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General Assembly backs findings of UN report into Gaza conflict



The four person United Nations fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict

5 November - The General Assembly today endorsed the report of the United Nations investigation which found that both Israeli forces and Palestinian militants were guilty of serious human rights violations during the conflict in the Gaza Strip at the start of the year.

After two days of debate in the Assembly, at UN Headquarters in New York, 114 Member States voted in favour of a resolution endorsing the report's findings and its recommendations for further action. Eighteen States voted against the resolution and another 44 countries abstained.

The probe, led by Justice Richard Goldstone, a former war crimes prosecutor at the UN war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, found that both sides committed serious war crimes and breaches of humanitarian law, possibly amounting to crimes against humanity, during the conflict in December 2008 and January 2009.

The four-member fact-finding team called for a number of measures, including the referral of the report to the Security Council, since neither the Israeli Government nor the responsible Palestinian authorities have so far carried out any credible investigations into alleged violations.

General Assembly President Ali Treki, speaking to journalists after the resolution was adopted, said that "this vote is an important declaration against impunity. It is a call for justice and accountability."

Mr. Treki called on all concerned to devote themselves to implementing the contents of the resolution, which asks both the Israelis and Palestinians to carry out independent inquiries.

“Without justice, there can be no progress towards peace. A human being should be treated as a human being, regardless of his or her religion, race or nationality.”

The fact-finding mission was set up earlier this year at the request of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

UN’s Balkan war crimes tribunal decides to appoint defence counsel for Karadžić

5 November - The United Nations war crimes tribunal set up to prosecute the worst offences committed during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s today instructed its registrar to appoint a defence lawyer for former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, who stands accused of genocide.

As the court-appointed counsel for Mr. Karadžić will need time to prepare his case, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague also issued the decision to resume the trial on 1 March 2010.



Radovan Karadžić

Mr. Karadžić refused to appear at the start of his trial on 26 October, claiming his defence – which he has been preparing himself – was not ready, despite ICTY decisions stating that he had been given adequate time.

Mr. Karadžić received four separate warnings before and after the trial’s scheduled commencement date that his obstructive conduct would result in the Court assigning a lawyer to him and proceedings continuing without him.

Given his right to self-representation, Mr. Karadžić will continue to act in his own defence, including the handling of day-to-day matters, such as filing motions and responses to motions issued by the prosecution, as well as preparing himself for trial next year.

The ICTY said in a news release that should he be absent when the trial restarts in March or engage in other obstructive behaviour, he will forfeit the right to self-representation and the appointed counsel will take over his entire defence. The appointed defence lawyer will attend the trial in any case to step in at any time the trial chamber determines necessary.

Mr. Karadžić, who served as president of Republika Srpska and as head of the Serb Democratic Party and supreme commander of the Bosnian Serb military forces, was arrested last year and transferred to the custody of the ICTY after more than 13 years on the run.

He is charged with two counts of genocide and a series of other crimes, including murder, extermination, persecution, deportation and the taking of hostages, related to actions taken against Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats and other non-Serb civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995.

The indictment against him alleges he is responsible for the murder of more than 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica – supposedly a “safe haven” – in July 1995 in one of the most notorious events of the Balkan wars.

Mr. Karadžić is also accused of being responsible for the shelling and sniping of civilian areas of Sarajevo during a 44-month siege of the city.

UN to relocate some Afghanistan staff following deadly attack



The United Nations flag flies at half mast in honour of fallen staff members in Kabul, Afghanistan

5 November - The United Nations said today it will temporarily relocate some of its staff as part of increased security measures following the deadly attack in the Afghan capital last week that killed five UN staff members and injured several others.

“Effective immediately, the United Nations is taking additional steps to reduce risks to its national and international staff serving in Afghanistan. This is in light of the 28 October attack against UN staff in Kabul as well as further ongoing threats,” the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a statement.

“Although details of the new measures can not be made public, it is expected that they will involve short-term relocations for some staff while additional security is being put in

place,” the statement added.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack on the guest house in Kabul, where 34 UN staffers were staying.

Some 600 out of the roughly 1,100 international UN staff in Afghanistan will be temporarily relocated, either to safer locations within the country or outside the country. The UN has around 6,000 people working across the country in total.

“We are not talking about pulling out and we are not talking about evacuation,” Kai Eide, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of UNAMA, told reporters in Kabul.

“We’re simply doing what we have to, following the tragic event last week to look after our workers in a difficult moment while ensuring that our operations in Afghanistan can continue.”

Last week Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pledged that the attack – which killed five UN staff and injured nine others – will not deter the world body from its mission to help the Afghan people build a better future.

“We stand by the people of Afghanistan today, and we will do so tomorrow,” he told a news conference in New York on the day of the attack.

UNAMA reiterated that the world body is fully committed to helping all of Afghanistan’s people, as it has been for more than half a century, and stated that every effort will be made to minimize disruption to its activities while additional security steps are being taken.

Drugs and crime threaten recent stability in Guinea-Bissau, warn UN officials

5 November - The prospects for political stability in Guinea-Bissau appear to be good but are threatened by drug trafficking and organized crime, United Nations officials warned the Security Council today.

“Although there seems to be a downward trend in the trafficking of cocaine through West Africa over the past few months, drug trafficking and organized crime remain a significant challenge for stability in Guinea-Bissau and the sub-region,” said Joseph Mutaboba, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s representative in the West African nation.



Anonymous intermediary involved in drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there has been a significant drop in drug seizures in West Africa over the past 18 months, corroborated by a similarly strong decline in European drug seizures with West Africa as the suspected source.

However, as UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa told the Council, international efforts may have caused the trafficking routes to move further south, or farther inland.

“The threat to Guinea-Bissau – though less obvious than in the past – is still serious,” he stated, noting that there have been reports of smuggling through many privately-owned islands of the Bissau archipelago.

“The Government needs greater assistance to gain control over these islands, which provide a safe haven for light aircraft and fast boats,” said Mr. Costa. “I therefore urge this Council not to be complacent.”

The Executive Director also highlighted three new “disturbing” trends in the region. The first is that a growing amount of the drugs coming into West Africa are being consumed locally. “This is new, though not surprising,” he said, noting that low prices and high supply of cocaine, particularly in Guinea-Bissau, cause havoc among youth who are already affected by other problems.

In addition, there are reports of drug use – as well as trafficking – affecting the military, and, since July, UNODC and Interpol have been investigating numerous West African sites where they found large amounts of chemicals used in drug processing.

“West Africa is now on the verge of becoming a source of drugs, not only a transit area,” said Mr. Costa. “Organized crime is growing indigenous roots.”

Mr. Mutaboba reported that along with drug trafficking and organized crime, stability in Guinea-Bissau is also threatened by “hegemonic politics” and intra-party divisions. “Much depends on the governing party’s ability to evolve away from exclusionary politics and develop inclusiveness and accountability.”

Presenting Mr. Ban’s latest report on Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Mutaboba noted that the Government has focused on managing the consequences of the high-profile assassinations that took place in March and June, and there is a perception that in other critical areas, limited progress has been made.

In March then president João Bernardo Vieira was assassinated amid tensions between the Government and the military forces in a country marked by decades of civil conflicts, coups d’état and uprisings.

Then in June presidential candidate Baciro Dabó and the former defence minister Helder Proença were assassinated on the eve of the official launch of the electoral campaign.

Despite the tensions that followed the killings, the country held peaceful elections and President Malam Bacai Sanhá was inaugurated on 8 September.

Mr. Mutaboba, who heads the UN Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), stressed the need for a “transparent and thorough” investigation of the assassinations, as well as the alleged coup d’état of June, to fight impunity, restore public confidence and establish truth.

Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti of Brazil, who chairs the Guinea-Bissau Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, highlighted additional challenges facing the country, including reform of the security sector, and building State institutions that are able to address basic social needs, ensure security and promote human rights.

In a statement read out by Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the Council’s rotating presidency for November, the 15-member body reiterated the importance of consolidating democracy, security, the rule of law, national reconciliation and the fight against impunity to ensure sustainable peace in Guinea-Bissau.

It took note of the ongoing consultations between the UN, the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), to assist the Government in investigating the political assassinations of March and June.



“The Security Council calls upon the Government of Guinea-Bissau to expedite this process, and calls on the above mentioned organizations and the international community as a whole, to bring their support to this end.”

The Council also urged the Government to take the necessary actions to, among other matters, combat drug trafficking and organized crime, and to ensure that the security sector is effective, professional and accountable.

Former Rwandan tea industry executive jailed for eight years by UN tribunal

5 November - The former head of the government office that controlled the Rwandan tea industry was today sentenced to eight years in prison after being found guilty by a United Nations tribunal over his role in the African country’s 1994 genocide.

A three-judge panel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which sits in Arusha in neighbouring Tanzania, convicted Michel Bagaragaza of one count of complicity. The defendant had pleaded guilty to the charge earlier this year.

Judges Vagn Joensen (presiding), Bakhtiyar Tuzmukhamedov and Gberdao Gustave Kam said the jail sentence included credit for the time Mr. Bagaragaza has spent in detention since his arrest in August 2005.



Michel Bagaragaza before the UN Tribunal in Arusha on 16 August, 2005

The ICTR’s trial chamber found that Mr. Bagaragaza substantially contributed to the murder of more than 1,000 ethnic Tutsis who had sought refuge at Kesho Hill and at Nyundo Cathedral, both in Gisenyi prefecture and close to tea factories.

Prosecutors had told the tribunal that Mr. Bagaragaza aided and abetted the planners and perpetrators of the killings at the two locations, including military and civilian leaders, members of the notorious Interahamwe militia, the Presidential Guard and staff at two tea factories.

In his post as director general of OCIR/Thé, Mr. Bagaragaza controlled 11 tea factories that employed about 55,000 people. He was also the vice-president of a bank and a political leader in Gisenyi prefecture.

On 8 April 1994, within days of the start of the genocide, Mr. Bagaragaza participated in a meeting with two senior officials in Giciye commune and learned that the two men had agreed that one of them, Thomas Kuradusenge, would lead attacks against the Tutsis seeking refuge at Kesho Hill and Nyundo Cathedral.

“Bagaragaza authorized that vehicles and fuel from the Rubaya and Nyabihu tea factories be used to transport members of the Interahamwe for the attacks, that the attackers be provided with weapons, which he had allowed the army to conceal at the tea factories in 1993, and that personnel from the factories participate in the attacks,” according to a summary of the tribunal’s judgement.

“Moreover, he met with Kuradusenge two or three times between 9 and 13 April 1994 and on Kuradusenge’s request gave him a substantial amount of money to buy alcohol for the Interahamwe in order to motivate them to continue with the killings in the Kabaya and Bugoyi areas.”

The judges noted that Mr. Bagaragaza had shown “genuine remorse for his actions... [and] has provided invaluable assistance to the prosecution in its investigations,” and this warranted a substantial reduction in what would otherwise have been his sentence.

Mr. Bagaragaza has “to a remarkable degree contributed to the process of truth-finding with respect to the Rwandan tragedy and to national reconciliation.”

The judges also said that defence lawyers provided credible evidence that Mr. Bagaragaza showed no bias against Tutsis in his personal and professional life and was likely to have been motivated by concern for the safety of his family and himself

when he took part in the organization of the killings.

“However, there is no sufficient basis in the agreed facts or the evidence of character witnesses to conclude that Bagaragaza, being a very resourceful person, would have faced imminent danger had he not complied with the requests of the local political and Interahamwe leaders.”

The Security Council authorized the creation of the ICTR in late 1994 in response to the genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed, often by machete, within just 100 days starting in early April that year.

Top UN human rights official to embark on first official visit to Brazil

5 November - The United Nations human rights chief will begin her first official visit to Brazil on Saturday during which she will discuss a range of issues with Government officials, members of civil society and others in three major cities.

Navi Pillay kicks off her weeklong visit in the northern city of Salvador, according to a news release issued from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).



High Commissioner for Human Rights
Navi Pillay

She will visit an Afro-Brazilian community located close to Salvador, before proceeding to Rio de Janeiro on Monday, where she will visit one of the city's impoverished districts, known as favelas.

On Wednesday, Ms. Pillay begins her visit to the capital, Brasília, where she will attend the opening of Brazil's Human Rights Defenders Conference.

While in the capital, she is also slated to sign an agreement that includes measures for establishing three-way partnerships between Brazil, OHCHR, and other countries that request help in improving human rights protection.

Africa's efforts to achieve anti-poverty goals in peril, warns Migiro

END POVERTY 2015
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Make it happen

5 November - Africa's efforts to meet the global anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by their 2015 deadline are threatened by the impact of the global financial crisis on the continent's economies, said Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro.

“Despite some notable achievements, progress is off track across the continent,” she told the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Ms. Migiro noted that between 2000 and 2008, Africa achieved impressive economic growth that averaged more than five per cent per year.

“But that good news is in peril. The economic crisis, for which Africa bears no responsibility, has drastically reversed recent trends,” she said at the meeting, hosted by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

She noted that Africa's growth for 2009 is projected to hit a paltry 1.7 per cent. Many people are losing their jobs and falling back into poverty.

“Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals is likely to be adversely affected. The food and energy crises, as well

as climate change, will also complicate our work.”

Ms. Migiro urged the participants – who are examining how the various United Nations departments, agencies and other components work more effectively together – to implement the recommendations issued in July 2008 by the MDG Africa Steering Group.

Chaired by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Group called for a number of measures in such areas as agriculture, education, health and infrastructure to speed up Africa’s progress towards reaching the Goals.

Regarding agriculture, the Group called for the international community to mobilize over \$750 million to help the continent meet short-term needs that have arisen due to soaring food prices. It also urged African governments to work with global partners to launch a Green Revolution on the continent.

Ms. Migiro also invited participants to take part in the meeting planned for 23 November in New York of the MDG Africa Working Group to identify areas where action should be intensified.

Today’s gathering in Addis Ababa follows a similar regional coordination meeting convened in Beirut by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which was also attended by the Deputy Secretary-General.

UN lauds first ever rescue of abducted children in southern Sudan

5 November - The United Nations today hailed the rescue of 28 children who had been abducted in southern Sudan’s Jonglei state, and urged that all those still being held be released immediately.

“We call upon the relevant authorities to ensure that all children still in captivity be released as soon as possible, and that the practice of child abduction is brought to a stop wherever they may be in southern Sudan,” said Lise Grande, the UN Deputy Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator.



Child soldiers at a military camp in Nyal, southern Sudan [File Photo]

The 28 children – aged between 2 and 14 years – were released on 22 October, following a new initiative by the Commissioner of Pibor county, who has vowed to stamp out the scourge of child abduction in Jonglei state.

In May, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said that thousands of children are estimated to have been displaced from their homes since the start of 2009 due to attacks by the Ugandan rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Central and Western Equatoria, while repeated clashes between tribal groups in Jonglei, Lakes and Warrap states were believed to have resulted in the death and abduction of children.

More than 140 children had been reportedly abducted in Pibor county, while children were feared to be among the 450 people believed killed in Pibor and the 170 people killed in Akobo county.

The group just released, which includes nine Ethiopians from the Gambella region and eight Southern Sudanese from Eastern and Central Equatoria states, is being accommodated temporarily at a centre in Juba, the capital of southern Sudan, according to a statement issued by the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS).

Ms. Grande voiced her hope that those currently in Juba will be reunited with their families as soon as possible, and that other abducted children will also be freed at the earliest.

UNICEF has been working on child registration to facilitate the tracing of families and reunification, as well as follow-up monitoring.

War against hunger, global warming can be won on farmlands – UN report



Farmers can contribute to mitigate global emissions

5 November - The world's farmlands can be the frontline for the fight against the impact of climate change and the battle to feed the mounting global population, according to a new report released by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today.

The report noted that crop farming not only suffers from global warming, but also contributes 14 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

But agriculture also has the potential to play a critical role in slashing global emissions, with around 70 percent of the possibility of alleviating the effect of climate change coming from developing countries, FAO said.

Improvements in cropland and grazing land management as well as the restoration of organic soils and degraded lands are the most significant technical measures to lessen the impact of climate change.

Nearly, 90 per cent of this potential will come from capturing carbon in the soil before it escapes into the atmosphere, according to the report, *Food Security and Agricultural Mitigation in Developing Countries: Options for Capturing Synergies*.

Agricultural mitigation options that sequester carbon can include low tillage, utilizing residues for composting or mulching, use of perennial crops to cover soil, and re-seeding or improving grazing management on grasslands.

"Many effective strategies for climate change mitigation from agriculture also benefit food security, development and adaptation to climate change," said FAO Assistant Director-General Alexander Müller.

A move that may boost food production would involve increasing the levels of organic matter in soil, leading to better plant nutrition and increased water retention capacity, which will in turn eventually result in higher yields and greater resilience.

The FAO report highlighted other options that involve difficult trade-offs, such as biofuel production, which provides a clean alternative to fossil fuel but competes for land and water resources needed for food production.

Restoration of organic soils also enables greater carbon sequestration, but may reduce the land available for food production.

The report stressed that many of the technical mitigation options are readily available and could be deployed immediately, noting that while these measures often generate a net positive benefit over time, they involve significant up-front costs.

In a related development, the heads of the UN's Rome-based agencies – FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – met today ahead of the World Summit on Food Security in two weeks to determine ways of combining their expertise to better serve the world's one billion hungry people.

"The sum total of the Rome-based agencies is greater than our individual parts and roles," FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf, IFAD President Kanayo Nwanze and WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran said in a joint statement.

"To succeed we need to work together. This is the time to put actions ahead of words," they added.

The meeting brought together top management teams to advance initiatives ranging from joint administrative efficiencies to strategic country-led food security programmes, and to build on progress made over the past two years improving cost-efficiency and cooperation.

UNESCO unveils winners of three prizes for science



5 November - An Indian professor, a Vietnamese professor, a Tunisian expert in water management and the organization responsible for Spain's national park system are the winners of three awards announced today by the head of the United Nations agency tasked with promoting science.

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), presented the prizes in Budapest, Hungary, where the three-day World Science Forum has opened.

The annual Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science has been jointly awarded to Yash Pal of India and Trinh Xuan Thuan of Viet Nam, UNESCO said in a press release.

Professor Pal was recognized for his participation in many Indian television programmes that deal with popular science, including Turning Point and Science is everywhere. He also helped establish the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics in Pune and the Centre for Educational Communication in Ahmedabad.

Professor Trinh is a world-renowned astrophysicist who in 2004 discovered the youngest known galaxy in the universe. He has written more than 200 academic articles on galaxies and authored a series of books, including an illustrated history of the Big Bang and a dialogue with the Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard.

Mr. Matsuura announced that the Great Man-Made River International Water Prize for Arid and Semi-Arid Zones, awarded every two years, has been given to Bellachheb Chahbani.

Dr. Chahbani has spent more than 25 years at the Institute of Arid Regions in Médenine, Tunisia, and his research has helped improve water management and optimize irrigation systems by reducing evaporation and run-off.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation, handed out every two years on the recommendation of the Bureau of the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO'S Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, has been issued to Spain's Autonomous Authority for National Parks (known by its Spanish acronym as OAPN).

The authority, which falls under the Spanish ministry of environment, rural and marine areas, runs the national park system and promotes international cooperation on the management of protected areas.

UN helps assess relief needs in wake of deadly typhoon in Viet Nam



Roads are regularly flooded and washed away in the aftermath of typhoons [File Photo]

5 November - United Nations aid workers are taking part in a rapid assessment mission in three provinces of central Viet Nam, among the areas hit hardest by Typhoon Mirinae, which has killed at least 98 people and left a trail of destruction worth more than \$56 million.

A disaster management working group, comprised of UN humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has dispatched an assessment team to Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa and Binh Dinh provinces.

The three provinces are among seven in Viet Nam that have been badly affected by Mirinae (also known as Santi) since it made landfall in the Asian nation early on Monday, two days after it pounded the northern Philippines.

More than 1,100 homes have collapsed from the heavy winds and rains, while another 15,000 houses have been damaged and 44,000 others flooded. At least 26 hospitals have also been damaged, as well as schools, public buildings and basic

infrastructure, including transport, irrigation, communications and energy systems.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the death toll has climbed to 98, with 20 people missing and 60 others injured, citing figures from authorities in Viet Nam.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which is sending staff to the rapid assessment mission, has started delivering water purification materials to the affected provinces.

The wider region has been hard hit by a series of typhoons and tropical storms, with four striking within the past five weeks. The northern Philippines has been the area worst affected.

Working together, nations can tackle today's major challenges – Ban

5 November - No country, however, powerful, can tackle alone the multiple challenges facing the world, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, stressing the need to work together on issues such as climate change, the economic crisis and global peace and security.

"We are all in this together. And we must act together," Mr. Ban said in his remarks to the Hellenic Parliament, becoming the first UN Secretary-General to address the body.

"That is why I say it is time for renewed multilateralism – a multilateralism that delivers for real people in real time," he added.

Mr. Ban, who wrapped up his two-day visit to Athens today, highlighted climate change as one area where countries can work together to make a difference.

"These are crucial days," he noted, with only four weeks to go until the climate change conference in Copenhagen, where countries are expected to wrap up talks on an ambitious new agreement to tackle global warming.

"We must have a global agreement – an agreement which is comprehensive, balanced, equitable and binding," he stated.

Likewise, all members of the international community should work together to spread economic opportunity more widely, he said, noting that the "clock is ticking" on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – the set of global anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

In addition, united action can help strengthen global peace and security, including in the area of disarmament, as well as successfully address long-standing regional concerns.

In this regard, Mr. Ban reiterated that he is "cautiously optimistic" about prospects for a settlement in Cyprus, noting the steady progress being made in UN-backed talks between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders aimed at unifying the Mediterranean island.

He said he was also encouraged by the Greek Government's clear endorsement of a continuing role for the UN in the negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the dispute over the latter's name.

"Now is the time for transformational change on all of these big issues," said the Secretary-General. "This is our chance. Now is our time to act."



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the Greek Parliament

UN peacekeepers involved in abuse are being punished, world body says



UNMEE peacekeepers

5 November - Dozens of United Nations peacekeepers implicated in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation have been disciplined and punished, a spokesperson for the world body said today.

The UN has imposed a zero-tolerance policy against sexual abuse and exploitation by its peacekeepers, and senior officials have reiterated in recent years that this means there is no impunity for blue helmets who engage in such practices.

UN spokesperson Michele Montas said that, since January, troop-contributing countries have reported that 33 military personnel implicated in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation while serving in UN operations have been disciplined and punished.

This is according to the Department of Field Support (DFS), which added that the punishments included forced retirement, withdrawal of officer's commission, various lengths of imprisonment and outright dismissal.

Last year, two military personnel received such disciplinary action and there were 15 such cases the year before, Ms. Montas told reporters in New York.

In addition, disciplinary action was taken, over the past three years, against 20 military personnel for cases involving other forms of misconduct, such as negligent loss of firearms, traffic-related violations and fraud or theft.

Some of the cases involved peacekeepers who served in Haiti, Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which hosts the largest UN peacekeeping mission worldwide.

Deployment of UN peacekeepers is at a record high, with more than 113,000 personnel serving in 18 operations on four continents.

While not providing details about those engaged in misconduct, Ms. Montas said there have been a number of cases where people have been repatriated, with follow-up action by troop-contributing countries.

"When allegations of misconduct are substantiated against any military or police serving in UN peacekeeping, the UN repatriates the individuals concerned and then bans them from participating in future peacekeeping operations."

She added that the UN tries to pursue cases of any misconduct as far as it can. Beyond that, national tribunals and national courts have a role to play.

"The UN is trying to get troop contributors to do more in prosecuting and punishing their nationals who engage in misconduct," said the spokesperson.

Ms. Montas stressed that there has been an increase in the number of requests and responses to those requests in dealing with the issue.

In 2009, the UN sent 112 requests for action taken concerning all forms of misconduct, including but not limited to sexual exploitation and abuse, and received 14 responses as of 3 November.

By comparison, she noted, the UN sent 192 such requests in 2008 and received six responses on action taken, while 146 requests were made and nine responses received in 2007.

International Criminal Court trial of former DR Congo leader to start next April

5 November - The International Criminal Court (ICC) announced today that the trial of Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, a former senior official of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who has been charged with war crimes, will begin in April 2010.

Mr. Bemba, the former Congolese Vice President, faces charges for alleged crimes committed in the Central African Republic (CAR) between October 2002 and March 2003, including rape, murder and pillaging.



Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, former DR Congo Vice-President on trial for war crimes.

Judges at the Hague-based ICC found that Mr. Bemba had the “necessary criminal intent” when in 2002 he ordered his armed group, the Mouvement de libération du Congo (MLC), into CAR to back up embattled leader Ange-Félix Patassé.

According to the Court, MLC fighters committed war crimes and crimes against humanity on that mission, with Mr. Bemba “effectively acting as military commander.”

He was transferred to the ICC in July 2008 after being arrested by Belgian police. In September, the Court decided that Mr. Bemba will remain in custody until the start of his trial, reversing an earlier decision to grant him temporary conditional release.

The situation in CAR is one of four – along with Darfur, DRC and Uganda – currently under investigation by the Prosecutor of the ICC, an independent, permanent court that tries persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Malnutrition on the rise among rural Tajik children, UN warns



WFP has been providing daily hot meals to 360,000 children attending primary schools in rural Tajikistan

5 November - Young children in rural Tajikistan are increasingly likely to be malnourished because of a lack of food, poor water quality and high prices for many basic products, United Nations aid agencies said today, warning that the children are now at greater risk of contracting infectious diseases.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that nutrition levels of rural Tajik children “has been deteriorating significantly,” with the percentage of children under the age of five classified as underweight for their height almost doubling to more than 10 per cent between January and July this year.

The proportion of children of the same age group considered to be severely malnourished rose from 1.9 per cent to 4.3 per cent in the same period.

OCHA said poor water quality during the summer months – following heavy floods and mudslides in the spring – in Tajikistan has led to more frequent bouts of diarrhoea among local children.

Food prices in the mountainous Central Asian country have also been particularly high during and immediately after the last winter, while there has been a lack of available food as well.

OCHA warned that infectious disease rates are likely to rise because of the poor nutrition, and this could in turn lead to more prolonged and severe cases of diarrhoea and of respiratory illnesses.

Since September, to coincide with the start of the school year, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been providing daily hot meals to 360,000 children attending primary schools in rural Tajikistan.

The agency also delivers food to an estimated 260,000 Tajiks considered to be in hardship regions, and also to 15,000 tuberculosis patients and their families.

WFP provides a series of other forms of assistance, including take-home rations for schoolgirls, food-for-work projects and nutritional supplements for malnourished children and their mothers.