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Ban expresses solidarity with UN staff during unannounced visit to Kabul

2 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made an unannounced visit today to Kabul, where he met with United Nations staff in the wake of last week's attack that left five colleagues dead, and assured the Afghan people of continued UN support during a meeting with President Hamid Karzai.

"I have come to Kabul to express my solidarity with the UN staff and Afghan people at this difficult time," Mr. Ban said in remarks to the press in the Afghan capital.

Five UN staff members were killed and nine others injured in an attack on a guest house in Kabul on 28 October, for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility.

Last week Mr. Ban had paid tribute to the victims of the attack, saying that "those who gave their lives... came to Afghanistan armed not with guns or bullets. They came with a more powerful weapon – hope. Hope for a better day for Afghanistan and a commitment to help its people build a better world and a better future.

"We will not be deterred from this noble mission. We stand by the people of Afghanistan today, and we will do so tomorrow," he added.

Mr. Ban met today with UN staff, and his Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) greeting UN staff in Kabul, Afghanistan

(UNAMA), Kai Eide, as well as the heads of UN agencies working in the country and security officials.

He also had what he described as “good” meetings with President Hamid Karzai as well as with Abdullah Abdullah, who announced yesterday that he is withdrawing from the presidential run-off that was scheduled for 7 November.

The Secretary-General issued a statement in Kabul responding to today’s decision by the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) to forego a run-off vote and to declare Mr. Karzai as the winner of the 2009 presidential elections.

“Afghanistan now faces significant challenges and the new President must move swiftly to form a Government that is able to command the support of both the Afghan people and the international community,” he noted.

“The United Nations remains committed to providing every support and assistance to the new Government in helping to push forward progress for all peoples of Afghanistan.”

Prior to arriving in Afghanistan, Mr. Ban met in Dubai with some of the UN staff members who were injured in last week’s attack. The Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, Gregory Starr, accompanied the Secretary-General to Dubai and is staying on in the region to examine safety and security issues in further detail.

Senior UN official urges rich countries to commit to deeper cuts in emissions



Turning to the sun for energy helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

2 November - The final round of talks ahead of next month’s landmark climate change summit in Copenhagen kicked off today with a warning from the chief United Nations negotiator that time is running out to produce a comprehensive, fair and effective new deal to fight global warming.

This last negotiating session in Barcelona is designed to close the gap between industrialized and developing nations on issues, such as funding to aid adaptation to global warming, technology cooperation, and action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation in developing countries.

Speaking to over 4,000 participants from 181 countries at the five-day gathering, aimed at hammering out a negotiating text for the 7 to 18 December conference in Copenhagen, the UN official said that progress at these talks are critical to the success of any treaty.

“After almost two years of negotiations... the clock has almost ticked down to zero,” stressed Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty encouraging nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In Copenhagen, governments are expected to agree to a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 treaty – part of the overall UNFCCC – which has strong, legally binding measures committing 37 industrialized States to cutting emissions by an average of 5 per cent against 1990 levels over the period from 2008 to 2012.

“The targets of industrialized countries that are presently on the table are clearly not ambitious enough,” said Mr. de Boer in light of an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) study which found that to stave off the worst effects of climate change, industrialized countries must slash emissions by 25 to 40 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020, and that global emissions must be halved by 2050.

Agreement on precise financial contributions from industrialized countries is needed ahead of Copenhagen, Mr. de Boer said in Barcelona, stressing that above all “clarity on what the prompt start-up finance will be to unleash urgent action in developing countries.”

“World leaders from the North and South are calling for an ambitious and comprehensive outcome at Copenhagen, and



concerned citizens around the world are demanding strengthened action on climate change,” said Mr. de Boer.

“There are only five days to further narrow down options and come up with working texts for Copenhagen, but I am convinced that this can be done.”

Head of UN atomic watchdog urges swift response by Iran to nuclear fuel deal

2 November - The outgoing head of the United Nations atomic watchdog today urged Tehran not to delay in responding to the draft agreement on fuel for its civilian nuclear research site, and called for transparency and cooperation to address outstanding issues related to Iran’s nuclear programme.

The agreement, put forward nearly two weeks ago during talks at the Vienna headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), concerns fuel for use at a research reactor in Tehran which produces medical radioisotopes for therapeutic and diagnostic procedures.



Spent nuclear fuel

Last week Iran informed IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei that it is “considering the proposal in depth and in a favourable light,” but needed more time to provide a response. The other three parties to the talks – France, Russia and the United States – have all indicated their approval of the agreement.

“Addressing the concerns of the international community about Iran’s future intentions is primarily a matter of confidence-building, which can only be achieved through dialogue,” Mr. ElBaradei said in his final address to the UN General Assembly as head of the IAEA.

“I therefore urge Iran to be as forthcoming as possible in responding soon to my recent proposal, based on the initiative of the US, Russia and France, which aimed to engage Iran in a series of measures that could build confidence and trust and open the way for comprehensive and substantive dialogue between Iran and the international community,” he stated.

He added that trust and confidence-building are an incremental process that requires focusing on the big picture and a willingness to take risks for peace.

Iran has stated that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes, but some other countries contend it is driven by military ambitions. The issue has been of international concern since the discovery in 2003 that the country had concealed its nuclear activities for 18 years in breach of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

“As a result of difficult and painstaking work, the agency has acquired a better understanding of Iran’s civil nuclear programme,” said the Director General.

“Nevertheless, a number of questions and allegations relevant to the nature of that programme are still outstanding and need to be clarified by Iran through transparency and cooperation with the agency.”

Mr. ElBaradei, who has headed the IAEA since 1998, also highlighted the case of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), which the agency reported to the Security Council 16 years ago for non-compliance with its non-proliferation obligations. Since that time, he said, the country has moved from the likely possession of undeclared plutonium to acquiring nuclear weapons.

“The on-again, off-again nature of the dialogue between the DPRK and the international community has stymied the resolution of this issue,” he stated.

In addition, he lamented the “tragic war” that was launched in Iraq “on the basis of a false pretext, without authorization from the Security Council, and despite the agency and the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission

(UNMOVIC) having found no evidence that Iraq had revived its nuclear weapons programme or programmes involving other weapons of mass destruction.

“It gives me no consolation that the agency’s findings were subsequently vindicated,” he said.

In July, the IAEA’s Board of Governors chose Yukiya Amano, a Japanese diplomat with a lengthy record of working on disarmament and non-proliferation issues, to succeed Mr. ElBaradei when he steps down at the end of November.

Huge amounts of avoidable post-harvest losses worsens hunger for poor – UN



Making metal silos for grain storage

2 November - The plight of the hungry in developing countries is needlessly aggravated by farmers losing up to half of their crops after gathering the harvest, the United Nations agricultural agency said today, stressing that adequate investment and training could drastically cut the losses.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) said that excessive rainfall, droughts, extreme temperatures, contamination by micro-organisms, and premature harvesting are among the causes of these post-harvest losses, which estimates put at anywhere from 15 to 50 per cent of what is produced.

Crops also lose value through damage because of spillage, harm from inappropriate tools, chemical contamination or rough handling – including heat build-up – during harvesting, loading, packing or transportation.

The removal of so much of the food supply from the market results in high prices, as well as avoidable damage to the environment as land, water, human labour and non-renewable resources such as fertilizer and energy are used to produce, process, handle and transport food that no one eats.

With the right kind of training, much of the food lost through poor transport and packaging practices can be saved, according to a news release issued by FAO.

Inadequate and insecure storage facilities in many developing countries is another major problem where the FAO in collaboration with donors can make a difference, as seen in an Afghan project that provided household metallic silos to around 18,000 homes.

Post-harvest losses were slashed by improving storage facilities and helping local tinsmiths to manufacture hermetically-sealed silos, which protected food stored pests, rodents, birds and fungi and allowed produce to be kept for long periods without loss of quality.

FAO said that participating farmers used the silos to store cereal grains and grain legumes, reporting higher incomes and longer storage possibilities, with losses falling to less than one or two per cent. In addition, the technical training to tinsmiths meant an additional 4,500 silos were put together locally and sold to other farmers.

In many developing countries the materials needed to build the silos are unaffordable for poor farmers. FAO has consequently set up a financing scheme to help more smallholders obtain better storage containers.

Post-harvest losses also present a problem in Western supermarkets, where if a fruit and vegetable is bruised, wilted, unripe, misshapen, of incorrect size or generally unsightly, it will not be put on the shelves. With an absence of alternative markets for such produce, it is thrown away.

DR Congo: UN peacekeeping chief calls for probe into killings by armed forces

2 November - The head of United Nations peacekeeping has called for a joint investigation into the targeted killing this year of dozens of civilians in the far east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by elements of the country's military.

Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said yesterday that the UN peacekeeping force in the DRC (known as MONUC) and the Congolese armed forces (known as FARDC) should conduct the inquiry.

Mr. Le Roy, who is currently on an official visit to the eastern DRC, said MONUC would immediately suspend its logistical support to the FARDC units believed to be implicated in the killings until the results of the investigation are known.

He said it would be up to the FARDC to take necessary measures once the probe is completed.

A UN spokesperson told journalists in New York today that "compelling evidence" had emerged that a brigade of the FARDC was responsible for the targeted murders of 62 civilians, including many women and children, in the Lukweti area of strife-torn North Kivu province between May and September this year.

"According to our information, these civilians were clearly targeted in attacks by certain units of the [army]," Mr. Le Roy told Radio Okapi, a UN-backed radio station.

MONUC forces have supported the FARDC in operations against Rwandan Hutu rebels based in North Kivu, but human rights groups have accused the army of carrying out numerous abuses against civilians during the operations.

Last month the independent UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings Philip Alston described the military operations as "catastrophic" and urged that an immediate and thorough investigation be established.

Stock exchanges can promote stable, sustainable global economy – Ban

2 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged leaders of stock exchanges and financial institutions to better manage and integrate environmental, social and governance issues into their business practices.

In a video message to a gathering at United Nations Headquarters of more than 60 top executives from around the world, Mr. Ban said that these so-called "ESG" issues are critical in creating a world economy that is more stable, inclusive and sustainable.

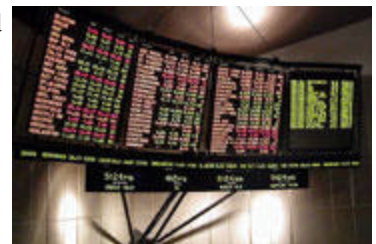
"Stock exchanges and other financial bodies and institutions have a key role to play," he told the group, which is meeting to explore ways in which stock exchanges can promote sustainable business practices and long-term approaches to investment.

He welcomed the steps already undertaken by participants to incorporate ESG considerations into new stock indexes, listing rules and regulatory frameworks, and said he hoped the meeting will inspire even further efforts.

The Secretary-General also highlighted the "unprecedented" partnerships forged between the UN and the business and financial communities in recent years.



UN Blue Helmets on patrol in Orientale province, DRC



Among them is the UN Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability and responsibility initiative, which currently involves over 5,000 companies across 130 countries.

Another is the UN-backed Principles for Responsible Investment – a set of voluntary actions for incorporating ESG issues into mainstream investment decision-making and ownership practices that today includes more than 600 institutional investors with assets of over \$18 trillion.

A report released in July by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and a powerful group of asset managers controlling some \$2 trillion in assets argued that if investment consultants and others do not incorporate ESG considerations into their services, they face “a very real risk that they will be sued for negligence.”

It also stressed the central role that the world's largest institutional investors – including pensions funds, insurance companies, sovereign wealth funds and mutual funds – have in easing the transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient green economy.

Today's meeting is co-hosted by the Global Compact, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN-backed Principles for Responsible Investment.

Police officers with UN force in Liberia stymie mass attempt at prison escape



UNMIL's administration building

2 November - Police officers serving with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Liberia have helped foil an attempted mass jail break this weekend from a prison in the West African nation's capital, Monrovia.

As many as 50 prisoners tried to escape about 2:20 p.m. yesterday after one inmate at Monrovia Central Prison stole a set of keys from a corrections officer and then locked that officer inside a cell, according to the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Dozens of detainees moved into the prison yard and tried to scale the prison's perimeter wall before they were intercepted by members of a Jordanian formed police unit (FPU) serving with UNMIL, as well as Liberian police officers and other prison staff.

The mission reported that several warning shots were fired into the air to deter the inmates and none were able to escape. Those who attempted to escape have since been relocated to other cells and at least 23 will appear in court over the matter.

UNMIL added that while 12 Jordanian FPU members, two detainees and one corrections officer sustained injuries during the escape attempt, they were minor.

UN envoy begins talks in Iraq on security and sovereignty issues



Scene outside Iraq's Ministry of Justice which was hit by a bomb on 25 October 2009

2 November - A senior United Nations political official held talks today in Baghdad with Iraq's Prime Minister and defence and national security ministers as part of his discussions with the country's leadership on Iraq's security and sovereignty.

Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, held consultations with Nouri al-Maliki, the Prime Minister, as well as with other senior Government officials, UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced last week that he was dispatching Mr. Fernandez-Taranco to Iraq following a request from the Government, days after a double

bombing in Baghdad killed around 150 people.

In September, during his address to the high-level segment of the General Assembly, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani called on the UN to set up an independent international commission to investigate deadly bombings and attacks that have struck the country since 2008, including the 19 August blasts that killed an estimated 100 people in the capital.

Mr. Talabani said that the scope and nature of the attacks meant they could only have been carried out with external help and warranted an outside investigation, as well as a special international court to try those accused of committing the crimes.

Last week Mr. Ban said that any probe into these attacks requires a mandate from the UN's 15-member Security Council.

Iraqi lawmakers are also considering amendments to key electoral laws over voter records in the oil-rich, ethnically mixed region of Kirkuk in the north and the publication of candidate lists, which threaten to delay national elections scheduled for January.

Darfur: joint African-UN force takes part in ceremony aimed at reducing ethnic tensions



Landscape of Darfur

2 November - The joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur has participated in a reconciliation ceremony in the north of the region that is aimed at halting a spate of recent inter-tribal clashes that have killed at least two dozen people.

Tensions have increased around the town of Shangil Tobaya after a member of the Tengur tribe was killed by Zaghawa men during their clashes with Birgid tribesmen last week, according to information released by the peacekeeping mission, known as UNAMID.

Yesterday UNAMID military officials, joined by a mediation committee of umdahs (local leaders) and a general from the Minni Minawi faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), met with community leaders from local tribes to urge them to exercise restraint.

After the talks the Zaghawas apologized for the killing and a peace agreement was signed by the two tribes to avert the threat of possible reprisals or the Tengurs joining forces with the Birgids to launch future attacks on the Zaghawas.

UNAMID has attributed the recent fighting to disputes over access to water, a particularly precious commodity in Darfur, an arid and landlocked region. The mission sent an assessment team to the area last week comprising military officers, police officers and humanitarian, human rights, security, civil affairs and protection officials.

UNAMID has been in place across Darfur since the start of last year to try to quell the fighting and humanitarian suffering that has engulfed the region since 2003. At least 300,000 people are estimated to have died from the conflict and another 2.7 million people remain displaced from their homes.

UN official kicks off week-long event on trade and investment in Asia-Pacific region

2 November - A top United Nations official has called on countries in Asia and the Pacific to strengthen regional ties in an effort to boost trade and investment and increase economic growth, kicking off a week-long event in Bangkok focusing on these critical issues.

The Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) noted that regional economic cooperation can be a driver of growth for a region traditionally reliant on trade with developed countries.

“Some of the world’s largest economies are in our region, [and] a more unified market of East Asian countries would be a potential economic powerhouse and an emerging centre of gravity of the world economy,” Noeleen Heyzer told 150 trade



researchers and policymakers at the Asia-Pacific Trade Economists' Conference.

“Strengthening regional connectivity will leverage our complementary strengths and synergies,” she added in her remarks to the two-day conference, which is the lead-off event for the inaugural Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week.

Ms. Heyzer also called for streamlining trade procedures, and untangling the “noodle bowl” – consolidating the 151 existing bilateral and regional trade agreements – which will encourage greater levels of economic integration.

Also at today's meeting, several speakers noted that although the three countries that have weathered the global economic slowdown with the least damage are in Asia – China, India and Indonesia – the crisis still required regional leaders to fundamentally rethink their trade policies.

The first-ever Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week will also feature the first session of ESCAP's Committee on Trade and Investment, which is scheduled to hear an address from Supachai Panitchpakdi, the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), on Thursday.

Iraq: UN agency condemns killing of teenage cameraman

2 November - The United Nations agency charged with defending the freedom of the press today deplored the killing of an Iraqi television cameraman who died when a bomb exploded outside his house in the northern city of Kirkuk.

Orhan Hijran, an 18-year-old who worked for the Al-Rasheed satellite TV channel, was killed following the explosion on 21 October, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported.



UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura issued a statement from the agency's headquarters in Paris in which he noted that “a shocking number of Iraqi journalists and media workers have paid with their lives” for carrying out their work in recent years.

“It is essential for the reconstruction of a free and democratic Iraq that the authorities improve the safety of journalists and enable them to carry out their work for the benefit of all.”

Iraq remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a non-governmental organization, estimates that more than 200 journalists or media support workers have been killed across the country since the United States-led invasion in March 2003.

UN maritime agency pledges support to repress piracy off Somali coast



2 November - The head of the United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO) has pledged that his agency will help Somalia repress piracy off its coast and in the Gulf of Aden, including through assisting in the creation of a national coast guard.

IMO Secretary-General Efthimios Mitropoulos discussed the issue with the Prime Minister of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke, during their meeting last week in London, where the agency is based.

The past year has witnessed an upsurge in piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa nation, which has been riven by factional fighting and had not had a functioning central government since the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991.

In January, Indian Ocean and Red Sea countries pledged to cooperate in seizing, investigating and prosecuting pirates off the

Somali coast in a stepped-up campaign to curb a scourge that has wrought havoc with international shipping, including UN delivery of emergency food aid.

The code of conduct, signed in Djibouti, calls for shared operations, such as nominating law enforcement or other authorized officials to embark in the patrol ships or aircraft of another signatory.

Mr. Mitropoulos emphasized the importance of putting the code of conduct – of which Somalia is a signatory – into effect.

The Prime Minister said that piracy off his country's coast needed to be tackled from the land side as well as from the sea, and requested help to halt attacks from the two main piracy networks (one in the central region of Somalia and one in Puntland) through the establishment of information-sharing centres.

He also stated that the country is reviewing its national legislation to ensure that pirates are prosecuted within Somalia, and requested the IMO's help in this regard.

Mr. Mitropoulos said that the IMO, in cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), will provide the requested assistance. In addition, it will, through its technical cooperation programme and assistance from Member States, help Somalia to establish a national coast guard.

UNICEF sounds alarm over numbers of South Asian children trapped in poverty



2 November - Some 300 million children in South Asia, or half of the region's under-18 population, suffer from chronic levels of poverty, according to a new United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study presented today at the opening of a conference in Bangladesh.

To combat the enormous amount of poverty afflicting children, UNICEF urged leaders across the region to strengthen efforts tackling the lack of food, education, health, information, shelter, water and sanitation for the young, at the conference in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka.

“We now have a better understanding of the real depth of how poverty affects children – not just as a side effect of their parents' income but their own profound deprivation,” UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia Daniel Toole told the meeting on achieving child well-being and equity in South Asia.

Mr. Toole told the two-day gathering that unlike in any other part of the world, “due to persistent and deep inequalities in the region, children in South Asia become trapped in an unrelenting cycle of discrimination at several levels – poor nutrition, health and sanitation and being excluded from education.”

UNICEF is proposing that a shift in the definition of poverty needs to take place – away from a narrow measurement that addresses income exclusively to a definition that includes income poverty, deprivation and well-being, resulting in more effective government policy.

“Investing in children is both a fundamental responsibility and an opportunity that, if not grabbed now, will tarnish a nation's growth,” said Mr. Toole. “This is a responsibility because poverty and under-nutrition damages a child's chance to thrive and also hampers the potential of countries to develop.”

He stressed that investing resources into good nutrition, primary health care, education and protection for children “will provide rich rewards in [the] future.”

Programmes involving community-based management of acute malnutrition, newborn and maternal health initiatives and support to basic health services through childhood, youth and early adulthood for women, as well as improving access to

water, sanitation and hygiene and education are among the areas requiring a hike in investment, said Mr. Toole.

Sierra Leonean judge elected head of UN-backed war crimes tribunal

2 November - A Sierra Leonean judge has taken over as the new President of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), the United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal set up to deal with the worst acts committed during the long and brutal civil war in the West African nation.

Justice Jon Kamanda was elected to a one-year term as the Presiding Judge of the appeals chamber, a post which automatically makes him the SCSL's President as well, according to a press release issued today by the court from Freetown, the capital.



The Special Court for Sierra Leone

Justice Emmanuel Ayoola of Nigeria was elected as Vice-President, the press release added.

Justice Kamanda succeeds Justice Renate Winter of Austria, who had served as President since May last year.

The new President has had an extensive legal career, having worked as a barrister, prosecutor and judge during the past 34 years. He has also served as a government minister in Sierra Leone.

The SCSL also announced today that Claire Carlton-Hanciles, a Sierra Leonean lawyer, has been named as the court's Principal Defender.

Insecurity in north-western Pakistan prompts UN to reduce staffing levels

2 November - The United Nations has decided to reduce the presence of international staff in north-western Pakistan in light of the security situation in the region, leaving only those vital for emergency, humanitarian relief or security operations, among other essential activities.

All other international UN staff members who are working in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) will be relocated, UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters in New York.

"Security measures will be enhanced for staff that will continue their work in those areas," she added.

Parts of NWFP, including its capital, Peshawar, have been the site of numerous bombings and attacks this year.

In addition, NWFP and FATA have been the targets of the Government's military operations to root out militants. Earlier this year, more than 2 million Pakistanis were displaced by the conflict between Government forces and militants in NWFP.

While about half of them have returned home, a new offensive in South Waziristan has already uprooted more than 100,000 people in recent weeks.

Ms. Montas said that the UN is committed to providing development and humanitarian assistance to the people of Pakistan, and will continue to work in the areas where help is required.



UN staff pay tribute to their 5 colleagues killed at the Pearl Continental Hotel on 9 June 2009 in Peshawar, Pakistan (file)

Five nations sign up to UN initiative to tackle deforestation



2 November - Five countries today joined the United Nations initiative aimed at combating climate change by creating incentives for poorer countries to reverse the trend of deforestation and invest in more sustainable forms of development.

Argentina, Cambodia, Ecuador, Nepal and Sri Lanka each asked to participate in the initiative, known as UN-REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries), adding to the initial nine member countries.

The five countries said they wanted to benefit from the expertise generated by

UN-REDD and its activities, particularly concerning improved consultations with indigenous peoples and civil society, according to a press release issued by the programme today in Nairobi.

UN-REDD, which is a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), hopes to eventually generate up to \$30 billion a year of financial flows from rich countries to poor nations to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The initiative targets deforestation and forest degradation as related activities such as agricultural expansion, the conversion of forests to pasture land, infrastructure development, destructive logging and fires account for almost 20 per cent of global emissions of greenhouse gases.

In its first year of operations UN-REDD has approved more than \$37 million in funding for the national anti-deforestation programmes of countries, including Panama, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Tanzania and Viet Nam. The programme says another 20 countries have voiced interest in joining.

Denmark also announced today that it is become the second country donor to the programme after Norway.

Truckloads of goods enter Gaza from Israel, UN reports



The main commercial Karni Crossing

2 November - The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) reports that nearly 80 truckloads of goods entered Gaza from Israel yesterday through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

The majority of the trucks contained fruit, cooking oil, dairy products, flour, frozen meat, tea and coffee.

More than 100,000 kilograms of cooking gas also made it into Gaza through Kerem Shalom, UNSCO noted. However, the Karni conveyor belt and the Nahal Oz fuel pipelines remained closed.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned in a report released in September that the ongoing Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, now in its third year, has triggered a “protracted human dignity crisis” with negative humanitarian consequences.

“At the heart of this crisis is the degradation in the living conditions of the population, caused by the erosion of livelihoods and the gradual decline in the state of infrastructure, and the quality of vital services in the areas of health, water and sanitation, and education,” stated the report, entitled “Locked In: The Humanitarian Impact of Two Years of Blockade on the Gaza Strip.”

The blockade, imposed following the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, includes the closure of Karni, one of the largest and best equipped commercial crossings; sweeping restrictions on the import of industrial, agricultural and construction materials; the suspension of almost all exports; and a general ban on the movement of Palestinians through Erez, the only passenger crossing to the West Bank.

New UN campaign aims to save over 5 million children from pneumonia deaths



1 November - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) launched a new action plan on Monday to prevent up to 5.3 million children from dying of pneumonia – the biggest child killer worldwide – by 2015.

Although nearly 2 million children die from the disease every year, with nearly all deaths occurring in 68 developing countries, relatively few resources are dedicated to addressing pneumonia.

The Global Action Plan for the prevention and control of Pneumonia (GAPP) seeks to raise awareness of the disease's massive toll, makes recommendations on what needs to be done, and lays out specific goals and targets.

The three-pronged plan calls for:

? protecting all children by providing an environment where they are at low risk of contracting the disease through exclusive breastfeeding for six months, adequate nutrition and reducing indoor air pollution, among other measures

? preventing children from becoming ill through vaccinations against diseases causing pneumonia, such as measles and pertussis and

? treating children who come down with pneumonia with the right care and antibiotics.

WHO Director-General Margaret Chan expressed confidence in the plan, which has a \$39 billion price tag, stressing that “if it is applied in every high burden country, we will be able to prevent millions of death.”

For her part, UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman underscored that “effective interventions to reduce deaths caused by pneumonia must be used more widely made more readily available for children at risk.”

The GAPP aims to boost coverage of all relevant vaccines and exclusive breastfeeding rates to 90 per cent to reach the goal of slashing child pneumonia deaths by 65 per cent and cutting the number of severe cases by 25 per cent, compared to 2000 levels.

Presidential candidate pulls out of Afghan run-off election – UN

1 November - With Abdullah Abdullah, the challenger to President Hamid Karzai in next week's run-off, withdrawing from the race, the top United Nations envoy to Afghanistan today expressed hope that the elections will be wrapped up shortly.

The 7 November run-off was announced late last month after the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) found evidence of fraud in the first round of voting on 20 August.



On the heels of Mr. Abdullah's announcement today, “the next step must be to bring this electoral process to a conclusion in a legal and timely manner,” Kai Eide, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, said in a statement.

Mr. Abdullah's decision was clearly "taken after a long period of discussion and reflection," and the UN official voiced hope that the former presidential candidate's reform proposals will be part of Afghanistan's future political agenda.

Last week, five UN staff members were killed and nine others injured in an attack, for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility, on a guest house in the capital, Kabul.

Jossie Esto of the Philippines, who worked for the UN Development Programme (UNDP) election team Louis Maxwell, a close protection officer from the United States Lawrence Mefful, a UN security officer from Ghana and Lydia Wonwene, a UNDP elections officer from Liberia, were killed in Wednesday's attack.

The identity of a fifth UN staff member killed when militants attacked the guest house, where 34 UN staffers were staying, still needs to be confirmed.

"These women and men went to Afghanistan with many talents. But they shared a common goal, that is, to help the Afghan people," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told UN staff members on Friday.

"They went despite the risks. They went to support another election and the opportunity for the Afghan people to shape their destiny," he said.

Both the Secretary-General and Mr. Eide pledged in the aftermath of the attack that the UN will continue its work in the country.

Mr. Ban said that the UN is urgently reviewing the security environment throughout Afghanistan, and is exploring the feasibility of bringing in additional security units to guard UN facilities and guest houses.

The UN will also be consolidating its staff now scattered among many different locations in Kabul and may suggest that personnel not directly engaged in critical duties be re-located over the coming weeks. In addition, Mr. Ban is dispatching a senior UN official to the Afghan capital to express sympathy and solidarity with the staff.

Ban concerned that key elements of Nepal's peace process not yet implemented



In 2006, the Maoist rebels and Nepalese government signed an historic peace agreement

31 October - That key commitments in the peace process in Nepal have not been implemented is cause for serious concern, with persistent mistrust among the parties undercutting their capacities for flexible negotiation, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has written in a new report.

The parties' "absorption in day-to-day politics and internal party issues" are also impeding talks, but recently the three major parties have created an informal task force and started discussing contentious issues pertaining to the peace process and constitution, Mr. Ban said.

A decade-long civil war, claiming some 13,000 lives, ended in 2006 with the signing of a peace accord between the Government and Maoists. After conducting Constituent Assembly elections in May 2008, the nation abolished its 240-year-old monarchy and declared itself a republic.

"While consultations at all levels continue in an ad hoc manner, it remains my view that a more formal mechanism in support of such interactions among senior leaders would benefit the peace process," the Secretary-General noted.

The election of a representative Assembly – whose central and "arguably most important challenge" is to draft a new constitution to be promulgated next May – is the most significant achievement of the peace process to date, he said.

The overall schedule to draw up the constitution has been revised for the sixth time and senior leaders of the main parties have generally not participated in discussions.

Mr. Ban called on the parties to step up efforts to address the long-term underlying causes of the conflict, such as restructuring the State and land reform. "To date, there has been little by way of agreed strategies for moving forward on these vital issues."

After months of "drift," the recent plan to restart the discharge of disqualified former Maoist fighters, with the joint engagement of the Government and Maoists, bodes well for the peace process, but he warned that it is too early to be confident about the initiative's success.

"It is therefore critical that the Government, UCPN-M [Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist] and the Maoist army sustain their cooperation and implement this long-overdue commitment as soon as possible," he said.

"Nepal is on the path of major political and social transformation," the Secretary-General wrote in his latest report on the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). "A Government of national unity remains desirable for timely promulgation of the country's new constitution and for the successful integration and rehabilitation of Maoist army personnel."

But also essential is a thorough review of the peace pact's implementation, which has not taken place since its signing in August 2006. "The parties should develop a clear road map of the priority actions needed to fulfil the expectations of the people of Nepal for the dividends of democracy and social transformation," he said.

In spite of the initial positive steps taken to promote the integration and rehabilitation of Maoist army personnel and discharge those disqualified by the 2007 verification process, the report pointed out that "those steps are rather tentative and cannot with certainty be considered sufficient to create the conditions for the completion of the Mission's activities by the end of the current mandate" next January.

"This underscores the considerable task that awaits the Nepalese parties in the coming two and a half months," the Secretary-General said. UNMIN, which was set up in January 2007 to assist with the peace process, "and the United Nations as a whole stand ready to assist them in achieving their peace process commitments."

Thousands in Asia-Pacific sprint to fight H1N1 – UN



The A(H1N1) situation needs to be carefully monitored

31 October - Some 11,000 people have taken part in today's United Nations running festival in Bangkok, Thailand, to raise awareness of the need to curb the spread of the H1N1 flu pandemic.

Over 400,000 confirmed cases and 5,000 deaths from H1N1 flu have been reported to the UN World Health Organization (WHO) as of last week, but the actual number of cases is much higher since authorities in many countries have stopped counting individual cases, Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), said.

"The spread of this disease underscores the importance of ensuring a healthy balanced life style, something that Thailand is known for, as well as ensuring access to health and social services for all," she said at the UN Day Run, whose theme this year is "Unite to Fight H1N1."

Diseases, she emphasized, know no boundaries. "But they can be stopped by awareness and education campaigns, healthy communities and affordable health care."

Today's event also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the UN being based in Thailand. Currently, 31 UN organizations are based in the Thai capital.

"The UN works around the world to make development more caring of our planet and more inclusive for our people," Ms. Heyzer stressed.

The WHO's latest recommendations call for single doses of H1N1 flu vaccine for adults, adolescents starting at age 10, and

pregnant women.

The agency said that the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization, which advises it on vaccine policy and strategy, recommended further studies in children older than six months and younger than 10 years, since the data are limited.

For pregnant women, SAGE noted that studies in experimental animals using live attenuated or inactivated vaccines found no evidence of direct or indirect harmful effects on fertility, pregnancy, foetal development, birthing or post-natal development.

“Based on these data and the substantially elevated risk for a severe outcome in pregnant women infected with the pandemic virus, SAGE recommended that any licensed vaccine can be used in pregnant women, provided no specific contraindication has been identified by the [national] regulatory authority,” WHO said in its update.

Sierra Leone: eight men found guilty of war crimes transferred to Rwanda

31 October - Eight men found guilty by a United Nations-backed court of war crimes and crimes against humanity during Sierra Leone's brutal decade-long civil war have been transferred to Rwanda to serve their sentences.

Currently, no prison in Sierra Leone meets the required international standards, so amid tight security, they were flown yesterday from the detention facilities at the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) compound in the country's capital, Freetown, to Rwanda's capital, Kigali.



Former leader of the RUF in Sierra Leone Issa Hassan Sesay (centre)

Among those transferred were three men who led a rebel movement called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who were convicted in February on charges relating to, among others, terrorism, murder, rape, sexual slavery and use of child soldiers, and, for the first time in history, forced marriage and attacks against peacekeepers.

Last week, the SCSL upheld the sentences of former RUF Interim Leader Issa Hassan Sesay to 52 years in prison, RUF commander Morris Kallon to 40 years and former RUF Chief of Security Augustine Gbao to 25 years.

Others flown to Rwanda to serve their sentences were three former leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), Alex Tamba Brima, Ibrahim Bazy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu, as well as two former leaders of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), Moinina Fofana and Allieu Kondewa.

The eight prisoners will be incarcerated at Rwanda's Mpanga Prison under an agreement between the Court and the Rwandan Government. The part of the facility where they will be held was originally built to house those convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Credit will be given for time served while in detention at the Special Court, which was set up jointly by the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone and is mandated to bring those bearing the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in the West African nation after 30 November 1996.

The Freetown-based Court last week handed down its final ruling in Sierra Leone last week, wrapping up its trial proceedings.

The remaining trial, involving former Liberian president Charles Taylor, is continuing at The Hague, where it was moved for security reasons.

Sudan: UN embarks on largest-ever delivery of voter registration materials



Elections were included in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudan

31 October - The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) are kicking off the largest-ever delivery of materials in the African nation ahead of tomorrow's voter registration exercise.

Nearly 120,000 kilogrammes of materials – including registration kits, forms and training supplies – will be sent to locations identified by the National Elections Commission (NEC).

UNDP is funding the cost of transporting the supplies to Sudan's 25 state capitals, while UNMIS is assisting in sending materials and NEC officers to train staff on the rules and procedures of voter registration in dozens of inaccessible and remote locations in Southern Sudan and Southern Kordofan.

For its part, the joint African Union-UN peacekeeping force in Darfur ([UNAMID](http://unamid.unmissions.org/Default.aspx)) will deliver materials to 10 isolated areas in Northern and Western Darfur.

“We're hopeful that this logistical assistance to NEC will enable the Commission to establish registration centers that enable more people to register and later to vote,” said Ray Kennedy, Chief Electoral Affairs Officer with UNMIS. “This will bring the country one step closer to a large-scale democratic polling exercise in 2010.”

NEC requested UNMIS – which is mandated to provide technical assistance and support for elections – to assist with logistics and operational planning, electoral materials, training and capacity building of staff in support of the upcoming general elections.

Next year's multi-party polls are a key milestone in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the pact which ended 20 years of fighting between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) separatists in the south and the national Government in the north.

In his most recent report on UNMIS, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the parties to the CPA to enhance their partnership in ensuring that the elections are held.

“The Agreement must be implemented in spirit as well as the letter if the immense work undertaken is to be sustainable,” he stressed, calling on the sides to enhance their cooperation.

Next year's elections must be seen as part of a larger process of democratic transformation, requiring a long-term commitment by all parties, the Secretary-General underscored, adding that it is vital that the polls are credible in the eyes of the Sudanese people.

“Coming to an agreement on how to proceed with elections will also allow the parties to give the requisite attention to preparations for the referendums in 2011,” the report said.

Ban congratulates US leader for lifting entry restriction based on HIV status



31 October - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today congratulated United States President Barack Obama for announcing that travel restrictions for people living with HIV from entering the country will be removed.

“I urge all other countries with such restrictions to take steps to remove them at the earliest,” Mr. Ban, who has made removing the stigma and discrimination faced by those living with HIV a personal issue, said.

Almost 60 nations impose some form of travel restrictions on people living with HIV.

Mr. Obama's announcement yesterday overturns a policy that had been in place since 1987, and it came as he signed the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act of 2009, which has provided treatment and support services to people living with HIV since 1990.

The legislation is named after Ryan White, a teenage boy who became a nationally known figure in the US in the 1980s as he battled discrimination and ostracism after contracting HIV from a contaminated blood treatment. He died in 1990.

In a speech to the Global AIDS Conference last August, Mr. Ban said that travel restrictions on people living with HIV “should fill us all with shame.”

At his request, several nations, including his home country, the Republic of Korea, are finalizing the lifting of such restrictions, with other countries including China and Ukraine considering removing them as well.

UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé has also welcomed Mr. Obama's move, stressing that “placing travel restrictions on people living with HIV has no public health justification.”

Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), added, “it is also a violation of human rights.”

The new Ryan White programme, he said in a statement issued yesterday, is “an integral part of the global AIDS response and a gesture of the United States towards achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for people within the United States living with HIV.”