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World's faiths can propel search for solution to climate change, says Ban

3 November - The world's religions have a crucial role to play in the global fight against climate change, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, characterizing the battle with global warming as a "moral" issue.

With the climate change conference in Copenhagen – where nations are expected to wrap up talks on an ambitious new agreement – just over one month away, "it is a pivotal moment for our world," Mr. Ban said at a gathering of secular and religious leaders at Windsor Castle in London.

'Green' growth can enhance efforts to tackle global poverty and improve food, water and energy security, he stressed.

"We can lay a foundation for peace and security for generations to come," the Secretary-General said at the event, hosted by Prince Philip. "We can define a more sustainable relationship with our planet."

Because the issue of climate change is inter-generational and moral, "this is why the voices, the deeds and the teachings of the world's faith groups are so vitally important," he emphasized.

Any deal reached in Copenhagen must be "comprehensive, equitable and ambitious," Mr. Ban said, urging faith



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, speak to journalists

communities to help communicate the message that action must be taken urgently.

The potential impact of faith communities, he said, is “enormous” because they have the ability to set an example for the lifestyles of billions of people and reach millions of young people through education.

“You can – and do – inspire people to change,” the Secretary-General said.

“Your practical commitments can encourage political leaders to act more courageously in protecting people and the planet.”

While in London, Mr. Ban also met with United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown, with whom he discussed climate change.

“We are going through a crucially important period for the whole of humanity,” he told reporters after his meeting with the UK leader.

He said is encouraged that European Union (EU) leaders, at their meeting last week, recognized the importance of providing technical and financial support for climate change.

“The developed countries should come out with ambitious targets for greenhouse gas emissions by 2020,” Mr. Ban said.

“We must be able to have an agreement where all the countries should participate with the clear vision that all the countries should work for the long-term goal to save this planet from climate change.”

He also spoke out against the notion that combating global warming is too expensive in a message delivered by Janos Pasztor, Director of the Secretary-General’s Climate Change Support Team, to a dinner last night preceding the Windsor Castle event.

“We will pay an unacceptable price if we do not act now,” he underscored, calling for support for the world’s most vulnerable to adapt to changes already afoot.

UN refugee agency rushing aid to Angolans expelled from DR Congo



Angolans expelled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) seek help in their homeland

3 November - The United Nations refugee agency has rushed relief items to help tens of thousands of Angolans expelled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) last month.

A Boeing 747 jet from Johannesburg, South Africa, touched down in Angola’s capital, Luanda, over the weekend carrying thousands of tents, sleeping mats and blankets, as well as a prefabricated warehouse.

Upon arrival, the supplies – sent in response to a request from the Angolan Government – were loaded onto army aircraft bound for Uige and Zaire provinces bordering the DRC.

Angolan authorities have said that 50,000 Angolans – most of whom had refugee status in the DRC – have either been expelled or have come back to their home country of their own accord.

“Many were not even given any opportunity to collect their personal belongings before being forced back to Angola,” said Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR).

Those who have returned are living in extremely difficult conditions, he said, with the agency having found some 500 people sleeping on a cement floor in an old school building without sleeping mats or mattresses in Kitumu in Uige province.

“The returnees’ stress is exacerbated because many became separated before being forced back to Angola,” Mr. Mahecic

noted.

When it visited the Mbaza Congo area of Zaire province three weeks ago, UNHCR found that also some 30,000 forcibly returned Angolans are in need of shelter, water, medicine and food.

Before the expulsions, the agency was already helping to pave the way for the return of those Angolans wishing to go back to their home country.

“UNCHR now looks forward to working with the Angolan and DRC governments to arrange a safe and dignified repatriation of Angolan refugees to their homeland,” according to Mr. Mahecic.

As of the end of September, there were still 111,000 refugees registered in the DRC and a further 40,000 in Zambia, South Africa, the Republic of Congo and Namibia.

Ban calls on Israel to halt eviction of Palestinians in East Jerusalem

3 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on Israel to halt what he called “provocative” actions after another Palestinian family in East Jerusalem was evicted from their home, the latest in a series of similar incidents.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban voiced dismay at continued Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem, including the demolition of Palestinian homes, the eviction of Palestinian families and the insertion of settlers into Palestinian neighbourhoods.

“These actions stoke tensions, cause suffering and further undermine trust,” said the statement.

Mr. Ban called on Israel to “cease such provocative actions,” and to implement its commitments under the Road Map peace plan by freezing all settlement activity, including natural growth; dismantling outposts; and reopening Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem.

The Secretary-General has cited continued Israeli evictions and house demolitions in East Jerusalem, and the expansion of settlements as obstacles to peace and contrary to the Road Map for a two-State solution espoused by the diplomatic Quartet – comprising the UN, the European Union (EU), Russia and the United States.

In addition to exacerbating tensions, such actions prejudice final status issues, and often have tragic human consequences, he told an international forum held in Morocco last week.

UNESCO pays tribute after death of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss



Claude Lévi-Strauss

3 November - The world has lost one of its greatest thinkers with the death of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said today, as he paid tribute to the renowned anthropologist.

Mr. Lévi-Strauss was “one of the giants of the 20th century,” said Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General, in a statement issued from the agency’s headquarters in Paris following the announcement of the Frenchman’s death at the age of 100.

“His thoughts changed the way people perceived each other, striking down such divisive concepts as race and opening the way for a new vision based on recognition of the common bond of humanity.



Bus used by the Israeli-Arab population for destinations in East Jerusalem

“We mourn his passing, which is a loss to the whole world. But we celebrate his life, which was devoted to enlightenment and understanding through knowledge, built largely out of his insatiable curiosity about his fellow human beings, which took him to some of the most remote corners of the world and definitively changed modern anthropology.”

Mr. Lévi-Strauss had worked closely with UNESCO since its creation and his last public appearance was for an event in Paris to mark the agency’s 60th anniversary in 2005.

“It was UNESCO’s great privilege to have worked with this great man over many decades,” Mr. Matsuura said.

Last year, the UNESCO Courier devoted a special edition to Mr. Lévi-Strauss in honour of his 100th birthday, drawing on audiovisual archives, articles and other publications written by the anthropologist over five and a half decades.

Ban calls on re-elected leader to ensure freedom and democracy for all Afghans

3 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged Afghan President Hamid Karzai – re-elected after his opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, withdrew from the run-off planned for next week – to take all steps necessary to ensure that the people of the South Asian nation can “enjoy genuine freedom, democracy, stability and prosperity.”

Over the weekend, Mr. Ban made an unannounced visit to Kabul, where five UN staff members were killed and nine others injured in an attack on a guest house on 28 October, for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility.

In a meeting with Mr. Karzai in the Afghan capital, Mr. Ban said that he urged the leader to ensure good governance, “including the eradication of corruptive practices prevalent in Afghanistan, controlling drug trafficking and forming a unity government with experienced ministers and government officials.”

He told reporters in London today that he also called on the President to reach out to “all the ethnic groups, all people, and political and religious leaders,” including those who were themselves presidential candidates such as Mr. Abdullah. He gained nearly one-third of the popular vote in the first round of elections.

In spite of the last week’s “heinous” terrorist attack, the Secretary-General vowed that the United Nations will continue supporting Afghanistan’s Government.

“We cannot and will not be deterred,” he emphasized.

Last Wednesday, Mr. Ban 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.

While in Kabul, Mr. Ban also met with his Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kai Eide, as well as the heads of UN agencies working in the country and security officials.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) meets Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul on 2 November 2009

Real wages under pressure as global economic crisis continues to bite, UN report finds



3 November - Real wages appear to be stagnating worldwide for the second consecutive year, underlining the fragility of any potential recovery from the global economic crisis, the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) reported today.

The ILO's annual study of global wages shows that growth in real wages – measured across 53 countries – declined from an average of 4.3 per cent in 2007 to 1.4 per cent last year. In some of the biggest economies sampled, real wages actually fell by 0.2 per cent last year.

This year, according to the ILO, “the picture on wages is likely to get worse,” with figures from the first quarter of 2009 indicating that real wages in nearly 20 countries are now falling outright, often because of cuts to the number of hours worked.

Manuela Tomei, the director of ILO's Conditions of Work and Employment programme and the lead author of the study, said the findings raise “serious questions about the true extent of an economic recovery, especially if government rescue packages are phased out too early.

“Wage deflation deprives national economies of much needed demand and seriously affects confidence,” she added.

In June ILO members responded to the global economic crisis by adopting a ‘global jobs pact’ that calls for measures to maintain employment and to avoid deflationary wage spirals and worsening working conditions.

Today's study notes that in the past few years both rich and poor countries have boosted their minimum wage levels by more than the rate of inflation because of concerns about increasing inequality.

Describing these changes as “an important policy tool for social protection,” the report proposes that tax reductions and other income-support measures also be introduced to further protect low-paid workers.

“Minimum wages, social dialogue and collective bargaining are all ways of avoiding deflationary wage spirals and their impact on society,” Ms. Tomei said.

In addition, the report warned that the economic crisis has worsened the problem of wage arrears in some countries, including Ukraine and Russia.

On Thursday the ILO's governing body gathers in Geneva to discuss the study and how to implement the global jobs pact.

As Maoists stage protests in Nepal, UN urges respect for human rights



Maoist supporters at rally in Kathmandu in June 2006

3 November - The United Nations today called on Nepal's Government and other parties in the Asian country to ensure that the human rights of all people are protected and respected as protests organized by the former Maoist rebels are held throughout the State.

“I urge the Government of Nepal, the Maoist leadership and all other political actors to exercise restraint in response to nationwide agitation,” said Jyoti Sanghera, Deputy Representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (OHCHR-Nepal).

“Organizers of the protests should ensure that protesters act peacefully and within the law,”

Ms. Sanghera said, referring to demonstrations that began yesterday.

The Office called on the leadership of the United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) to make certain that their cadres refrain from violence and maintain the rule of law, underscoring that emergency services, humanitarian agencies and human rights monitors must be given free passage at all times.

In a press release, the Office also called on the Government to uphold its international obligations and ensure that security forces act with restraint and respect the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

In a new report, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that the lack of implementation of key commitments in Nepal's peace process is cause for serious concern, with persistent mistrust among the parties undercutting their capacities for flexible negotiation.

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.

Greater UN coordination can boost efforts to achieve anti-poverty goals – Migiro



Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro

3 November - Greater coordination among United Nations agencies is crucial to helping countries, including those in the Arab region, slash poverty, hunger, illiteracy and a host of other scourges, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told a meeting in Beirut today.

Ms. Migiro was addressing the opening of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) meeting, which is designed to ensure that the various UN departments, agencies and other components in the region work more effectively together.

"We all appreciate that the objective of the RCM is mainly to achieve policy coherence and create synergy at the regional and sub-regional levels to improve the impact of our work," she told the gathering in the Lebanese capital which was convened by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

"Not for the sake of coordination itself, but to help facilitate real results for our clients – the governments and peoples of our Member States."

She noted that coordination and collaboration within and among UN agencies is "central" to efforts to achieve the global anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as other objectives, and stressed the importance of their combined strength.

"Each of you, as separate agencies, programmes and funds, have decades of experience in this region – experience that spans a wide variety of issues," she said.

"What unites us is our commitment to the right of all children, women and men to live full and dignified lives, with the opportunity and freedom to realize their full potential."

Ms. Migiro underscored the urgency of enhancing the level of coordination among UN bodies in the region, noting that the target date for achieving the MDGs is just a few years away. “With just over five years left in the MDG period, we must do everything possible to ensure that the Goals are met, across this region, and within each country.”

She added that Western Asia demonstrates that “great progress can be made when good policies are matched with adequate resources,” noting that child and maternal mortality are low across the region, and extreme poverty is limited.

Still, more can be done, she said, pointing out that more children need to be enrolled in school, good jobs should be available to more people, and greater efforts are needed to address hunger.

In addition, she noted that the Arab region can play a vital role in identifying success stories and pointing out challenges, ahead of the high-level General Assembly meeting on the MDGs slated to be held in September 2010.

“We hope this will enable us to catalyze effective action to replicate and scale-up existing successes... to fill gaps in our progress toward the Goals... and to make good on the MDGs’ promise for all of the world’s people,” said the Deputy Secretary-General, who will travel to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, this week for a similar regional coordination meeting convened by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Good corporate citizenship in Asia-Pacific region must be more than just for show – UN

3 November - Businesses in the Asia-Pacific region are becoming better corporate citizens but often only for display and not for any lasting impact, a leading United Nations official told a regional gathering on trade and investment today.

Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), addressed more than 200 participants at a meeting in Bangkok on corporate responsibility, saying responsible corporate behaviour can be more effectively harnessed to promote economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability.



ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer

All too often, Ms. Heyzer said, enterprises engage in activities to generate good public relations, instead of activities that will have lasting effect on the communities where they operate.

“[We need] to make sure that we move from that kind of a ‘showcase’ and ensure that corporate social responsibility is integral to business practices, something that will run through the whole production process,” she said.

Today’s meeting was co-organized by ESCAP and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and was held as one of a series of events in the first ever Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week.

New UN measures to help consumers with technology purchasing decisions



3 November - The United Nations telecom agency is set to introduce measures that will help consumers know if the information and communications technology (ICT) equipment they are buying will work with other devices.

The new conformity and inter-operability programme by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) will support much more informed purchasing decisions for end users, be they companies or consumers, the agency stated in a news release. It also has the potential to widen markets, increase competition and decrease costs.

A key element of the programme is a global database that buyers can consult, without cost, to check whether a product conforms to ITU standards, or will work with other network elements.

According to the ITU, lack of conformity and inter-operability of ICT equipment is a major concern, especially in developing countries.

“A dizzying array of similar products can sometimes make purchasing decisions difficult,” noted Malcolm Johnson, Director of the ITU’s Telecommunication Standardization Bureau. “Inter-operability is at the heart of what ITU does, so we have put in place procedures that will greatly assist those faced with often complex buying decisions.”

Mr. Johnson added that the programme will significantly reduce the problems that telephone companies, ICT service providers, businesses and consumers face.

“I believe this initiative is of great significance in our efforts to bridge the digital divide, but will be equally beneficial to those in the developed world,” he stated.

The new programme, which will be voluntary and open to ITU members and non-members alike, will also focus on skills training and the development of regional testing centres for developing countries.

As part of the initiative, ITU will organize a series of inter-operability events that will allow two or more vendors to get together to verify that their equipment inter-operates satisfactorily. An interoperability declaration can then be added to the database.

The agency will also hold regional workshops and tutorials on conformity assessment and inter-operability.

UNICEF begins relief efforts after floods strike north-eastern Kenya



Parts of Kenya have been pounded by El Niño-related enhanced rainfall with serious consequences

3 November - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is leading UN relief efforts in north-eastern Kenya, where recent torrential rainfall has brought flooding at the same time as much of the rest of the country endures a prolonged drought.

UNICEF is working with Kenya’s Red Cross Society and local authorities to chlorinate wells contaminated with flood water in the El Wak area of Mandera district, close to the border with Somalia, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

About 4,600 Kenyans living in the northeast and along the Indian Ocean coast have been displaced from their homes and forced to live with host families or in schools, OCHA reported today.

Fears are mounting that the wider Horn of Africa region could experience devastating floods in the next few months as the El Niño weather phenomenon takes effect, with heavy rains expected to peak this month across the region.

OCHA said as many as 750,000 people may eventually be affected by floods and landslides from the current rainy season.

UN aid agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Kenyan authorities have developed contingency plans that include the pre-positioning of relief items such as food, mosquito nets and water treatment chemicals in flood-prone areas.

Last month UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes warned that Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda are likely to be hit hardest by El Niño, with Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia also at risk.

Much of the region, including large swathes of Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia, has been stricken by drought recently.

John Lennon's sons and Yoko Ono revive 'Give Peace a Chance' to help UN



Singer John Lennon and Yoko Ono in Ottawa, Canada, 22 December 1969

3 November - Celebrating the 40th anniversary of John Lennon and Yoko Ono recording the anti-war anthem *Give Peace a Chance* with the Plastic Ono Band, the United Nations announced today that the proceeds from the release of a commemorative single will garner funds for its peacebuilding efforts in countries emerging from conflict.

Yoko Ono – the former Beatle's wife and artistic collaborator – along with his sons, Sean and Julian Lennon have partnered with music industry giants, EMI and Sony, to give the net profits from the sale of the song to the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The special anniversary edition digital single will be available to download from iTunes through the end of the year.

"I am delighted to see that a song so closely identified with the pursuit of peace, will shine a light on the United Nations' peacebuilding efforts and financially support PBF projects," said UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Chairperson Ambassador Heraldo Muñoz of Chile.

The song was written in 1969 during the late Mr. Lennon's and Ms. Ono's famous week-long "bed-in" protest against the Viet Nam War, in which they lay on their honeymoon bed and courted the world's media at the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel.

Profits from the song – sung by over 500,000 people at the anti-Viet Nam War demonstration later that year in Washington, DC – will benefit the PBC, which was established in 2005 to bolster countries in their bid to rebuild after conflict, reconcile divisions and prevent them from relapsing into bloodshed.

Mr. Muñoz told reporters in New York that the Peacebuilding Fund paid for projects in countries emerging from conflict, so as to show people a quick peace dividend, as opposed to larger, development-oriented projects.

He thanked Member States, including middle-income countries, which had contributed well over \$300 million to the Fund, but stressed that, for the mechanism to be truly effective, other sources of money were needed.

"We want private individuals, philanthropists to assist in this effort that belongs to all of us," said Mr. Muñoz. "Yoko Ono has been a fundamental moving force in allowing this gift to the United Nations peacebuilding effort, and I thank her personally for what she has done."

So far, the Fund has provided financial help for the countries on the Commission's agenda – Sierra Leone, Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR) and Guinea-Bissau – as well as some 14 other countries that were emerging from conflict.

UN report calls for greater research on marine ecosystems beyond territorial waters

3 November - Greater scientific research is essential to better understand the potential impact of activities on marine biodiversity beyond the coastal areas that fall under national jurisdiction as the more remote areas are just as vulnerable, says a new United Nations report.

While most human activities and pressures on marine biodiversity continue to be in coastal areas, more attention is being paid to the vulnerability of species and ecosystems outside these areas, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes.

According to the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, pressures from different types of human activities, such as destructive fishing practices, pollution and human-induced climate change, have resulted in the degradation of

marine habitats, the over-exploitation of biological resources and increasing loss of biodiversity.

Marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction – which are resources shared by all States – is even more vulnerable to such pressures. Because no single State or individual has any property rights over those resources, notes the Division, access to them is open to everyone with the consequence that there is limited incentive for their conservation or sustainable use.

“It is vital to continue and strengthen efforts aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction,” Mr. Ban states in his report.

He points out that while various efforts have been initiated at the global level to address this issue, knowledge about marine biodiversity, particularly beyond areas of national jurisdiction, remains scarce.

“While there is an increasing demand for scientific knowledge, it has been reported that marine biodiversity is the subject of many fewer research and protection efforts than those carried out for the terrestrial environment.

“As a result, there is limited understanding of ocean ecosystems beyond areas of national jurisdiction, in particular deep-sea ecosystems, and about the vulnerability, resilience and functioning of the associated marine biodiversity,” he states, adding that sustained marine scientific research activities are therefore essential.

The report also underlines the importance of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction for healthy, functioning marine ecosystems, economic prosperity, global food security and sustainable livelihoods.

Among the factors putting these areas at risk are limited, albeit expanding, knowledge of the richness and resilience of biodiversity in some areas of the oceans; the absence of regular monitoring programmes; and limited capacity to implement and enforce relevant instruments.

Therefore, the report calls for “timely policy guidance” by the General Assembly to ensure the application of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant instruments with respect to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

SEAL THE DEAL: Climate change illustrates need for better water management



3 November - Water is at the centre of many of the worst natural disasters. Too much of it and there are floods that inundate homes and cropland and displace thousands of people. Too little of it, and there can be droughts that ruin harvests and destroy the livelihoods of entire communities.

Climate change is only increasing the severity and frequency of such events, and to devastating effect. Rising temperatures and sharply fluctuating levels rainfall have the potential to dramatically impact the availability and quality of water, hurting the poorest the most.

A United Nations-backed Water Day is being held today to highlight how the issue of water intersects with all adaptation efforts during the last negotiating session in Barcelona, Spain, before next month’s conference on climate change in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The Day is supported by UN-Water, an inter-agency group bringing 26 UN bodies and nearly two dozen external partners together to enhance coordination to deal with issues related to all aspects of freshwater and sanitation.

The issue of adaptation to climate change is “really all water-related,” said Frederik Pischke, adviser for UN-Water with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels, will mainly be felt through their impacts on water, he stressed.

The management of water resources has implications for almost all corners of society and the economy, including health, food security, sanitation and energy.

Climate variability means that increasing stress will be placed on water, requiring urgent action, especially in the most vulnerable nations, according to UN-Water, which cautions that without improved management, gains made in reducing poverty and achieving the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be compromised.

The use of water must be “equitable, effective and responsible,” Mr. Pischke underscored.

National plans and international investment in climate change adaptation do not fully take into account the centrality of water, and any policy adopted must ensure that adaptation is a central part of any development strategy.

Therefore, “it would be good if there’s strong reference” to water in the agreement reached at next month’s conference in the Danish capital, Mr. Pischke said. The current negotiating text does include references to water resources.

The UN and its partners, he pointed out, are already looking into how what is agreed upon in Copenhagen “to trigger the necessary action on the ground.”

Water Day, marked on the sidelines of the Barcelona talks, will feature sessions led by experts and advocates from governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on water’s relationship with livelihoods; ecosystems and forests; land; regional and transboundary cooperation; gender; and energy.

UN health agency urges countries to remain prepared for H1N1 virus

3 November - The United Nations health agency today reiterated that countries need to remain prepared for the H1N1 virus, noting that the world has not yet hit the peak influenza season between January and February when more cases are expected.

“It is completely expected that they will be seeing more influenza cases at this time, and that they will continue to see more,” Gregory Hartl, spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO), told a news conference in Geneva.

An H1N1 update issued by the agency last week indicated that large parts of North America and parts of Europe are already over what WHO calls the epidemic threshold, so there is substantial influenza activity and more is expected.

Mr. Hartl said the indication is that this will become widespread across the Northern Hemisphere and temperate zones as these areas move forward through the late autumn and winter.

In a related development, WHO has deployed a team of experts to Ukraine, following a request from the Government, which has recorded more than 250,000 cases of influenza-like illness.

“As the pandemic virus has rapidly become the dominant influenza strain worldwide, it can be assumed that most cases of influenza in Ukraine are caused by the H1N1 virus,” the agency said in a statement.

The team will begin initial work in the Lviv region, where reported numbers of cases showing severe manifestations of acute respiratory illness have been especially high.



WHO staff prepare boxes of antiviral drugs to treat the H1N1 virus for dispatch to countries [File Photo]

While many questions remain to be answered, WHO stated that the outbreak in Ukraine may be indicative of how the virus can behave in the Northern Hemisphere during the winter season, particularly in health care settings typically found in Eastern Europe.

Despite concerns about the side effects of the H1N1 vaccine, WHO said it remains one of the best tools available to fight the virus.

“It has already been administered to hundreds of thousands of people. And so far we have not seen any severe side effects, and the number of side effects or adverse events, as we would call them, from this vaccine is in line with what we would expect from a seasonal flu vaccine,” said Mr. Hartl.

“Remember this vaccine is no different from any other vaccine in the sense that all vaccines will on rare occasions produce adverse events,” he noted, pointing out that the advantages of getting vaccinated far outweigh the risks at this point.

As of 25 October, there have been more than 440,000 laboratory confirmed cases of pandemic influenza H1N1 worldwide and over 5,700 deaths reported to WHO.