



In the headlines:

- Somali violence uproots 80,000 civilians in January alone, reports UN agency
- Shelter urgently needed for Haitian quake victims, UN reports
- UN agency boosts efforts to assist rising number of hungry in southern Sudan
- Parties in Western Sahara dispute to hold new round of talks next week – UN
- Haiti's children at increased risk of abduction, slavery and trafficking, UN experts warn
- Attacks halt UN food agency's deliveries in north-western Afghanistan
- Child labour impeding development in Ecuador, says UN rights expert
- UN neutral in next year's southern Sudan referendum, Ban stresses
- UN closes Palestinian refugee camp straddling Iraqi-Syrian border
- UN calls on Europe to take in larger share of refugees for resettlement
- Japan takes first steps to resettle refugees from Myanmar, UN reports
- Extreme cold triggers livestock disaster in Mongolia – UN

More stories inside

Somali violence uproots 80,000 civilians in January alone, reports UN agency

2 February - The United Nations refugee agency today reported that a sharp rise in violence in Somalia in January left nearly 260 civilians dead, in addition to uprooting over 80,000 and causing widespread destruction.

According to local sources, intense clashes between Government forces and militia groups fighting in the strife-torn central regions have also left 253 civilians wounded.

All of this “makes January the deadliest month since last August,” Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva.

During January, some 29,000 people have been uprooted by heavy fighting in Dhusamareeb in Galgaduud region, with the internally displaced persons (IDPs) there facing difficult conditions.

“Fearful of returning to their homes, many are reported to be sleeping in the open with dwindling shelter and little water. There are also growing concerns about the health conditions of particularly vulnerable groups – such as children, women and elderly,” said Mr. Mahecic.

Also last month, over 25,000 have fled their homes to escape renewed clashes in Beled Weyne in Hiraaan region, while



A group of Somali IDPs outside their crude shelters in an area west of Mogadishu

another 18,000 are known to have been displaced in the on-going conflict in the capital, Mogadishu.

UNHCR said that worsening security has made it difficult, if not impossible, for humanitarian workers to access the needy population.

The agency plans to distribute emergency relief items and shelter material to over 18,000 people in 27 locations where the displaced are temporarily settled around Dhusamareeb and Beled-Weyne as soon as the security conditions allow.

More than 1.4 million people are internally displaced in Somalia, which has been devastated by factional fighting and without a functioning central government since 1991, owing to escalating violence and a worsening humanitarian situation.

In addition, some 560,000 Somalis live as refugees in the neighbouring countries, including Kenya, Yemen and Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) said it is working with its non-governmental partners in Somalia to carry out disease surveillance. There are indications that acute watery diarrhoea is widespread in parts of the country's central and southern regions.

Shelter urgently needed for Haitian quake victims, UN reports



Haitians build temporary homes in Port-au-Prince

2 February - Beyond food, hundreds of thousands of Haitian earthquake victims displaced from their homes in Port-au-Prince, Léogâne and Jacmel urgently need shelter, with plastic sheeting taking priority over tents, the United Nations reported today in its latest update three weeks after the catastrophe struck the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Haiti's Ministry of Health, with support from the UN World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), is planning a targeted immunization campaign beginning today for people in temporary settlements, including rubella and diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccines for children under seven and diphtheria and tetanus for older children and adults, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

said.

Sanitation, which was already a challenge in Haiti prior to the devastating 12 January quake, which killed up to 200,000 people, injured many others and left 2 million in need of aid, is an even greater challenge now, and will remain an important public health issue in the coming weeks, according to UN health officials.

The Government estimates that some \$32 million is needed to buy urgent seeds, tools and fertilizers for farmers so that they can begin planting in March, with the spring planting season usually accounting for 60 per cent of Haiti's agricultural production, OCHA said.

Due to the need to ensure that crops are harvested from the August-October planting season, farmers are not able to migrate to temporary sites or shelter points and many therefore are not being counted in needs assessments and have not received assistance. A UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) aerial assessment of the Grand Goâve and Léogâne areas found that 20 to 60 per cent of farmhouses were destroyed.

The overall security situation across the country remains stable but potentially volatile, OCHA reported. The Haitian police presence is increasing and joint patrolling with UN police is covering many areas in the capital.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) says it has now reached around 850,000 people since the earthquake struck, with rations lasting up to two weeks, and it hopes to provide rice to some 2 million Haitians over the next two weeks.

Provision of shelter materials other than plastic sheeting is not feasible in most spontaneous camps due to the density of the sites and lack of relocation space in the vicinity, and plastic sheeting is being prioritized over tents, with the full endorsement of the Government, to ensure that shelters will last during the rainy season and beyond.

Yesterday UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Haiti Kim Bolduc said 200,000 tents would be needed for the rainy season in three months' time. Shelter support will be incrementally upgraded to transitional shelter and eventually be replaced by construction of permanent housing, OCHA said.

As to logistics, OCHA reported that the south pier of Port-au-Prince port remains unsound, with a capacity to offload some 250 TEU (20-foot container equivalent) per day. This is expected to increase to 500 TEU per day in the coming week. Over 100 ships are currently on their way to Haiti and a system of prioritization is being discussed with the Government. The ports of Cap-Haïtien, Saint Marc and Miragoâne are functional but all have limited capacity.

Meanwhile, Port-au-Prince airport is handling some 120 to 150 planes per day, the number split between United States military aircraft, US civilian flights carrying relief cargo, and international humanitarian flights.

UN agency boosts efforts to assist rising number of hungry in southern Sudan

2 February - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is ramping up efforts to assist nearly 4.3 million people in southern Sudan where the number of hungry has quadrupled over the past year due to conflict and drought.

“This spike in the number of hungry people in southern Sudan comes just ahead of the rainy season, when roads become blocked and communities are cut off from food assistance,” said Leo van der Velden, WFP’s coordinator for southern Sudan.

The agency plans to assist the hungry for two to eight months in 2010, depending on how heavy the rainy season is and the extent of food available in local markets.

It is pre-positioning 50,000 metric tons of sorghum, pulses and vegetable oil to feed the millions who may be cut off when the rains start. It will also support school meal programmes for more than 400,000 schoolchildren and provide food for tens of thousands of conflict-affected families, returnees and refugees.

The annual food needs and livelihood assessment, conducted last November by Sudanese officials along with WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), highlighted the increasing needs of those in southern Sudan.

Since then agencies such as WFP and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have called for immediate action to address the food shortages and prevent them from escalating into a deeper crisis.

WFP currently faces a \$485 million shortfall in funding to provide relief this year to some 11 million people in need of food assistance across all of Sudan, including the south.

Parties in Western Sahara dispute to hold new round of talks next week – UN

2 February - The parties in the dispute over the status of Western Sahara, where fighting broke out between Morocco and the Frente Polisario after Spain’s colonial administration ended in 1976, have agreed to a United Nations proposal to hold their next set of informal talks next week in the United States.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “encourages the parties to make further progress and urges focused and productive discussions,” a statement issued by his spokesman said.

The talks on 10-11 February will be held within the framework of Security Resolution 1871 of last April, which welcomed the parties’ agreement to hold small, informal talks in preparation for a fifth round of negotiations, calling upon them to continue the dialogue



Sudan is WFP's largest operation, with assistance reaching 5.9 million people in 2009



UN-led talks on Western Sahara were held in New York, on 8 January 2008 (file)

under Mr. Ban's auspices without preconditions to achieve "a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara."

The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been entrusted with monitoring the ceasefire reached in September 1991 and organizing a referendum on self-determination.

Morocco has presented a plan for autonomy, while the Frente Polisario says the territory's final status should be decided in a referendum on self-determination that includes independence as an option. The two sides have held several rounds of talks recently under the leadership of Mr. Ban's Personal Envoy Christopher Ross, who proposed the latest round of talks to be held in Westchester County, outside New York.

Haiti's children at increased risk of abduction, slavery and trafficking, UN experts warn



Haitian children camped out on a football field in Jacmel

2 February - Unaccompanied children in Haiti, including orphans and those sent by their parents to live with more affluent relatives or strangers, run a greater risk of being abducted, enslaved, sold or trafficked due to increased insecurity following last month's devastating earthquake, a group of United Nations human rights experts warned today.

"Protection of children must be at the heart of the relief operation in Haiti," said the independent experts, who are mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor slavery, sale of children, trafficking and violence against children.

"Unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable and it is essential, wherever possible, to register, trace and reunite children with their families," they added. "During the evacuation efforts, it is imperative to avoid the unnecessary separation of families which may place children at higher risk, aggravate their trauma and distress and hinder their recovery and reintegration."

The group praised the UN's establishment of a 'Child Protection Sub-Cluster,' geared to safeguard children's rights and prevent violence, abuse and exploitation, and highlighted the efforts of this body to set-up a rapid registration system for unaccompanied children.

"One of their key goals is to register children under five, and older girls, children and youth with mental disabilities or serious injuries, as well as restaveks [those sent by parents to live with others] that have been separated from their 'employers'. We welcome this vital initiative."

They also urged international organizations and governments assisting Haitians "to ensure that the work on child protection remains a priority and continues to be properly funded and coordinated under the umbrella of the United Nations."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Independent Expert on Haiti have also emphasized the critical need to protect children in the chaotic aftermath of the earthquake, and in light of the particular dangers posed by thousands of gang-members and other criminals who escaped from prisons damaged by the quake.

The warning was issued by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery Gulnara Shahinian; the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography Najat M'jid Maalla; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children Joy Ngozi Ezeilo; and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children Marta Santos Pais.

Attacks halt UN food agency's deliveries in north-western Afghanistan



WFP distributes food to an average 3.7 million Afghan people yearly, primarily in remote, rural areas

2 February - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has temporarily suspended deliveries in north-western Afghanistan after a convoy was attacked over the weekend, resulting in the loss of over 100 metric tons of food aid.

A 19-truck convoy was stopped for the night in the Sang Atash area of Badghis province on 30 January when it was attacked.

Seven vehicles and the food supplies they were carrying were destroyed, while two other vehicles were damaged, although some of the food they were transporting was salvaged.

Challiss McDonough, WFP public information officer for Afghanistan, said that one truck driver is being treated for injuries, while one driver and his truck are currently unaccounted for.

The agency, she said, has temporarily halted food deliveries to the area while the security situation is being evaluated.

“WFP calls on all parties in Afghanistan to allow safe passage of vital food assistance intended to support the neediest Afghans,” Ms. McDonough said.

The agency has been working continuously in the country since 1963 and is active in all 34 of its provinces. It has identified insecurity, drought, floods and low education levels as being among the factors exacerbating food insecurity in Afghanistan.

Child labour impeding development in Ecuador, says UN rights expert



Gulnara Shahinian, UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery

2 February - Despite the commitment shown by Ecuador to eliminate child labour, the scourge remains a major obstacle to the country's development efforts, said an independent United Nations human rights expert.

Following her just-concluded visit to the country, Gulnara Shahinian, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, lauded the Government's efforts to tackle child labour, including its worst forms, domestic servitude, forced labour and debt bondage.

However, she told reporters in Quito yesterday that, despite the progress made, the extent of child labour remains “alarming” and domestic servitude and debt bondage are challenges still to be overcome.

“Child labour in all its forms is an obstacle to the development of Ecuador where a high percentage of the population are children,” stressed Ms. Shahinian.

The Special Rapporteur noted a number of initiatives by the Government, UN agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other actors to eliminate child labour and to address the situation of child-workers.

At the same time, she deeply regretted that “those programmes have yet to achieve universal coverage and be accessible to all.”

Ms. Shahinian also assessed cases of labour exploitation, inhuman and degrading treatment as well as discrimination, which are encountered particularly by the large refugee and asylum-seeking community of Colombian nationals as well as sectors of the Ecuadorian population, including Afro-Ecuadorians, montubios and indigenous peoples.

“I am very concerned about the dire conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers and wish to stress that the Government is responsible for their protection and the restoration of their rights,” she said. “Urgent measures are required to protect and restore the rights of these people and to create an environment conducive to the elimination of labour exploitation and slavery in these areas.”

In addition, she noted that the international standards for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in the provinces outside Pichincha are not sufficiently implemented, despite the Government’s liberal immigration policy.

“It is only by investing adequately in all children, regardless of ethnic or national origin, immigration or other status, that Ecuador will ensure sustainable development and prosperity for the decades ahead,” stressed Ms. Shahinian, who visited Quito, as well as Machala in the province of El Oro, Esmeraldas, and San Lorenzo in the province of Esmeraldas, and Lita and Ibarra in the province of Imbabura.

The Special Rapporteur, who works in an independent and unpaid capacity, will submit a report on her visit to Ecuador to a forthcoming session of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

UN neutral in next year’s southern Sudan referendum, Ban stresses

2 February - The United Nations has taken no position on next year’s referendum on independence for southern Sudan, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored today as he refuted recent media reports to the contrary.

“The Secretary-General made clear that the United Nations would work to support the parties in their efforts to ‘make unity attractive’ as well as the exercise by the people of Southern Sudan of their right to self-determination in a referendum,” his spokesperson said in a statement.

Mr. Ban has also stressed that the world body will endeavour to avoid any “potential negative consequences” following the referendum.

Next year’s vote is among the key milestones of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the pact between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) that ended the long-running north-south civil war.

“Any suggestion that the United Nations may have taken a position that may pre-judge the outcome of such a referendum is incorrect,” today’s statement emphasized.

Nearly 17 million people across the country are estimated to register to vote in elections in April, the first multi-party democratic ballot for decades.

On top of the referendum on Southern Sudan, next year will also witness a referendum on the future of the disputed oil-rich area of Abyei. Last year, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague shifted some of the borders of Abyei, leaving control of the Heglig oil field with the national Government in Khartoum.

Over the weekend, the Secretary-General told the African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that “time is of the essence” for Sudan in light of the elections and referenda scheduled in the near future.



Southerners marching in Juba, Sudan, urging voter registration for crucial April 2010 elections

UN closes Palestinian refugee camp straddling Iraqi-Syrian border

2 February - The United Nations refugee agency has closed a makeshift camp located between the borders of Iraq and Syria and relocated the last of the Palestinians who had been stranded there for nearly four years.

The last 60 residents of the Al Tanf camp were transferred yesterday morning by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), working in cooperation with Syrian authorities, and they will be housed temporarily at another refugee camp, Al Hol, inside Syria.

“I am very happy that this is finally over,” said Abu Mohanned, one of the relocated refugees. “We have been waiting for this for such a long time and yet we are anxious about what’s next.”

Al Tanf, a makeshift camp located on a narrow strip of the so-called “no man’s land” between the Syrian and Iraqi borders, was set up in May 2006 for Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq since 2003 because of threats, torture, detention, or after friends and family members were killed.

While the camp was meant to be a temporary solution, the refugees ended up spending almost four years there, noted UNHCR. During this time, they faced harsh desert conditions such as extreme temperatures, sandstorms and floods, all with difficult access to medical services.

UNHCR has been appealing to States to resettle the Palestinian refugees that have been stranded in such makeshift camps to give them a chance to start a new life.

Out of the 1,300 Palestinian refugees who had lived at different times in the camp, more than 1,000 were relocated to third countries, including Belgium, Chile, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

“Today we were able to close this camp and this is a very important step and achievement in responding on a humanitarian basis to the situation of people who were stranded there as a result of fleeing persecution,” said Philippe Leclerc, UNHCR’s deputy representative in Syria.

“However, there are still hundreds of Palestinian refugees from Iraq who are in Al Hol camp in the north-eastern province of Hassake and they also need the same compassion and understanding,” he said.

Al Tanf is one of three camps that received Palestinian refugees from Iraq. Currently, there are around 2,000 in Al Hol and in Al Waleed camp, which is on the Iraqi side of the border.



Palestinian refugees head towards the buses that will take them to Syria after years in Al Tanf

UN calls on Europe to take in larger share of refugees for resettlement



A young Afghan boy and friends gather in a field near the City Hall in Calais, France

2 February - The United Nations refugee agency today called on Europe to play a larger role in refugee resettlement, 90 per cent of which is currently borne by the United States, Canada and Australia.

“Resettlement is an important tool of refugee protection and provides a durable solution every year for tens of thousands of refugees who cannot safely remain in their first countries of asylum, and for whom return to their countries of origin is not possible,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Andrej Mahecic told a news briefing in Geneva, welcoming Spain’s recent establishment of an annual refugee resettlement programme.

Spain thus became the latest of the 27-member European Union (EU) to adopt such an initiative, but currently European countries together provide only about 6 per cent of the world’s resettlement opportunities.

“UNHCR would like to see more European engagement in refugee resettlement, and hopes the Spanish decision will encourage other EU Member States to follow,” Mr. Mahecic said.

Besides Spain, which set up the new initiative last week, 12 other European countries have annual resettlement programmes – the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Last year Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg also implemented ad hoc resettlement programmes.

UNHCR recently welcomed the European Commission’s proposal for the establishment of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme. In 2009, UNHCR assisted around 66,000 refugees to resettle, of whom roughly 5,000 went to European countries.

Japan takes first steps to resettle refugees from Myanmar, UN reports



Two women refugees and their children in one of the camps on the Thailand-Myanmar border

2 February - Japanese officials are visiting a refugee camp in northern Thailand to interview refugees from Myanmar who are setting to start new lives in Japan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported today.

This is the first concrete move Japan has taken towards becoming the first Asian nation to resettle refugees from Myanmar, following its announcement in December 2008 that it will take in 90 people from Mae La camp over three years as part of a pilot project.

UNHCR selected refugees being interviewed this week based on how long they have been living in the camp, in some cases reaching two decades but with no other solution in sight.

“The final decisions as to whether they will be accepted for resettlement rests with Japan,” said agency spokesperson Andrej Mahecic.

Barring any glitches, the first refugee family is expected to leave for Japan this September, with 30 refugees set to be resettled every year over three years.

Approximately 20,000 Myanmar refugees have already left Mae La to begin new lives, forming part of the more than 55,000 refugees who have been resettled from the nine camps in Thailand since a large-scale programme started in 2005. Most have



departed for the United States, Australia and Canada.

“We welcome the addition of Japan to the list of resettlement countries, not only for the important signal it sends to other Asian countries, but also as significant burden-sharing, helping Thailand find solutions for refugees from Myanmar who have been on its territory for more than 25 years,” Mr. Mahecic said.

Extreme cold triggers livestock disaster in Mongolia – UN



A herder milks yaks in Must, Khovd Province, Mongolia (file)

2 February - More than 20,000 families are at the risk of going hungry, as temperatures reaching as low as -50 degrees centigrade have killed nearly two million head of livestock in Mongolia, the United Nations agriculture agency reported today.

One third of the Asian nation’s population leads nomadic lives and depend entirely on livestock for a living.

Urgent assistance of \$6 million is needed over the next two or three months to help herders make it through to spring, a rapid needs assessment conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found.

Locally known as dzud, the extreme cold experienced in Mongolia – roughly the size of Western Europe – followed a very dry and long summer and fall, during which insufficient livestock feed was produced to provide to the animals for the winter months.

If current conditions continue, the Government predicts that losses could reach 3-4 million head of livestock by spring. So far, it is estimated that economic losses have topped \$60 million.

Out of Mongolia’s 21 provinces, 14 are considered to have been seriously affected, with tens of thousands of families owning up to 300 head of livestock having lost over half their herds. Their cash income is plummeting and they face soaring fodder prices.

If aid does not reach the country soon, spreading poverty will lead to mass migration to urban areas later this year, FAO warned.

The agency’s Animal Production and Health Commission for Asia and the Pacific has provided 5,000 doses of medicinal food supplements for dairy cows, pregnant heifers and young bulls, and is also prepared to assist in disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans.

Bulk of emitters submit climate pledges to UN convention



Turning to the sun for energy helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

2 February - Some of the world’s biggest emitters of carbon dioxide have formally submitted to the United Nations their national targets to cut and limit greenhouse gases by 2020 – abiding by the 31 January deadline specified in the Copenhagen Accord produced at December’s UN summit in Denmark.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) said that by the deadline it had received specific pledges from 55 countries that together account for 78 per cent of global emissions from energy use.

“This represents an important invigoration of the UN climate change talks under the two tracks of Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. The commitment to confront climate change at the highest level is beyond doubt,” said Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, said in a statement.

The countries that signed on to the Copenhagen Accord include the United States and China, the two largest emitters, along

with the European Union, (EU) Australia, India and Japan.

The pledges are purely voluntary and there are no enforcement provisions for the signing countries.

“Greater ambition is required to meet the scale of the challenge. But I see these pledges as clear signals of willingness to move negotiations towards a successful conclusion,” said Mr. de Boer.

The sixteenth conference of parties to UNFCCC is scheduled for 29 November in Mexico City. The next round of formal negotiations is scheduled to be in Bonn, Germany, at the end of May.

Several countries have indicated their wish to see a quick return to the negotiations with more meetings than the scheduled sessions.

“We are seeking further guidance from governments,” said Mr. de Boer.

Georgians displaced in South Ossetian conflict get Internet access thanks to UN



A group of young boys try out computers in Karaleti settlement in Georgia

2 February - Thousands of Georgians displaced by the 2008 conflict with Russia over South Ossetia are getting access to computers for their education and livelihood purposes, thanks to an initiative by the United Nations refugee agency.

“Knowledge is a key, and this programme is giving that key to IDPs [internally displaced persons] and refugees here,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative Peter Nicolaus said at the opening this past weekend of Georgia’s first Community Technology Access (CTA) centre in the new settlement of Karaleti in the Shida Kartli region, close to the breakaway region of South Ossetia.

The region shelters about 30,000 people who fled their homes during the brief conflict in August 2008 and some 4,200 of the IDPs live in the nine settlements.

UNHCR and its implementing partner, World Vision International, plan to open similar centres in the coming weeks in eight more settlements in Shida Kartli and two in north-eastern Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge, where some 800 Chechen refugees are rebuilding their lives with support from UNHCR and its partners.

“Having access to the internet means I can stay up-to-date with new information and pass it on to my students,” said Sophio Melquoshvili, who now teaches in a primary school.

Another IDP, Marika Gochashvili, used to be a nurse but cannot find nursing jobs in Karaleti. “So I am interested in learning as much as I can about ICT [information and communications technology] so that I can teach others,” she said.

The CTA programme was announced last September at the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative by UNHCR and its corporate partners, Microsoft and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Under the first phase, successful pilot projects were launched in refugee camps in Rwanda and Bangladesh. The centres in Georgia are being opened under the project’s second phase, which will see computer technology brought to IDPs in Georgia and up to eight other countries.

The centres will provide classes for children and computer literacy courses and distance learning for youth and adults. Other services will include entrepreneurship training, business centres, employment services and career counselling. Where possible, CTAs will generate income to cover costs.

Shida Kartli’s Deputy Governor Giorgi Avaliani applauded the opening of the centre and thanked UNHCR for helping the IDPs. “I am sure that new technologies, and access to those technologies, will change their everyday life,” he said, adding that the project “will have a very satisfying result.”

Joined hands must replace clenched fists, Ban tells nuclear disarmament meeting



A nuclear test

2 February - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today praised the role of international political, military, business and faith leaders in pushing for the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons with a global campaign to build public and political support.

“Your efforts are a crucial part of this bigger picture,” he said in a video message to the Global Zero World Summit in Paris. “You are helping to create real public pressure for change.”

Some 200 dignitaries are expected to attend the three-day meeting, including former United States Secretary of State George Shultz, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, and Queen Noor of Jordan.

“I salute Global Zero for mobilizing so many people. You know that joined hands can achieve much more than clenched fists. You are proving that a small group of committed supporters can change the world,” Mr. Ban said, stressing that global nuclear disarmament has been a long-standing dream for him.

“It is also a strategic priority for the United Nations. Nuclear weapons threaten our security. And every dollar spent on weapons is one less spent on schools, life-saving medicine, or research into life-affirming technologies.”

He cited encouraging signs that leaders are listening, noting that Russia and the US are showing renewed commitment to reach new agreements limiting nuclear weapons, and that the Security Council summit last September had generated further momentum.

“Global Zero is not just a slogan – it is a tangible goal that can and must be achieved,” Mr. Ban declared, with the Summit on Nuclear Security in Washington just two months away and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) Review Conference following in May. “There is a need for action at these sessions – meaningful steps that move us forward.”

“To all of you in Paris, and to people everywhere yearning for a safer, better world, I say this: Global Zero is not just a slogan – it is a tangible goal that can and must be achieved. A world free of nuclear weapons can be ours. Let us make it happen.”

Top UN envoy holds long series of talks with Iraqi leaders to ensure success of polls

2 February - The top United Nations envoy in Iraq is continuing talks with the country’s various Iraqi leaders to ensure that elections scheduled for the first week in March can be conducted in a credible manner with the help of the international community, leading to an outcome acceptable to the Iraqi people.

“The UN has called upon the competent Iraqi authorities to finalize the process for the preparation of the candidate lists for the 7th March elections, prior to the start of the campaigning period next week,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Representative Ad Melkert said in a statement today.



Ad Melkert

Mr. Melkert, who has been engaged in extensive discussions over the past several weeks, has held bilateral meetings to share the experience of the UN in other post-conflict countries on resolving disputes that must balance the critical need for justice and accountability of those who have in the past been part of oppressive regimes and the need for peace, reconciliation and inclusion in the democratic process.

He reaffirmed the UN's full respect for the independence of Iraq's judiciary: "It is not up to the UN to make specific political requests or to advice on how the Iraqi courts should resolve pending judicial cases," he said.

"What matters is a proper legal basis for decisions, including the right for candidates that their appeal is carefully considered and to remain a candidate until such an appeal has been dealt with appropriately."