brett, IFAD's country programme manager for Pakistan. “Future growth in this sector will depend partly on microfinance institutions and commercial banks forging successful financing partnerships. This programme will work to build such partnerships.”

The IFAD-supported programme will work with small farmers, livestock owners, traders and microentrepreneurs; women and households headed solely by women; and vulnerable rural households living below the poverty line.

In another development, IFAD announced an over \$14 million project to boost the market value of Bolivia's millions of llamas, alpacas and undomesticated vicuñas in products like meat, hides and wool-based handicrafts, as well as eco-tourism. The agency will contribute a loan of \$7.2 million for the initiative.

“The project will give poor rural people better access to financial services and provide them with technical assistance, knowledge and information, so that they can start small businesses,” said Roberto Haudry de Soucy, IFAD's country programme manager for Bolivia.

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America. Although GDP per capita grew during the 1990s, it was insufficient to reduce poverty, inequality and social exclusion, IFAD said. Poverty in rural areas is almost double the rate it is in capital cities, and extreme poverty is nearly triple.