



In the headlines:

- Ban leads call for greater efforts to end 'silent war' of sexual violence in conflict
- Agriculture has vital role in ensuring Africa's food security, says UN official
- Security Council demands action to end sexual violence as a tactic in war
- Palestinians hit by higher food prices and falling incomes, UN report says
- Escalating violence in Zimbabwe 'unacceptable,' says UN political chief
- Senior UNICEF official begins visit to Ethiopia to assess drought situation
- Impunity must end for violence to stop in south-central Nepal, UN officials say
- UN agency devises calculator to estimate carbon footprints of flights
- United States, Australian, Irish and Swedish radio shows wins awards from UN
- Promising future for nuclear power but challenges remain, says UN official
- Settlement in Cyprus 'not a foregone conclusion,' says UN envoy
- UN relief wing hails private sector support to aid appeals after Myanmar cyclone

More stories inside

Ban leads call for greater efforts to end 'silent war' of sexual violence in conflict

19 June - Noting that an increasing number of women and girls are falling victim to the "silent war" of sexual violence in conflict areas, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today led a chorus of United Nations officials in urging greater efforts to combat the scourge.

"Violence against women has reached unspeakable and pandemic proportions in some societies attempting to recover from conflict," Mr. Ban told a Security Council debate focusing on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Today's meeting comes almost eight years after the Council adopted its landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and is chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of the United States, which holds the 15-member body's rotating presidency for this month.

Mr. Ban stressed that responding to this "silent war against women and girls" requires leadership, comprehensive strategies and the involvement of everyone, from the UN and national governments to rape survivors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In March the Secretary-General launched a global campaign to end violence against women, including the practice of sexual violence in armed conflict. He announced today that he will soon appoint a UN envoy tasked entirely with advocacy for



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at Council meeting

ending violence against women.

In response to calls from women's groups, rape survivors and NGOs, he is also bringing together a dozen UN entities in a concerted effort called UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. It brings together experts on various issues, including peacekeeping, HIV/AIDS and human rights, to help stop rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-ridden countries.

Mr. Ban noted that the UN can act more forcefully when the Council adopts resolutions with strong language on sexual and gender-based violence, and called for all future mandates of UN operations to contain clear provisions on protecting women and children in conflict.

And on the issue of UN operations, the Secretary-General added, "Let me be clear: the United Nations and I personally are profoundly committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation or abuse by our own personnel."

He also called for the greater involvement of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and recovery after the guns fall silent. "By creating a culture that punishes violence and elevates women to their rightful role, we can lay the foundation for lasting stability, where women are not victims of violence, but agents of peace," he said.

Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro also addressed today's meeting, saying that sexual violence has not only grave physical and psychological health consequences for its victims but also direct social consequences for communities and entire societies.

"Impunity for sexual violence committed during the conflict perpetuates a tolerance of abuse against women and girls and leaves a damaging legacy by hindering national reconciliation," she said.

The Deputy Secretary-General added that tackling this complex problem on all fronts will require the combined effort of all, including governments, the UN system, civil society organizations and NGOs.

She called women "one of our greatest assets" in the fight against such horrific crimes. "If we promote the full and equal participation of women in the security sector, we can ensure that security services effectively identify and respond to their needs."

General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim noted that while both the Assembly and the Council have adopted groundbreaking resolutions on the issue, stronger and more coordinated efforts are needed to address sexual violence against women.

"Clearly we all have to do more to prevent human rights violations against women and girls in situations of armed conflict, do more to punish the perpetrators, and end the impunity of war crimes violators."

He added that women must be assured equal and full participation in conflict resolution and peace-building processes, and represented in the structures and institutions realized from any peace dividend to ensure that it lasts.

Agriculture has vital role in ensuring Africa's food security, says UN official

19 June - Despite the fact that African agriculture remains undercapitalized, inefficient and uncompetitive, it holds the key to ensuring food security on the continent, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

Addressing the 25th FAO Regional Conference for Africa, Director-General Jacques Diouf stated that with political will and good governance, Africa can boost its agricultural production and feed its population.



He told the gathering in Nairobi that the global surge in food prices, coupled with other

factors such as climate change, the diversion of agricultural production for biofuels, rapid urbanization and population growth, and animal and plant diseases have worsened food insecurity in Africa.

At the same time, he called food insecurity a political issue, a matter of priorities in the midst of the most fundamental of human needs. The decisions made by governments determine the allocation of resources, he pointed out.

In 2003 African leaders committed to allocate at least 10 per cent of their budgets to agriculture and rural development. However, a report by the African Union indicates that only one in five countries have reached or exceeded that target.

Mr. Diouf pointed out that, in the last 30 years, agricultural imports have risen more rapidly than exports, with Africa becoming a net importer of agricultural commodities, 87 per cent of which were food products in 2005.

According to FAO, some of the major factors inhibiting agricultural development on the continent relate to the availability of water, arable land, fertilizers and seeds.

To address some of the negative impacts of soaring food prices and to boost food production, FAO launched an initiative last December to support low-income, food-deficit countries by helping farmers access the vital inputs they need.

Security Council demands action to end sexual violence as a tactic in war



19 June - The Security Council today demanded that all sides to armed conflicts around the world stop using violence against women as a tactic of war and take much tougher steps to protect women and girls from such attacks.

In a resolution adopted unanimously after a day-long debate on women, peace and security, Council members said women and girls are consistently targeted during conflicts “as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group.”

The effect is to also prolong or deepen conflicts and to exacerbate already dire security and humanitarian conditions, particularly when the perpetrators of violent crimes against women go unpunished for their actions.

The resolution demands that all parties immediately stop sexual violence against civilians and begin taking measures, from the training of troops and upholding of military discipline procedures, to protect women and girls.

Sexual violence crimes should be excluded from amnesties reached at the end of conflicts, the 15-member Council added, calling on States to also strengthen their judicial and health-care systems to provide better assistance to victims of violence.

The resolution was adopted after dozens of speakers told the Council about the appalling effects of sexual violence during armed conflicts, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon saying the problem had reached “unspeakable and pandemic proportions” in some countries.

Mr. Ban announced he will soon appoint a UN envoy tasked entirely with advocating for an end to violence against women.

Opening today’s meeting, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the truest test of the will of the international community was the protection it gave to the most vulnerable.

“When women and girls are raped, we cannot be silent... we must be their advocates,” Ms. Rice said.

South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana C. Dlamini Zuma called for “the silence” around sexual violence to be broken. Many women were afraid to speak out about their ordeal, the minister said, because they were so traumatized and stigmatized by the crimes they endured.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, Slovenia's Sanja Štiglic stressed the need for a gender-sensitive approach to post-conflict countries, from awareness training for judges and court staff to stepped-up efforts to ensure that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes.

Philomène Omatuku Atshakawo, Minister of Gender, Family and Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where sexual violence has reached epidemic levels in the east of the country, said such violence was leading to the feminization of poverty.

Female victims were no longer able to work the land or work at all, she said, adding that as a result the Government was trying to introduce a range of measures – economic, security and psychosocial among them – to ameliorate the situation.

China's Liu Zhenmin backed the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation of women and girls by UN peacekeepers and urged troop-contributing countries to boost their training and monitoring of their blue helmets.

Palestinians hit by higher food prices and falling incomes, UN report says



19 June - Nearly 40 per cent of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank do not have access to sufficient food, a rise of four per cent from 2006, according to a joint report issued by three United Nations agencies.

The report says that the main causes of food insecurity in the occupied Palestinian territories are “rooted in the military and administrative measures imposed by the Israeli occupation – closure regime, permits, destruction of assets – as well as settlement expansion and derived infrastructure multiplication – access to land and water and the construction of bypass roads.”

“The agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip is close to collapse, as no exports are allowed, and there is a total unavailability of fertilizer, pesticides and other crucial inputs,” according to the report, released yesterday by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The UN agencies also report that soaring food prices, falling incomes and growing unemployment are all jeopardizing the livelihoods of Palestinians, leading to heavy debt and changes in family eating habits.

“Palestinians are eating less. Many parents reduce their intake to allow for their children to eat. Half the surveyed population have decreased their spending on food, 89 per cent reduced the quality of food they buy while 75 per cent reduced the quantity since January 2008 and almost all people have reduced their consumption of fresh fruit, vegetables and animal protein to save money. Very few Palestinians now eat fresh [red] meat.”

More than a third of breadwinners in the Gaza Strip are unemployed, while 27 per cent are without work in the West Bank, the report notes.

“The agriculture sector urgently needs to be strengthened to increase local food productions and create vital income and employment opportunities for the struggling population,” said Luigi Damiani, the FAO's Senior Project Coordinator in Jerusalem.

Rising fuel and commodity prices are also making it more difficult to deliver aid.

“It is becoming extraordinarily difficult to cover the growing needs of the Palestinian people,” said Christine van Niewenhuyse, WFP Representative in the occupied Palestinian territories, adding that donor contributions have declined recently. “As more people are pushed into hunger and food insecurity, we fear people's health and welfare could sharply deteriorate.”

The report notes that in the past year the price of wheat flour has risen by 73 per cent in the West Bank and 68 per cent in the Gaza Strip, while a third of Palestinians have seen a fall in their income, with the poor being hit by a 40 per cent drop.

Farmers in the Gaza Strip have faced three major shocks in recent months, the report says: the complete closure of the Strip by Israel, a late frost and an ongoing drought.

The report paints a picture of an increasingly dependent population. Some 59 per cent of households now rely on credit to buy food, even as the availability of informal credit is drying up. In addition, 76 per cent of households in Gaza have received some type of cash or in-kind aid in the past three months, with higher levels of coverage for refugees, while 23 per cent of households have been assisted in the West Bank.

“The economic downturn results in a much greater need for food assistance, while the severe closure regime makes it harder for us to deliver our services,” Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said. “Palestine refugees are facing triple threats – higher prices, greater aid dependency and more restrictions.”

The report concludes that “there is little scope for action other than that of a humanitarian-emergency nature to solve food insecurity, until the political dimension is resolved.”

Escalating violence in Zimbabwe ‘unacceptable,’ says UN political chief



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

19 June - The top United Nations political official today called the escalating violence in Zimbabwe “unacceptable,” adding that, should current conditions prevail, it would be difficult for the international community to recognize the outcome of next week’s run-off presidential poll.

“It is of utmost importance that the violence is stopped immediately and that humanitarian assistance is facilitated, not prevented,” Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe said.

Attending a round table on Zimbabwe at UN Headquarters on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Pascoe added that the country is currently so polarized that whatever the result of the election, a “winner-takes-all” strategy will not bring peace and stability to the country.

“We must be prepared to send a strong message to ensure that the will of the Zimbabwean people is respected and to call for renewed efforts to restore security and the rule of law in the country,” he stressed.

President Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) are set to face each other in the run-off scheduled for 27 June.

The Southern African nation has been beset by deadly violence since the first round of the presidential election on 29 March. Many MDC activists have reportedly been killed or injured in recent weeks and human rights defenders and staff with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) harassed.

Commenting on the humanitarian situation, Mr. Pascoe said that the current political crisis is compounding an already deep social, economic and humanitarian crisis, in a country where as many as 4 million people are vulnerable and in need of help.

While the Government has now lifted the suspension of field operations for NGOs running supplementary feeding schemes and those involved in AIDS-related issues, the humanitarian space remains very restricted, he said.

Mr. Ban has dispatched another senior UN official, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios, to Zimbabwe to discuss these issues with the parties. Mr. Menkerios has met with Mr. Mugabe and Mr. Tsvangirai, as well as the Foreign Minister, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, church leaders and civil society groups, including human rights

organizations.

Senior UNICEF official begins visit to Ethiopia to assess drought situation

19 June - The deputy chief of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) arrived in Ethiopia today for the start of a four-day visit to review the humanitarian situation in the south and southeast of the country, which has become parched by drought.

Hilde Johnson, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, is expected to meet with Government officials, UN agencies, key donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) while in Ethiopia, according to a statement released in Addis Ababa, the capital.

As many as 4.6 million Ethiopians are now in need of immediate humanitarian assistance because of a lack of seasonal rains, coupled with rising food prices. The worst affected areas are in three administrative states of the Horn of Africa country: Oromio, Somali Region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR).

Children are among the hardest-hit by the current conditions, with about 75,000 children estimated to be facing severe acute malnutrition already.

Earlier this month the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) revised its appeal for Ethiopia to at least \$325 million to meet the growing demand for aid.

Impunity must end for violence to stop in south-central Nepal, UN officials say

19 June - United Nations human rights officials in Nepal have warned that the cycle of violence in the south-central district of Kapilvastu will continue unless impunity ends for the perpetrators of attacks and respect for the rule of law is re-established.

Representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (OHCHR-Nepal) visited several towns and villages this week in Kapilvastu, where 14 people died last September amid riots and widespread violence.

The officials met with some of the victims of the violence, as well as with police officers, human rights defenders, local authorities and staff from UN agencies.

OHCHR-Nepal representative Richard Bennett said it was important to complete a thorough investigation of last year's deadly violence and to start prosecuting those responsible for the attacks.

He stressed that the security of communities can only be guaranteed when everyone demonstrates a commitment to tolerance and authorities show initiative in building confidence among the population.

"Although some steps were taken at the local level to improve the security of the local population, the authorities and local political leaders need to do much more to restore communities' confidence in the State, and they should be allowed to undertake their important work free from political interference," Mr. Bennett said.

A report issued by OHCHR-Nepal recommended that the key findings of a judicial commission set up in the wake of the killings be made public and then implemented.

It also called for reforms to public security operations and training, and urged that representatives of victims and internally displaced persons (IDPs) be more involved in district-level decision-making.



UN agency devises calculator to estimate carbon footprints of flights

19 June - The United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has unveiled a carbon calculation tool on its website that allows travellers to estimate the “carbon footprint” for any given flight they take.

The Carbon Calculator uses only publicly available and verifiable information to make its calculations about the amount of carbon dioxide emissions from a flight, taking into account such variables as aircraft type, route data, passenger load and the amount of cargo.



Green Passport

Roberto Kobeh González, President of the ICAO Council, said the calculator should benefit both individuals and organizations and will improve as a tool as more technical and operational information becomes available.

“The Carbon Calculator responds to the wish of many travellers for a reliable and authoritative method to estimate the carbon footprint of a flight, so they can choose the programme best suited to offset the impact of their trips on climate change according to the amount of carbon dioxide they are responsible for,” Mr. Kobeh said.

It has been introduced by the Montreal-based ICAO as part of efforts to support the UN Climate Neutral Initiative, which calls for all parts of the UN system to determine their total carbon emissions, and is being backed by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is also recommending the methodology used in the Carbon Calculator to its member airlines for use in their carbon-offsetting programmes, in part to achieve a more consistent approach to estimating the carbon footprint of flights.

United States, Australian, Irish and Swedish radio shows wins awards from UN

19 June - A programme on homeless American youth and a broadcast on breast cancer survivors in Ireland are among the winners of a series of radio awards presented by the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) today.

Radio programmes from the United States, Australia, Ireland and Sweden were all honoured as part of the New York Festivals Radio Programming and Promotion Awards.

The Gold Award has gone to XM Satellite Radio, US, for *The Invisible: Children Without Homes*, and the Silver Award to SBS Radio, Australia, for *The Stolen Generation*.

The two Bronze Award winners are: RTE-Ireland, for *One in Eleven*, and UR, Sweden, for *Breaking the Silence in Israel*.

The Invisible: Children Without Homes, which was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show, is a collage of stories on homeless youth and how they navigate their way through a social service system that has failed them. It focuses on how homeless youth are more likely to suffer from abuse, abandonment, health problems and learning disabilities than other children.

The Stolen Generation poses the question of whether one generation can atone for the deeds of another. This youth-produced programme examines how multicultural generations of Australians react to their Government’s recent apology to the Aborigines for the former state practice of removing indigenous children from their families.

The first co-winner of the Bronze Award, *One in Eleven*, tells stories of breast cancer survivors and how a group of women in Ireland struggle to acquire basic health care services.

Breaking the Silence in Israel, the second co-winner, questions freedom of speech in Israel and the need to search for comprehensive information on the conflict in the Middle East.

Jointly sponsored by DPI and New York Festivals, the awards were established in 1990 to honour exceptional radio programming that best reflects and exemplifies the values, aims and ideals of the UN.

Promising future for nuclear power but challenges remain, says UN official



19 June - The number of nuclear power reactors around the globe is estimated to increase by 60 per cent by 2030, but the industry still needs to deal with a series of challenges, according to a top official with the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Addressing an event in Seoul to mark 30 years of civilian nuclear power in the Republic of Korea, the Deputy Director General of the IAEA, Yuri A. Sokolov, said that decades of experience in constructing, commissioning, operating and maintaining nuclear power plants would be a crucial help to bring newcomers into the nuclear field.

“The way in which nuclear power has developed in Korea is a clear demonstration of how the challenges can become opportunities,” Mr. Sokolov said, speaking at the event which occurred earlier this month.

However, he added that the global nuclear power industry needed to find convincing answers to a number of challenges, including the sustainability of uranium resources; safety and economics; waste management and the fuel cycle; public acceptance and non-proliferation.

The Republic of Korea now has 20 nuclear power units in operation, six units under construction and two units in planning stages.

According to figures released by the Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power company, over the last 30 years in Korea nuclear power has generated a total of 2 trillion kW/h of electricity, saving the Asian country an estimated 2.94 billion barrels of heavy oil worth \$96 billion.

Settlement in Cyprus ‘not a foregone conclusion,’ says UN envoy



Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNFICYP Chief of Mission

19 June - The United Nations envoy to Cyprus says that much hard work still needs to be done to reach a comprehensive settlement of the long-running dispute that has divided the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities on the Mediterranean island.

“A comprehensive settlement is not a foregone conclusion... compromises are indeed always the basis on which durable agreements are constructed. There will be problems along the way – some of them serious. That is precisely why there is a peace process,” Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the UN’s Special Representative said today, addressing a medal ceremony for the UN’s Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

After a meeting on 23 May, Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat committed themselves in a statement to working towards “a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions.”

The partnership will comprise a Federal Government with a single international personality, along with a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, which will be of equal status.

After further meetings with UN officials, the two leaders are expected to schedule a further face-to-face meeting.

“It is crucial to keep in sight the ultimate objective: that of bringing about a future of durable peace and prosperity for all the people of Cyprus,” Mr. Zerihoun said. “And that is why the leadership, courage and vision that the leaders have demonstrated at the present juncture are so crucial.”

UNFICYP has been in place on the island since 1964 after the outbreak of intercommunal violence. It is tasked with preventing a recurrence of fighting, contributing to a return to normal conditions and the maintenance of law and order.

UN relief wing hails private sector support to aid appeals after Myanmar cyclone

19 June - Private sector donors have emerged as a vital contributor to international appeals for aid after last month’s devastating cyclone in Myanmar, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said today.

About \$30 million in contributions has been provided by the private sector, including \$10 million raised by the various national committees of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) around the world.

OCHA said the biggest individual private contributors include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has given \$3 million to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and Total oil company, which has given \$2 million and provided fuel to transport relief supplies.

Many companies are channelling their donations through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which is managed by OCHA so that funds can be quickly directed in the wake of a disaster.

More than 134,000 people are dead or missing as a result of Cyclone Nargis and the subsequent tidal wave, which struck Myanmar on 2-3 May, and as many as 2.4 million people are affected. The Ayeyarwady Delta area and the country’s most populous city, Yangon, are among the hardest-hit areas.

Meanwhile, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) has unveiled its action plan to try to prevent the spread of dengue fever, which is endemic to Myanmar. The number of cases is expected to rise because of a forecast increase in mosquito breeding sites after the cyclone.

UN human rights chief urges Egypt to stop deporting Eritrean asylum-seekers

19 June - The top United Nations human rights official said she was “alarmed” by reports that Egypt has deported some 700 Eritrean-asylum seekers in the past few days, and called on authorities to halt any further forced returns.

“People who could well be at risk in their home country should never be sent back before their asylum claims have been properly addressed,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said in a statement.

“Egypt should respect its international obligations not to send home anyone who could face torture or other serious forms of ill treatment, as may well be the case with those who have apparently been deported in recent days,” she added.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Egypt has seen a surge of Eritreans entering the country illegally in recent months by land from Sudan or directly from Eritrea via the Red Sea.

On 15 June, the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to High Commissioner António Guterres reaffirming Egypt’s commitment to uphold its international obligations relating to the protection of refugees and to grant UNHCR in Cairo access to Eritrean citizens who have entered Egypt illegally.



Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms. Arbour welcomed the Egyptian Government's decision to grant UNHCR staff limited access to the asylum-seekers in order to determine their refugee status.

She urged authorities to immediately stop any further deportation of Eritreans until their asylum status has been properly clarified.

Somalis face one of world's worst humanitarian crises, UN refugee chief warns

19 June - The United Nations refugee chief has spotlighted the plight of hundreds of thousands of displaced Somalis and Kenyans on the eve of World Refugee Day, calling on the international community to accelerate its efforts to help people in both countries return safely to their former homes.

Visiting Dadaab refugee camp yesterday on the Kenyan-Somali border, where he then stayed overnight, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres described the plight facing Somalis as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.



High Commissioner António Guterres talks with Somali refugees in Dadaab, Kenya

Mr. Guterres stressed the urgency for a political solution to the deadly conflict wracking Somalia, which has not had a functioning national government since 1991.

“Only peace can solve the problems of the 200,000 people living in Dadaab in such dramatic circumstances,” he said, noting that the camp has swelled to more than double its planned capacity when it was established 16 years ago.

“Children have been born here in this camp. They are now in secondary school and still there is no peace in Somalia,” a female refugee told Mr. Guterres.

The most recent statistics indicate there are about 457,000 Somali refugees around the world, with the most in Kenya, but many others in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. Another 1 million people are internally displaced in Somalia.

Noting that World Refugee Day is being celebrated tomorrow, the High Commissioner pledged greater support from the agency to alleviate the situation faced by Somalis.

He also visited internally displaced Kenyans in the town of Naivasha, where they have been living after deadly post-election violence broke out at the start of the year.

Although more than 195,000 Kenyans have returned home since the violence subsided, about 43,000 remain in camps around the country, including two such camps in Naivasha.

Mr. Guterres told internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Naivasha camps that his visit was “an expression of solidarity with the Government and the people of Kenya.” UNHCR has provided tents and other aid supplies to displaced Kenyans this year, and trained many local relief workers.

“A camp should only be a short-term solution, but we try to make it as dignified as possible for those who must spend time there. Our biggest wish is that you will soon be able to go home in safety and dignity.”

As part of its activities to mark World Refugee Day, UNHCR is also launching a pioneering application with the social networking website Facebook to raise funds and awareness about refugee protection.

The application, launched today, provides a variety of activities for Facebook users – estimated at more than 80 million – which are then matched by donations from UNHCR partners.

Claudia Gisiger-Gonzalez, senior external relations officer for UNHCR, said the arrangement was “a cutting-edge

experiment” for the agency that brings together technology and new media tools to promote its work.

UNHCR is already using other popular social networking websites, including YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, Digg, Reddit and Deli.cio.us.

Nigerian ambassador elected to head UN Human Rights Council

19 June - The United Nations Human Rights Council today elected Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi of Nigeria for a one-year term as President of the Geneva-based body that replaced the much-criticized Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Uhomoibhi, 57, has been serving as his country’s Ambassador to Switzerland and Permanent Representative to the UN Office at Geneva.

Following his election to head the 47-member body, Mr. Uhomoibhi recalled that the Council’s main purpose was to uphold the dignity of the human person through the promotion and protection of human rights.

“Failure to advance the aims and objectives of the Human Rights Council collectively by all nations, all peoples and all institutions will be a colossal failure of humanity to protect its own dignity and rights under the rule of law and agreed norms and practices,” he said.

“States undoubtedly bear the primary responsibility to protect and promote human rights,” he added. “As such, the Council should per force continue to direct its gaze and its searchlight on actions of States to ensure that they abide by all their commitments.”

The new President also pointed out that no nation or people have a monopoly over human rights, but all nations, and certainly all people, have a duty to promote and protect them.

Mr. Uhomoibhi succeeds Romania’s Doru Romulus Costea, who took over from the Council’s inaugural president, Luis Alfonso de Alba of Mexico.

The Council also elected four Vice Presidents today. They are Elchin Amirbayov of Azerbaijan, Erlinda F. Basilio of the Philippines, Alberto J. Dumont of Argentina and Marius Grinius of Canada. Mr. Amirbayov was also elected as Rapporteur. The terms for the newly-appointed bureau members will end on 18 June 2009.

The Council will hold its next regular session from 8 to 26 September.

Côte d’Ivoire eligible for UN Peacebuilding Fund – Secretary-General

19 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced that Côte d’Ivoire is eligible to receive help from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, set up two years ago to help countries emerging from conflict consolidate their gains and avoid slipping back into war.

Mr. Ban’s decision follows a request for funding from the Secretary-General’s Special Representative to the West African country, Y. J. Choi, that is also backed by the Ivorian Government.

“The country is now in a pivotal post-conflict phase,” with elections scheduled for November, and funding is therefore critical for ensuring that Côte d’Ivoire “continues on the path for peace,” said Carolyn McAskie, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support.



Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi (Nigeria)



Blue helmet inspecting weapons collected from Ivorian militias (file photo)

Mr. Choi welcomed the announcement, saying the Fund can fill crucial gaps, “such as for the reintegration of former combatants or the pursuit and facilitation of political dialogue.”

It is not the first time that the Fund has allocated spending to Côte d’Ivoire. It already funded an assistance package of \$700,000 to support last year’s successful efforts of neighbouring Burkina Faso to broker a settlement between Ivorian political forces.

UN officials have warned that although the security and political climate has improved since the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement last year by the Government and the rebel Forces Nouvelles, the country is still fragile. Violent crimes remain persistently high, and there has been a lack of progress in disarming both the Forces Nouvelles and militia groups in the west.

Since its creation in 2006, as part of reforms that led to the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the Fund has exceeded its initial funding target of \$250 million and has so far allocated \$101 million for projects in Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and the Central African Republic (CAR) and for emergency projects and initiatives in Haiti and Africa.