



In the headlines:

- Ban deplores Israeli decision to expand Jerusalem settlement
- Top UN official visits camps housing Sri Lanka's conflict-displaced
- Security Council calls on UN missions to help protect civilians from Ugandan rebels
- UN, partners revise appeal for storm-hit Philippines upward to nearly \$144 million
- UN tribunal clears two Rwandans accused of genocide, crimes against humanity
- Security Council urges Malagasy leaders to hold elections, form Government
- Top UN official stresses academia's role in solving global problems
- Over 117,000 displaced Bosnians kept from returning home by political disputes – UN
- Mine blasts take terrible toll despite UN progress in eliminating explosives
- UN report condemns trial in DR Congo military court over killing of journalist
- Violence against Kyrgyz woman rising despite legal restraints, UN expert says
- Ordinary citizens can help world's hungry billion through online UN campaign

More stories inside

Ban deplores Israeli decision to expand Jerusalem settlement

17 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deplored the Israeli Government's decision today to expand Jerusalem's Gilo settlement, stressing that it was built on Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.

“The Secretary-General reiterates his position that settlements are illegal, and calls on Israel to respect its commitments under the Road Map to cease all settlement activity, including natural growth,” a statement issued by his spokesperson said, referring to the peace plan that foresees two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security.



A street in Gilo, Jerusalem

“He believes that such actions undermine efforts for peace and cast doubt on the viability of the two-State solution,” it added.

It was the latest of several recent statements by Mr. Ban calling for a halt to Israeli settlement activity and the demolition of Palestinian homes and evictions in East Jerusalem. Last month he stated that Jerusalem must be the capital of two States – Israel and Palestine – with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all, if peace in the Middle East is to be achieved.

Top UN official visits camps housing Sri Lanka's conflict-displaced



UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes (right) speaking with IDPs in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, on 27 April 2009

17 November - The top United Nations humanitarian official kicked off his visit to Sri Lanka today with a stop at camps housing some of the civilians uprooted during the country's decades-long conflict to see what progress has been made in terms of releases and the remaining problems.

The three-day visit is the fourth to the country this year for Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes, who has raised the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with officials on several occasions.

There were more than 270,000 displaced people staying in closed camps after the conflict between the Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended in May. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that about 163,000 are still there.

The residents in the camps in Jaffna that Mr. Holmes visited today continue to suffer from a lack of freedom of movement and are hoping for an early return to their homes or release from the camp, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Mr. Holmes, who is also UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, also spoke to some of the 60,000 recent returnees to Jaffna, who were happy to be out of the camps but continue to face problems, including separation from family members, and lack of means of livelihood.

In addition, he met with the local government officials in Jaffna and was updated on the progress in the demining exercise to facilitate the return of IDPs to their areas of origin. They also discussed early recovery issues.

Tomorrow Mr. Holmes will travel to Vavuniya, where most of those who fled the violence have been staying.

He will then return to the capital, Colombo, to meet with government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the country.

Security Council calls on UN missions to help protect civilians from Ugandan rebels

17 November - The Security Council today called on United Nations missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan to coordinate strategies to protect civilians from the rebel Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has killed, kidnapped and displaced thousands of people.

In a press statement read out by Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the monthly presidency for November, the 15-member body "expressed deep concern at the direct and serious threat the activities of the LRA pose to the civilian population, the conduct of humanitarian operations and regional stability."



Children displaced by LRA attacks in Western Equatoria State, Sudan

It commended States in the region for their increased cooperation, welcomed their joint efforts to address the serious threat posed by the LRA, and encouraged them to share information with UN operations in the region so as to make every possible effort to ensure the protection of civilians, in particular women and children.

The LRA, which terrorized northern Uganda for two decades before spilling over into neighbouring countries, has been accused of committing atrocities including mutilations and the recruitment of child soldiers.

The Council reiterated previous demands that the LRA immediately cease all attacks on civilians, and urged them to surrender, assemble and disarm, as required by an unfulfilled peace agreement which the group's leader Joseph Kony has refused to sign.

UN, partners revise appeal for storm-hit Philippines upward to nearly \$144 million



In the lakeshore community of Muntinlupa, outside Manila, elderly women queue to receive relief items

17 November - International aid agencies are seeking nearly \$144 million in a revised appeal to support humanitarian efforts in the Philippines, which was hit by a series of storms since September, the United Nations said today.

According the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), only \$26 million has been received so far in response to the initial appeal for \$74 million launched in early October.

Nearly 1,000 people died as a result of the disasters – Tropical Storm Ketsana and Typhoons Parma and Mirinae – which affected around 9.8 million people and destroyed over 40,000 homes.

The latest assessments by UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) show that some 4.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 520,000 children under the age of five.

“Of particular concern for humanitarian agencies are the estimated 1.7 million people still displaced or living in areas that remain flooded,” OCHA stated in a news release. “These areas are likely to remain flooded for another three or four months, putting those affected at serious risk of disease outbreaks.”

The storms have severely affected the planting season in Northern Luzon, the main agricultural region in the Philippines. Preliminary assessments by the Department of Agriculture and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that between 100,000 and 120,000 farming households, or half a million people, lost all of their production and assets.

Aid agencies have been reporting that funding shortfalls have limited their ability to follow through with humanitarian action plans designed to support life-saving projects and to launch early recovery efforts.

UN tribunal clears two Rwandans accused of genocide, crimes against humanity

17 November - The United Nations-backed tribunal tasked with trying atrocities committed during the 1994 Rwandan massacre of ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus today acquitted a priest who had been charged with genocide and crimes against humanity, a day after it did the same in the case of the brother-in-law of the country's former president.

Judges presiding at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) ordered the immediate release of Hormisdas Nsengimana – accused of being a leader in “Les Dragons” or “Escadrons de la Mort” (“Death Squad”) – from the ICTR detention centre in Arusha, Tanzania.

During the genocide, Mr. Nsengimana was a rector of the prestigious Catholic school, Collège Christ-Roi in Nyanza. He was also alleged to be at the centre of the extremist Hutu gang that planned and carried out targeted attacks in and around the school and other parts of the region.

The Trial Chamber said the Prosecution failed to establish the factual and legal basis to convict Mr. Nsengimana for criminal responsibility in the deaths of several Tutsi priests, a judge, and many other Tutsi victims. Insufficient evidence was presented to the Court to find him guilty of establishing and supervising three roadblocks in the vicinity of Christ-Roi,



2003 poster of fugitives wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

mounted to intercept and eliminate Tutsis.

Yesterday, the ICTR also acquitted and released Protais Zigiranyirazo, brother-in-law of the former Rwandan President, after a successful appeal to overturn his conviction for genocide and crimes against humanity.

The Appeals Chamber found several serious factual and legal errors in the Trial Chamber's assessment of Mr. Zigiranyirazo's alibis, in relation to both events on which his convictions were based.

Security Council urges Malagasy leaders to hold elections, form Government



The aftermath of turmoil in Madagascar

17 November - The Security Council today welcomed the power-sharing agreement reached by Madagascar's current and former leaders, and urged the political forces to end months of internal strife with the establishment of a new Government.

The four past and present leaders – Andry Rajoelina, Marc Ravalomanana, Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy – of the Indian Ocean nation struck the deal following talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 6 November.

The 15-member Council encouraged the political forces “to rapidly conclude the formation of the Government,” Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting of Austria, which holds the Council's rotating presidency for this month, told reporters after a closed-door meeting.

Mr. Mayr-Harting added that the Council supports the efforts of the United Nations in the process, in particular the election consultation team which was sent this week.

In addition, it encourages the joint mediation team to continue its efforts to help implement the next steps agreed in Addis Ababa, in particular the referendum on the Constitution and the organization of the elections.

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.

Top UN official stresses academia's role in solving global problems

17 November - A top United Nations official today called for a new culture of “intellectual social responsibility” to take education beyond the classroom to the search for real solutions to real problems, with the academic and educational sectors creating and sharing knowledge to help realise UN objectives and goals.

“The United Nations was founded on the premise of individual States working collectively for the greater global good,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyoo Akasaka told the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha, Qatar.



Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyoo Akasaka

“It draws upon the strength of all nations to address a broad spectrum of security, development and human rights challenges. The time has come for scholarship to do the same, and to draw upon all its varied disciplines to inform the solutions to the problems the world faces today.

“The time has come for a new culture of ‘intellectual social responsibility’ – one that takes teaching, learning and research beyond the classroom, laboratory or campus; one that harnesses its energy and promise to the search for real solutions to the real problems that are confronted by real people; and one that recognizes that to be sustainable, education must itself have

the capacity to sustain.”

Mr. Akasaka pointed to the “movement of minds” launched by his own Department of Public Information (DPI), mobilizing an international network of centres of higher learning through the Academic Impact initiative, with the simple premise that there is no area of scholarship or research which cannot have an impact on what the UN is trying to do.

“What the ‘Academic Impact’ asks is that each participating institution undertake one activity each year which can directly contribute to the realization of a specific United Nations objective,” he said of the initiative first announced by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last year, and which has been joined by more than 250 universities and institutions of higher learning so far and endorsed by international academic networks from every region, covering a range of disciplines.

These include technology, public health, art, physical and social sciences, global affairs and education itself which, Mr. Akasaka stressed, was central to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These include targets for slashing a host of ills, including extreme hunger and poverty, infant and maternal mortality, and lack of access to education and health care – all by 2015.

“Whether in the area of health, shelter, or livelihood, education is the means to their achievement,” Mr. Akasaka said, noting that Mr. Ban has called for a summit next year to galvanize action to achieve the MDGs by the deadline.

“As such, the Millennium Development Goals represent an excellent example of the critical link between academic research and action,” he said, underscoring that they were defined on the basis of what was seen as academically sustainable, with their benchmarks determined scientifically. Universities could mobilize their campuses to demonstrate support to the MDGs at the 2010 summit, he added, citing a tremendous groundswell of youth support, particularly from students, for the goals and the efforts of governments to attain them.

Mr. Akasaka cited both the Academic Impact and the mobilization for the MDGs as concrete examples of how to make education sustainable, a major focus of the WISE organized by Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned and the Qatar Foundation and bringing together a diverse group of experts and leaders.

“It will only be when education provides not only the skills, but also leads to opportunities to make use of them, that education can again be said to be truly sustainable,” he stressed, noting that 51 million jobs will need to be created in Arab countries within the next 10 years to absorb those entering the job market.

“The question remains whether the education of this region’s large youth population will be met at the same pace as the creation of jobs and other opportunities for the future educated men and women of this region. Failure to do so, and the resulting frustration and disappointment that could arise, might result in potentially ‘unsustainable’ societies,” he said.

Turning to the global picture, Mr. Akasaka said that worldwide 72 million children of primary school age are still denied the right to education, almost half of them in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Asia with 18 million out-of-school children. In Western Asia, 64 per cent of the 3 million children out of school are girls.

“It is only when a world preoccupied with immediate deadlines and timeframes looks to a vision of the future that the benefits of education become tangible and, indeed, sustainable,” he added.

In his speech to the summit, the Secretary-General’s High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Cheick Sidi Diarra, focused on ways to manage international academic mobility, which he called a “double-edged sword” that offers many possibilities for developing countries but also threatens to drain them of intellectual capital.

“If current trends of internationalization continue, the distribution of the world’s wealth and talent will be further skewed,” he said. “[But] the advancement of communication technology has made it increasingly feasible to tap intellectual migrants at their host countries, creating the phenomenon of brain circulation.”

Over 117,000 displaced Bosnians kept from returning home by political disputes – UN

17 November - Political disputes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are impeding the return of over 117,000 people, dooming them to endure the consequences of wartime atrocities 14 years after the end of the Balkan conflict that drove them from their homes, an independent United Nations expert said today.

“Bosnia’s internally displaced need durable solutions to rebuild their lives,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Representative on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Walter Kälin said on his return to Geneva from Sarajevo, the capital. “However, the present political disputes endanger the progress needed to address their humanitarian needs and to remove an important obstacle to a lasting peace.”



Walter Kälin, the Secretary-General's Representative for the Human Rights of IDPs

He stressed that a revised strategy plank of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war sets out a range of measures to assist IDPs, dealing with all relevant elements for a durable solution on issues of housing and property, security, livelihoods, health and education, non-discrimination and reconciliation, but certain political parties have blocked its adoption in the upper house of the parliament.

“There are still more than 117,000 registered IDPs who are in need of durable solutions,” Mr. Kälin said, noting the revised strategy reaffirms that return is the preferred solution, while also providing space for local integration, especially of the most vulnerable.

“Many returnees need to have their houses reconstructed and connected to infrastructure. It is just as important that they benefit from equal opportunities to find employment. It also needs to be ensured that their pensions and social welfare entitlements are transferred to their place of return,” he added, calling on the Government not to reduce budget allocations for a durable solution and on donors to continue to provide the necessary funding.

He recalled that 7,500 people still reside in often dreadful conditions in collective centres. “Most of these people are too vulnerable or traumatized to return. However, they should and can be integrated locally,” he said.

“For example, I met a woman who suffered unspeakable atrocities during the war and did not want to return to her home region. When she received a small apartment after spending more than a decade in limbo, she said that the war had finally come to an end for her.”

Mine blasts take terrible toll despite UN progress in eliminating explosives



17 November - With over 5,000 casualties last year from landmines that continue to indiscriminately kill and maim decades after they are laid, two senior United Nations officials today warned that, despite significant progress in ridding the world of these explosive devices, much more needs to be done.

“Over the past two years over 41 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed,” the Assistant-Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Dmitry Titov, told reporters in New York. “And the production, transfer and sale of anti-personnel mines has stopped in many parts of the

world.”

He noted that in Sudan mine clearance efforts have opened up to 29,000 kilometres of road, unblocking trade routes, allowing refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their communities, and helping humanitarian agencies

deliver emergency relief supplies to various vulnerable groups around the country.

Some headway has even been made in war-torn Afghanistan, site of the oldest and largest mine action programme, where the number of casualties of landmine blasts has dropped from over 100 per month in 2005 to less than 60 a month at present owing to the destruction of around 84,000 mines in 2008 alone.

However, the goals of “clearing land and transport routes to improve the livelihoods of communities are still hampered by the threat of landmines in over 70 countries,” stressed Director of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Maxwell Kerley.

“Some 14 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines still remain to be destroyed throughout the world,” said Mr. Kerley, recalling a recent report by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urging all UN Member States to ratify the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has been signed by 103 countries and ratified by 24 to date.

Mr. Kerley also noted that some 1,000 participants representing governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are slated to attend the UNMAS summit on a mine-free world, to be held in Cartagena, Colombia, in two weeks.

Fourteen UN departments, agencies, programmes and funds play a role in mine-action programmes in 30 countries and three territories.

UN report condemns trial in DR Congo military court over killing of journalist

17 November - A United Nations report released today criticizes the judicial process in a Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) military court in connection with the trial of a murdered Congolese journalist, including the alleged bribery of the presiding judges.

The report concluded that the judicial process was “interspersed with several irregularities suggesting that the judiciary authorities lack the will to establish the truth” behind the June 2007 killing of Serge Maheshe, who was working for UN-sponsored Radio Okapi.



Serge Maheshe

Mr. Maheshe was shot dead while entering a UN-marked vehicle in Bukavu, the capital of volatile eastern province of South Kivu. In August 2007 four civilians were initially sentenced to death on the basis of confessions, which were subsequently retracted.

Military magistrates were accused at the time of obtaining the confessions under duress, but no independent inquiry was carried out to investigate these allegations.

The report stressed that “certain violations noticed in the Maheshe case are frequently observed in other trials before military courts.”

The report on the trial – produced jointly by the UN mission in DRC (MONUC) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – noted that the guarantees for a just and fair trial were not respected by the South Kivu Military Court.

It spotlighted the court’s refusal to investigate other credible leads and motives likely to shed more light on the murder among the persistent inadequacies in the criminal inquiry.

In addition, the report underscored the absence of an independent and impartial inquiry into subornation charges brought against two military magistrates and a climate of intimidation and threats against the defence lawyers among the barriers to a fair process.

Echoing the report, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay urged the Government “to guarantee the

protection of lawyers and human rights defenders, including journalists, to allow them to perform freely their duty, without risk of interference, discrimination, threat or reprisal.”

Ms. Pillay also called on the international community to help strengthen technical and logistical support to the Congolese judicial institutions and reinforce resources for all the members of the judiciary, civilian and military.

“We all must pursue, with the Congolese political and judiciary authorities, the independence and integrity of justice, the strict compliance with the principle of the right to a fair trial,” said Ms. Pillay, highlighting the need to adopt “a law for the protection of human rights defenders, including journalists, that complies with relevant international norms.”

Violence against Kyrgyz woman rising despite legal restraints, UN expert says



Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women

17 November - Despite the encouraging commitments by the Kyrgyz Government, women and girls are increasingly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and destitution, an independent United Nations human rights expert said today following her first mission to the country.

UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women Rashida Manjoo commended the Government for the adoption of numerous international instruments and legislative and policy frameworks, such as the Law on Social and Legal Protection against Domestic Violence, which has been described as one of the most progressive in the region.

But she noted that since Kyrgyzstan’s independence in 1991, these efforts “have been accompanied by widespread poverty on the ground, insufficient investments and reforms in social services, and a resurfacing and reinterpretation of traditions and values which have strengthened patriarchal systems of control over women, gender stereotypes and de facto discrimination.”

As a result, she said, “there is an increase in the prevalence levels of violence against women and girl children, homelessness, migration, the numbers of women being incarcerated for drug-related offences and also for the killing of family members, rates of HIV/AIDS infections, maternal mortality rates, levels and forms of corruption, and impunity for acts of violence against women by both State and non-State actors.”

During the 8 to 17 November visit, Ms. Manjoo met with government officials, human rights and women’s organizations and victims of violence. She said the most prevalent forms of violence against women – two-thirds of whom live in rural areas – include domestic violence and under-age marriages.

“Equality and equal protection doctrines demand that we address violence against women as discrimination against women, and as a serious human rights violation,” she said.

“The rights to dignity, equality, bodily integrity, non-discrimination and freedom from all forms of violence – both public and private – are fundamental rights. Elimination of violence against women requires political will, legal measures, human and financial resources, and also civil society action.”

Ms. Manjoo, who was appointed to her post in June 2009, works in an independent and unpaid capacity, and reports to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.

Ordinary citizens can help world's hungry billion through online UN campaign

17 November - As the number of chronically hungry people tops one billion, the head of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is calling on ordinary citizens to mobilize through the "Billion for a Billion" campaign to end hunger.

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran highlighted the campaign in a statement issued on the second day of the World Summit on Food Security taking place in Rome.

"Food security is not only a matter of humanitarian assistance and agricultural development; it is a matter of national security, peace and stability," Ms. Sheeran said.

"Without food, people revolt, migrate or die. This is the emergency issue of our generation, and we stand at a critical crossroads. At this moment in time we must galvanize all nations, all people and all resources to defeat hunger."

"A Billion for a Billion" (www.wfp.org/1billion) is an online campaign designed to make a link between the "on-line haves" and the "have nots."

It is based on the idea that more than a billion people go hungry, but more than a billion people are on the internet.

"If everyone with plenty gave just \$1.50 or Euro1 a week, those without food would have enough to eat," Ms. Sheeran noted.

"Together we need to make sure that the hungry eat today – and are able to feed themselves tomorrow. It's time to act."



WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran

UN rights chief urges South Asian judges to facilitate access to justice for all



17 November - The United Nations human rights chief has called on judges across South Asia to ensure that everyone has access to justice, as part of efforts to combat the scourges of inequality and discrimination.

While inequality and discrimination remain an enormous challenge across the world, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay singled out what she described as "the burden of multiple discrimination" that affects women, the poor, caste groups and indigenous peoples, among many others.

"This web of inequality and discrimination produces swathes of social exclusion and disadvantage in our societies," she said in a video message to the opening on Monday of a meeting of regional judges and experts from the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) and the UN Human Rights Council.

The two-day event, hosted by the Maldives, looks at the interpretation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination by courts in the region and the role of judges in ensuring access to justice for all.

"The judiciary can and must play a critical role in fighting the scourges of inequality and discrimination," Ms. Pillay stressed, noting in particular that they can do this by facilitating access to justice.

"Regardless of the substance of a complaint, some individuals' claims will never be heard because of barriers to justice that discriminate against them," she said. "This is an area in which judges may have even more power to counter discrimination and exclusion."

She added that OHCHR hoped to strengthen its cooperation with judiciaries in South Asia and support them through the dissemination of good practices and comparative jurisprudence, and to facilitate the sharing of experience and insights among peers.

UN refugee agency calls for end to three-year detention of Lao Hmong



Lao Hmong boy in a refugee camp

17 November - The United Nations refugee agency today called for an end to the detention of 158 Lao Hmong, who have been held ever since they were rounded up in Bangkok for deportation three years ago.

“UNHCR calls on all parties to play their part in finding a humanitarian solution to their plight and end the detention of this group,” Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told a news conference in Geneva.

The children, women and men who are being held in two cells in an immigration detention centre in Nong Khai, Thailand, have been recognized as refugees, Mr. Mahecic said.

He noted that many of the Hmong living in the highlands of Laos took part in the war that engulfed Laos in the 1960s and 1970s. When the Pathet Lao came to power in 1975, many tens of thousands of Lao Hmong fled to Thailand seeking asylum, and large numbers were resettled in Western countries, mostly in the United States.

Four countries – the US, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands – have offered resettlement places to the refugees.

“We believe they should be allowed to leave Thailand for resettlement,” said Mr. Mahecic. “They have not committed any crime, and their detention serves no purpose.”

“We believe that a solution for this group will not only respond to an urgent humanitarian need but also help turn one of the final pages in the refugee history of the Hmong in Thailand.”

Property issues remain focus of UN-backed talks between Cypriot leaders



Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias (right) and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat

17 November - Property issues were once again the focus as Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders met today to continue United Nations-backed reunification talks.

Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat held “good and friendly discussions,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Cyprus, Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, told reporters after the meeting.

The leaders will meet again on Friday to take up organizational matters, and then again next Tuesday, to discuss citizenship, immigration and asylum, Mr. Zerihoun added.

Last year Mr. Christofias and Mr. Talat committed themselves to working towards “a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions.”

That partnership would comprise a Federal Government with a single international personality, along with a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, which would be of equal status.

Full-fledged power-sharing negotiations have been taking place since September 2008.

Latest round of UN-backed Darfur peace talks resumes tomorrow in Qatar

17 November - United Nations-backed mediation talks aimed at bringing peace to the strife-torn Sudanese region of Darfur will resume tomorrow in Doha, Qatar, the world body announced today.

This latest round of the talks will include the participation of Darfurian civil society organizations, including women's and youth groups.

Organized under the auspices of the African Union-UN Joint Mediator, Djibril Bassolé, the Doha talks present an opportunity for the Sudanese Government and rebel movements to negotiate and agree on common measures that would help push the peace process forward.



Landscape of Darfur

Fighting has raged across Darfur since 2003, pitting the rebel movements against Government forces and allied Janjaweed militiamen. An estimated 300,000 people have been killed in the region over the past six years and another 2.7 million people forced to leave their homes.

The joint African Union-UN peacekeeping force in Darfur, known as UNAMID, has been deployed there since January 2008 to try to quell the fighting and protect civilians.

Ban names veteran British journalist as new spokesperson



Martin Nesirky

17 November - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Martin Nesirky, a veteran journalist from the United Kingdom, as his new spokesperson.

Mr. Nesirky is currently with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, where he has served for more than three years as Spokesperson and Head of Press and Public Information.

He also served for more than two decades as an international correspondent and editor for Reuters. He covered a number of issues affecting international peace and security, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, events in the Balkans and nuclear non-proliferation issues.

His tenure with Reuters included a stint as the Moscow Bureau Chief with responsibility for coverage of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and as a senior editor in London handling global political news stories, including the Middle East and Africa. He has been posted in Berlin, The Hague, and Seoul.

Mr. Nesirky succeeds Michele Montas of Haiti who is retiring from the Organization on 30 November.

“The Secretary-General is grateful to Ms. Montas for her dedication and service as his Spokesperson since the beginning of his term on 1 January 2007,” read a note issued by Mr. Ban’s office.

Yellow fever vaccination drive to cover almost 12 million West Africans – UN

17 November - The largest-ever mass vaccination campaign protecting populations from the dangerously infectious yellow fever disease will begin next week across three West African countries, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) announced today.

The week-long UN-supported initiative is slated to target nearly 12 million people across Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone, all countries at high risk of yellow fever outbreaks.

Local health teams will administer the vaccinations, as well as offer a package of pre-emptive measures, including vitamin A, deworming tablets and, in Sierra Leone, measles vaccine.

“High vaccination coverage will prevent outbreaks of yellow fever, a disease that is very difficult to diagnose in the early stages of infection,” said WHO Epidemic Readiness and Intervention Unit Coordinator William Perea.

“A single dose of the vaccine offers full protection,” noted Dr. Perea, adding that he hoped the vaccination campaigns would be carried out throughout all high risk African countries by 2015.

With help from a \$103 million donation from the GAVI Alliance – a vaccine-financing partnership that includes WHO, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – a total of 29 million people have been protected through mass vaccinations programmes since 2007 conducted in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal and Togo, as well as a first phase completed in Sierra Leone.

“Thirty-seven countries in Africa and the Americas have introduced yellow fever vaccine in their routine childhood immunization schedule up from 12 countries a decade ago,” said the Director of WHO’s Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals, Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele.

However, 160 million people could still be at risk in Africa if further funding is not secured for the emergency stockpile and preventive vaccination in remaining high-risk countries, added Dr. Okwo-Bele.

“Yellow fever is reappearing in countries that have not reported cases in many years,” said Fenella Avokey, WHO African Regional Office Medical Officer for Yellow Fever Control.

“We must finish the job we started to sustain the gains achieved so far,” said UNICEF Senior Health Specialist Edward Hoekstra. “Children and adults in West and Central Africa are unnecessarily affected by yellow fever, when one dose of vaccine would prevent them getting the disease at all.”

The 13 highest-risk countries in Africa are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.



Mosquitoes, such as those that carry yellow fever, breed in stagnant water

Women's empowerment in Africa targeted at UN-backed conference



17 November - A week-long United Nations-backed conference on achieving the equality and empowerment of women in Africa has opened in Banjul, The Gambia, with calls for an urgent revamping of current practices on the continent.

“It is high time for Africa to depart from this unproductive rule of doing business as usual,” UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Deputy Executive Secretary Lalla Ben Barka told the Eighth Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15), which began yesterday and is being attended by over 600 participants from 43 countries.

“Indeed, the time to revisit our habits and actions is NOW because women are still bearing the brunt of all types of shortcomings, crises, wars and conflicts,” she added.

Beijing +15 refers to the UN Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, when world leaders committed themselves to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and declared that their full participation in all spheres of society, including the decision-making and access to power, are fundamental for development and peace.

Men have a role in ensuring women's participation, UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in The Gambia Chinwe Dike stressed, referring to the plank in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that urges men to participate fully in all actions towards equality. “Women's well-being often cannot improve without including men because gender is relational,” she said.

The conference was also briefed on the restructuring of the ECA's Committee of Women and Development (CWD), which will serve as an advisory forum of experts and policy makers providing guidance to the Commission's work on gender equality, empowerment and advancement. The Committee is composed of senior experts from ECA's member States.

Green energy on rise across Africa but still lags behind other regions – UN



17 November - More green energy and climate-friendly projects target Africa than ever before, but the numbers still lag behind Asia and Latin America, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced today.

The projects, from renewable energies to tree planting, are part of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol – the global emissions reduction treaty. They allow developed countries to reduce emissions and meet global warming commitments by investing in carbon reduction projects in developing countries.

A total of 112 CDM Africa projects, worth a total of Euros 212 million a year, are at “validation, requesting registration or registered,” UNEP said, noting that this is up from 78 projects in 2008 and just two in 2004.

Around 80 per cent of the projects are in sub-Saharan Africa, with 28 projects underway or planned in South Africa, followed by 14 in Kenya. In North Africa, Egypt has 13 projects, followed by Morocco with 10.

The projects include two large solar water heating projects in South Africa, the promotion of energy efficient light bulbs in rural Senegal and a municipal waste-composting project in Uganda.

Experts say the latest figures underline the importance of Africa's Governments pressing for reform in the weeks before the UN Climate Change Convention meeting in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December.

At the same time, they noted that while the figures are cause for optimism, they also underline how few projects are currently flowing into Africa when compared with several other parts of the world.

Globally, there are over 4,730 CDM projects operating or close to approval. The lion's share is in Asia and the Pacific with a total of just over 3,700 projects, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean with close to 820.

These issues will be part of the agenda at the Green Electricity Conference organized by UNEP, the Kenyan Government and the French development agency AFD in Nairobi on 23 and 24 November.