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Secretary-General leads UN tribute to colleagues killed in Haitian quake



Secretary-General addresses memorial service for 101 UN staff members who perished in Haiti's earthquake

9 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today led United Nations staff and the family and friends of personnel who perished in the Haitian earthquake in honouring the memory of the 101 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the Organization.

“Today, we commemorate the single greatest loss the UN has suffered in its history,” a visibly shaken Mr. Ban stated during the memorial ceremony held at UN Headquarters in New York.

The 7.0-magnitude quake, affecting one third of Haiti's 9-million strong population, brought down the Christopher Hotel, which houses the UN headquarters in Port-au-Prince, and other buildings hosting the world body's offices.

“We remember 101 lives of consequence,” Mr. Ban told the gathering, which was also attended by senior officials, representatives of Member States, and colleagues from the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

The Secretary-General's Special Representative to Haiti and head of MINUSTAH, Hédi Annabi, his Deputy Luiz Carlos da Costa and Acting Police Commissioner Doug Coates were among those that were killed.

“We honour 101 unique paths that joined in Haiti to write the larger story of the United Nations,” he said of the diplomats, humanitarians, doctors, drivers, police officers, soldiers and various other professionals who died on 12 January.

Though they came to Haiti from all corners of the world, from all walks of life, they had one thing in common, noted the Secretary-General. “They shared a common conviction... a belief in a better future for the people of Haiti, and a common resolve to help them build it.

“And as they fulfilled their mission in Haiti, they illuminated a profound truth – earthquakes are a force of nature, but people move the world.”

Today’s ceremony featured a reading of the names of the 101 civilians, military and police personnel from 29 countries who died, as well as of a poem written by Ambassador Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima of Cape Verde about Haiti and a song performed by Haitian singer Emeline Michel.

General Assembly President Ali Treki paid tribute to the fallen, stating that one way to honour their sacrifice is to support the Government and people of Haiti. “The major challenge is to ensure that Haiti can continue to develop... and it is up to the international community to carry out this lofty objective,” he stated.

Haiti’s Ambassador to the UN, Léo Mérorès, expressed his gratitude for the efforts of those who perished, highlighting their invaluable contribution to peace and development in his country.

UN rights chief calls for new approach to end cycle of violence in Nigeria

9 March - The United Nations human rights chief said today she was appalled by the latest “massacre” of hundreds of villagers in northern Nigeria, and called for authorities to tackle the underlying causes of the tension in the region.

As many as 500 people in the area around the city of Jos may have been killed last weekend during the latest wave of clashes between Christians and Muslims, which followed similar attacks in January and in November 2009.

“In both cases, women and children and elderly people were among those who were viciously slaughtered,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in a news release. “After the January killings, the villages should have been properly protected.”

She stressed that better security is clearly vital, but added that it would be a mistake to think of the situation as simply sectarian or ethnic violence, and to treat it solely as a security issue.

“What is most needed is a concerted effort to tackle the underlying causes of the repeated outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence which Nigeria has witnessed in recent years, namely discrimination, poverty and disputes over land,” she stated.

“The Government needs to address these issues head-on.”

Ms. Pillay stressed that it was essential that the forces of law and order in the Jos region act in a “visibly even-handed fashion,” and that justice is seen to be done by all sides.

“The job facing the security forces and the judiciary is extremely sensitive,” she said. “It is important to avoid stimulating new resentments, while at the same time ensuring that those responsible for these atrocious acts do not escape justice.”

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking to reporters yesterday, called for all sides to exercise maximum restraint, and said the country’s political and religious leaders should work together to address the underlying causes and to achieve a permanent solution to the crisis.



Nigerian soldier runs past a burnt-out truck in Jos

Head of UN mission in Haiti says humanitarian aid will be needed until 2011

9 March - Nearly two months after Haiti was struck by a catastrophic earthquake, the top United Nations official there says the country is moving towards recovery and reconstruction but will need continued urgent humanitarian relief for at least the next 12 months.

“That first phase of humanitarian aid and assistance will have to be there in a parallel track with the other two – recovery and reconstruction – because the rainy season is already arriving and we will have the hurricane season in June,” Edmond Mulet, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), told journalists today in New York.



Edmond Mulet, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti

Emergency shelter, site management, sanitation and food continue to be the main priorities in Haiti, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

To date, emergency shelter material has reached nearly 525,000 people, or 41 percent of those in need.

Haitian officials and aid workers have also been finalizing plans for five transitional settlements on plots of land chosen by Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive. The idea is to move some of the 1.3 million homeless people out of the congested capital of Port-au-Prince.

Officials are also concerned about a lack of funding for agriculture, which usually supplied 60 per cent of national food production needs, before the main planting season begins later this month.

The Haitian Government, which was already in a weak situation before the quake, is actively participating in the recovery effort, Mr. Mulet stressed.

Aid officials and the Haitian Government are in the process of creating the Post Disaster Needs Assessment and Recovery Framework (PDNA), which will be presented to donors at a meeting in New York on 31 March. The PDNA will include plans and programmes for the mid- and long-term development of Haiti.

A technical preparatory meeting ahead of the donor meeting will be held in the Dominican Republic capital of Santo Domingo on 16 and 17 March.

Last month, OCHA issued a revised \$1.44 billion appeal for Haiti, the largest ever natural disaster appeal.

Praising the humanitarian response, Mr. Mulet said it was “more coordinated” than in the early days, “although there is always room for improvement.”

He praised MINUSTAH staff who were “putting the mission back on its feet” despite “living, working and showering” at the logistics base. The mission lost 101 staff when the earthquake razed the Christopher Hotel, which housed its headquarters.

The two main pillars of MINUSTAH, the military and police components, were operational the day after the earthquake despite severe losses, Mr. Mulet noted.

He added that in addition to fulfilling the traditional mandate of providing safety, security and stability to Haiti, peacekeepers were tasked with new activities, including humanitarian assistance and support for recovery of economic activities.

UN blue helmets established “exemplary” relationship with troops not under the UN mandate – Canadian, Jamaican, French, Spanish and United States soldiers – in providing security to humanitarian convoys and other security efforts.

Mr. Mulet noted that MINUSTAH peacekeepers are increasingly providing these services themselves, having received some of the 3,500 additional troops and police authorized by the Security Council in January.

Olympics and World Cup soccer must take up cause of right to housing – UN expert



9 March - The Olympic Games and the football World Cup must champion the right to adequate housing, with such ‘mega-events’ often driving people out of their homes, according to a new United Nations report by an independent human rights expert.

“I am particularly concerned about the practice of forced evictions, criminalization of homeless persons and informal activities, and the dismantling of informal settlements in the context of mega-events,” said Raquel Rolnik, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing.

Stepped-up demand for space to erect sports venues, hotels and roads can result in the demolition of existing buildings.

“The importance given to the creation of a new international image for the cities, as an integral part of the preparations for the Games, often implies the removal of signs of poverty and underdevelopment through reurbanization projects that prioritize city beautification over the needs of local residents,” said the new report, released yesterday.

Displacement can also arise from steps taken by local authorities to swiftly remove unsightly slums from areas visible to visitors, it noted, citing how 15 per cent of the population of Seoul, Republic of Korea, was evicted and 48,000 buildings torn down to prepare for the 1988 Olympic Games.

Redevelopment can also sharply reduce the availability of social and low-cost housing, including State-subsidized residences, the publication pointed out. In Atlanta, United States, 1,200 social housing units for the poor were destroyed in the run-up to the 1996 Olympics, while it is possible that plans to build hundreds of thousands of new low-cost homes could be affected by shifting budget demands ahead of this summer’s FIFA World Cup soccer tournament.

Mega-events, Ms. Rolnik said, “can be an opportunity to potentially enhance the right to adequate housing” by promoting infrastructural and environmental improvements for host cities.

But redevelopment projects all too often result in extensive human rights violations, she underscored.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has adopted the Olympic Movement Agenda 21, which, among other elements, seeks to fight social exclusion.

For its part, FIFA has stressed the need to promote sustainable development through football and has committed itself to promoting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets agreed upon by world leaders with a 2015 deadline.

The report called on both bodies to consider the consequences of mega-events on the enjoyment of human rights. The selection of host cities should be open to scrutiny by civil society, and housing provisions should be incorporated into any hosting agreements – which must be in line with international and national standards – entered into.

Authorities must protect people from forced evictions, discrimination and harassment, as well as provide redress for victims, it added.

Ms. Rolnik, an architect and urban planner, was appointed as Special Rapporteur in 2008. She serves in an unpaid capacity

and reports to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.

UN and aid partners call for \$60 million to help 110,000 Congolese refugees

9 March - The United Nations and its partners today launched an appeal for just under \$60 million to help more than 100,000 refugees from the northwest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who have fled ethnic violence and are seeking refuge in neighbouring Republic of Congo (ROC).

The funds will help some 110,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom are women and children, as well as 58,000 people in the Republic of Congo's host areas for a six-month period.

Clashes broke out last October when Enyele militiamen launched deadly assaults on ethnic Munzayas over fishing and farming rights in the Dongo area of Equateur province.

The tensions have enveloped most of Equateur, sending some 114,000 to the Republic of Congo, driving some 60,000 to other parts of the province, and forcing an additional 17,000 people to seek refuge in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The Government and people of the ROC have once again responded generously to refugees escaping fighting in the DRC, said John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

"But they have very limited resources and a small population, over half of whom subsist on \$1.25 per day," he pointed out. "Significant support is therefore required from the international community."

The refugees are scattered across more than 100 sites – living with host families, sheltering in abandoned huts or building makeshift settlements – along a 500-kilometre stretch of the Oubangui River between Liranga district and the ROC's border with the CAR. In most areas, they vastly outnumber the local population by a ratio of five to one.

Low river levels are also compounding difficulties, resulting in relief supplies having to be ferried or flown in.

The Government, UN agencies and other groups carried out two assessment missions last November, which found that food, livelihood support, clean water, health care and education as among the top needs.

Social services, if they existed in areas where refugees are now living, are completely overwhelmed, and the influx of refugees is also heavily straining local resources, such as water, wood and fish.

In December, the UN Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) – which aims to speed up relief operations for humanitarian emergencies and make funds available quickly after a disaster, when people are most at risk – allocated nearly \$8 million to the crisis, with bilateral funding also having been put forward.

This leaves the unmet portion of the appeal launched today at \$41 million.

Of the \$59 million appealed for today, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is calling for \$20 million to help to increase overall protection and boost logistical capacity. The funds will also be put towards providing primary education for more than 20,000 children and shelter, as well as the provision of clean water.

"Our concern is that four months into exile, the refugees are still lacking basic humanitarian aid, despite our efforts," agency spokesperson Melissa Fleming told reporters in Geneva. "So far, we've been able to cover just 30 per cent of the needs of this huge population for food, sanitation, shelter, health care and primary education."

UN entities also taking part in today's appeal are the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF),



DRC refugees living close to the border between the Republic of Congo and the CAR

the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

Ban to visit Israel and occupied Palestinian territories later this month



Cement and iron are desperately needed in Gaza for reconstruction

9 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will visit Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after attending next week's meeting in Moscow on the Middle East peace process, his spokesperson announced today.

The 19 March meeting in the Russian capital will bring together the members of the diplomatic Quartet – comprising the UN, the European Union, the United States and Russia – which support the Roadmap peace plan calling for two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky confirmed that Mr. Ban is expected to visit Israel, the West Bank and Gaza following the Quartet meeting, saying further details would be forthcoming.

Senior UN officials have voiced concern in recent months over the impasse in negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the Secretary-General stating yesterday that he hoped the Moscow meeting will lead to direct talks between the two sides.

Recent developments in the Middle East peace process were also among the issues discussed by Mr. Ban and Israel's Vice Prime Minister, Silvan Shalom, during their meeting in New York yesterday.

The Secretary-General regretted the lack of any meaningful steps toward reconstruction and rehabilitation in Gaza one year after the Israeli military offensive there, according to information provided by his office, and once again called on Israel to ease the closure of border crossings into the territory.

Progress on women's rights will help achieve global development goals – Migiro

9 March - Significant progress in realizing women's rights is crucial to achieving sustainable development and the globally agreed targets to slash poverty, hunger, illiteracy and a host of other socio-economic ills, the Deputy Secretary-General said today.

"Women and girls still face discrimination and disadvantage socially, economically and politically," Asha-Rose Migiro told a meeting in preparation for the ministerial review to be held later this year by the United Nations Economic and Social (ECOSOC) on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

However, she added, good practices and initiatives exist that can be scaled-up and replicated in many areas.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is the third of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the anti-poverty targets world leaders have pledged to attain by 2015.

Ms. Migiro noted that many countries recognize that women are more likely to be living in poverty and have increased social safety nets, often as part of larger efforts to reduce women's vulnerability to poverty.

Progress is being made toward gender parity in primary schooling, and in some countries women outnumber men in tertiary education, she pointed out.



Deputy Secretary-General Asha Rose Migiro

At the same time, females represent two thirds of the world's illiterate people. Conditional cash transfer programmes that provide incentives for attendance in education are among the strategies that countries are employing to change this.

“We must use the lessons from these programmes to design and implement the next generation of policies that combine even greater incentives for education with smarter strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes,” said the Deputy Secretary-General.

She also called for boosting women's access to decision-making in society, noting that women comprise more than 30 per cent of the representatives in the national parliaments of only 25 countries.

“Quotas for women have been useful, but countries must also show innovation in applying strategies and targets for women's participation in all areas of decision-making in the public and private sectors.”

Women must also have a far greater role in the resolution of armed conflicts and peacebuilding, and must be fully included in the post-conflict development of governments, institutions and civil society, she added.

“When women and girls have the same freedoms and rights as men and boys, we will have more stable economies and stronger more peaceful societies.”

West African farmers receive boost from UN organic food exporting initiative



Farmer grafting mango trees in Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

9 March - Some 5,000 West African farmers are reaping the rewards from a United Nations scheme aimed at helping them export produce to the growing organic food market in the industrialized world.

The \$2.4 million UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) project has helped farmers in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone to meet the necessary certification and adapt to the required methods to grow and sell organic products, according to a FAO news release issued today.

FAO noted that the organic and fair trade market in developed countries is expected to grow by about five to 10 per cent per year over the next three years, offering new opportunities for smallholder farmers in poor countries.

Entering the market not only requires a conversion period from conventional to organic agriculture – including changes from production and harvesting to packaging, certification and marketing – during which farmers incur higher costs resulting from new techniques without initially benefiting from the higher prices associated with the organic label.

“Some farmer groups had never exported products before – at best they offered them to the local market at a low price,” said FAO trade economist Pascal Liu.

“Most of them had a very low level of institutional capability, technical capacity and financial resources,” added Mr. Liu. “Now most of the groups have legal status, meet regularly, keep records and are now made up of ‘real members’ who pay dues.”

As a result of the improved structure and organization farmer groups are now in the position to draw up and negotiate contracts with an exporter, with some pineapple growers from Ghana and Cameroon seeing their exports growing despite the economic crisis.

“One group in Cameroon, for example, not only found a buyer for their organic pineapples, but thanks to the cost analysis we did with them, they were also able to negotiate better terms with their long-term conventional buyer,” said Cora Dankers, an FAO project officer.

FAO said that the German-backed project has also resulted in a rise in living conditions and food security as the additional income is generally spent on food, clothing, school fees and medical bills.

In addition, the project has led to new jobs in the production of certified products as well as supportive services, and the new organic production methods have also been adopted by farmers who are not members of the producer groups.

UN health body issues first-ever guidelines on procuring safe malaria medicines

9 March - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today issued new guidelines for malaria treatment, marking the first time the agency has released guidance on procuring safe and effective medicines to treat the disease.

The agency warned that if not used properly, artemisinin-based combination therapy, known as ACTs, which have transformed treatment in recent years, could become ineffective.

“The world now has the means to rapidly diagnose malaria and treat it effectively,” said Robert Newman, Director of WHO’s Global Malaria Programme (GMP).



A communal malaria test, Khanh Phu, Viet Nam

Half of the world’s population is at risk of contracting malaria. Every year, there are 250 million new cases, resulting in 860,000 deaths, the overwhelming majority of which are among African children.

In Africa, it also affects over 50 million pregnant women and is responsible for 10 per cent of all maternal mortalities every year.

The second edition of the Guidelines for the Treatment of Malaria provides evidence-based recommendations for countries on both diagnosis and treatment.

The main changes in this edition from its first, which was published in 2006, are the emphasis on testing before treatment and the addition of a new ACT to the list of recommended treatments.

“WHO now recommends diagnostic testing in all cases of suspected malaria,” Dr. Newman said. “Treatment based on clinical symptoms alone should be reserved for settings where diagnostic tests are not available.”

In 2008, less than 25 per cent of suspected malaria cases were tested in 18 of the 35 African countries which reported results.

Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs), which use a dip stick and a drop of blood, have recently been developed, which can replace microscopy. These new tests can reliably find the malaria parasites in the blood and can be carried out at all levels of the health system, including in community settings.

WHO said that moving towards universal diagnostic testing of malaria is a critical step forward in the fight against the disease since it will allow for the targeted use of ACTs by those who actually have malaria.

The aim, the agency said, is to reduce the emergency and spread of drug resistance, with better management of malaria helping to tackle other problems, like childhood illness and child survival.

The new guidelines are also the first time they have included a 16-step checklist on the selection and procurement of ACTs.

“Pharmaceutical markets in malaria-endemic countries are often unregulated and national authorities need practical help to assess the quality of malaria medicines before they buy them,” said Andrea Bosman, Coordinator of the Medicines and Diagnostics Unit at WHO’s GMP, warning that there are too many medicines of varying quality on the market.

Low-quality medicines impact the health and lives of patients, damage health services' credibility and can boost resistance to treatment, WHO cautioned.

"These guidelines will help countries select and procure effective medicines of good quality and save lives by improving the way patients are diagnosed and treated," said George Ki-Zerbo, Malaria Programme Manager at the WHO Regional Office for Africa, located in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo (ROC).

Last month, dozens of African leaders met in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, to address the challenges facing the continent in the effort to meet the UN target of ensuring universal access to malaria control measures by the end of this year.

More than two dozen heads of State convened the first working session of the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) during the annual African Union (AU) summit.

ALMA was launched during the General Assembly in September to provide a forum to ensure efficient procurement, distribution, and utilization of malaria control interventions; facilitate the sharing of effective malaria control practices; and ensure malaria remains high on the global political agenda.

As much as 40 per cent of health-care spending in endemic countries goes to malaria, costing the continent around \$12 billion a year, according ALMA.

The 26-nation ALMA coalition said that in the past 12 months alone at least 90 million long-lasting, insecticidal mosquito nets were delivered in Africa, and overall 200 million such nets have been distributed to 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, where virtually all malaria deaths occur.

"The world is closer than ever before to ending malaria deaths," said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Envoy for Malaria Ray Chambers, with the WHO's 2009 World Malaria Report indicating that more than one-third of malaria-affected countries have documented reductions in cases of more than 50 per cent.

UN expert calls for culturally sensitive reforms for indigenous people in Australia

9 March - Despite recent advancements in tackling the human rights of indigenous people in Australia, an independent United Nations expert today called on the country's authorities to develop new social and economic initiatives and to reform existing ones to allow respect for cultural integrity and self-determination.

"Having suffered a history of oppression and racial discrimination, including dispossession of lands and social and cultural upheaval, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples endure severe disadvantage compared with non-indigenous Australians," said James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.



The Australian aboriginal flag flying in Victoria Square, Adelaide

In his report issued following an official visit to Australia last August, the Special Rapporteur said that the so-called Northern Territory Emergency Response – a Government plan rolled out in 2007 to address problems faced by Aborigines, particularly women and children – contains problematic features from a human rights standpoint.

As part of the emergency response police were sent to Aboriginal areas to help curb alcohol abuse, sex abuse and domestic violence. The programme also contains provisions for compulsory income management, assertion of extensive powers by the Commonwealth Government over Aboriginal communities, and alcohol and pornography restrictions.

"Effective control of their lands and territories continues to be denied to many indigenous communities in Australia," the Special Rapporteur noted, voicing concerns over some aspects of the emergency response.

The programme continued in 2008, while Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered a national apology to indigenous peoples and called for a genuine partnership between the Government and indigenous communities to move towards a future “based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.”

In his report, Mr. Anaya recommended indigenous participation in the design, delivery, and monitoring of programmes, and promoting culturally-appropriate programmes that incorporate or build on indigenous people’s own initiatives.

“Governmental programmes must secure just social and economical well-being for indigenous peoples, while advancing their self-determination and strengthening their cultural bonds,” Mr. Anaya said.

The Rapporteur, who reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, serves in an unpaid and independent capacity.

Shift in telecoms regulations could spur economic growth, UN report says



9 March - New approaches in regulating information and communication technology (ICT) could help to stimulate investment and growth in rolling out new networks and upgrading technology, despite the current global recession, according to a new United Nations report.

Demand for services such as mobile telephones and broadband Internet have remained buoyant despite the economic crisis, with mobile subscriptions set to reach 5 billion this year and mobile broadband subscriptions having topped 600 million.

But the ICT industry has also witnessed reduced sales in equipment and manufacturing, as well as lower demand.

The new publication by the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU), entitled “Trends in Telecommunication Reform,” said the industry is currently undergoing a generational shift from fixed telephone networks to mobile connections of all types, next generation networking and broadband wireless networks.

Previously clear borders among telephones, broadcasting and online services are being eroded, with people able to watch movies on their computers and programming being downloaded on mobile phones.

As a result, “ICT regulators play a key role in fostering ongoing innovation and competition, enabling operators to adopt the latest, most power technologies, and ensuring consumers enjoy the very best range of services at the lowest possible prices,” said the agency’s Secretary-General, Hamadoun Touré.

The economic crisis has sounded the alarm on the need for effective regulation and has kick-started a dialogue on the role of the Government, which is now considering the need for State intervention to ensure, among other elements, the development of a ‘broadband economy.’

The new report argued that regulators and policy-makers can tackle the potential risk for under-investment in tomorrow’s networks through a two-pronged approach that would involve Government-backed funding programmes and effective regulatory strategies and policies.

In a related development, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Cambodia today unveiled a training course seeking to boost the South-East Asian nation’s ability to harness ICT to promote development.

According to the ITU, Cambodia is in the early stages of ICT development, ranking 120 out of 159 countries, and has been endeavouring to increase nationwide access to ICTs.

The four-day workshop opened today in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, and drew 50 top policy-makers – to examine ways to enhance awareness and bolster knowledge on the effective use of ICTs for sustainable socio-economic

development.

The course is part of the UN Asia and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT), headquartered in Incheon, Republic of Korea. Similar workshops have been carried out across the region, including in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan and Samoa.

Sri Lanka: UN supports health services for resettled women



Mobile health clinic offering reproductive care to thousands of displaced persons from northern Sri Lanka in Vavuniya

9 March - The United Nations is setting up mobile health clinics and distributing hygiene packs and maternity kits to women and children returning home to former conflict zones in northern Sri Lanka.

“UNFPA [the UN Population Fund] is pleased to be working with our partners in restoring health services and ensuring that the unique health concerns of women and girls are not overlooked during the resettlement process,” said UNFPA Representative Lene Christiansen after visiting several resettlement areas recently.

Of the 2,500 pregnant women who moved out of displaced camps this year, some 150 are expected to give birth in the next month, UNFPA said today.

Government forces defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) last year after more than two decades of fighting. But the conflict left hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced.

Given that most health facilities were damaged during the conflict or are difficult to access by the limited public transport, UNFPA and the Sri Lankan officials have begun to operate mobile reproductive health clinics in resettled areas.

The mobile clinics – run in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, provincial health officials and the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka – offer prenatal and postnatal care, voluntary family planning, services for prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and psychosocial counselling.

In addition, UNFPA provided a range of reproductive health equipment and supplies to the Mallavi Base Hospital and Kilinochchi General Hospital.

Iraqi Christians fleeing religious violence in Mosul receive UN support

9 March - The United Nations and local authorities in northern Iraq are providing food, hygiene kits, kerosene and other humanitarian aid to hundreds of Christian families who fled their homes in the city of Mosul following targeted intimidation and violence.

“Protection remains an ongoing concern for the Christian community as well as other vulnerable groups remaining in Mosul,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported yesterday.

Fleeing families told OCHA that while many Muslim residents in Mosul had shown sympathy to the plight of the Christian community, continued threatening telephone calls and demands for bribes had caused them to flee.

Some women interviewed by OCHA also said they felt pressured to wear the hijab, a veil worn by Muslim women, so as not to be identified as a Christian.

The number of people displaced rose from 720 families or 4,320 people on 1 March to 866 families or 5,196 people just three days later.



Christian minorities in Iraq have been targeted by extremists

The World Food Programme (WFP), through its partner Islamic Relief, distributed 50 kilograms of wheat flour per family to 638 families in different locations in Ninewa governorate, which includes Mosul – Iraq’s second largest city.

Additional families received food assistance through WFP’s programmes for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the neighbouring Dahuk and Erbil governorates.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), through its cooperating partner, International Medical Corps, has announced plans to conduct an awareness campaign on child protection for all IDPs in the areas of displacement.

In addition, the Kurdistan Regional Government has issued directives to local universities to facilitate the enrolment of affected Christian students after they reported that they were not attending classes in their hometown.

The humanitarian effort is overseen by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with support from OCHA, local Iraqi authorities, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and other UN agencies.

UN honours Gates Foundation and Asian lawmakers’ group with population award

9 March - The United Nations is recognizing the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the

Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development with this year’s Population Award.

Established by the General Assembly in 1981, the UN Population Award is given annually to individuals and institutions for outstanding contributions to population concerns and their solutions.



Bill and Melinda Gates

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – established by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife – have long been working on a “simple premise: all lives have equal value. Today, billions of people never have the chance to live a healthy and productive life,” according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which presents the award.

The Gates Foundation will share the award with the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD). According to the statement released today, AFPPD is honoured for its commitment to informing, educating, motivating and involving parliamentarians on issues related to reproductive health, family planning, food security, ageing, urbanization, migration, HIV and AIDS and women's empowerment.

The awards are scheduled to be presented during a ceremony on 3 June at UN Headquarters in New York.

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) elects countries to serve on the award committee for three-year terms. The current members are Bangladesh, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Norway and Tanzania. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Obaid are ex-officio members.

Last year, the Secretary-General presented the award to Egyptian doctor Mahmoud Fathalla and Nicaraguan non-profit Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense (MCN).