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Ahead of Washington visit, Ban expresses belief in climate change talks



9 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced confidence for an agreement next month on fighting global warming even as key issues remain unresolved, a day before he travels to Washington D.C. to discuss with senior officials and congressional leaders what world governments expect in terms of the United States' role.

“The Secretary-General is confident that governments will reach agreement in Copenhagen on the fundamental issues that will form the substance of a legally binding international agreement which is the end goal for guiding action on climate change,” the Director of Mr. Ban's Climate Change Support Team, Janos Pasztor, told a news conference in New York on the upcoming summit in the Danish capital.

Although in all likelihood it will not be possible to complete all the work needed for a legally binding agreement at Copenhagen, he said, the meeting should make clear what needs to be done in the three core fundamental issues that remain unresolved – ambitious mitigation targets in the developed countries, how to consider mitigation actions in developing countries, and financing.

“Those are the three key issues where there still needs to be agreement, and they are precisely the issues where heads of State and heads of government need to be engaged because those issues are so important for the overall economic development of the countries that you cannot expect the negotiators themselves to make a move,” he added.

Asked why, in that case, Mr. Ban was confident, he replied: “Because they can be resolved, that's why.” That confidence is based on his recent conversations with world leaders in which everyone wants to have a deal in Copenhagen, Mr. Pasztor



said.

“There is tremendous interest and while we’re not quite there yet, the willingness is there to make it happen, so it is not a question of whether or not we’re going to have a deal, it’s a question of how we’re going to make sure that we get a good deal in Copenhagen and the Secretary-General is convinced that it is possible and therefore it will happen,” he added.

World governments are seeking to agree to a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 treaty that committed 37 industrialized States to cutting emissions by an average of 5 per cent against 1990 levels over the period from 2008 to 2012.

On Friday, as the last preliminary negotiations before Copenhagen wrapped up in the Spanish city of Barcelona, Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said developed countries would need to provide at least \$10 billion to enable developing countries to immediately develop low-emission growth and adaptation strategies and to build internal capacity.

Ban calls on new Lebanese cabinet to fulfil terms ending Israeli-Hizbollah war



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with Saad Hariri (file photo)

9 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged Lebanon’s new national unity government to fully implement the Security Council resolution that ended the war between Israel and Hizbollah three years ago.

That resolution called for an end to hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah militants, respect for the so-called Blue Line separating the Israeli and Lebanese sides, disarming of militias and an end to arms smuggling. Hizbollah, which has not disarmed, is part of the new unity government.

Mr. Ban said in a report to the Council last month that disbanding militias, especially Hizbollah, was “of vital importance” to Lebanon’s democracy and sovereignty.

In a statement issued today by his spokesperson, he voiced satisfaction that, five months after elections, Lebanese political leaders had been able to agree on the new cabinet. “The Secretary-General hopes that Lebanese political leaders will continue to work together in a spirit of unity, dialogue and cooperation,” the statement said.

Mr. Ban urged the new Government to quickly take up the challenges that remain to consolidate both the sovereignty of Lebanon and the institutional capacity of the Lebanese state, as called for in several accords and Security Council resolutions.

The UN played a role in trying to bridge the gap between the parties to a unity government with Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams meeting with the various factions. On Friday he conferred with Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri.

UN envoy cites need to deal with underlying causes of DR Congo conflict



Olusegun Obasanjo, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on the Great Lakes Region

9 November - While the crisis that plagued eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) last year and threatened to engulf the entire region has eased, some of the factors that led to the fierce fighting and the displacement of hundred of thousands must still be dealt with, a senior United Nations envoy said today.

“The slide to war that threatened the region last year was effectively reversed,” Olusegun Obasanjo, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, told the Security Council today.

“But what we have successfully treated were only the symptoms, not the underlying

ailments that have led to repeated crises in the region,” he added. “Without dealing effectively with the underlying issues, peace can neither be durable nor irreversible.”

Some 250,000 people were uprooted last year – on top of the 800,000 who were already displaced in the region – as the Congolese national armed forces, known as the FARDC, battled with the mainly Tutsi National Congress for People’s Defence (CNDP), formerly led by renegade general Laurent Nkunda.

Months of negotiations, facilitated by Mr. Obasanjo and his co-mediator and African Union (AU) Special Envoy Benjamin Mkapa, resulted in the signing on 23 March of the peace agreements between the Government, the CNDP and the other armed groups.

Among the “substantial, if intermittent” progress with respect to the 23 March agreements, Mr. Obasanjo cited the transformation of the CNDP and other armed groups into political parties, the return of many internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes and a “notable warming” in regional relationships, particularly between the leaders of DRC and Rwanda.

At the same time, important provisions of the agreements still remain unimplemented, he said. These include, perhaps most importantly, the identification of means to foster the participation of elements of the former armed group more directly in the political life of the nation, as well as the establishment of a national reconciliation mechanism and reforms in the area of good governance and the proper control of natural resources.

“That these provisions remain to be implemented represents risks to the gains that we have witnessed,” said Mr. Obasanjo.

He said that he has informed Congolese President Joseph Kabila of his intention to step back from an active role in the peace process in the eastern DRC and the Great Lakes region.

Also, in about a month, his Senior Special Adviser will lead a team to the DRC to make a further assessment of progress. Following that, at the end of January, Mr. Obasanjo and Mr. Mkapa, will submit a final report to AU leaders.

The Special Envoy said he is now working to retool his existing support office in Nairobi as a small, dedicated “listening post” that would continue to assess the implementation of the 23 March agreements and regional rapprochement.

He recalled that the relationships in the region had been so fractured at this time last year that Presidents Kabila and Paul Kagame of Rwanda would neither shake hands nor speak to one another when they attended an emergency summit in Nairobi last November.

If anything gave him hope for the future, said Mr. Obasanjo, it was the rapprochement between the DRC and Rwanda and between the two leaders, the fruits of which have been seen in, among other actions, the joint operation against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed militia involved in clashes in North Kivu.

“Generally, an atmosphere of détente and cooperation has developed in the region,” he told reporters after briefing the Council, adding that the 23 March agreements have prepared the foundation for peace and order on which to continue building.

Also welcoming the rapprochement between the DRC and Rwanda were members of the Security Council who encouraged the countries “to build further upon this positive momentum,” Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the rotating Council presidency for this month, told the press.

They also reiterated their deep concern about the impact of the military activities in eastern DRC on civilians since the beginning of 2009, and expressed their support for the recent decision by the UN peacekeeping force in the country, known as MONUC, not to work with units of the FARDC implicated in grave human rights violations.

UN officials remember fall of Berlin Wall, 20 years on



The Berlin Wall

9 November - The fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago today is a reminder of the difference that ordinary people can make for the greater good, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, urging the world to salute those fighting to enhance human rights and freedoms.

Mr. Ban issued a statement through his spokesperson in which he said the Wall's tearing down "changed the course of history and came to symbolize the triumph of ordinary people in their quest for freedom. We owe it to all of those who fought for their fundamental rights and freedoms to never forget their struggle. Their story still inspires today."

The Secretary-General said the anniversary offers "a reminder of the difference people can make for the greater good, whether it is fighting for human rights in 1989 or working in the 21st century to end poverty, feed the hungry and combat climate change."

The incoming head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in a separate statement, said world leaders cannot afford to be complacent in the quest for freedom, human rights and diversity.

Irina Bokova, Director-General-elect of UNESCO, used the anniversary to stress that the battle for universal values has not yet been won.

"Today we live in a globalized world, but too many walls remain," said Ms. Bokova. "UNESCO's task is to break through these walls, wherever they may be and whatever form they take."

Ms. Bokova, who succeeds Koichiro Matsuura as UNESCO chief on 15 November, served as foreign minister of Bulgaria during the 1990s.

She described the fall of the Berlin Wall as "an event of immense historical importance for world peace and the advance of democracy. It was the start of a new era, giving rise to hopes, not just in Eastern Europe but around the world, for a better life. A page has been turned."

But she also noted that while globalization could be "a liberating force, it also carries the risk of creating a more uniform world, eroding the incredible diversity that is the real source of human creativity, economic and social development, and opening the way for new forms of repression, exclusion and poverty."

As winter's rigours descend on Gaza, UN calls on Israel yet again to open crossings



A Palestinian boy amidst the debris of a destroyed house in Gaza City

9 November - The United Nations and its non-governmental organization (NGO) partners today called yet again on Israel to immediately open crossings into the Gaza Strip to give Palestinians access to desperately needed materials, especially in view of the coming winter and rainy season.

"The winter will be particularly hard on the children of Gaza, whose capacity to withstand the rigours of a cold, wet winter has already been severely undermined by a marked deterioration of basic services and descent into poverty," the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory, Maxwell Gaylard, said in a news release, the latest of countless UN appeals to reopen the crossings since Israel's three-week war against Hamas

last winter.

"With winter rains and cold weather now imminent, the people of Gaza are even more desperately in need of construction materials such as cement, roofing tiles and glass to build and repair homes destroyed and damaged in the Israeli military offensive of 2008-2009, as well as of regular supplies of fuel, electricity and clean water."



More than two years of blockade since Hamas seized control of Gaza coupled with widespread destruction resulting from the war have caused severe damage to the homes, roads and utilities, including tens of thousands of homes damaged or destroyed, deterioration and further damage to already fragile and overloaded water, sanitation and electricity distribution networks, and a marked fall-off in the quality of essential services, the release said.

“Intensive discussions which the United Nations has conducted with the Government of Israel for the resumption of suspended building projects, which would provide much-needed housing and social services for the people of Gaza, have not yet yielded any positive outcome,” it added.

Nearly 1,400 Gazans were killed and more than 5,000 injured during the three-week offensive, which Israel says it launched to stop thousands of rockets fired by Hamas and other Palestinian militants into southern Israel.

The fighting left communities, families and children fearful and traumatized, many of them living in ruins, virtually destitute, and relying increasingly on the UN and its humanitarian partners for daily sustenance. Over 3,530 homes were destroyed, more than 2,850 severely damaged and 52,900 suffering minor damage. Without repair, winter winds and rain will render damaged homes uninhabitable, the release warned.

Mr. Gaylard and the NGOs called on the Israeli Government to allow in urgently-needed construction and repair materials, adequate supplies of industrial fuel for electricity generation, and essential items for the proper functioning of water and sanitation systems.

“The people of Gaza share with everyone else the right to dignified lives, free of indiscriminate and prolonged suffering. They should not be subjected to this continuation of collective punishment brought on by the blockade, Mr. Gaylard said.

UN agency to set up museum of information and communication technology



ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré

8 November - The United Nations telecommunications agency announced today that it has signed an agreement with the United Arab Emirates to build a new museum that will focus on the impact of information communications technology (ICT) on people's lives.

The new museum will be known as the ICT Exploratorium and will be housed at the headquarters of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in Geneva when it opens next year, the agency said in a press release.

Under the agreement, signed in Abu Dhabi by ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré and Mohamed Al Ghanim, Director-General of the UAE's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, the UAE and its authority will donate \$2 million to the design and construction of the museum.

ITU will acquire the exhibits, equipments and other resources necessary to establish the museum, which will be free of charge to the general public.

The agency said the museum will feature permanent interactive exhibits highlighting cutting-edge ICT systems and their role in everyday lives, as well as rotating exhibitions on new inventions, emergency communications and the future of the Internet.

Dr. Touré thanked the UAE and its telecommunications regulator for their support of the museum.

“As we all know, ICTs are not just about technologies any more – they are closely linked with every aspect of our daily lives,” he said.

Health care for women still far below need and expectation, UN

report finds



9 November - Many of the world's countries continue to fail to meet the health-care needs of women at key stages of their lives, such as when they reach adolescence or when they are elderly, a new United Nations report has found.

The report, issued today by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, said urgent action is required to improve the health and lives of women, despite considerable progress in recent decades.

Sexual and reproductive health services tend to focus exclusively on married women in too many countries, according to the report, noting that in those societies few services are made available to unmarried women and adolescents, and even fewer to marginalized groups such as sex workers, intravenous drug workers, ethnic workers and rural women.

Up to 80 per cent of all health care worldwide takes place in the home, and is almost always provided by women, who are often unsupported and unremunerated in these activities.

Launching the report, WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said it was “time to pay girls and women back, to make sure that they get the care and support they need to enjoy a fundamental human right at every moment of their lives – that is, their right to health.”

Dr. Chan questioned: “If women are denied a chance to develop their full human potential, including their potential to lead healthier and at least somewhat happier lives, is society as a whole really healthy? What does this say about the state of social progress in the 21st century?”

The report observed that HIV, tuberculosis and pregnancy-related conditions remain the major killers of women aged between 15 and 45, but that as women age, non-communicable diseases – such as heart attacks and strokes – become leading causes of death and disability.

However, in many countries heart attacks and strokes are considered “male” problems, leading to an under-diagnosis of heart disease in women.

Females are also hampered from their lower socio-economic status, with a lack of access to education, income and decision-making positions limiting women's ability to protect their health.

This is particularly true in the case of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, where cultural pressures mean many women lack basic knowledge about HIV and how to negotiate safer sex practices.

“We will not see significant progress as long as women are regarded as second-class citizens in so many parts of the world,” Dr. Chan said.

“In so many societies, men exercise political, social and economic control. The health sector has to be concerned. These unequal power relations translate into unequal access to health care and unequal control over health resources.”

The WHO report, entitled *Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda*, outlines proposals for reform to help women.

These include strengthening health systems so they can better meet women's needs, changing public policy to deal with the social and economic factors that adversely impact women's health and identifying mechanisms to promote women's leadership in health care.

Head of UN agency applauds China-Africa forum's commitment



on food security



9 November - The head of the United Nations food agency today welcomed the declaration by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation underlining the critical role that investment in food security, agriculture and infrastructure plays in feeding people on the continent.

World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director Josette Sheeran noted that for decades the agency has helped people in China and Africa access the food they need to live healthy, productive lives.

“We have helped farmers feed their families, while supporting them as they improve their land, dig wells, and build roads and clinics and schools,” Ms. Sheeran said in her statement, applauding the pledges for further support made at the Forum, which wrapped up today in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

“In the midst of humanitarian emergencies, WFP has also rebuilt roads, ports and airstrips to reduce the cost of delivering humanitarian aid,” she said. “By strengthening infrastructure, WFP has helped to cut the cost of transporting people and goods over the long term.”

Ms. Sheeran noted that China’s own success in addressing malnutrition and bolstering food security stands as an example to the world that hunger can be beaten in a generation, especially when small farmers are given access to credit and markets.

“WFP is looking to replicate this success by supporting small farmers in regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where – last year – it purchased \$427 million worth of food from farmers in 15 countries across the continent,” said Ms. Sheeran.

UN chief urges world to disarm in favour of investment in peace and development



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses 2008 Disarmament Commission Session [File Photo]

9 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has warned that global military spending now tops \$1 trillion per year while funding for development remains woefully low by comparison, in a message urging leaders to harness the growing political will to reduce stockpiles of weapons and redirect expenditure towards peaceful goals.

“The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded,” Mr. Ban told participants attending the Religions for Peace Global Youth Campaign on Disarmament for Shared Security conference in Costa Rica on Saturday.

Mr. Ban said that more weapons are being produced, “flooding markets, destabilizing societies and feeding the flames of civil war and terror,” yet a new wave of interest in advancing disarmament goals is sweeping over governments and civil society.

“People everywhere are recognizing as never before the tremendous burdens and risks of continuing to invest vast sums and energies in nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, small arms, landmines, cluster munitions and other deadly weapons,” said Mr. Ban.

Noting that disarmament is back on the global agenda, he stressed that “we must make the most of this new moment of opportunity.”

The Secretary-General said that there can be “no development without peace and no peace without development. Disarmament can provide the means for both.”

Mr. Ban was speaking at a three-day event in San Jose, Costa Rica, where almost 150 youth leaders representing the world’s religious traditions came together to commit to disarmament, by developing plans for multi-religious advocacy and action at the national, regional and global levels. The conference closed today.



Thousands of conflict-displaced Yemenis receive vital UN food aid



Thousands of people in Sa'ada, Yemen, are in need of humanitarian aid

9 November - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners have provided assistance to almost 100,000 people displaced in northern Yemen by the latest round of fighting between Government forces and Al Houthi rebels, the agency reported today.

The clashes that resumed in August have driven some 150,000 people from their homes. UN officials have been calling for a ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow civilians to leave the conflict zone and enable aid workers to deliver much needed assistance to the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

WFP said that in spite of better access to some of the areas affected by fighting, the situation remains volatile and supply routes are unreliable.

The situation is particularly dramatic in the town of Sa'ada, where access has been extremely difficult for the past three months.

“Our biggest concern is that we might be unable to re-supply stocks in Sa'ada town, which could result in widespread suffering,” said Gian Carlo Cirri, WFP Representative in Yemen.

The agency has delivered commodities through a cross-border operation from Saudi Arabia to assist some 10,000 displaced people in the northern border area of Mandaba, five kilometres inside Yemen, where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Yemeni Red Crescent Society began distribution last week.

A recent UN assessment mission to the area revealed that food prices have doubled since the conflict began and is out of reach for many families. Blankets, cooking utensils, medicine, and water sanitation facilities are among the other urgent needs.

Following recent clashes in the border area, WFP is monitoring the situation to see if more people start to flee the area, and to what extent its supply route through Saudi Arabia into northern Sa'ada governorate could be affected.

UN examines disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation link



Eroded and deforested slopes in Jamaica's Blue Mountains

9 November - A United Nations-backed gathering of experts kicked off today in Panama to initiate for the first time an assessment of the effect climate change has on the future threat of natural disasters and how nations can better manage an expected rise in severe weather patterns.

The first global scientific effort examining the linkages between disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change will be undertaken by over 90 experts attending the four-day meeting in Panama City, which was convened by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The call for the investigation – consisting of an extensive survey of scientific and technical data available in 2010 – comes in response to a IPCC report in 2007 which predicts that more frequent and severe extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, storms, heat waves were likely in the future warmer world.

“The IPCC Special Report is a collective effort that will shine a spotlight on the working policies and tools that people have been using for years to manage and adapt to natural variations of the climate,” said Margareta Wahlström, UN Special

Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

“It will inform governments about what works best to reduce disaster risks and manage extreme events, and how to cut down on future losses of lives and assets,” added Ms. Wahlström.

The assessment, *Managing the Risk of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation*, will be delivered in a report, slated for release in 2011 following worldwide technical and governmental review.

The experts will assess measures that governments and people can take to build resilience to weather and climate hazards and examine practices, strategies and approaches that communities can use to adapt to climate change.

The IPCC team of experts combines the forces of economists, sociologists, risk analysts, hydrologists, agricultural experts, health researchers, and risk reduction practitioners alongside climate scientists from a diverse range of developing and developed countries.

Information and communication technology experts gather at UN event in Beirut



ITU Director of Telecommunication Development Bureau Sami Al Basheer Al Morshid

9 November - More than 750 policymakers from the world of information and communication technology (ICT) are meeting in Beirut at an event co-hosted by the United Nations telecom agency where they can share experiences and forge common approaches to navigating today's complex ICT markets.

Hamadoun Touré, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), said the theme of this year's event, “Hands On or Hands Off: Stimulating Growth Through Effective Regulation,” is particularly relevant in the context of the current economic crisis, when many governments are looking to the ICT sector to re-energize debilitated national economies.

“In every field of human endeavour, and in every crisis we face, ICTs are part of the solution,” he told the opening of the Global Industry Leaders Forum.

“ICTs are playing a pivotal role in helping us emerge from the financial crisis and in fuelling economic recovery. And ICTs are directly responsible for job creation in the Knowledge Economy,” he added.

Sami Al Basheer, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau, said he was proud the Bureau can offer this platform for the main actors of the ICT industry to “imagine, design, build and administrate the markets, networks and services that our citizens, businesses and governments require for their further development.

“Today every country, no matter what its level of development, relies on ICTs for its economic and social development,” he noted. “The environment that enables new technologies to be used and shared by all can only be created through regulatory reform.”

Delegates from more than 110 countries are attending the event, which also includes a three-day Global Symposium for Regulators, which begins tomorrow.

Kamal Shehadi, Chairman and CEO of Lebanon's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority and chair of this year's Global Symposium for Regulators, praised ITU as a role model for effective public-private partnership.

The Geneva-based agency's membership comprises not only 191 Member States, but over 700 private sector members, who play an active role in ITU's technical standardization, spectrum management and development work.

Millions in the United States lack access to affordable, adequate

housing – UN



Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

9 November - An independent United Nations expert has warned that the United States is an increasingly expensive place to find housing, leaving many more people homeless at a time when the financial crisis is hitting hard across the country.

“Millions of people in the U.S. are spending high percentages of their income to make their monthly rent and mortgage payment, face foreclosure or eviction, and live in overcrowded and substandard conditions,” said Raquel Rolnik, the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, in a statement following her first official visit to the United States.

“The number of homeless continues to rise with increasing numbers of working families and individuals finding themselves on the streets. The economic crisis has exacerbated this

situation.”

Ms. Rolnik traveled to the cities of Washington DC, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, as part of an 18-day fact-finding mission about the status of affordable and adequate housing in the US.

The Special Rapporteur met with senior Government officials at the local, state, and federal level, including at the Department of State and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). She also attended public town hall meetings in each city visited, and engaged in discussions with representatives of civil society and people experiencing homelessness.

In a statement, Ms. Rolnik said she was pleased to note that the new US Administration is thinking critically and broadly to confront and solve the affordable housing crisis in the country, reversing decades of budget cuts and proposing large additional budgetary resources to housing. But she noted that a wider range of permanent options for affordable housing, particularly for the most vulnerable, is required.

“Though a good goal, implementation of mixed income developments in many cases leads to displacement, discriminatory practices and a reduction of the stock of affordable and adequate housing for low-income households,” said Ms. Rolnik.

Ms. Rolnik stressed that in designing and implementing these options, affected residents and community members should be partners in the planning and decision making process, as required by international human rights norms.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948, states that, among other matters, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family”, including housing.

Ms. Rolnik, who serves in an independent and unpaid capacity, will present her official report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2010.

Poor states face 17 per cent debt servicing rise, threatening growth, UN warns



UNCTAD Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi

9 November - Poor countries, already hit hard by the global financial and economic crisis in their efforts to fund social and health programmes, are facing a double blow this year with debt servicing increasing by over 17 per cent as a proportion of government revenue, a top United Nations trade official warned today.

Moreover, the crisis has weakened the banking sectors of several low-income countries, UNCTAD Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi told a debt management conference in Geneva.

“If the global crisis were to extend beyond 2010, the risk of bank failures would increase in some developing countries, adding further pressure on their already strained budgetary positions,” he said.

He stressed that developing countries faced a serious dilemma as they seek to emerge from poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the world set itself in 2000 to slash a host of social ills, ranging from extreme poverty and hunger to maternal and infant mortality to lack of access to education and health care, all by 2015.

Borrowing heavily to achieve these targets, as well as to build roads, railways, ports and other infrastructure needed to allow long-term economic progress, saddles them with debt that leads to slow growth. But not making such investments also leads to slow growth and will lead to many countries not meeting the MDGs, he said.

UNCTAD has already begun a major project – called Promoting Sovereign Lending and Borrowing – which aims at helping creditor and debtor countries to establish standards that might avoid periodic repayment difficulties and more easily resolve disputes.

The three-day meeting, the seventh of UNCTAD's debts management conferences, is being attended by over 300 participants from some 100 countries, including government finance, debt, and treasury officials, banking representatives and academics specializing in development finance, along with officials from multilateral organizations.

UN crime chief urges use of anti-graft treaty to restore integrity to financial system



Antonio Maria Costa

9 November - The United Nations crime tsar today blamed shady trading for the financial crisis that rocked most of the world last year, urging governments to use an international anti-corruption treaty to outline measures to restore trust in the financial system.

The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) criticized governments for allowing the financial system lose control, as well as financiers and corporate tycoons for turning their transactions into a free-for-all game.

Speaking at the opening of a week-long meeting in Qatar of the UN Convention against Corruption, UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa urged all States to recognize a silver lining to the crisis by using the UN anti-corruption treaty as “a blueprint for restoring confidence in markets, businesses, and governments.”

The 2005 Convention, which has 141 States Parties and is overseen by UNODC, contains protective measures that apply to dealings in the public and private sectors. “Corruption is preventable, not a fact of life, or part of business,” said Mr. Costa.

One of the main issues under discussion at the Third Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention in Doha is the creation of a mechanism to review implementation of the treaty.

“At the moment, corruption is in the eye of the beholder – there is no way to measure it,” said Mr. Costa.

A review mechanism would enable States to analyze the effectiveness of its fight against corruption and identify where more progress is needed.

“It must be a technical inter-governmental review to measure progress, not a game of name and shame,” said Mr. Costa, calling on States to “seal the deal” on the review mechanism by the end of the meeting on Friday.

The Conference of States Parties is being attended by over 1,000 delegates from 125 countries, as well as representatives of civil society, international organizations, parliaments, the media and the private sector.

DR Congo and UN launch stabilization and recovery fund



9 November - The United Nations and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have launched a fund to help the vast country recover from years of devastating civil war that ended earlier this decade, and continuing strife in its eastern provinces that has displaced more than a million people.

“The start of [the Government’s] STAREC [stabilization and recovery programme] and today’s launch of the stabilization and recovery fund are perfect examples of the way in which the United Nations and its international partners work in the DRC in supporting sovereign national authorities for the populations benefit,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-

moon's Special Representative Alan Doss told the launching ceremony in Kinshasa, the capital, on Friday.

“With the support of donors, like the Netherlands and Belgium today, our efforts on the ground will be able to be more effective.”

The Netherlands has donated \$2.7 million, while Belgium has pledged at least €6 million for programmes aimed at eliminating sexual violence, in addition to \$20 million already allotted from the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

The stabilization and recovery fund’s council announced several projects, including the rehabilitation of former combatants, training for the national army and housing for the families of soldiers, the deployment of national police in strategic zones, support for war wounded and the establishment of business centres in mining zones.

Prosecutor to ask International Criminal Court to probe Kenyan violence



Luis Moreno-Ocampo International Criminal Court Prosecutor

7 November - The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has announced that he will ask the tribunal to open an investigation into the deadly post-election violence in Kenya in December 2007 and January 2008.

Luis Moreno-Ocampo, speaking after a meeting this week in Nairobi with President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, said he would make a formal request to the ICC next month.

“There is a reasonable basis to believe that the attacks against Kenyan civilians during the post-election violence constitute crimes against humanity under the ICC's jurisdiction,” he said yesterday.

Article 7 of the Rome Statute, under which the ICC operates, defines a crime against humanity as "a widespread or systematic attack directed against the civilian population."

Mr. Moreno-Ocampo said Mr. Kibaki and Mr. Odinga, who agreed to serve in a power-sharing administration following the violence, had promised to cooperate with any investigation.

The ICC also announced yesterday that it has assigned three judges to a pre-trial chamber to deal with the Kenyan issue.

Ethnic violence engulfed the East African country after disputed elections at the end of 2007 and, following an inquiry, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan submitted sealed materials about possible crimes to Mr. Moreno-Ocampo earlier this year.

Under the ICC's complementarity principle, the tribunal only intervenes if there are no national proceedings against those responsible for the crimes.

Once Mr. Moreno-Ocampo makes a formal request to the ICC's pre-trial chamber, the court can agree to allow a case to go ahead, reject it or ask for more information.

In a press release yesterday the prosecution said that "ICC proceedings should go hand in hand with complementary investigations and prosecutions at the national level as well as healing and reconciliation processes.

"These three tracks would complement each other. Kenyans could provide an historic example for the world in how to address and prevent massive crimes."

The ICC is an independent, permanent court that investigates and prosecutes persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is based in The Hague in the Netherlands.

Iraqi decision means election preparations can now proceed, Ban says



8 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed today's approval by Iraqi lawmakers of amendments to electoral laws, saying the move – which follows weeks of deadlock – means national parliamentary polls can be held in January as scheduled.

A majority of members in Iraq's Council of Representatives today backed the amendments, which are supposed to be in place 90 days before the staging of the polls, currently slated for 16 January.

Lawmakers had been deadlocked for weeks on how to deal with the oil-rich, ethnically mixed region of Kirkuk in the north and on the publication of candidate lists.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson Mr. Ban said “this decision now paves the way for preparations for national elections to be held in January.

“These elections will be a crucial opportunity to advance national reconciliation and contribute to Iraq's political progress,” he added. “The Secretary-General appeals to all political blocs and their leaders to demonstrate true statesmanship during the election campaign and participate in a spirit of national unity.”

Mr. Ban reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to support and assisting the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), tasked with organizing the ballot.

He also encouraged the Iraqi people “to participate in a process that will shape their country's future.”

Ban welcomes power-sharing deal in Madagascar



The UN is closely involved with efforts to resolve the political crisis in Madagascar peacefully

7 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the power-sharing agreement reached by Madagascar's current and former leaders and urged them to implement the deal to resolve months of political wrangling in the Indian Ocean country.

Madagascar's four past and present leaders -- Andry Rajoelina, Marc Ravalomanana, Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy -- struck the power-sharing deal today following talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Mr. Ban "urges the Malagasy leaders to speedily inaugurate the Government of National Unity and to put in place the transitional institutions foreseen in the Maputo agreement," his spokesperson said in a statement.

In early August the four leaders reached a separate power-sharing deal in Maputo, Mozambique, but were subsequently

unable to agree on the composition of a transitional government.

Mr. Ban's spokesperson said the UN would continue to support Madagascar "through the transition and beyond," led by former Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano, who has been working with the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the International Organization of the Francophonie to mediate a solution to the political tensions.

For almost a year Madagascar has been engulfed by political problems that culminated in the resignation in March of Mr. Ravalomanana as president. He was replaced as national leader by Mr. Rajoelina, the former mayor of the capital, Antananarivo.

Pakistani farmers get help to boost production from UN, European Union



Distribution of seed and fertilizer to farmers hit hard by last year's food price hikes.

9 November - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the European Union (EU) have partnered to provide seed and fertilizer to almost 100,000 farmers in rural Pakistan who were hit by the surge in food prices last year.

According to FAO, an additional 10 million Pakistanis were pushed into hunger as a result of the rise in food prices, bringing the total number in the South Asian nation to an estimated 46 million, or 28 per cent of the population.

While Pakistan has just produced a bumper crop of 24 million tonnes of wheat – 2 million above its nationwide requirement in food, prices remain high, especially in rural areas, where most food insecure people live.

“The food may be there, but for many, it is too expensive to buy,” FAO noted in a news release.

The EU works with both FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) to alleviate hunger in Pakistan, funding a €40 million operation through to June 2011.

As part of that programme, WFP is providing food assistance to nearly 600,000 farmers and labourers, while FAO helps small-scale farmers – who make up much of the country's rural population – increase their production.

“They can't grow enough for themselves, because the prices of inputs have gone up,” said Gamal Ahmed, FAO's Representative in Pakistan. “That's why we focus on providing them with seeds and fertilizer.”

Ahead of the planting season which begins this month, 97,500 farmers received agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizer from FAO.

The agency also works to ensure that productivity gains are sustainable beyond the current season, by improving irrigation and water harvesting systems, by reducing post-harvest losses, and by offering training to farmers.

Joint UN-African force calls on Sudanese group to stop obstructing its work



UNAMID soldiers

9 November - The joint African Union-United Nations mission assisting in restoring peace and stability in Darfur has called on one of the major rebel groups in the Sudanese region to stop impeding its work, while deploring the harassment and detention of its personnel.

The call from the mission, known as UNAMID, follows an incident on 4 November in which armed elements from the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) surrounded a UN helicopter which landed at Deribat, East Jabel Marra in South Darfur.

The group prevented the helicopter from taking off for three hours, before eventually releasing it and the UNAMID personnel on board who were on a field assessment in the area.

“UNAMID strongly deplores the periodic harassment and detention of its personnel and stresses that it will not tolerate any attempts at intimidation or attacks on its personnel that are aimed at thwarting the progress of the peace process,” the Mission said in a statement.

Since the conflict in Darfur began in 2003, pitting rebels against Government forces and allied Janjaweed militia, some 300,000 people are estimated to have been killed through direct combat or as a result of disease, malnutrition or reduced life expectancy, and more than 2.7 million others have been forced to flee their homes.

UNAMID has been in place in Darfur since the start of last year to try to quell the fighting and humanitarian suffering that has engulfed the region.