



In the headlines:

- Secretary-General en route to Italy to meet with G8 leaders
- Violence against Afghan women widespread and unpunished, finds UN report
- UN launches initiative to rid West Africa of organized crime, drug trafficking
- Five years after judgment, Israel barrier still under construction – UN
- UN war crimes tribunal rejects Karadžić claim for immunity from prosecution
- Uprooted Pakistanis express desire to return home to UN relief chief
- Lebanon and neighbours need to make more progress – UN envoy
- UN-backed fund reaches over 2 million people worldwide with AIDS treatment
- Fight against heart attacks, strokes and cancers gets boost with new UN initiative
- Foreign direct investment policies of G20 nations generally positive, says UN report
- UNICEF welcomes release of almost 200 child soldiers by Central African rebel force
- Bill Clinton wraps up first visit to Haiti as UN special envoy

More stories inside

Secretary-General en route to Italy to meet with G8 leaders

8 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is heading today to the Italian city of L'Aquila, where he will meet with the leaders who are attending the annual summit of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized nations, after wrapping up his first official visit to Ireland.

In a letter sent to G8 leaders ahead of their 8-10 July summit, Mr. Ban highlighted climate change and development as some of the current challenges requiring action.

Among other things, Mr. Ban asked G8 governments to take the lead on the issue of climate change by making “ambitious and firm commitments” to slash greenhouse gas emissions by 25-40 per cent, the levels the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says are required on the part of industrialized countries to ward off the worst effects of global warming.

On development, the Secretary-General urged the G8 to outline how donors will scale up aid to Africa over the next year to fulfil the commitments the Group made at its summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, in 2005.

Mr. Ban departed for Italy from Ireland, where he met today with Irish Defence Minister Willie O’Dea. They travelled to the McKee Barracks, where the Secretary-General met with a group of veteran UN peacekeepers from Ireland and also took part in a ceremony paying respect to Irish peacekeepers that made the ultimate sacrifice while serving the Organization.

The UN chief is scheduled to travel again next week to attend the 15 July Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Sharm



el-Sheikh, Egypt, where he will deliver an address encouraging the group to build on its leadership role to address some of today's challenges, including disarmament, the economic crisis and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The eight MDGs – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education – have a target date of 2015, as agreed by world leaders in 2000.

Violence against Afghan women widespread and unpunished, finds UN report



Girls attending the community-based school in the village of Hussain Khel (file photo)

8 July - Violence against women, including rape, is widespread in Afghanistan, according to a new United Nations report, which details the extent of the problem against a backdrop of impunity and a failure by authorities to protect women's rights.

“This report paints a detailed and deeply disturbing picture of the situation facing many Afghan women today,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said of the 32-page report issued jointly by her office (OHCHR) and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

“The limited space that opened up for Afghan women following the demise of the Taliban regime in 2001 is under sustained attack, not just by the Taliban themselves, but by deeply engrained cultural practices and customs, and – despite a number of significant advances in terms of the creation of new legislation and institutions – by a chronic failure at all levels of government to advance the protection of women's rights in Afghanistan.”

The report, launched today in Kabul by the UN and Indian actress and social activist Shabana Azmi, touches on various aspects of the scourge, including so-called “honour” killings, the exchange of women and girls as a form of dispute resolution, trafficking and abduction, early and forced marriages, and domestic violence.

It focuses on two principal issues – the “growing trend” of violence and threats against women in public life, and rape and sexual violence.

Afghan women participating in almost all sectors of public life, including parliamentarians, civil servants and journalists, “have been targeted by anti-government elements, by local traditional and religious power-holders, by their own families and communities, and in some instances by government authorities,” says the report.

Although the Afghan Constitution includes a 25 per cent quota for female members of parliament – one of the highest such quotas in the world – the report also notes that “a number of female MPs have already indicated that due to the prevailing security situation and death threats they repeatedly receive, they will not be contesting the next national assembly elections in 2010.”

The report also details numerous attacks on girls' schools, and on girl students – including gas and acid attacks – by “anti-government elements.”

When it comes to sexual violence, the report states that rape is both widespread and taboo, and it is the victims that are more likely to be punished than the perpetrators. “Only in a few isolated cases have public institutions taken appropriate action. In many instances, victims seeking help and justice are further victimized... Government action to address rape is woefully inadequate.”

The report notes that there is no explicit provision in the 1976 Afghan Penal Code criminalising rape, and a survey of convicted rapists in one Afghan prison indicated that they did not know that rape was a criminal offence.

In addition, police and judicial officials are often not aware or convinced that rape is a serious criminal offence, the report states, and “investigating a rape case is rarely a priority.”

The High Commissioner stressed that the Government has a duty to eradicate these practices, by making them illegal, educating its population and demonstrating leadership and commitment to safeguard the rights of all Afghan women and girls.

“The silence surrounding the widely-known problem of violence against the girls and women of Afghanistan must be broken,” she stated.

Kai Eide, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, emphasized that political and other leaders had to address this issue more vigorously and not leave it to human rights activists or women alone.

“The problem isn’t that violence against women is being condoned. It’s not,” said Mr. Eide. “The problem is that violence against women is not being challenged or condemned. And that has implications both for countless individual victims and for the country’s future development.”

UN launches initiative to rid West Africa of organized crime, drug trafficking

8 July - To combat organized crime and drug trafficking wreaking havoc in West Africa, the United Nations today launched a new initiative to tackle the scourge in the region, where \$1 billion worth of cocaine transits through annually.

The West Africa Coast Initiative is a partnership of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), along with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Interpol.



Cocaine haul

The new scheme seek to address West Africa’s porous borders, weak governance and corruption, which have been allowed traffickers to operate in a climate of impunity.

According to a new UNODC report released yesterday, organized crime – including trafficking in human beings, counterfeit drugs, toxic wastes and even natural resources – is arresting development in the region while lining the pockets of a select few.

In some cases, the value of trafficked goods exceeds the gross domestic product (GDP) of West African nations, which are among the world’s poorest, it added, noting that a powerful select group is profiting from the illegal trade.

“We’ll be focusing on post-conflict situations,” UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa told reporters at UN Headquarters today, noting that Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone will be the focus of the Initiative.

He added that if democratic elections can be held soon in Guinea, it, too, will be added to the list of nations.

Yesterday, Said Djinnit, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for West Africa and head of UNOWA, briefed the Security Council, underscoring that the already fragile situation in the region has been exacerbated by drug trafficking and organized crime.

UNOWA, he said at today’s press briefing, has been working to sensitize the region, especially the leaders of its countries, about the implication of the scourge on efforts to consolidate peace and stability in West Africa.

For his part, Andrew Hughes, UN Police Adviser for DPKO, said that the Initiative will comprise UN Police (UNPOL), who will be mentored and advised by international experts, with participation from Interpol.

“It will have global reach through the Interpol network, be regionally coordinated, internationally mentored, but locally owned,” he said today, voicing hope that this collaborative method will be successful in disrupting organized crime

networks.

Five years after judgment, Israel barrier still under construction – UN

8 July - Five years after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found that Israel's building of a barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory was illegal, the situation has not improved, the United Nations human rights arm said today, calling for the dismantlement of the barrier.

Tomorrow marks the five-year anniversary of the Court's Advisory Opinion, in which it called on Israel to halt construction and bring an end to its system of curbing the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the West Bank.



Palestinian women walk near Israel's barrier near Ramallah in the West Bank

By a majority of 14 to 1, the judges found that the barrier's construction breaches international law, saying it violated principles outlined in the UN Charter and long-standing global conventions that prohibit the threat or use of force and the acquisition of territory that way, as well as principles upholding the right of peoples to self-determination.

Although Israel claims the barrier is only a temporary security measure, the ICJ said that the specific route chosen is unnecessary to achieve its security objectives, with most of the barrier running inside the West Bank, instead of the so-called Green Line, or 1949 Armistice Line.

But in the five years since the Advisory Opinion was issued, "Israel continues to disregard the views of the ICJ, and the Wall remains under construction," being 60 per cent completed, the West Bank branch of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said today.

"The Wall is but one element of the wider system of severe restrictions on the freedom of movement imposed by the Israeli authorities on Palestinian residents of the West Bank," according to a press release issued by OHCHR.

At present, more than 600 closures block Palestinians' movement in the West Bank, while an increasingly segregated road system restrict travel for them while Israelis can move freely.

Such constraints not only curtail Palestinians' freedom of movement, but also impede a host of other human rights, including the right to work, health, education and an adequate standard of living.

"And Palestinian residents currently lack meaningful access to an effective remedy – judicial or otherwise – for their plight," OHCHR said, calling on Israel to comply with the ICJ's Advisory Opinion and make reparations for any damage caused.

For his part, Maxwell Gaylard, the top UN humanitarian official in the occupied Palestinian territory, said today in Jerusalem that "there is still time to change the situation."

UN humanitarian agencies, he added, are calling for a freeze in the construction of the barrier in the West Bank and its re-routing to the Green Line, in light of both the Advisory Opinion and the humanitarian impact.

In Gaza, Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), welcomed a group of Gazan youth who recently returned from a three-week recreational tour to Poland to her office today.

Organized by the Polish Government with the aim of helping children affected by the recent hostilities in Gaza, more than 70 youngsters spent one week in the capital, Warsaw, undergoing psychological and medical treatment, and then the next two weeks touring the Eastern European nation.

They visited castles, a water park, a zoo and a cinema, with one child telling Ms. AbuZayd that the day he boarded the plane to Warsaw was “the best day of his life.”

One of the children on the tour, 12-year-old Mahmoud Samouni, lost 48 members of his extended family during the three-week clashes which killed at least 1,300 Palestinians and wounded some 5,300. The heavy bombardment and fighting also reduced buildings and other infrastructure to rubble.

UN war crimes tribunal rejects Karadžić claim for immunity from prosecution

8 July - The United Nations war crimes tribunal for the 1990s Balkan conflicts today rejected an application by the former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić that he should be granted immunity from prosecution because of an agreement he says he struck with the United States Government in 1996.

Three judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), sitting in The Hague, denied a motion by lawyers for Mr. Karadžić, saying he had not been able to establish that there has been an abuse of process.

Mr. Karadžić says that he reached a deal with US representatives, led by its official Richard Holbrooke, that he would be immune from any subsequent war crimes prosecution if he gave up politics and withdrew from public life in mid-1996. Mr. Holbrooke has denied making such an agreement.

But the ICTY agreed with prosecutors that Mr. Karadžić could not show that any such agreement was arranged under the authority of the Security Council, which set up the tribunal to handle the cases of the worst atrocities committed during the Balkan wars.

After more than a decade as a fugitive, Mr. Karadžić – who served as the president of Republika Srpska and commander of Bosnian Serb forces during part of the 1990s – was arrested a year ago and transferred to The Hague to stand trial on charges of genocide, complicity in genocide, extermination, murder, wilful killing, persecutions, deportations, inhumane acts and other crimes.



International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) building in The Hague

Uprooted Pakistanis express desire to return home to UN relief chief



A displaced family arrives in Sugar Mill new camp, in Charsadda district, Pakistan

8 July - Displaced Pakistanis, driven from their homes by fighting between Government forces and militants in north-west of the country, today expressed their desire to return home as soon as possible to the top United Nations relief official.

On the second day of his four-day visit to the South Asian nation, John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, visited Peshawar, Mardan and Swabi in North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

In Peshawar, he met with Owais Ahmed Ghani, the provincial governor, as well as top officials from NWFP, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and UN agencies.

Mr. Holmes expressed his appreciation to the Government, but also voiced concerns the difficulties faced by some people in registering and about preparations for the monsoon season, which is set to begin in a few weeks. Authorities, in turn, said they are worried about the resumption of education when the school year begins on 1 September, given that those uprooted by fighting are sheltering in nearly 4,000 schools.

Mr. Holmes and the Government agreed that returns should begin as soon as possible, provided they are voluntary and sustainable.

In Mardan and Swabi, the UN official met with internally displaced persons (IDPs).

“Many of them told me they would leave this very afternoon – if conditions were right,” he said. “But they need to be sure that they will be safe when they go back, that basic services are there, and most importantly that they will not have to leave their homes again.”

The vast majority of the 2 million people displaced by the crisis are living in spontaneous settlements, rented accommodations or with host families.

Mr. Holmes, who also serves as UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, he visited a spontaneous camp, currently home to 3,000 uprooted people who live in a very basic, crowded school complex.

In Jamal Garhi, he visited a village where the 1,500-strong population has doubled since the crisis, with one family of seven taking in 95 distant relatives from Swat.

He also stopped at Sang-e-Marmar hub, where hundreds of IDPs are receiving rations and supplies from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Mr. Holmes wrapped up his day by visiting the Yar Hussain camp, where nearly 30,000 displaced people mostly from Buner district – where he will be going tomorrow – are taking shelter.

“We still need to do more to help people both now and in the coming months,” he said, stressing that host families and communities need particular help. “Those who will remain displaced will need help for some time, and those who go back will need help for six months to make sure they can stand on their own feet again.”

UNHCR said yesterday that preparations continue in the displacement camps, with the monsoon season beginning shortly.

The agency’s spokesperson Ron Redmond told reporters in Geneva that, depending on the intensity of the monsoon, some families may have to be relocated to other areas less prone to flooding.

Lebanon and neighbours need to make more progress – UN envoy



Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams briefs journalists

8 July - The formation of new Governments in Lebanon and Israel bodes well for the implementation of the Security Council resolution that helped to end their 2006 war, a senior United Nations envoy said today, while lamenting the lack of progress on several key outstanding issues.

“Unfortunately, there remain many areas of 1701 where there has been little progress,” Michael Williams, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, told reporters after briefing the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report on the resolution’s implementation.

Resolution 1701 called for, among other matters, renewed respect for the Blue Line separating the Lebanese forces and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the disarming of militias and an end to arms smuggling.

Mr. Williams noted that, despite repeated criticism by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Israeli air violations of the Blue Line continue “unabated and on a daily basis.”

In addition, no date has been set for a withdrawal of the IDF from the northern part of the village of Ghajar, as required under resolution 1701.

As noted by Mr. Ban in his report, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) submitted a proposal one year ago to facilitate the full withdrawal of the IDF. The Lebanese Government said last August that it was ready to accept the proposal.



While Israeli officials reaffirmed their commitment to resolving the issue, they said they were not in a position to provide a definitive response since the new Government was undertaking a comprehensive policy review.

The Special Coordinator said the issue of Israel's withdrawal from Ghajar is going to be one of the main areas of work in the coming months. "We believe now with a new Government in Israel, the formation of a new Government in Lebanon, the hard work of UNIFIL, that the atmosphere may be more propitious to a settlement."

He added that he believed the Ghajar issue "is far more achievable in the short run" than that of the Shab'a Farms area, which Lebanon and Syria have yet to resolve. The establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two neighbours over the past year, he noted, provides a "sound basis" on which to tackle their border issues.

"We believe that with the successful implementation of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, and other positive developments in the relations between the two countries... that the next step to be taken will be the delineation of the common border between the two countries."

Mr. Williams said a "deeply disturbing" development in recent months was the uncovering of alleged Israeli spy networks in many parts of Lebanon.

"If these allegations are confirmed in court, this would constitute a very serious violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and, consequently, undermine relevant Security Council resolutions," he stated.

As for allegations that UNIFIL was facilitating the passage of individuals involved in the spy rings across the Blue Line, Mr. Williams described them as "without foundation."

Despite these developments, he said he believed that, "three years after the 2006 war, with the renewal of a democratic mandate for the new Government of Lebanon that Prime Minister Saad Hariri is trying to form, there is a sound basis in the coming months for proceeding with the further implementation of 1701."

UN-backed fund reaches over 2 million people worldwide with AIDS treatment

8 July - More than 2 million people living with HIV have been reached with life-saving treatment thanks to the United Nations-backed Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, marking a 30 per cent jump from last year.

Results released today show that on top of the 2.3 million people receiving anti-retroviral medicines for AIDS, Global Fund-backed schemes have also provided 5.4 million people with effective treatment for TB, the leading cause of death among HIV-infected people.



Further, the Fund reported success in the fight against malaria, with 88 million insecticide-treated bednets delivered to families, up from 59 million nets last year.

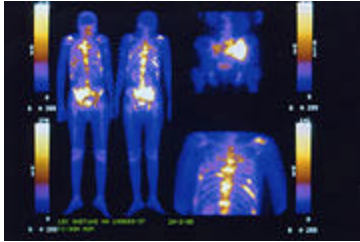
"In less than eight years, the Global Fund has gone from a concept to a driver of change," said Executive Director Michel Kazatchkine. "When we first began our work in 2002, few people in developing countries were being treated for AIDS or tuberculosis. Malaria was a neglected disease. Many countries simply did not have the resources to fight these diseases effectively."

But now, "the story is changing dramatically," he said, adding that while greater efforts are needed, "real progress" against the diseases has been made.

The information released today combined data from Global Fund-supported initiatives in 140 countries, and showed, among other things, that nearly 80 million people have been reached by HIV counselling and testing, almost 4 million AIDS orphans and vulnerable children have been provided with basic care and support, and 1.4 billion condoms have been

distributed worldwide.

Fight against heart attacks, strokes and cancers gets boost with new UN initiative



Whole body scan of patient being reviewed to assess the spread of cancer

8 July - The United Nations health agency today launched a network of leading global experts and groups to help boost efforts to combat noncommunicable diseases, such as heart attacks, strokes and cancers, and to ensure these issues are given priority.

The new Global Noncommunicable Disease Network (NCDnet) will unite currently fragmented efforts by bringing the cancer, cardiovascular, diabetes and respiratory communities together with tobacco control, healthy diets, and physical activity advocates, according to a news release issued by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Integrating the prevention of noncommunicable diseases and injuries into the national and global development agendas is not only achievable but also a priority for developing countries,” said Dr. Ala Alwan, WHO’s Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

“The goals of the new network are to increase focus on the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, to increase resource availability and to catalyse effective multi-stakeholder action at global and country levels,” he noted.

Noncommunicable diseases cause 38 million deaths annually and together with injuries are responsible for 70 per cent of all global deaths, WHO noted, adding that 80 per cent of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Deaths from noncommunicable diseases worldwide are estimated to increase by 17 per cent over the next 10 years, with the greatest increase projected in Africa (27 per cent).

Supported by the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and leading non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the network will advocate for raising the priority given to noncommunicable diseases in development work at the national and international levels.

“The challenges policymakers face include how to address the links between noncommunicable diseases and poverty, how to minimize the health and economic losses among the economically active population, and how to prepare for the pressures on health systems resulting from the growing numbers of people with noncommunicable diseases,” said Joy Phumaphi, Vice-President of the Human Development Network of the World Bank.

This year’s annual session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), currently meeting in Geneva, is focusing on global public health. WHO said it expects that many delegates will call for setting goals in the fight against noncommunicable diseases, as has been done for other health challenges in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015.

Foreign direct investment policies of G20 nations generally positive, says UN report



8 July - A review conducted by the United Nations trade and development arm shows that the Group of 20 (G20) countries have for the most part refrained from taking policy measures that restrict foreign direct investment (FDI), but warns that some economic stimulus packages could give rise to “smart” protectionism.

A substantial number of the policies surveyed among the G20 – an informal forum comprising 19 nations and the European Union – by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) were in fact conducive to facilitating investment, the agency says

in a news release.

The review, which looked at policy developments between October 2008 and June 2009, points to positive investment specific measures such as those that smooth the way for the entry of foreign investors or facilitate foreign investment projects in host countries.

Some countries have also enacted measures to encourage outward investment by domestic companies, including those for streamlining the approval process, and providing financing and insurance.

UNCTAD also notes that investment-related measures were positive, including the various State aid or economic stimulus packages enacted by a majority of countries in response to the economic and financial crisis.

At the same time, the report cautions against the emergence of what can be described as “smart” protectionism from economic stimulus packages. It adds that protectionist pressures could still arise as the crisis spreads to less-affected economic sectors and countries, and a “new wave of economic nationalism” could occur in the aftermath of the crisis.

The report on policy trends is part of the agency’s contribution to its flagship World Investment Report series, and seeks to help officials get the most out of FDI, which UNCTAD says is crucial to assisting both developed and developing countries recover from the ongoing crisis.

UNICEF welcomes release of almost 200 child soldiers by Central African rebel force

8 July - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has welcomed the release of nearly 200 child soldiers by a Central African rebel group and called for more demobilizations in the conflict-torn country.

The People’s Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD) has released 166 boys and 16 girls aged between 10 and 17 since April, and nearly all those child soldiers have since been reunited with their families, UNICEF said in a statement issued yesterday.

The release of the child soldiers follows the rebels’ signature of a peace agreement last year and a visit to the Central African Republic (CAR) by Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

“We are extremely pleased that APRD leaders are following through with their commitment to surrender the children in their ranks,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF’s representative in Bangui, the CAR capital.

The UN agency has been working closely with the CAR Government and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to plan and coordinate the release of the children, who mostly hail from Ouham Pendé province in the north of the country.

Two transit centres were built and each released child was given a “demobilization kit” that includes clothes, sleeping mats, blankets and personal hygiene items. The former soldiers also receive medical check-ups, basic literacy and mathematics classes and counselling.

When the children return to their former communities they can participate in catch-up classes to facilitate their reintegration into regular schools, while older children can attend training programmes in such areas as animal husbandry, tailoring and carpentry.

But Mr. Mdoe stressed that the former child soldiers are usually returning to communities with limited access to basic services and few employment opportunities. Sporadic fighting continues in northern CAR, particularly near the borders with Chad and Sudan.



A Central African Republic rebel group has released nearly 200 child soldiers since April 2009

“Reintegration is a long and often difficult process in any circumstance, and the prevailing climate of insecurity adds to the challenges,” he said. “We need to keep up our assistance to these communities if we want the demobilization programme to succeed.”

UNICEF is calling for an additional \$1 million to ensure that the demobilization and reintegration of the child soldiers can continue.

Bill Clinton wraps up first visit to Haiti as UN special envoy

8 July - Former United States President Bill Clinton is wrapping up a three-day visit to Haiti today, his first since being appointed United Nations Special Envoy for the impoverished Caribbean nation.

During a visit to the country in March, Mr. Clinton and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon assessed the situation in the wake of four back-to-back tropical storms that battered the country in 2008, killing nearly 800 people and affecting an estimated 1 million people.

Mr. Clinton’s current trip was aimed at discussing how to support Government efforts to brace the country for hurricanes, generate new jobs and boost the delivery of basic social services.

Today he met with representatives of the private sector, women’s groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and discussed the key challenges facing them today in Haiti. The meetings aimed to ensure private sector investments in the country, coordination of NGO activities and the inclusion of women in recovery efforts.

Last night, Mr. Clinton and President René Préval had a working dinner with donors to encourage them to honour the commitments they made at a pledging conference in Washington, D.C. in April and align their contributions to the Government’s recovery plan.

The dinner capped off a day that included visits to, among others, the city of Gonaïves, which was devastated by floods last year, and to an emergency hospital that has temporarily replaced one destroyed by hurricanes.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, with an annual estimated gross domestic product (per capita) of \$390.

UN envoy in Greece to discuss former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia name issue

8 July - The United Nations envoy tasked with mediating talks between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the dispute over the latter’s name is in Athens for talks with Greek representatives.

Matthew Nimetz, the Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy for the talks, met with Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis today to hear the latest views of the Greek Government.

Mr. Nimetz also conveyed the views of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the name issue after having just held two days of talks in Skopje, as well as his own amended proposals for resolving the issue.

He said Greece agreed to study the proposals and to respond soon with their comments.

Mr. Nimetz, who also met with opposition leader George Papandreou while in Athens, said he is keeping in touch with UN Member States that are interested in the name issue, as well as the European Union.



The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Haiti, former US President Bill Clinton, meeting with residents of Gonaïves



Personal Envoy Matthew Nimetz

The Interim Accord of 13 September 1995, which was brokered by the UN, details the difference between the two countries on the issue. It also obliges the two sides to continue negotiations under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to try to reach agreement.

Insecurity in eastern DR Congo still hindering humanitarian aid operations – UN

8 July - The precarious security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where rebel fighters are continuing attacks against several villages, is a major obstacle to assistance programmes in the area, the United Nations humanitarian arm said today.

According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's latest report on the DRC, there are some 1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country's volatile east, with 500,000 having been uprooted since this January due to clashes between the FARDC and the rebel Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR).



Thousands of civilians have fled violence in eastern DRC

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported today that FDLR fighters have continued their attacks on villages and towns in the areas of Lubero, Masisi and Walikale in North Kivu province, committing atrocities that include forced labour, sexual violence, arson and looting.

“The precarious security situation continues to be a major obstacle to the implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes in North Kivu,” UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters. “Remote parts of the territories of Masisi and Walikale remain inaccessible.”

Attacks against humanitarian workers have also continued, according to OCHA. During the first half of 2009, there were 66 incidents of violence against humanitarian workers, compared to 37 incidents during the corresponding period in 2008.

Mr. Ban noted in his report that the security and humanitarian situation in eastern DRC is still a major concern, despite the recent signing of a peace pact between the Government and one of the main combatants in the fighting, the National Congress for People's Defence (CNDP).

Iranian Kurd refugees in Iraq relocated from no-man's land to camp – UN

8 July - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has shut down a makeshift camp, home to nearly 200 Iranian Kurds refugees, in the no-man's land on the Iraqi-Jordanian border, relocating them to another site on Iraq's border with Syria.

The 186 Iranian Kurds were moved by UNHCR's Office in Iraq to Al Waleed camp, which already hosts 1,400 Palestinian refugees.



Iranian-Kurdish refugees at the Kawa camp

Most Iranian Kurds refugees in Iraq live in the Kawa settlement set up by the agency and the Kurdistan Regional Government in 2006, following the closure of a camp in Anbar.

However, this group of 186 refugees fled to the border village of Trebil, creating challenges for UNHCR, which was providing them with basic assistance, and for the Iraqi Government, which provides security. Authorities had set a 5 July 2009 deadline for them to leave the no-man's land and relocate to Al Waleed.

“Their previous location, which was very difficult to access, created limitations for how far we could go in providing support,” said Daniel Endres, UNHCR Representative in Iraq, voicing hope that the agency will be better able to provide a better standard of living and basic needs – such as food, water, sewage, education and health services – to the refugees in Al Waleed.

“Living in a tent in the desert is difficult and UNHCR will continue to search for more durable solutions for this group, as well as for the Palestinian refugees who already reside there,” he added.

Iraq currently hosts 40,000 refugees, most of whom are Palestinians, but also include Turkish Kurds and Iranian Kurds. The majority of them are sheltering in camps and settlements, with UNHCR providing protection and basic assistance while exploring longer-term solutions.