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## Japanese official chosen to head UN atomic watchdog

**2 July** - A Japanese diplomat with a lengthy record of working on disarmament and non-proliferation issues will be the next chief of the United Nations nuclear watchdog after winning a secret ballot today against two other candidates.

The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, meeting at the IAEA's headquarters in Vienna, chose Yukiya Amano as Director General to succeed Mohammed ElBaradei when he steps down at the end of November.

Mr. Amano was elected after he received 23 votes in favour, securing the necessary two-thirds majority from the 35-member board. He beat out Abdul Samad Minty of South Africa and Spain's Luis Echávarri. Belgium's Jean-Pol Poncelet and Ernest Petric of Slovenia had already withdrawn their candidatures.

Mr. Amano, 62, becomes the fifth Director General in the IAEA's history. He is Japan's current Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna, and a member of the IAEA Board of Governors.

The ambassador has been involved in the negotiating process for major international instruments in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear energy policy, and he has previously held senior Japanese Government posts in the scientific, nuclear energy and arms control fields.



Amb. Yukiya Amano of Japan

## UNAIDS hails Indian court decision decriminalizing homosexuality



**2 July** - The United Nations Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has hailed today's decision by an Indian court to overturn a 150-year-old law and decriminalize homosexuality, voicing hope that more countries that ban same-sex activity will follow suit.

The Delhi High Court said the law – Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which outlaws “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” – violated the South Asian nation's constitution.

“The inclusiveness that Indian society traditionally displayed, literally in every aspect of life, is manifest in recognizing a role in society for everyone,” said Chief Justice A.P. Shah and Justice S. Murlidhar.

With today's decision, the High Court has “restored the dignity and human rights of millions of men who have sex with men and transgendered people in India,” UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé said.

“Oppressive laws such as Section 377 drive people underground, making it much harder to reach them with HIV prevention, treatment and care services,” he added.

In a press release issued in New Delhi, UNAIDS called on all governments to guarantee the full respect of human rights for men who have sex with men, lesbians and transgendered people by repealing laws prohibiting sex between consenting adults in public.

The agency also underscored the importance of enacting laws to protect these groups from violence and discrimination; addressing homophobia and transphobia; and bolstering health services.

The annulment of Section 377 “sends a positive message to countries where such laws still exist,” Mr. Sidibé stressed, noting that UNAIDS looks forward to working with the Indian Government to address the AIDS pandemic.

On top of violating individuals' human rights, the prohibition of homosexuality in over 80 countries impedes the response to HIV, hampering treatment to access for people living with the disease, according to UNAIDS.

## Niger's continuing crisis imperils democracy, Secretary-General warns

**2 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced deep concern about Niger's continuing political and constitutional crisis, warning that it threatens to destabilize the country and undermine recent progress towards democratic governance and the rule of law.

The recent decisions taken by the Niger Government “have made it extremely difficult for the country's democratic institutions and the Constitutional Court to play their roles as guarantors of the rule of law,” Mr. Ban said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

Media reports say President Mamadou Tandja has dissolved the country's Parliament and its Constitutional Court in a row over his plans to hold a referendum – scheduled for next month – to change Niger's constitution so he can run for a third term in office.

The statement from Mr. Ban's office urged restraint on both sides and political dialogue to resolve the crisis, and he also offered his good offices to work with regional partners – especially the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – to find a solution.



Less bustle at a market in Niger's capital Niamey, as some heed calls for a strike to protest a constitutional referendum

## Human rights experts join chorus of UN condemnation over coup in Honduras



Skyline of the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa

**2 July** - Four independent United Nations human rights experts today voiced serious concern over the situation in Honduras following last weekend's coup d'état, calling for the immediate restoring of democracy in the Central American country and the lifting of curbs on fundamental freedoms.

The experts said they were especially disturbed by reported arrests, threats and acts of harassment against human rights defenders, journalists and social leaders.

In a statement issued in Geneva, the experts deplored what they called "the alteration of the democratic institutional order" in Honduras and the breaking of the rule of law in the coup.

The statement follows similar condemnations this week from the General Assembly and from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon after military leaders deposed President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales last Sunday, hours before a referendum on changing the Honduran constitution was due to be held.

The experts urged the Government in Honduras to guarantee the human rights of all citizens, to ensure the free exercise of fundamental freedoms, the re-opening of media outlets that had been closed or suspended, and a ban on the use of excessive force by the armed forces and the police.

Today's statement was issued by: the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, Manuela Carmena Castrillo; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Leandro Despouy; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Margaret Sekaggya; and the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue.

## Cypriot leaders discuss territory issue during latest round of UN-backed talks

**2 July** - Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders discussed the issue of the territory that each of the two constituent States would occupy in a future federation during their latest round of United Nations-backed talks today.

Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat exchanged preliminary views on the territory issue, according to remarks made by Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cyprus, following the discussions in Nicosia.



From left to right: Special Representative Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat and Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias

Today's discussions were only the latest round of UN-backed talks between the two leaders aimed at reunifying the Mediterranean island.

In May 2008, the leaders committed themselves to working towards "a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions."

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

Mr. Zerihoun said the two leaders also discussed the follow-up to a recent agreement reached on the opening of the Limnitis-Kokkina crossings, and decided to discuss security issues at their next meeting, scheduled for 9 July.

The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) has been in place on the island since 1964, following the outbreak of

inter-communal violence.

## Knowledge crucial for African development – UN officials

**2 July** - With knowledge being an essential element in Africa's development process, a United Nations librarian has called on African governments to help narrow the digital divide.

Citing the example of the United States, where people can access the Internet in public libraries for free, Abraham Azubuike, Chief Librarian of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), said that even with limited resources, African countries can still afford to help people go online.



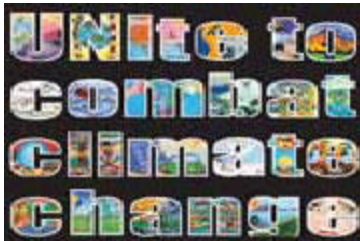
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)  
head office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

“Development plans without an emphasis on access to, and utilization of, knowledge are bound to fail as development itself is a learning process,” he said, speaking at the First International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives which began at ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The three-day event has drawn some 250 people – representatives from international and inter-governmental organizations, universities and libraries – and is exploring how to disseminate knowledge to promote development, from the grassroots to upper political levels.

“The most successful route to building knowledge societies is through building strong knowledge institutions and spreading awareness of new technical and cultural possibilities for sharing of information and resources,” Lalla Ben Barka, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), said yesterday at the start of the Conference.

## UN-Caribbean partnership crucial amid today's crises, says Ban



**2 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has hailed the collaboration between the United Nations and the countries of the Caribbean in tackling the various crises impacting the region and the world at large, including the global financial turmoil and climate change.

“In the current daunting international environment, our partnership is more important than ever,” Mr. Ban said in a message sent to the heads of government meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), taking place in Georgetown, Guyana, today and tomorrow.

Mr. Ban noted that CARICOM nations, which are highly vulnerable to external shocks and among the most indebted in the world, are especially affected by the economic and financial crisis.

“The declines in foreign investment, tourism and remittance, which account for a large share of income, are of great concern,” he told the gathering. In addition, the close links between the domestic banking sector and international banks mean that many countries are experiencing tightening liquidity, thereby reducing domestic credit and causing the cancellation of several projects.

“The global community must come together to address the impact of the crisis, in particular on the poor – those least responsible for the crisis and least able to respond,” said Mr. Ban. “We must keep global commitments on aid. We must reform and update our international institutions.”

Citing the need to for better real-time data on the consequences of such crises, the Secretary-General informed the meeting that he would soon launch a Global Vulnerability Alert System.

Mr. Ban also highlighted the serious threat posed by climate change to the economic and physical viability of Caribbean countries, and called on them to continue showing leadership in efforts to “seal the deal” in Copenhagen in December, when countries are expected to wrap up negotiations on an agreement to slash greenhouse gas emissions.

Further, he called on Caribbean leaders to support a more integrated implementation of the Mauritius Strategy adopted at the 2005 UN conference on small islands, which addresses the unique development problems of this vulnerable group of countries in such areas as environmental management, transport, trade and sustainable development.

## Women's centres re-open in Darfur with help from AU-UN mission



Women lining up for a WFP food distribution at Abu Shouk camp, El Fasher, North Darfur

**2 July** - Female internally displaced persons (IDPs) will again be able to learn job skills, take literacy classes and receive awareness programmes on reproductive health after the joint African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) helped reactivate women's centres at an IDP camp in the Sudanese region.

UNAMID's Gender Advisory Unit has worked with the North Darfur state Ministry of Social Affairs to relaunch the centres at the Abu Shouk IDP camp on the outskirts of the state capital, El Fasher. The centres, which will be run by a local non-governmental organization (NGO), had closed last year.

The Abu Shouk centres are expected to carry out several activities aimed at helping women gain livelihoods, including tailoring, candle-making and handcrafts. There will also be adult literacy classes, and awareness programmes on women's reproductive health, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

## Dozens of UN Volunteers head to Timor-Leste to support local polls



**2 July** - Dozens of United Nations Volunteers (UNV) are heading to Timor-Leste to help the fledgling nation's upcoming local elections.

The first batch of the 62 international volunteers arrived last week, with the next two groups scheduled to reach Timor-Leste this month.

UN Volunteers have played a key support role for all electoral processes in the country, starting with the Popular Consultation in 1999.

For this year's village polls, the Timor-Leste Government has requested the volunteers' assistance in areas including field operation, logistics, civic and voter education, and monitoring.

In his most recent report on the country, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he is encouraged by the strides made by the leaders and people of Timor-Leste since violence shook the small Asian nation in 2006, but warned that the root causes of that crisis, including poverty and unemployment, still linger.

In late April 2006, fighting – attributed to differences between eastern and western regions – erupted when 600 striking soldiers, or one-third of the armed forces, were fired. Ensuing violence claimed dozens of lives and drove 155,000 people, 15 per cent of the total population, from their homes.

In the more than two years since that crisis, Timor-Leste, which the UN shepherded to independence in 2002, has “made remarkable progress in overcoming the most visible reminders of that year,” Mr. Ban writes in his latest report on the UN mission in the country (UNMIT).

The Secretary-General's Special Representative, Atul Khare, briefed a United States Congressional delegation, the first-ever to Timor-Leste, on UNMIT's mandate and activities, as well as on strides made to consolidate stability in the wake of the 2006 crisis.

The bolstering of the relationship between the two countries “can help deepen the understanding that democracy in a young

nation like Timor-Leste provides the best avenue for redressing societal grievances, and hence creates the conditions for better long-term security and development,” he said at today’s meeting in the capital, Dili.

## New UN report spotlights challenges to rural development in Western Balkans

**2 July** - Economic development in the rural areas of several nations in the Western Balkans is being hindered by challenges related to agriculture, climate change and migration, according to a new report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank.

The report, “The Changing Face of Rural Space: Agriculture and Rural Development in the Western Balkans,” takes a look at the situations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

It says that agricultural trade deficits are widening and climate change is putting pressure on agricultural resources. In addition, young people are increasingly migrating to urban areas or abroad in search of economic opportunities.

While the five countries are at different stages of development, they face similar challenges in modernizing their agricultural sectors to become competitive in regional and European markets.

“The agrifood sectors in these countries are undercapitalized and highly fragmented, dominated by small producers with unsophisticated production and quality control systems,” says FAO’s David Lugg, a co-author of the report. Processing capacity, a potentially critical part of the value chain, is also limited.

The report, intended primarily for policy-makers and donors in the region, notes that scarce credit or land, expensive inputs, degraded infrastructure and poor access to high-value markets are among the obstacles faced by some farmers.

At the same time, the report suggests that the prevailing challenges, as well as the region’s ongoing process of integration with the European Union, are an opportunity.

“The need to meet EU food safety and other standards while addressing the food and financial crises is a powerful incentive for improving agricultural policy,” it states. “Agriculture and rural development as sources of growth, employment and food security now need to be taken seriously.”

Julian Lampietti of the World Bank also notes the need to look beyond agriculture at overall rural development in the region.

“What’s needed is a balanced approach that emphasizes increased competitiveness of the agrifood sector while providing alternative income opportunities in rural communities to help future generations avoid the poverty trap,” he says.

The report also calls on countries to come up with strategies to adapt to climate change, noting that the region is likely to face higher temperatures, reduced and more variable precipitation, and more frequent extreme climatic events, such as floods, droughts and heat waves.

## Progress in West Africa remains fragile, despite positive trends – UN report

**2 July** - While West Africa has witnessed some positive trends recently, including the holding of peaceful elections, progress in the region remains fragile and faces a number of threats, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in a report published today.



Economic development in the rural areas of several nations in the Western Balkans is lagging behind

In his report on the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), Mr. Ban writes that the overall peace and security situation in the region continued to improve over the past six months.

“In spite of a number of debilitating internal and external factors, including food insecurity and the global financial crisis, West Africa is witnessing the emergence of positive trends towards peace, post-conflict recovery and stability,” he states.

“Progress in the areas of governance and the rule of law, although significant, have remained essentially fragile and might even be reversible in some areas,” he continues. “Furthermore, emerging and growing security threats, including organized crime, illicit and terrorist activities and climate change, jeopardizing ongoing endeavours and the gains achieved so far.”

In addition, Mr. Ban voices deep concern about the “recent wave” of unconstitutional changes of government in the region.

“Coups d’état are illegitimate acts that constitute a severe setback for democratization in West Africa and a threat to national cohesion and stability, with significant subregional implications,” he states, adding that the resurgence of coups in the region has generated serious human rights concerns, a problem that is compounded by impunity for perpetrators.

The Secretary-General says the international community must respond in a firm, proactive, collective and consistent manner to address both the root causes of coups and those practices that can act as triggers, such as grievances related to wealth and power-sharing and infringements of democratic processes and disregard for human rights.

The report also highlights drug trafficking and cross-border organized crime, which continue to impact negatively on security in West Africa, with Mr. Ban noting that growing international engagement, coupled with bold national and subregional initiatives, are beginning to yield results.

While drug trafficking is emerging as one of the more pervasive and dangerous forms of cross-border organized crime in West Africa, other illicit activities are also a concern. These include human smuggling, piracy and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as the activities of criminal and other armed groups.

Mr. Ban notes that in the coming six months, UNOWA – headed by his Special Representative Said Djinnit – will continue to focus on priority areas such as advocacy for conflict prevention and peace consolidation.

The Office will also continue to play a significant role in efforts to address drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as help to strengthen the capacity of national institutions, including the security sector, in providing security for electoral processes.

## **Ban welcomes deal aimed at ending tensions between Ghana and the Gambia**

**2 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the agreement reached by the Gambia and Ghana to end tensions that emerged after the deaths and disappearances of Ghanaian nationals on Gambian territory in 2005.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban applauded the two African countries “for their commitment to settle the differences between them in a peaceful and negotiated manner.”



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

The Gambia and Ghana signed a Joint Communiqué today in Sirte, Libya, where an African Union (AU) summit has also been taking place.

Mr. Ban said in the statement that “he trusts that the Joint Communiqué will strengthen the existing fraternal and cordial bilateral relationship between Ghana and the Gambia.”

He also expressed appreciation for what he described as “the immense contribution” of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), “which worked preventively and in partnership with the UN to resolve the problem between the two countries.”

Last year the UN and ECOWAS set up a joint fact-finding team to look into the deaths of the Ghanaians.

## Ban discusses Myanmar during talks with Singapore’s leaders



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, (left) meets Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore.

**2 July** - The situation in Myanmar and the global economic crisis topped the agenda today when Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon held talks with Singapore’s leaders on the latest stop of his international trip.

Mr. Ban met with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and later had a working dinner with Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong after arriving earlier today in the small South-East Asian country.

Mr. Lee reiterated Singapore’s supports for the good offices of the United Nations Secretary-General and for the work of Mr. Ban’s Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari on Myanmar, which Mr. Ban is slated to visit tomorrow.

While in Singapore the Secretary-General also discussed the challenges facing the international community, particularly the global economic crisis, as well as UN-Singaporean relations.

Mr. Ban had arrived in Singapore from Japan, where he stressed to top officials the need for the country’s leadership in “sealing the deal” on an ambitious climate change pact in Copenhagen, Denmark, this December.

Tomorrow morning, he is scheduled to travel to Myanmar for a two-day visit, arriving in Yangon and travelling on to the capital, Nay Pyi Taw, where he will hold talks with Senior General Than Shwe.

Ahead of that trip, the Secretary-General has listed his four main areas of concern: the release of all political prisoners, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi; the resumption of Government-opposition dialogue as part of the national reconciliation process; the need to create conditions necessary for credible elections; and the importance of building on the joint humanitarian effort that emerged in the wake of last year’s devastating Cyclone Nargis.

From Myanmar, he will travel to Switzerland, Ireland and Italy, before returning to New York.

## UN tribunal finds former Rwandan investigator guilty of leaking information

**2 July** - A former Rwandan investigator for the United Nations tribunal set up to deal with the mass killings that engulfed the small African nation in 1994 was found guilty today by the same court of leaking protected information.

Léonidas Nshogoza, who worked for the defence during the trial of Jean de Dieu Kamuhanda, was given a 10-month sentence by International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which sits in Arusha, Tanzania.



Charged with contempt of the Tribunal for repeatedly meeting with and disclosing protected information about two witnesses, Mr. Nshogoza was acquitted of three other counts today.

In its judgment, the trial chamber said it took into account aggravating factors, including his repeated meetings with protected witnesses, his legal background and his position as an investigator in the Kamuhanda defense team.

But it also noted that it had considered mitigating factors, including the family situation of Mr. Nshogoza, who has three teen-aged children.

Mr. Kamuhanda is serving concurrent life sentences after being convicted of genocide and extermination by the ICTR, which found that he had supervised the killings in his native Gikomero commune in the Kigali-Rural prefecture.

The ICTR was set up by the Security Council in the wake of the genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and Hutu moderates were killed, mainly by machete, during a period of less than 100 days starting in early April 1994.

## Fall in foreign tourism accelerates, UN agency reports

**2 July** - International tourism shrunk by 8 per cent in the first four months of the year as the global economic crisis continued to restrict the budgets of travellers, but the pace of the decline is expected to ease later this year, according to the latest figures released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Some 247 million tourist arrivals were recorded between January and April this year, compared to 269 million in the same period last year, with falls reported in every region of the world except Africa and South America.



UN World Tourism Organization  
Headquarters

The statistics, unveiled today in the latest edition of UNWTO's World Tourism Barometer, mean the Madrid-based agency has had to revise its forecast for 2009 and now predicts that tourist numbers will drop by between 4 and 6 per cent across the whole of the year.

UNWTO said the slowdown in the global market in the latter half of 2008 only accelerated this year, with the tourism industry being hit particularly hard by economic troubles in key source markets, such as the United Kingdom.

The outlook remains clouded, the agency said, given the current level of advanced bookings, the recent reduction in airline capacity and travellers' concerns about the potential threat posed by the influenza A (H1N1) virus.

Europe has been one of the hardest hit regions, with a 10 per cent slide recorded so far this year, due in part to the depreciation of the pound sterling in the UK, one of the largest sources of international tourists.

The Middle East fell by 18 per cent, but UNWTO said complete figures for that region are not yet available. Tourist numbers in the Asia-Pacific region dropped by 6 per cent and in the Americas by 5 per cent. But within that, South America recorded a rise of 0.2 per cent.

The best result was registered in Africa, where tourist numbers increased by 3 per cent, thanks to particularly strong demand for North African destinations and the recovery of Kenya as a destination after a decline following the deadly political violence in the East African country in early 2008.

Overall, the pace of the decline is expected to soften, so that in the last four months of this year the drop may be as little as 3 per cent on 2008 figures.

UNWTO continues to stress that the tourism industry is critical to resolving international economic fortunes as it is one of the largest employment sectors in most countries and can serve as a stimulus to the rest of the economy.

## Independent UN rights expert criticizes seizure of aid boat by Israeli forces

**2 July** - An independent United Nations human rights expert today denounced what he described as "the unlawful naval seizure" by an Israeli gunboat of a ship carrying medicine and reconstruction material for the people of Gaza.

Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, said the Israeli action “implements its cruel blockade of the entire Palestinian population of Gaza.”

It also violates Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits any form of collective punishment directed at an occupied people, he stated.

A news release issued from his office in Geneva says the boat had been inspected in response to Israeli demands before departure by the port authorities in Cyprus to determine whether there were weapons on board. None were found, and Israeli authorities were so informed.

“Nonetheless, the 21 peace activists on the boat were arrested, held in captivity, and have been charged with ‘illegal entry’ to Israel even though they had no intention of going to Israel,” the release states.

Last month a group of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) called for an end to the two-year blockade on Gaza, which has left the population of 1.5 million almost totally dependent on international aid.

In addition, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has repeatedly called on Israel to ease its blockade, most recently during a meeting in New York with Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the entry of essential goods and services, including materials for reconstruction, spare parts for water and sanitation projects, as well as industrial and agricultural materials remain either restricted or banned outright.

Maxwell Gaylard, the top UN humanitarian official in the occupied Palestinian territory, reported in May that the Gaza conflict – which took place from December last year to this January – had destroyed some 4,000 homes and damaged another 40,000. While donors have pledged billions of dollars for Gaza’s reconstruction, work cannot begin because of the blockade.

## Health threats to displaced Pakistanis major concern for UN agencies

**2 July** - United Nations agencies have expressed their concerns about the health and welfare of the approximately 2 million displaced people living in north-west Pakistan, while also lauding the Pakistanis who have provided food, shelter and other resources to those in need.

“The everyday people of Pakistan are the real heroes of this current crisis in Pakistan,” Martin Mogwanja, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan, told a news conference in the capital, Islamabad. “They set an inspiring example of extraordinary generosity for the whole world.”

He said he hoped this example is followed by the governments of the world, whose continued urgent support is desperately needed to help those uprooted from their homes by fighting between Government forces and militants in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Most of the displaced are living with host communities, and the health-care, sanitation and water systems in the affected areas are under enormous strain.

“There are major challenges facing the displaced and those people still caught in the conflict area, for example in the Swat Valley and other conflict zones, where health facilities have been damaged or destroyed,” said Eric Laroche, Assistant Director General of the Health Action in Crises Cluster of the World Health Organisation (WHO).



Women visit UNFPA-supported clinic in Pakistan serving internally displaced persons (IDPs)

He cited diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, measles, surgical emergencies and mental trauma as some of the most severe threats to people's health, and highlighted the need for more medicines, equipment and staff, particularly female workers.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Laroche pointed out that over 30 potential communicable disease outbreaks have been investigated by the disease early warning system led by WHO. All of them have been quickly controlled by aid agencies working in the health sector.

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has voiced concern about the situation of women and children caught up in the crisis, especially those who have remained behind in areas of conflict.

UNICEF's Louis-Georges Arsenault told reporters that while the full extent of their situation is not yet understood, it is believed they have been living under "intolerable circumstances without proper access to clean, potable water, medical services and food."

According to the agency, more than 60 per cent of those displaced are children under the age of 18, who are in critical need of, among others, health and educational services, nutritional support, water and sanitation.