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Galapagos Islands removed from UN list of World Heritage sites in danger



Galapagos Islands

29 July - Ecuador's headway in combating threats posed by invasive species, unbridled tourism and over-fishing has allowed the Galapagos Islands to be removed from the list of World Heritage sites considered to be in danger by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Galapagos, comprising 19 islands and a marine reserve, are situated some 1,000 kilometres from the South American continent. Deemed a World Heritage site in 1978, they have been described as a unique "living museum and showcase of evolution."

Situated where three ocean currents meet, the Galapagos were formed by seismic and volcanic activity.

Along with the islands' extreme isolation, these processes led to the development of unusual animal life, such as the land iguana and the giant tortoise, which inspired Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection after his visit to the Galapagos in 1835.

They were put on the list of sites in danger in 2007, and the World Heritage Committee, currently meeting in the Brazilian capital, Brasilia, welcomed the Ecuadorian Government's ongoing efforts to bolster conservation measures, especially in the use of biosecurity measures to prevent foreign plant and animal species from reaching the islands through the use of sniffer dogs and other means.



The Committee also lauded the country's moves to limit the number of tourists and arrivals of ships and aircraft, as well as to control fishing.

Added to the List of World Heritage in Danger by the 21-member Committee today was the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi in the Ugandan capital, Kampala. It contains four royal tombs within the Muzibu Azaala Mpanga main building, which was nearly completely destroyed in a fire in March.

Considered an outstanding example of an architectural style developed by the Buganda Kingdom since the 13th century, the building will be reconstructed.

Also joining the danger list today is the Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery in central Georgia. The Committee voiced its serious concern over a major reconstruction project at the Cathedral, which it believes will undermine the integrity and authenticity of the site, calling for it to be halted immediately.

The construction of the Cathedral, named after Bagrat III, the first king of united Georgia, began at the end of the 10th century and wrapped up in the early 11th century. It was partly destroyed by the Turks in 1691.

The Gelati Monastery's main buildings were erected between the 12th and 17th centuries and is well-preserved.

UN envoy deplores takeover of Palestinian homes by Israeli settlers



Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

29 July - The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has deplored today's forcible takeover by armed Israeli settlers of a building in Jerusalem's Old City that housed nine Palestinian families, and called on the Government to take immediate action.

"I call on the Israeli authorities to remove the settlers from the property and restore the status quo ante," Robert Serry said in a statement, describing the events as "unacceptable."

The move follows the destruction by Israeli authorities yesterday of a number of Palestinian commercial structures on the outskirts of East Jerusalem.

"These provocative acts come at a critical time in the international community's efforts to move the peace process forward," the envoy stated.

He called on Israel to heed the call of the diplomatic Quartet – comprising the UN, European Union, Russia and the United States – to refrain from provocative actions in East Jerusalem, including house demolitions and evictions.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and senior UN officials have in recent months voiced concern about forced evictions, house demolitions and settlement activity, while urging Israel to honour its commitments under the Road Map, the internationally approved plan for a two-State solution to the Middle East conflict.

The need to continue Israel's freeze on settlement activity, as well as the situation in Gaza, will be among the issues Mr. Ban intends to discuss with Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Barak when the two meet in New York tomorrow.

The Secretary-General also made a number of calls to senior leaders in the region yesterday in his continuing efforts to encourage the parties to move forward in the peace process.

He spoke separately with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa and Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, underscoring his support for proceeding towards meaningful direct talks, according to his spokesperson.

Missing pilot in Darfur found safe, UN-African peacekeeping force reports



29 July - A Russian helicopter pilot missing since the start of the week was found safe late today in southern Darfur, the joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping mission in the war-ravaged Sudanese region confirmed.

On Monday, a UNAMID helicopter had picked up three representatives of the rebel group known as the Liberty and Justice Movement (LJM) as part of plans to transport them to the Qatari capital, Doha, to participate in peace talks aimed at bringing an end to the long-running Darfur conflict.

The aircraft – with four Russian crew members, the LJM delegates and one international UNAMID civilian staff member on board – was diverted several kilometres from where it was scheduled to land in Oum Sader, 55 kilometres north of Nyala, due to poor conditions on the ground.

They were then met by a hostile group which robbed and beat several people aboard the helicopter, a UTAir Russian company aircraft contracted to work for the mission.

Minus the pilot, the passengers of the helicopter were taken to a nearby Government military camp, where they stayed overnight, before arriving at the UNAMID base in Nyala on Tuesday.

The mission was since contacted by Sudanese authorities to have an aircraft on standby, UNAMID spokesperson Kemal Saiki told the UN News Centre.

The mission's helicopter, carrying security officers from both UNAMID and the Sudanese Government, flew to Oum Sader to recover the Russian pilot. He is now at UNAMID's base in Nyala, where he is undergoing a medical examination.

This incident comes as tensions are rising in the region, with UNAMID peacekeepers on patrol in western Darfur being ambushed by unidentified gunmen today in an attack that injured seven blue helmets.

According to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the troops returned fire on their attackers, who fled the scene, and UNAMID immediately sent reinforcement troops to the scene of the clashes.

In another incident, clashes broke out in Kalma camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) over the weekend on the heels of the latest round of the Doha peace talks between those who support the negotiations and those who do not.

The gunmen identified themselves as members of the Abdul Wahid faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), one of numerous rebel groups that have been fighting Government forces.

One person was injured and no deaths were reported following the violence. Sudanese authorities have arrested two people for attempting to assault a sheikh who attended the Doha conference.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on “all concerned to address their differences through political dialogue and to refrain from any action that could incite violence.”

Some 300,000 people have been killed and 2.7 million others have been displaced in the past seven years in Darfur due to fighting between rebels and Government forces backed by allied Janjaweed militiamen.

General Assembly chief voices deep sadness after deadly capsizing in DR Congo



General Assembly President Ali Treki

29 July - General Assembly President Ali Treki today expressed deep sadness after learning that a boat overturned on a major river in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), reportedly killing around 140 people.

Media reports state that the boat capsized yesterday as it was transporting passengers and goods along the Kasai River, a tributary of the Congo River, from the town of Mushie to Kinshasa, the national capital. There are indications that the boat was overloaded.

Many Congolese travel by boat, even when the vessel is overcrowded, as the country has few functioning roads and railways.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Assembly President Ali Treki described the news of the capsizing as shocking and he offered his condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and Government of the DRC.

Dismissal of Honduran judges sends an intimidating message – UN rights experts



Skyline of the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa

29 July - The recent dismissal of three judges and a magistrate in Honduras, apparently because they spoke out during the political crisis that engulfed the country last year, sends a disturbing message to other jurists in the Central American country, three independent United Nations human rights experts warned today.

The experts said the dismissal last month of the judges Guillermo López Lone, Luis Chávez and Ramón Enrique Barrios and the magistrate Tirza Flores could have the effect of intimidating other members of the judiciary “to refrain from expressing views different from those expressed by the authorities” in Honduras.

“None of the decisions that led to the dismissal of the judges and the magistrate contains legal grounds that justify why the conduct that was the object of the disciplinary proceedings was considered to be grave,” the experts said in a statement issued from Geneva.

The Supreme Court notified the four jurists that they had been dismissed for “non-compliance or serious breaches of their duties,” but the experts said the sackings seem to be connected to the jurists’ public remarks during last year’s crisis, when there was a coup d’état in Honduras, and their involvement in several acts of protest.

“Judges can be dismissed only on serious grounds of misconduct or incompetence, in accordance with fair procedures that guarantee objectivity and impartiality. Accepting an invitation to give a lecture, write an article, present an application for habeas corpus in favour of the dismissed president or participate in public demonstrations does not seem to meet these criteria.”

The dismissed judges and magistrate have appealed the decision to the Judicial Career Council of Honduras, and a ruling is expected soon.

The experts stressed in their statement that it is important to resolve the matter “in accordance with international standards in this area” and for Honduras to consolidate the independence of the judiciary and guarantee both democracy and the rule of law.

The three experts are: Gabriela Knaul, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Frank La Rue, the

Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression; and Margaret Sekaggya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. They each serve in an independent and unpaid capacity and report the UN Human Rights Council.

UN supporting efforts to help victims of Pakistani floods



29 July - The United Nations is sending relief supplies to help victims in Pakistan of heavy floods, which are the worst that some parts of the Asian nation have seen in more than eight decades.

Heavy rains in recent days have triggered flash and river floods across Pakistan, causing death and widespread displacement, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Thousands of people have lost their homes and livelihoods, with the waters destroying crops and damaging roads and bridges.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), formerly known as the North-West Frontier Province, is experiencing its worst flooding since 1929, with at least 400,000 people affected. Swat, Charsadda and 23 other badly-hit districts have received up to 29 centimetres of rain in the past 24 hours, the highest recorded rainfall in the region in the past 35 years.

Road links to the city of Peshawar in the province have been cut off, while the Swat River has broken its banks and there is a fear that the Indus River will soon overflow.

Government-led relief efforts are under way in KPK, with authorities having provided food, tents and other supplies, while in some areas, the army is evacuating people from their villages.

In Baluchistan province, flooding has reached seven districts, affecting some 150,000 people.

The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are providing tents and other items, while the UN World Health Organization (WHO) is coordinating with the Government to provide medicine.

For its part, the World Food Programme (WFP) is ready to provide food if needed.

Investing in education and jobs the key to promoting development in Laos – UN



29 July - A new joint report by the United Nations and Laos recommends that authorities in the South-East Asian country invest more in education as well as promote good health and decent jobs to achieve their economic and social development targets.

The latest National Human Development Report, produced with the help of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), provides a set of recommendations on how to improve human development in Laos through employment.

Sonam Yangchen Rana, UNDP Resident Representative in Laos, said at the report's launch yesterday that its theme could not be "more relevant or timely," given that the Government is formulating the next national socio-economic development plan for 2011-2015.

"Central to the achievement of the economic and social targets set out in the plan for the next five years will be the issue of labour," she stated.

She added that human development is about putting people at the centre of development. “It is about people realizing their potential, increasing their choices and abilities to make informed decisions to live full and creative lives with freedom and dignity.

“At its most basic level this means making it easier for people to lead long and healthy lives, by acquiring the knowledge and skills to engage in economic activities, having equal access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and by participating in their community.”

Laos has recently improved its ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI), standing at 130th out of 177 countries, according to the 2007-2008 Global Human Development Report.

The new report suggests that human development is the highest in the capital, Vientiane, and lowest in the provinces of Sekong, Oudomxay, Attapeu, and Phongsaly.

Ms. Rana noted that in a rapidly changing Laos it is important to think not only about economic growth but also about how it can be enjoyed by everyone.

For example, she said, it is important to think how women can participate as productive members of society at their workplace on a par with men; how young people can gain skills for employment across all sectors; how the benefits of 8 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) can also be shared by the vulnerable groups.

In Laos, as in any society, this relies on the human capacities available to carry out quality work under decent conditions, she stated. “To achieve this we must invest in people from the very beginning, through an improved formal and informal education system, and by promoting good health.”

The other recommendations in the report include improving people’s livelihoods through more and better jobs in the non-farm sector, promoting decent work and ensuring that social safety nets are available to migrant workers.

UN envoy meets with Lebanese political party leader



Michael Williams, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon

29 July - The calm that has returned to southern Lebanon following recent violence was among the topics discussed in today’s meeting between a senior United Nations official and the head of one of the country’s political parties.

In recent weeks, personnel from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) have been the target of protests and attacks by villagers in the south in response to routine military exercises carried out by the mission.

Michael Williams, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, said that he expressed “our satisfaction that calm has been restored” during his talks today with Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces party.

“But everyone has to work very hard to maintain that stability and that is absolutely vital now and in the coming weeks and months,” the UN official told reporters following his meeting with Dr. Geagea.

Mr. Williams said he briefed the Lebanese politician on the latest Security Council meeting on resolution 1701, which ended the conflict between Israel and Hizbollah that erupted in 2006, as well as calls for respect for the so-called Blue Line separating the Israeli and Lebanese sides, the disarming of all militias operating in Lebanon and an end to arms smuggling in the area.

During the Council meeting earlier this month, the envoy said that while the resolution has helped to ensure stability, the parties must do more to meet their commitments.

“Stated commitment is good, implementation in practice is better,” he told journalists following that meeting.

In his talks with Dr. Geagea today, Mr. Williams said that he welcomed President Michel Sleiman's meetings with all key domestic players in the past two weeks.

"I also take this opportunity to welcome the intensive regional diplomacy involving key Arab parties to help defuse the tensions of recent days," the UN official said.

Blue helmets come under fire in western Darfur, UN reports



UNAMID peacekeepers have been ambushed by unknown armed men while conducting their duties in Darfur

29 July - Peacekeepers on patrol in the west of the war-ravaged Sudanese region of Darfur were ambushed today by unidentified gunmen, with seven blue helmets sustaining injuries, the United Nations reported today.

According to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the troops returned fire on their attackers, who fled the scene. The joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur, known as UNAMID, immediately sent reinforcement troops to the scene of the clashes.

All of the blue helmets later returned to their base, where those wounded in the ambush are receiving medical treatment.

Today's development comes amid violence in other parts of Darfur, where an estimated 300,000 people have been killed and 2.7 million others have been displaced in the past seven years due to fighting between rebels and Government forces backed by allied Janjaweed militiamen.

Over the weekend, clashes broke out in the Kalma camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) following the latest round of peace talks in the Qatari capital, Doha, aimed at bringing an end to the Darfur conflict, with some of the camp's residents saying they were not fully represented.

The gunmen identified themselves as members of the Abdul Wahid faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), one of numerous rebel groups that have been fighting Government forces.

One person was injured and no deaths were reported following the violence. Sudanese authorities have arrested two people for attempting to assault a sheikh who attended the Doha conference.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed his concern over the clashes in Kalma camp, calling on all sides "to address their differences through political dialogue and to refrain from any action that could incite violence."

In his statement, he noted that the AU-UN Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassolé and UNAMID "are doing all they can to defuse the situation and facilitate reconciliation."

The mission said today that three people who were either supporters or members of the rebel group known as the Liberty and Justice Movement (LJM), which recently signed a ceasefire agreement with Sudanese authorities in Doha, were killed yesterday in western Darfur.

The lost their lives in violence which broke out last night in the Hamadiya camp in Zalingei between IDPs backing LJM and those supporting the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) faction. Several houses of LJM backers were burned down in the fighting.

UNAMID reports that the clashes have ended, with authorities arresting four suspects and confiscating weapons found in their homes. Humanitarian aid to the camp has been suspended due to the insecurity.

On Tuesday, Ibrahim Gambari, the mission's head, told the Security Council that the peace process in Darfur has reached a critical point, with the security situation deteriorating just as prospects for a negotiated settlement have improved slightly.

He noted several encouraging signs pointing to a possible peace deal. "Civil society is now more involved in peace talks than ever, the Government of Sudan is demonstrating renewed commitment to negotiations, and the leaders of most armed opposition movements are either participating in or are expressing an interest in participating in the talks," he said.

But Mr. Gambari, who is also the Joint Special Representative of the UN and AU in Darfur, warned that the overall security situation continues to deteriorate in the remote and arid region on Sudan's western flank.

Government forces have clashed with members of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which withdrew from the Doha talks and has yet to re-engage, dislodging the rebel group from several of its traditional strongholds and disrupting its main supply routes.

New UN-backed information centre to boost law enforcement in Cyprus



Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias (R), Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat and Special Adviser Alexander Downer

29 July - The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities today set up a United Nations-backed centre where they can exchange information on matters related to thefts, murders, trafficking and other crimes on both sides of the Mediterranean island.

The 24-hour Joint Communications Room (JCR) will be run by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot law enforcement experts, along with police officers from the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, known as UNFICYP.

The JCR, which became operational in May 2009, was situated in the UN Protected Area in Nicosia. Since then, it has dealt with a total of 89 cases on various issues passed from one side to the other, most of which have been successfully completed.

Speaking at the opening of the new permanent location, Alexander Downer, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, called the JCR "a very good example of the two communities in Cyprus successfully working together."

He added that exchanges of information, in particular on crime and criminal matters, are of enormous value to the authorities.

The JCR is an initiative of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, one of seven specialized bodies formed as a confidence-building measure between the two communities with the support of the UN.

The committee serves as a mechanism for information sharing and joint initiatives on legal and criminal matters and is a direct result of the agreement reached between the two Cypriot leaders in March 2008 by which they set out to resume full-fledged negotiations aimed at reunifying the island.

The leaders committed themselves to working towards "a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions."

That federation 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.

Indonesia commits to boost safety of schools and hospitals in UN-backed scheme



The main hospital in Padang, Indonesia, was severely damaged by the 2009 earthquake

29 July - Indonesia today pledged to enhance the safety of more than 3,000 schools and 100 hospitals as part of its commitment to a global United Nations programme to bolster these structures, where poor construction can often lead to the highest death tolls during earthquakes and other disasters.

“No child must die because schools or hospitals are not safe when disaster happens,” said Margareta Wahlström, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In April, the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) launched the One Million Safe Schools and Hospitals Campaign, which aims to raise public awareness and mobilize resources for a host of tasks ranging from repairing and retrofitting buildings to relocating to safer sites and constructing new safe ones where necessary, to purchasing safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits.

Indonesia has experienced several large earthquakes in the past decade, as well as other hazards, such as volcanic eruptions, floods and drought. These disasters have claimed more than 160,000 lives and destroyed many hospitals and schools.

The recent magnitude-7.9 quake, which ravaged parts of western Sumatra last September, left nearly 200,000 households in need of emergency shelter and other assistance. Additionally, it damaged 270,000 buildings, including at least 3,500 classrooms and 85 hospitals and health facilities.

Senior Indonesian officials launched the country’s campaign on safe schools and hospitals today, with the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). More than 200 participants representing the Government, civil society, schools and hospitals made pledges on the ISDR campaign’s website to support efforts to bolster the resilience of schools and hospitals throughout the South-East Asian nation.

Ban and senior Serbian official discuss Kosovo at UN Headquarters



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic in May 2010

29 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Foreign Minister of Serbia, Vuk Jeremic, met today at United Nations Headquarters in New York, where they discussed questions related to Kosovo as well as a planned high-level meeting on disarmament.

The meeting comes one week after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) released its advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in February 2008, which Belgrade rejects.

By 10 votes to four, judges at the ICJ concluded that the declaration does not breach either general international law, a Security Council resolution from 1999 following the end of fighting in Kosovo, or the constitutional framework that was adopted by the Secretary-

General’s Special Representative on behalf of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

UNMIK was established after Western forces drove out Yugoslav forces amid inter-ethnic fighting in 1999. Ethnic Albanians outnumber ethnic Serbs and other minorities by about nine to one in Kosovo.

The Secretary-General said today that he planned to closely coordinate next steps with the European Union (EU), which has offered to facilitate a process of dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

He and Mr. Jeremic also discussed a Serbian draft General Assembly resolution on this subject, according to information provided by the Secretary-General's spokesperson.

Mr. Ban said he continued to appeal to all sides to support constructive dialogue and the settlement of all remaining concerns, while encouraging political stability and discouraging provocations.

During their talks, the Secretary-General also said he hoped the Foreign Minister will attend the high-level session of the Conference on Disarmament that he will be convening in New York on 24 September.

Kites fly high over Gaza as children at UN summer camp soar to new world record



Children take part in Kites Festival 2010
Gaza

29 July - More than 6,200 children attending a summer camp in the Gaza Strip run by the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees have broken their own world record for the number of kites flown at the same time.

The feat comes exactly one week after more than 7,200 children bounced basketballs simultaneously for five minutes, doubling a 2007 record set in the United States.

“We still have to await final confirmation from the Guinness Book of World Records, but according to our figures the kids have done it. What an amazing achievement – two world records in a week,” said John Ging, Director of Operations in Gaza for the UN Relief and

Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Both record-breaking events were part of the Summer Games programme organized by UNRWA in nearly 150 locations across Gaza over a period of six weeks, beginning on 12 June.

Around a quarter of a million children participate in the Games, which include sports as well as recreational and cultural activities. This is the fourth year that UNRWA has organized the programme in Gaza, whose 1.5 million Palestinian residents have been languishing under a three-year-old Israeli blockade.

“Like children anywhere in the world, children here must have a sense of normality,” said Mr. Ging. “Despite the abnormality they face in their daily lives, today’s achievement has lifted the spirits of the entire population here in Gaza.”

Nutrient-rich algae can boost Chadian women’s incomes and tackle malnutrition – UN



Dihé, from Chad

29 July - A local variety of the nutrient-rich, blue-green algae known as spirulina could boost incomes for women in Chad who harvest the product as well as help fight nutrition, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported today.

The agency is running a \$1.4 million project in which women are gathering and processing the product, known locally as dihé, from the shallow pools of water on the edges of Lake Chad where it forms at certain times of the year.

Launched in 2007, the project showed them how to do the job more efficiently and hygienically, and how to process, package and market the product, which is traditionally dried into a thin biscuit and later made into a bitter-tasting sauce.

So far 10 tons of dihé have been produced and sold through pharmacies and groceries in the country, generating 50 million CFA Francs (€75,000) of profits for 500 women, according to the project’s coordinator, Mahamat Sorto.

Mr. Sorto claims that the naturally-produced dihé has better nutritional value than the commercially-produced spirulina and

is 100 times cheaper than the product retailed in developed countries.

“However, prior to broader promotion and marketing further tests on the product may be needed and international certification obtained,” FAO stated.

UN panel pays out \$650 million in reparations for Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait



A destroyed Iraqi battle tank amidst other vehicles on the highway between Kuwait City and Basra, Iraq in April 1991

29 July - The United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC), which settles the damage claims of those who suffered losses due to Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait, today made \$650 million available to nine successful claimants.

The UNCC’s Governing Council has identified six categories of claims: four are for individuals’ claims, one for corporations and one for governments and international organizations, which also includes claims for environmental damage.

The latest round of payments brings the total amount of compensation disbursed by the Commission to more than \$30 billion, according to a press release issued by the Geneva-based body.

Established in 1991 as a subsidiary organ of the Council, the Commission has received nearly three million claims, including from close to 100 governments for themselves, their nationals or their corporations.

The majority of funds for compensation payments have come from the sale of Iraqi petroleum under the so-called Oil-for-Food programme, which came to an end in 2003, and later within the scope of arrangements made under Security Council resolutions.