



In the headlines:

- UN staff among few survivors of deadly plane crash in eastern DR Congo
- Roadblocks leave hundreds of Afghan refugees stranded in Pakistan – UN
- UN-backed effort to remove dangerous nuclear fuel from Serbia moves ahead
- Workplace attitudes to HIV/AIDS vastly improved, reports UN labour agency
- Cyprus: top UN political official cautiously optimistic about chances of progress
- Security Council calls for more progress in implementing Lebanon resolution
- Security Council extends UN operation in Georgia for further six months
- ‘Long-overdue’ justice necessary in Cambodia, says Secretary-General Ban
- UN agencies call on Israel to immediately resume full fuel shipments to Gaza
- Darfur: UN-AU mission to probe misconduct allegations about staff member
- Eastern DR Congo will remain focus of mission’s resources, UN envoy says
- Food production must benefit world’s poor, urge UN-backed scientists

More stories inside

UN staff among few survivors of deadly plane crash in eastern DR Congo



Hewa Bora Airways DC-9

15 April - Three United Nations staff members are among only a handful of survivors from today’s plane crash in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that has killed dozens of people, the UN peacekeeping mission to the country reports.

The mission, known as MONUC, said a Hewa Bora Airlines plane crashed soon after take-off at about 2:45 p.m. from the airport at Goma, close to the border with Rwanda. The Kinshasa-bound flight was carrying an estimated 80 passengers and six crew members.

Radio Okapi reported the plane experienced technical difficulties during the take-off and briefly reached an altitude of 100 metres before it crashed into homes in the nearby densely populated Birere suburb of Goma and burst into flames. Nearly all on board are reported to have died.

MONUC peacekeepers, fire brigades, ambulance crews, medical staff and first-aid providers were dispatched immediately to the crash site to help local authorities give treatment to the injured and evacuate victims to a UN hospital.

The mission said the few survivors include two international staff with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), one of whom is in critical condition; one national staff member with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); and the spouse of an OCHA national staff member. The pilot, his co-pilot and a flight attendant are also believed to have survived.

The DRC has long had an extremely poor aviation safety record, and just last Friday the European Union added Hewa Bora Airlines to its blacklist of airlines banned from flying into EU air space.

Roadblocks leave hundreds of Afghan refugees stranded in Pakistan – UN



Afghan refugee in Jalozai (Pakistan)

15 April - Hundreds of Afghan refugees set to leave Peshawar in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to return to their homeland have been left stranded after local tribal disputes shut down a key road between the two countries, the United Nations refugee agency reported today.

Over 360 Afghan families that had been processed for repatriation from Peshawar on Monday were unable to leave due to the roadblock along the Peshawar-Torkham highway.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has temporarily suspended its voluntary repatriation operation via Peshawar in order to prevent more families from being stranded.

UNHCR spokesperson Ron Redmond told reporters in Geneva that assisted returns will start again once the road is cleared.

The blockage has also meant that more time will be needed to repatriate those Afghans living in the Jalozai refugee camp in NWFP. The deadline to close that camp was today.

"UNHCR acknowledges that Jalozai must be closed as previously agreed and that its residents must cooperate by leaving on time," said Mr. Redmond. "Nonetheless, we hope the Pakistani government can give them a little more time in view of the current impasse on the Peshawar-Torkham road."

More than 70,000 Afghans living there have been given the options of voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan or relocation to an existing refugee village in Pakistan.

Over 3,000 have repatriated in recent weeks, while more than 30 families have asked to be relocated to Kot Chandna refugee village in Pakistan's Punjab province.

"The authorities have assured us that houses that are still occupied will not be demolished, and that basic services such as food, water and electricity will keep running until the last inhabitant leaves," Mr. Redmond said.

"We have also urged the authorities to be more proactive on relocating Afghans who cannot return to Afghanistan," he added.

Meanwhile, assisted returns are unaffected and continue in south-western Pakistan through UNHCR's Baleli Voluntary Repatriation Centre in Balochistan.

UN-backed effort to remove dangerous nuclear fuel from Serbia moves ahead

15 April - A global effort to remove dangerous spent fuel and decommission a Soviet-designed nuclear reactor in Serbia has cleared another major funding hurdle as part of a United Nations-backed initiative to close down potential sources of terrorism and proliferation.

The UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said today that together with the Serbian Government it recently signed a \$8.63 million framework agreement with the European Commission (EC) to help fund decommissioning the reactor at Vinca reactor on the outskirts of Belgrade, the capital.

But \$25 million more is still needed to complete the project, which includes repatriating to Russia high-enriched uranium

(HEU) that could be converted to weapons-grade material.

“The EC support was absolutely crucial to the life of the programme, but we have quite a ways to go to find the remaining \$25 million for the project,” said IAEA Special Programme Manager for the Vinca Institute Nuclear Decommissioning (VIND), John J. Kelly.

“The EC contribution serves as a great example and encourages other potential donors to invest in an important and successful project. With radioactive waste, disused sources, and leaking spent fuel that’s almost 45 years old, the Vinca site presents huge radiological challenges.”

Once completed, the spent fuel shipment will comprise the largest in the European theatre, and extra shipping casks have already been built for the project through funding received from the United States.

Thousands of containers of unprocessed radioactive waste and disused sealed radioactive sources must also be removed from old, degraded storage buildings, repackaged and placed into new holding facilities. In a third stage the reactor will be decommissioned.

Security at Vinca had long been a source of concern, with much of the dangerous material and facilities inadequately protected, but thanks to funding and other support from the Serbian Government and the US for upgrades and police, overall security has been substantially improved over the past two years.

International concern over Vinca mushroomed in the 1990s after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, which led to increased international cooperation to reduce the radiological risk.

The IAEA has been involved in various such projects in recent years from now independent of reunified countries that were part of the Soviet sphere of influence, including the secret airlift from the former East Germany of 270 kilos of HEU that could be used by terrorists to make nuclear explosives and the repatriation from Uzbekistan of fuel containing enough uranium to produce two and a half nuclear bombs.

Workplace attitudes to HIV/AIDS vastly improved, reports UN labour agency



15 April - Effective HIV policies have led to more supportive attitudes at the workplace towards co-workers living with the virus, the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) says in a new report.

Prepared by the ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS in the world of work, “Saving lives, Protecting jobs” tracks changes in attitudes related to HIV and presents a series of good practices and data collected from workplaces, ministries of labour and employers’ and workers’ organizations.

“With 33.2 million people globally living with HIV, the majority of whom are still working and in their most productive years, the workplace is a unique entry point in addressing HIV/AIDS,” the agency notes in a news release.

The report summarizes the activities of the Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises (SHARE) project, which is active in over 650 workplaces in 24 countries, covering almost one million workers. It includes data gathered by the ILO over the past four years from six pilot countries – Belize, Benin, Cambodia, Ghana, Guyana and Togo – on the impact of HIV/AIDS activities and non-discrimination policies in the workplace.

“Several countries offer outstanding examples of how they address HIV/AIDS using the workplace for prevention, care and support, and tackle stigma and discrimination,” said Dr. Sophia Kisting, Director of the ILO Programme.

The agency reported that in all six pilot countries, workers demonstrated “a marked improvement” in attitudes towards people living with HIV.

The percentage of workers who reported having a supportive attitude towards co-workers living with HIV rose from 49 per cent to 63 per cent on average during the period covered. In Ghana that figure increased from 33 per cent to 63 per cent.

The report also showed that attitudes towards condom use improved considerably in most countries, rising for example in Cambodia from 34 per cent to 68 per cent. Further, the percentage of workers who reported using condoms with non-regular partners rose in all six countries from 74 per cent to 84 per cent.

The ILO attributes the changes in behaviour to better policies and practices in the workplace, including an increase in the number of enterprises in the six pilot countries that have written HIV policies. In addition, employers' and workers' groups are increasingly making use of the ILO's Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS.

Cyprus: top UN political official cautiously optimistic about chances of progress



Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe

15 April - The United Nations political chief told the Security Council today that he was optimistic that Cyprus could soon be reunified, but he also cautioned that the upcoming negotiations between the two communities on the Mediterranean island would not be easy.

Speaking to reporters after briefing the Council, B. Lynn Pascoe said he was looking forward to next week's start of substantive talks among the working groups set up under the agreement signed by the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on 21 March.

Mr. Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said his discussions last week with senior officials in both Athens and Ankara also left him "really optimistic" about the outlook for Cyprus and the chances of ending the long-running dispute.

"I think the entire world would be delighted to see Cyprus move forward on its negotiation," he said. "We would like to see this settled as soon as possible."

In response to a journalist's question, Mr. Pascoe said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would consider appointing a special envoy on the issue in the months ahead if the working groups make progress in the first phase.

Security Council calls for more progress in implementing Lebanon resolution

15 April - The Security Council today called for greater progress on the outstanding issues needed to reach a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah in southern Lebanon following their war in mid-2006.

In a presidential statement, Council members reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the Council resolution that ended the conflict and urged all parties in the region "to intensify their efforts" to comply with the text.

That resolution called for, among other issues, renewed respect for the Blue Line separating Lebanese and Israeli forces, the disarming of militias and an end to arms smuggling.

Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo of South Africa, which holds the rotating Council presidency this month, said in today's statement that the 15-member body "emphasizes the need for greater progress on all the key issues required for a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution."

He added that the Council gives its full support to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and welcomed its recent enhanced cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). In addition, it urged all parties to abide by their obligations to respect the safety of UN personnel in the area.

Security Council extends UN operation in Georgia for further six months



15 April - The Security Council today extended until 15 October the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), established in 1993 to verify compliance with a cessation of hostilities and separation of forces accord following the armed conflict between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides.

In unanimously adopting the resolution extending UNOMIG, the 15-member body called on both sides to consolidate and build on recent improvements in the overall security situation along the ceasefire line, and underlined the need for “a period of sustained stability” along the line and in the Kodori Valley.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his recent report on Abkhazia, Georgia, noted that “a period of sustained stability along the ceasefire line and in the Kodori Valley would improve the prospect of repairing the much deteriorated relationship between the two sides.”

In today’s resolution, the Council urged “all parties to consider and address seriously each other’s legitimate security concerns, to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation, including political action or rhetoric, and to comply fully with previous agreements regarding ceasefire and non-use of violence.”

It also called on both sides to finalize without delay documents on the non-use of violence and on the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

At its February meeting in Geneva, the Secretary-General’s Group of Friends expressed its disappointment at the lack of progress in implementing the proposals it had set out last year to boost confidence between the parties.

The Council too expressed its regret at the lack of such progress, and urged both sides to implement these measures without conditions.

‘Long-overdue’ justice necessary in Cambodia, says Secretary-General Ban

15 April - Noting that today is the tenth anniversary of the death of the notorious Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on the United Nations-backed tribunal to “soon deliver long-overdue justice for the people” of the South-East Asian country.

“I would like to remind the international community of the urgent importance of bringing to closure one of history’s darkest chapters,” Mr. Ban said in a statement.

“The United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia remain actively engaged in efforts to hold the Khmer Rouge senior leaders and those most responsible accountable for their horrific crimes.”

The Secretary-General said it was his hope that the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) – which has been operational since July 2006 – could soon deliver justice.

Under an agreement signed by the UN and Cambodia, the ECCC was set up as an independent court using a mixture of Cambodian judges and staff and foreign personnel. It is designated to try those deemed most responsible for crimes and serious violations of Cambodian and international law between April 1975 and January 1979.

Estimates vary but as many as three million people died during the rule of the Khmer Rouge, which was then followed by a protracted period of civil war in the impoverished country.

UN agencies call on Israel to immediately resume full fuel shipments to Gaza

15 April - United Nations humanitarian and development agencies today called on Israel to immediately resume the distribution of sufficient fuel to the Gaza Strip to allow Palestinians there to go about their normal daily lives.

“The current situation is a threat to the health and well-being of the population of the Gaza Strip, 56 per cent of whom are children,” a joint statement signed by eight UN bodies said. “The work of the United Nations organizations in Gaza has been severely hampered affecting schools, health facilities, and food distribution.”

Israel ceased all fuel supplies to Gaza, which was already suffering from shortages, after an attack on 9 April by Palestinian militants, condemned by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as an act of terrorism, on a fuel terminal in Nahal Oz, southern Israel, the sole overland conduit into the Strip.

The organizations called for a cessation of all acts of violence, including attacks such as the one on Nahal Oz, in which two Israelis were reported to have been killed. It said Israel’s announcement that it would resume deliveries to Gaza’s power plant was a positive, but insufficient to address severe fuel shortages for transport and generators.

“The current absence of fuel at petrol stations has meant that normal transportation has ceased,” the agencies said. “Many students have been unable to get to school, and many health professionals have been unable to get to hospitals and clinics. There have been difficulties transporting essential items such as food throughout Gaza.”

The signatories were: the UN Special Coordinator’s Office (UNSCO), UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Darfur: UN-AU mission to probe misconduct allegations about staff member

15 April - The United Nations-African Union hybrid peacekeeping force in Sudan’s war-wracked Darfur region said today that it has opened an investigation into allegations by local authorities that one of its staff has engaged in misconduct.

The officer, serving with the mission (known as UNAMID) in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state, was detained by authorities on Sunday before being handed over to the mission, as per the status-of-forces agreement signed by the Sudanese Government and UNAMID.

“It should be noted that medical tests undertaken this far, at the request of local police, proved negative,” the mission said in a statement to the press.

“UNAMID upholds a zero-tolerance policy as regards misconduct by peacekeepers. Peacekeepers are expected to respect the culture and traditions of the host country and show the highest standards of conduct at all times.”

The statement stressed that should the allegations prove founded, then the mission would take “appropriate measures” to deal with the staff member.

UNAMID was established by the Security Council last year to try to bring stability to Darfur, which has been beset by fighting between rebels, Government forces and allied militiamen since 2003. In that time, more than 200,000 people have died from violence, hunger or disease and nearly 2.5 million others have had to flee their homes.

At full deployment the mission should have around 26,000 uniformed personnel, but it currently has less than 10,000 troops, military observers and police officers in place across the arid and isolated region.



Eastern DR Congo will remain focus of mission's resources, UN envoy says

15 April - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has made solid progress in trying to stabilize the volatile east of the country, but the continued presence of armed rebels and militias means the region will remain the overwhelming focus of its operations for some time, its chief told reporters today.

Alan Doss, the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the DRC and the head of the mission, known as MONUC, said as much as 90 to 92 per cent of the total number of blue helmets are deployed across the east of the vast country, which is trying to rebuild after years of misrule and civil war.

Nearly two out of every three MONUC peacekeepers are based in either of two provinces, North Kivu and South Kivu, where the fighting and violence has been the worst in recent years but two recent accords were signed.

Mr. Doss – who briefed the Security Council earlier today on the latest mission report – said the mission was making relative progress in restoring State authority to areas formerly controlled by rebels or other irregular armed groups, especially in the Ituri district of North Kivu.

A large proportion of the DRC, which is as big as Western Europe, remains at peace, he said, although they are still burdened by enormous challenges, such as human rights violations, high infant and maternal mortality, and what he described as an epidemic of sexual violence.

“This is a problem of immense dimensions,” he stressed, noting the lack of a meaningful criminal justice system in many parts of the country and the widespread culture of impunity, including for members of the Congolese national security and defence forces who commit such violations.

He said the presence of the notorious rebel group from northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), in the borderlands area was another concern, as no one knew of their intentions in the DRC.

Mr. Doss said it was also important to remain vigilant about the threats posed in the east by such armed groups as the Rwandan Interahamwe and the Forces Démocratiques de la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR).

MONUC is consulting with both the Rwandan and the Congolese Governments to try to persuade the groups to disarm and repatriate, he added, saying it was vital for the countries of the region to work together, particularly given the porous nature of the borders.

Food production must benefit world's poor, urge UN-backed scientists

15 April - A United Nations-backed group of over 400 scientists are calling for a radical change to the way the world grows food to better serve the poor and hungry and to protect the planet's resources.

Modern agriculture has brought significant increases in food production, but its benefits have been uneven and have come at a high cost to small-scale farmers, workers, rural communities and the environment, according to a new report by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development.

The group, which is sponsored by several UN agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as the World Bank, proposes putting measures in place that will boost production while also protecting and conserving precious resources such as water, forests and biodiversity.

“To argue, as we do, that continuing to focus on production alone will undermine our agricultural capital and leave us with an increasingly degraded and divided planet is to reiterate an old message,” said Professor Bob Watson, Director of



IAASTD.

“But it is a message that has not always had resonance in some parts of the world. If those with power are now willing to hear it, then we may hope for more equitable policies that do take the interests of the poor into account,” he added.

The group also calls for addressing trade regimes and subsidy systems, since, as Professor Watson noted, “the poorest developing countries are net losers under most trade liberalization scenarios.”

The report comes just one day after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed the need for a “significant increase in long-term productivity in food grain production,” in addition to short-term measures to address critical needs and avert starvation in many parts of the world amid the global surge in food prices.

The crisis has already sparked unrest and tensions in many countries, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Senegal, Morocco and, most recently, in Haiti, where several people have died in riots.

Today the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) expressed concern that the increasing food prices could force families to spend more on less food, and families might remove their children from school so that they can work and earn money.

Stopping school meals due to lack of funds is another concern, since the only semi-balanced meal many children eat are provided at schools, the agency noted.

UN war crimes tribunal for Balkans grants temporary release to three men

15 April - The United Nations war crimes tribunal set up to deal with the worst crimes committed during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s has granted temporary provisional release to three men either facing trial or mounting an appeal in separate cases.

The appeals chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), sitting in The Hague, yesterday ordered that Berislav Pušić be released from its custody, starting from the first feasible date and concluding on 2 May.

The reasons for the temporary release of Mr. Pušić, whose original request was granted by the ICTY in February but then stayed following a prosecution appeal, will be detailed later, the tribunal said.

Mr. Pušić and five other men – all senior figures in the Bosnian Croat wartime entity known as Herceg-Bosna – are currently jointly on trial in what is known as the ‘Prlic and others’ case, charged with committing war crimes in 1992 and 1993 against Bosnian Muslims and other non-Croats in south-western and central Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The many charges include murder rape, unlawful deportation, imprisonment, cruel treatment, unlawful labour, the wanton destruction of cities, towns and villages, and persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Lazarevic, a former high-ranking official in the Yugoslav Army during the war in Kosovo in 1999, was today granted provisional release on humanitarian grounds from 25 April to 1 May. He will be in Serbia for the duration of the period under strictly controlled conditions, including 24-hour surveillance.

Mr. Lazarevic and five others are on trial for an alleged campaign of terror and violence directed against Kosovo Albanians and other non-Serbs living in Kosovo in 1999, with the charges including murder, persecution, deportation and forcible transfer of civilians.

Also today, the ICTY appeals chamber granted provisional release to Pavle Strugar, who has filed an appeal against his conviction for attacks on civilians and the destruction or wilful damage of the Old Town of the historic city of Dubrovnik



during the war. He is to be released no later than 17 April for a period of no more than six days.

Mr. Strugar, a former commander in the Yugoslav Army, is currently serving an eight-year jail term for his role in the military campaign against Dubrovnik. But both he and prosecutors have appealed, and a hearing is scheduled for 23 April.

Chad: UN distributes aid to refugees left homeless after camp blaze



Smouldering ashes of "I" Block in Goz Amer

15 April - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided temporary housing and relief supplies to more than 2,000 Darfurians who were left homeless after a fire swept through part of the Goz Amer refugee camp in eastern Chad last week.

The agency has distributed mats, blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans to some 2,130 refugees from Sudan's war-torn Darfur region, who are currently being housed in three schools at the camp until family tents arrive in the coming days.

In addition, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) will be handing out an extra one-month food ration to the affected families.

UNHCR spokesperson Ron Redmond said the cause of last Friday's blaze is believed to be an untended cooking fire which spread rapidly due to high winds.

As of Monday, 24 refugees had been admitted to the camp's health centre with various burn injuries – none of them life-threatening. In addition, at least 15 severely traumatized refugees are receiving counselling from a UNHCR partner organisation in the camp.

"Staff report that some of those made homeless are suffering from psychological trauma because the blaze rekindled memories of the Janjaweed attacks on their villages, including house torching, that forced them to flee from Darfur to Chad in 2003 and 2004," Mr. Redmond said.

Goz Amer, which lies about 70 kilometres from the border with Darfur, is host to about 20,500 people and it is the southernmost of 12 UNHCR-run camps in the region that are home to more than 240,000 Darfurians in total.

UNHCR plans to rebuild the destroyed section of the camp using more solid material than the straw and mud that most shelters are made from.

Aid needed to fight drug smuggling in sub-Saharan Africa – UN anti-crime chief



Antonio Maria Costa

15 April - Smuggling routes in the sub-Saharan Sahel region of Africa that were traditionally used for cigarettes, arms and illegal migrants are now becoming highways for cocaine, heroin and hashish, with kidnapping and banditry rife, the United Nations chief crime fighter warned today.

"Policing such terrain is a challenge for any country, made even greater when resources are limited," UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa told Western and Central African ministers at a session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna, calling for increased technical assistance.

"The international community must act to prevent a further deterioration of the situation that could destabilize the entire region and have a dangerous spill-over effect," he said. "Countries where these goods are headed should also do more to reduce the demand that is fuelling this dangerous trade."

He noted that criminals were also exploiting the region's rich natural resources, and that the overall situation provided a lucrative source of funding for rebels, anti-government forces and terrorists in a vast inhospitable and remote area stretching across the width of Africa, where nomads and traders have for centuries moved back and forth across borders.

Some countries like Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger have thousands of kilometres of almost open frontiers.

Not only is this a threat to security, but also a drain on development. Badly-needed resources are being shifted away from education and health care into security. In one country alone, resources spent on border security and crime fighting last year were sufficient to have built 600 schools and health centres.

"These countries are being targeted by smugglers because they are vulnerable, and criminal activity is making them even more vulnerable," Mr. Costa said. "We must break this vicious circle."

Among needs identified for technical assistance were counter-narcotics, criminal justice reform, anti-corruption, border management, intelligence sharing, terrorism prevention and the battle against the illicit arms trade.

Countries represented at the meeting included Burkina Faso, Chad, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Togo, Niger and Senegal.

Brain drain can also be brain gain for some source countries – UN report

15 April - The so-called brain drain of migrants taking their skills and initiative to their new countries of residence can also serve as an engine of growth in their homelands, according to a study released today by the United Nations University (UNU).

"The idea that the mobility of bright, qualified people represents a permanent loss of scarce human capital for the source country is becoming rapidly outdated," study director Andrés Solimano said. "Talent mobility can bring benefits both to host and source countries."

But although this is the case in high-tech and other fields, it is not the case in the health sector, particularly in the case of migrating African, Asian and Caribbean health professionals.

"Here the old worries about brain drain are in general fully warranted," Mr. Solimano, regional adviser at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, told a news conference in New York.

Among positive examples cited by the study, *Mobilizing Talent for Global Developments*, figure several successful Indians and Taiwanese in the high-tech industry in the United States who also set up hardware and software companies in their home countries, contributing to growth.

Other examples include a successful mobile telephone company founded by a Bolivian entrepreneur in the US which has already opened several plants in Latin American capitals.

"So you see a pattern of circulation, part of the investments is done in the first world, part of the investments is done in the third world," Mr. Solimano said. "So this notion of one-way mobility, that people leave their country, take whatever abroad and are completely lost for the whole country should be reassessed. It's more realistic to think there's a movement of people in both directions."

But in the health sector the study, produced by the university's World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), cautions that emigration hurts source countries.

As doctors, nurses and medical specialists continue to leave African, Asian and Caribbean countries, the health services they leave behind become depressed and inadequate, especially in Africa, which is already suffering the toll of HIV/AIDS,



malaria and other diseases that kill and impair economic development.

The studies also recommends that countries that are losing talent should set up more liberal and open regimes that create a positive climate for business and the well-educated, leading to an improvement in the economy and society at large.

Egyptian actor appeals for funds to help UN feed Iraqi refugees in Syria



Mahmoud Yassin

15 April - Egyptian actor Mahmoud Yassin, an Ambassador Against Hunger for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), has appealed for urgent funds for the agency's operation in Syria which aims to feed some 360,000 Iraqi refugees by the end of this year.

The operation is facing a funding shortfall of 45 per cent, with WFP having received only \$24 million out of the \$44 million needed.

After meeting some of the Iraqi families assisted by WFP during his visit to Syria on Monday, Mr. Yassin said "the last thing they need is for their basic food requirements to be disrupted as well."

WFP and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, carried out a distribution of food and other items in February.

"If the funds don't become available soon, the next round of food distribution may have to be postponed," warned Pippa Bradford, WFP's Country Director for Syria.

The food distribution in Syria is part of a \$127 million regional operation that includes assistance to 750,000 Iraqis displaced within their country. That operation is facing a funding shortfall of over 60 per cent.

Syria is hosting some 1.5 million Iraqis who have left their homeland. Many of them have no savings or income and are finding it difficult to cope with the rising costs of living, including food prices.

A UN survey found that about a third of Iraqi refugees in Syria said they skipped one meal a day to feed their children. Sixty per cent said they were buying cheaper, often less nutritious, food owing to the high prices.