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Proposed climate change measures insufficient, Ban tells major economies

9 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that the cuts in greenhouse gas emissions proposed by the world's largest economies are not deep enough, and warned that much more effort is needed if governments are to reach a meaningful agreement on climate change by the end of the year.

Speaking in L'Aquila, Italy, where the annual summit of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized nations is taking place, Mr. Ban said the climate change commitments made by the leaders of those countries and other participants in this week's Major Economies Forum (MEF) meeting, "while welcome, are not sufficient."

"The time for delays and half-measures is over," he said. "The personal leadership of every head of State or government is needed to seize this moment to protect people and the planet from one of the most serious challenges ever to confront humanity."

G8 leaders agreed this week to a long-term goal of reducing emissions by 2050, but Mr. Ban said that this target was not credible without "ambitious mid-term targets, and baselines."

"In order to achieve such a global goal, developed countries must lead by example in making firm commitments to reduce their emissions by 2020 on the order of the 25 to 40 per cent below 1990 levels that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate



Change (IPCC) tells us is required. It is disappointing to note that thus far, the mid-term emissions targets announced by developed countries in the MEF are not in this range.”

The Secretary-General noted that the countries represented in L’Aquila are responsible for more than 80 per cent of global emissions, “and that is why they bear special responsibility for finding a solution to the political impasse. If they fail to act this year, they will have squandered a unique historical opportunity that may not come again... We stand at a historical crossroads. Business as usual is no longer viable.”

Mr. Ban is convening a global summit on climate change in New York in September, when world leaders converge for the annual opening of the General Assembly, in a bid to build momentum ahead of talks in Copenhagen in December that are supposed to result in a far-reaching new pact on greenhouse gas emissions.

He stressed that every country must play its part, “based on the principle of equity.” Affluent countries can provide funding and technological assistance to poorer States so they can reduce or mitigate the impact of emissions, while those developing countries can step up their own efforts to reduce emissions.

Mr. Ban also urged world leaders to work harder to deal with other pressing global challenges, especially food insecurity and the (A)H1N1 influenza pandemic.

He welcomed the G8’s pledge to spend \$15 billion over the next three years to tackle food insecurity and improve agriculture, but noted that “now we need to deliver on that pledge, and work together to boost national action plans, in an integrated manner.”

Turning to influenza, the Secretary-General said the pandemic was “starting to accelerate in a disturbing way” and G8 members therefore should commit to at least \$1 billion in additional spending to assist struggling countries with overloaded health-care systems.

“We have a small window of opportunity to help poor countries access what they need to get ready for the virus,” he said.

Without global support, Somalia will fall to opposition – top UN political official



Security Council considers situation in Somalia

9 July - If the international community allows Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) – forged in a process of consensus – to fail, the poverty-stricken Horn of Africa nation will be taken over by opposition groups employing tactics of coercion and intimidation, the top United Nations political official cautioned today.

Last year’s UN-facilitated Djibouti Agreement ended the conflict between the TFG and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, with President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed taking office in January and a new Government being formed in February.

“The choice before us is a stark one: either we help the Somali people overcome the current attempt to thwart efforts towards peace or we allow the new unity Government based on consensus and the Djibouti Accords to fall to a radical armed opposition,” B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told an open meeting of the Security Council.

The TFG is being challenged by insurgent forces, backed by foreign fighters, but “strives to maintain cohesion despite the obvious difficulties faced by any government of national unity,” he said.

It is reaching out, he noted, to opposition forces and working to broaden its support among community, religious and civil society leaders, while trying to project a moderate vision of Islam in line with Somali culture.

In contrast, the rebel Al Shabaab has been assassinating clan leaders and Government officials, doling out harsh

punishments for minor offenses, Mr. Pascoe said.

He also called for nations to honour the pledges made in April at a donors' conference in Brussels for both the Government and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), emphasizing that it is in the world's interest to ensure that the TFG does not collapse.

"To enable the Government to enhance its legitimacy and broaden its base, we must invest in building the security institutions and improve its capacity to deliver public services and employment, which would have a positive impact on the hearts and minds of ordinary Somalis," the official said.

National reconciliation is also a key element in consolidating peace in the country, he stressed, adding that the country's peace process is open to all groups renouncing violence and willing to cooperate with the Government.

Also essential is bolstering AMISOM and providing it with the resources necessary to support the TFG and the Somali people, Mr. Pascoe told the Council.

Last month, a suicide car-bomb attack killed the national security minister, Omar Hashi Aden, and a number of innocent civilians.

"As President Sharif recently stated, the TFG's immediate physical survival is very much dependent on a more robust AMISOM presence," Mr. Pascoe said today, calling on nations to back efforts to allow the force to reach its full authorized strength of 8,000.

Also calling for greater support for AMISOM today was Susana Malcorra, Under-Secretary-General for the Department for Field Support (DFS).

Coordination is essential given that most of the funds pledged to the African Union (AU) and troop-contributing countries will be provided bilaterally, she said.

"I urge all Member States and regional organizations, including the European Union and the League of Arab States, to redouble efforts to expedite disbursement of pledges and to work closely with the UN to ensure that the combined support for AMISOM can be identified and prioritized," she said.

Meanwhile, "on the ground, we are gathering momentum," Ms. Malcorra said, with the UN supplying rations to AMISOM and constructing hospitals, among other steps.

At the end of today's meeting, which heard from nearly two dozen speakers, the Council underscored the need for the Djibouti Agreement to remain the foundation for the resolution of the conflict in Somalia.

"The Security Council reaffirms its support for the Transitional Federal Government as the legitimate authority in Somalia under the Transitional Federal Charter," according to a presidential statement read out by Ambassador Ruhakana Rugunda of Uganda, which holds the Council's rotating presidency this month.

Condemning recent attacks on the TFG and civilians, it reiterated its demand that "violent opposition groups immediately end their offensive, put down their arms, renounce violence and join reconciliation efforts."

Mr. Rugunda said that the 15-member Council deplores the loss of life and worsening humanitarian crisis.

Earlier this week, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that over 200,000 people have now been forced to flee the Somali capital, Mogadishu, since fighting broke out between the Government and opposition groups in early May, in the biggest exodus from the troubled city since Ethiopian forces intervened in the Horn of Africa nation in 2007.

Today, the Council commended AMISOM's efforts in Somalia, and took note of the communiqué recently issued at the AU



summit in Sirte, Libya, which called on the Council to impose sanctions against Eritrea and others supporting armed groups undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia.

“The Security Council is deeply concerned in this regard and will consider expeditiously what action to take against any party undermining the Djibouti Peace Process,” Mr. Rugunda said.

Global cooperation key to boosting public health – UN Economic and Social Council

9 July - A high-level United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) gathering wrapped up today with a call for global cooperation to tackle public health challenges in the face of interrelated food, economic and climate crises which are stalling efforts to reach development targets.

In the Ministerial Declaration adopted by consensus in Geneva at the end of the four-day High Level Segment, participants stressed that “urgent and collective efforts” are crucial to improve public health, especially as the food crisis has affected the nutrition levels of people in poorer countries.



Many developing countries use traditional medicine to help meet some of their primary health care needs

The financial and economic crises are “undermining and slowing or reversing the development gains of developing countries” as they try to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline, the Declaration said.

Further, climate change poses serious health risks to all nations, especially to least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries, as well as those in Africa, it noted.

Cooperation, the Declaration said, is also vital “to meet emerging, new and unforeseen threats and epidemics,” including the A (H1N1) influenza virus and other potential pandemics.

In spite of some progress made in the past decade in boosting global health, ministers and delegates at the ECOSOC session lamented inequities both within and among countries.

“In particular, we are deeply concerned that maternal health remains one of the largest health inequities in the world,” they said, appealing on States to reaffirm their commitment to prevent and curb child and maternal mortality and morbidity.

Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, today called the Declaration a comprehensive text, noting that a follow-up meeting will be held next year to gauge how much of an impact today’s document has in changing public health systems.

At the opening of the High-Level Segment on Monday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on rich and poor nations to boost efforts to fight poverty and hunger, with a new report showing that overall progress has been too slow for most of the MDGs.

“This year’s Millennium Development Goals Report delivers a message that should not surprise us but which we must take to heart: the current economic environment makes achieving the goals even more difficult,” he said.

The target for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed, Mr. Ban noted. Meanwhile, 1.4 billion people must gain access to improved sanitation by 2015 to achieve the sanitation target.

“We have been moving too slowly to meet our goals,” he said. “Yet the report also shows that when we have the right policies, backed by adequate funding and strong political commitment, actions can yield impressive results.”

UN humanitarian chief gets first-hand look at site of Pakistani clashes



Internally displaced Pakistani women and girls queue for UNHCR relief items

9 July - The United Nations humanitarian chief today visited the district of Buner in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the scene of the recent fighting between the Government and insurgents that uprooted over 2 million people.

On the third day of his visit to the country, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes spent time in the village of Sultanwas, which suffered the most extensive destruction of anywhere in the district during the fighting.

District officials said that more than half of those who had fled Buner because of the military operation had already returned, with more on the way.

"I saw no evidence today of continuing conflict in Buner, although I could visit only a small part of the district in the short time I had," said Mr. Holmes, who is also Emergency Relief Coordinator.

"Clearly many people have made up their minds to return home, and have done so. That is welcome, but people need to be sure that the whole district is safe, with basic services reconnected, before normality can be assured.

"Meanwhile, it is essential for the Government and the humanitarian community, with donor support, to go on reducing the suffering of the displaced, and those who have been helping them," he said.

Mr. Holmes also visited Daggar, the district centre, where he noted that most shops had opened, and that normal business seemed to be resuming.

The majority of the 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are living with host families, in rented accommodations or in spontaneous settlements, while the rest are spread out across some 20 camps.

The UN humanitarian chief reaffirmed the need for short-term assistance to help people recover and resume their lives and livelihoods, and noted that recovery and reconstruction and the necessary improvement in basic services would require time and substantial resources.

Mr. Holmes is scheduled to meet President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors, before wrapping up his four-day visit.

International Criminal Court receives materials on Kenyan post-election violence

9 July - The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) today received sealed information about persons suspected of being responsible for last year's post-election violence in Kenya from Kofi Annan, the former United Nations secretary-general who helped mediate an end to the deadly clashes.

In a press release issued in The Hague, ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo said he had received a sealed envelope and supporting materials that had previously been entrusted to Mr. Annan – who is also the Chairman of the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities – by a commission investigating the violence that erupted in December 2007 and early 2008.



Hundreds of Kenyans were displaced during post-election violence in early 2008 in Nairobi

Mr. Moreno-Ocampo's office has had the situation in Kenya under preliminary examination since last year, and last week a

high-level Kenyan Government delegation visited The Hague to discuss the need for accountability for those responsible for the violence.

“The Kenyan authorities, while continuing all efforts to set up national proceedings, have committed to start sharing information on the current status of investigations and prosecutions arising out of the post-election violence, as well as on measures taken to protect witnesses, with a view to assisting the [ICC] Prosecutor’s work,” the press release noted.

If the efforts to conduct national proceedings fail, the Government agreed last week to refer the situation to the ICC within one year.

“The transmission of documents by Mr. Kofi Annan forms part of these collaborative efforts to ensure that justice is not delayed and that future crimes can be prevented,” Mr. Moreno-Ocampo said.

The ICC is an independent, permanent court that investigates and prosecutes people accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is based on a treaty known as the Rome Statute, of which 109 countries are now States Parties.

Benin: UN activates humanitarian response as heavy floods take toll

9 July - United Nations humanitarian agencies operating in Benin are conducting rapid assessments to determine how they can best assist the thousands of people caught up in the heavy floods that have struck the West African country.

At least 20,000 people are estimated to have been displaced or otherwise affected by the floods, with the area around Cotonou, the commercial capital, and along the entire southern coastline among the hardest hit regions.



Flood victims in Benin's economic hub Cotonou, in the neighborhood of Senade

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported today that it has deployed emergency staff to Benin to ensure that priority needs in health, shelter and water and sanitation are being met.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are all taking part in preliminary assessments to ascertain the most immediate needs of the population.

Benin is beset by flooding almost every year at this time because of the annual rainy season. But this year’s inundations have been so severe this year that the Government has imposed a state of emergency.

UN adviser takes part in summit on sport and social change in London



9 July - The United Nations official tasked with promoting sport for development and peace today joined retired sports stars Ian Thorpe, Michael Johnson and Dikembe Mutombo and senior international political, religious and business figures such as Tony Blair, Desmond Tutu and Richard Branson at a London summit on how sport can drive social change.

Wilfried Lemke, the UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, took part in a panel discussion on the role of sport in education, one of a series of panels on the third and final day of the Beyond Sport Summit.

The summit – attended by more than 350 high-level participants – aims to generate ideas for ways in which sport can promote development or other socially useful activities and to help set up strategic partnerships between government,

business, philanthropy and the sports community.

Earlier this week Mr. Lemke attended the 13th General Assembly of the Association of National Olympic Committees in Africa, which was held in Abuja, Nigeria. Since taking up his role as Special Adviser in April last year, Mr. Lemke has given special attention to Africa, particularly sports programmes that empower women and girls or people living with physical or intellectual disabilities.

Security the focus of latest round of UN-backed talks between Cypriot leaders

9 July - Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders held another round of United Nations-backed talks today, discussing security and guarantees as part of their efforts to try to reach a solution that will unify the Mediterranean island.

Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat met in Nicosia and made introductory statements on the issue of security and guarantees, according to Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus (known as UNFICYP).

The two leaders agreed to devote their next meeting, scheduled for 17 July, to the same issue, Mr. Zerihoun told journalists after today's round of talks.



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

On Tuesday Mr. Zerihoun told a panel discussion in Nicosia on the role of civil society that it was not possible to speak of a single "Cypriot civil society" given the continuing division of the island.

But he said the civil societies on both sides of the divide "have persevered in their commitment to work together to foster trust and understanding between the communities and help achieve peace and reconciliation. Indeed, civil society groups have at various times in the past few decades provided the only channels for communication and contact between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

"Today, happily, we face a different situation: there is a reinvigorated peace process, bi-communal contact is no longer the exception and it has become much easier for Cypriots today to move around the island."

Mr. Zerihoun said that hopes for a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus remain low among the public on both sides, and therefore civil society has a valuable role to play to ensuring the success of the peace process.

"Civil society organizations can help communicate to people on both sides the potential benefits of a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem. And once, as we all hope and expect, a settlement is achieved, active participation of civil society groups will be essential to making it sustainable."

Israel barrier must come down, UN rights expert says



Israel's separation wall in Bethlehem

9 July - On the fifth anniversary of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) finding that Israel's building of a barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory was illegal, a United Nations independent human rights expert today spoke out against what he says is Israel's violation of Palestinian rights.

"Tear down that wall, Mr. Netanyahu," Richard Falk, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, said at an international conference at The Hague on the ICJ's 2004 Advisory Opinion.

That opinion 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.

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.

The barrier is still under construction, and "despite this Israeli refusal to comply [with the ICJ's decision], the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations have totally ignored Israel's defiant behaviour, which has resulted in a major encroachment on Palestinian rights, as well as sending the cynical message that power trumps law," Mr. Falk said today.

Israel's refusal to dismantle the barrier is just another example of its "unlawful conduct," including settlement expansion and imposing collective punishment on Gaza's population, he added.

Yesterday, the West Bank branch of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that the barrier, which is 60 per cent completed, "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."

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, the Office said. 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.

Global small arms sales reached \$2.9 billion in 2006, according to UN data

9 July - The value of the global trade in small arms and light weapons is estimated to have risen by 28 per cent between 2000 and 2006 to reach \$2.9 billion, according to United Nations customs data presented in the 2009 edition of the Small Arms Survey.

The annual report, published by the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, says the demand for guns in the United States remains the key driver of trade in small arms.

"The United States continues to drive the global small arms trade, remaining the largest importer of pistols and revolvers, sporting shotguns, and small-calibre ammunition. Greater demand for small arms in the United States was responsible for 48 per cent of the worldwide increase in imports from 2000 to 2006," states a press release issued in Geneva.

The top exporters of small arms include the US, Italy, Germany and Brazil, with the US also leading the list of importers, followed by Saudi Arabia, Cyprus and Germany, according to the report which is based information from 53 countries.

"Current data shows that the global trade in small arms and light weapons is robust and even expanding, and that handguns are driving it," said Small Arms Survey Programme Director Keith Krause.

"We don't know whether these weapons are destined for civilians, police, or military forces. But it is striking that handguns have outpaced all other small arms and light weapons over the period," he added.

The report also includes a section on post-conflict situations that highlights case studies of Aceh (Indonesia), Afghanistan,



Small arms at a disarmament collection point in Akobo, Sudan

and southern Lebanon.

US legal expert appointed as Registrar of UN-backed tribunal for Lebanon killings



9 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed David Tolbert of the United States as the Registrar of the United Nations-backed tribunal set up to try the perpetrators of recent political killings in Lebanon, including the February 2005 murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Mr. Tolbert will succeed Robin Vincent at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, an independent body based in The Hague, Netherlands.

“The Secretary-General is grateful for Mr. Vincent’s assistance in the establishment and commencement of the Tribunal’s work,” UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters.

Mr. Tolbert, who will take up his duties on 26 August, has served in a number of senior capacities with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which is responsible for trying those responsible for the worst crimes committed during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s.

He also served as the Secretary-General’s Special Expert on UN Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials.

The President of the Tribunal, which began its operations in early March, is Antonio Cassese of Italy. Daniel Bellemare, a Canadian prosecutor and former head of the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC) into the murders, serves as the court’s Prosecutor.

UN population agency and Iraq partner to boost development



Displaced Iraqi children sit in their makeshift shelter in an abandoned government building in Baghdad in 2008

9 July - The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Iraqi Government have agreed to step up their collaboration in promoting national development in the strife-torn nation.

Earlier this week, top UNFPA officials wrapped up talks in the capital, Baghdad, with their Iraqi counterparts, including the Minister of Planning and Development Cooperation, the head of the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Advisory Council, and representatives from the ministries of youth, health, civil society and environment.

The meetings, also attended by 10 parliamentarians from seven governorates, focused on UNFPA’s support of government programmes, including through providing technical support for this year’s population and housing census.

Participants also discussed Iraq’s reproductive health, gender, youth and population development needs in line with the country’s 2010-2014 development plan.

New investment monitoring tool aims to boost business in Africa – UN agency

9 July - The United Nations and the African Union today launched a new tool, designed in partnership with the Microsoft Corporation, to help map investment flows on the continent and provide business leaders the information they need to make sound decisions.

The Internet-based Investment Monitoring Platform will “provide data and information on the characteristics of foreign and domestic investors, as well as their motivations, actions, perceptions, intentions, and impact,” according to a news release

issued by the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

The Vienna-based agency launched the database along with the African Union Commission at a meeting in Addis Ababa that was attended by government ministers and representatives of banks, African investment promotion agencies, the private sector and industry experts.

UNIDO Director-General Kandeh K. Yumkella welcomed the initiative, noting it will bring a “new level of transparency” to the investment and business landscape in Africa.

“It will allow country ranking through investor evaluation and performance. It will also enable investors to conduct analysis and make more informed decisions, better assess business risks, and identify potential counterparts,” he said.

The information on the platform will be gathered through bi-annual surveys of both foreign and domestic investors conducted in more than 20 African countries by UNIDO, the first of which will start on 23 July in Kenya and Senegal.

It is hoped that 22 countries will be covered by the end of October this year.

“The information gathered will also allow for a better understanding of the impact of the global financial crisis on investment flows in Africa,” Mr. Yumkella said.

“It will help Government and national agencies design more effective investment and business policies, promotion strategies and services that respond to investor needs, and formulate viable industrialization strategies for the continent.”

Iraq: ancient Babylon archaeological site damaged by military activity



Babylon Temple: update on damage assessment

9 July - The ancient site of Babylon – home to the Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – has been significantly damaged due to its use as a military base by coalition forces in Iraq from 2003-2004, according to a report released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today.

Digging, cutting scraping and leveling resulted in considerable damage to the archaeological city, with the Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way and other key structures also being harmed, the Final Report by UNESCO’s International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC Iraq) said.

“Without pointing fingers, we now have a clear picture of the situation,” said Mohamed Djelid, director of UNESCO’s Office for Iraq.

The report, launched at a press conference in Paris, “provides the starting-point for the major challenge of restoration and conservation,” he added.

Babylon was the capital city for two famous kings of antiquity: Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC), who introduced one of the world’s first law codes, and Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BC).

Partially excavated over the last century, much of ancient Babylon, which lies 90 kilometres south of Baghdad, remains undiscovered.

According to a 2005 British Museum report, the use of Babylon as a camp by the Multi-National Force between April 2003 and December 2004 by coalition forces is “tantamount to establishing a military camp around the Great Pyramid in Egypt or around Stonehenge in Britain.”

The Final Report noted that the Iraqi Government’s 1978-1987 restoration project rebuilt several buildings, erected modern

facilities and undertook new landscaping, in part to create a new palace for Saddam Hussein, “to the great detriment of the site.”

Babylon was plundered during the 2003 war, when contents from the Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar museums and from the Babylon Library and Archive were stolen and destroyed.

The new study noted that no new “malicious” or accidental damage has been reported since December 2004, and currently problems are due to neglect and maintenance and buildings previously restored are in poor condition.

Experts behind the Final Report called for a conservation plan to be implemented with the ultimate goal of nominating Babylon to join nearly 900 other sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Improving mobile communications during disasters focus of new UN partnership

9 July - The United Nations telecom agency has teamed up with a United States-based wireless services provider to improve mobile communications in preparing for disasters and in responding once they strike.

As part of the agreement, Qualcomm Incorporated will donate a compact, easy to operate and deployable base station worth nearly \$500,000 to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to boost the capacity of the UN agency to deploy mobile telecommunications to help countries in disaster preparedness, as well as in response and recovery.



Sami Al Basheer, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Development Bureau, welcomed the alliance, noting the vital impact it will have on helping countries when emergencies strike.

The Qualcomm Deployable Base Station (QDBS) “brings with it the wireless technology that is so essential in bridging the telecommunication gap when terrestrial networks are knocked out by natural disasters,” he said.

Through its Wireless Reach™ initiative, Qualcomm works with organizations such as ITU to bring wireless technology to those who need it most.

“We are proud to work with ITU and provide a useful system to enhance their emergency communications programme,” said Shawn A. Covell, Senior Director of International Government Affairs for Qualcomm.

Invest more in higher education, say participants at UN forum



School children compare notes about their vegetable garden's ecology

9 July - Over 1,000 participants at a United Nations forum have called on governments to increase investment in higher education, and stressed the need for enhanced teacher training and greater regional cooperation in areas such as recognizing qualifications.

The World Conference on Higher Education, hosted by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, discussed a wide range of issues over the course of its four-day meeting, including the impact of globalization on higher education, social responsibility, academic freedom, research and financing.

“At no time in history has it been more important to invest in higher education as a major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society and to advance research, innovation and creativity,” says the final communiqué adopted by the conference, which gathered participants from some 150 countries.

The communiqué notes the need to better integrate information and communications technologies throughout higher education to meet increasing student demand and share the results of scientific research.

It also emphasizes the need for strengthened regional cooperation regarding the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance, governance, research and innovation, and highlights the importance of establishing regional higher education and research areas.

In addition, participants called for measures to boost higher education in Africa – a special focus of the conference – including efforts to meet rapidly increasing demand; more attention to areas such as agriculture, the environment and natural resource extraction; and the mobilization of private financing.

Highlighting the global teacher shortage, the communiqué also calls for higher education “to scale up pre-service and in-service teacher training with curricula that equip teachers to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century.”