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Between



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UN UPDATE

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON AIDS

The 2008 High-level Meeting on AIDS will take place at the UN headquarters in New York from 10–11 June to carry out a comprehensive review of the progress in meeting the targets set in past agreements, including the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. The organizational arrangements for the High-level Meeting (HLM) are outlined in resolution A/62/178, adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2007.

Ahead of the meeting, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will submit a comprehensive and analytical report for consideration by Member States. The SG's Report will be based on national reports that Member States were requested to submit to UNAIDS by 31 January 2008.

(continued on page 2)

ON THE WAY TO UNCTAD XII

The twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XII) will bring together heads of government, ministers and about 4,000 participants from UNCTAD's 193 member countries to focus on the global economy and its impact on development in Accra (Ghana) from 20–25 April 2008.

Reflecting the conference theme, "Addressing the opportunities and challenges of globalization for development," the focus will be on how to spread the benefits of globalization more equitably so that no countries or peoples are left behind. UNCTAD XII will provide a platform for action on issues such as energy security, migration and the emergence of developing countries as engines of economic growth, by allowing decision makers to identify appropriate policy responses as well as specific measures and actions.

With Ghana as host, the conference offers an opportunity to put the spotlight on Africa's role in the international economy and highlight matters of special

concern to African countries. Given that the commodity economy is an important focus of the 21st century, UNCTAD XII will also help identify policies that could be implemented at regional and national levels to help small producers reach markets and to overcome market access barriers.

The Preparatory Committee for UNCTAD XII, established at the fifty-fourth session of the TDB in October 2007 (see Focus Page 14), decided to hold two hearings with civil society to provide opportunities for civil society to contribute to the preparatory process and to comment on the pre-conference negotiating text. The half-day hearings were held on 28 January and 3 March 2008. Civil society organizations that were unable to attend the Geneva meetings were invited to provide written contributions to the four sub-themes of the pre-conference negotiating text.

(continued on page 2)

SG LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Speaking during the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women's 52nd session on 25 February 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched a multi-year campaign to end violence against women that will continue until 2015, to coincide with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"Violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable and never tolerable," he stressed, noting that no country, culture or woman was immune. Horrific crimes — including rape, sexual violence and the abduction and sexual enslavement of women and children during times of armed conflict — continue unpunished. At least one in every three women was likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime, and the practice of prenatal sex selection meant that countless others were denied the right even to exist, he stressed.

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UN Staff Killed on Duty in 2007

At least 42 United Nations staff members were killed on duty in 2007, according to the Staff Union's Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service, with the killing of 17 staff members in Algiers on 11 December capping off one of the deadliest years ever. "While we mourn our colleagues and the other civilians killed, we cannot but stress the need for prevention and punishment," said Staff Union President Stephen Kisambira. "Prevention is the task of the Department of Safety and Security, but especially of Member States. Those responsible for such heinous acts must be sought and brought to justice by Member States, who are responsible for national security. Very seldom are perpetrators prosecuted, perpetuating the climate of impunity." Six peacekeepers were killed in a bomb attack in southern Lebanon on 24 June. Other incidents, from Sudan to Uganda and from Afghanistan to Nepal, claimed the lives of at least three other peacekeepers and 33 civilian staff members. Four truck drivers delivering supplies for the World Food Programme (WFP) were killed in three separate incidents in Sudan.

UNAIDS: HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON AIDS (CONT FROM P1)

The HLM will provide a forum for various stakeholders, including government representatives and accredited civil society participants, to discuss the progress made, challenges remaining and sustainable ways to overcome them. It will also include an informal interactive civil society hearing.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has been working closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly (OPGA), NGLS and the Civil Society Support Mechanism (CSSM) to support civil society engagement in the HLM and in the country level reporting processes on AIDS. The CSSM is a coalition led by the International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO) and the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC).

An online application form was available to NGOs not in consultative status with ECOSOC from 23 January - 22 February 2008 that were seeking to attend the HLM. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC can register to attend until the meeting itself. The form can be accessed at www.un-ngls.org/unaid/en. A Civil Society Task Force has been set up, in cooperation with the Civil Society Support Mechanism, to support UNAIDS and the OPGA in key decisions relating to the attendance and participation of civil society organizations and the private sector in the HLM.

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ON THE WAY TO UNCTAD XII (CONT FROM P1)

The 3 March hearing took the form of an interactive debate and provided an opportunity for dialogue and an exchange of views among representatives of UNCTAD Member States and representatives of civil society and the private sector and parliamentarians on issues relevant to the theme and sub-themes of UNCTAD XII. The outcome of the hearing was summarized in a report of the Preparatory Committee to UNCTAD XII.

UNCTAD holds its ministerial-level conference every four years to set the organization's priorities and guidelines for action. UNCTAD's previous quadrennial conferences have been held in São Paulo (Brazil) in 2004; in Bangkok (Thailand) in 2000; in Midrand (South Africa) in 1996; in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia), 1992; Geneva (Switzerland), 1987; Belgrade (former Yugoslavia), 1983; Manila (Philippines), 1979; Nairobi (Kenya), 1976; Santiago de Chile (Chile), 1972; New Delhi (India), 1968; and Geneva (Switzerland) in 1964.

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SG LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (CONT FROM P1)

"This is a campaign for them. It is a campaign for the women and girls who have the right to live free of violence, today and in the future. It is a campaign to stop the untold cost that violence against women inflicts on all humankind," Mr. Ban said.

The campaign aims to mobilize public opinion to ensure that policy makers at the highest level work to prevent and eradicate violence against

women. A key target will be to secure political will and increased resources from governments, international institutions, UN entities, the private sector and other donors for policies and programmes to combat the problem. The campaign aims to encourage the active involvement of men and boys, recognizing the critical role they must play. Three key areas will be focused on: global advocacy; United Nations leadership by example; and strengthened efforts and partnerships at the national, regional and international levels. The link to the MDGs reflects the fact that violence against women constrains the active involvement of women in development and is seen as a serious obstacle to the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

The campaign seeks to harness the existing momentum in the General Assembly and the Security Council to take action against all forms of violence against women, including rape in conflict and post-conflict situations. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders pledged to redouble efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and, following the release of an in-depth study by the Secretary-General (A/61/122), further impetus was generated by two General Assembly resolutions (A/61/143 and A/62/133) on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, adopted in December 2006 and 2007 respectively, and a resolution on rape and sexual violence (A/62/134) adopted in December 2007.

The campaign will also build upon decades of work by women activists, women's groups and other civil society organizations who continue to lead the struggle to expose and counter violence. Their work has placed the issue on the global agenda and deepened understanding of the nature and scope of violence against women and girls and its impact on the survivors, their families, communities and countries.

Ongoing reform of the UN, aimed at enhanced coherence, has helped create an enabling environment for the UN System to work together on the issue. UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict — a collaborative initiative of 12 UN entities, see article page 7 — and other efforts, such as UNIFEM's "Say NO to violence against women" online signature campaign, demonstrate this new approach. The UN Task Force on violence against women is spearheading joint programming at the national level, while the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, set up 11 years ago, has supported partners in communities, nations and regions around the world. Further, the Secretary-General will propose a high-level event in 2010 to review what has been accomplished, exchange best practices and map out the steps ahead.

Further information is available online: (<http://endviolence.un.org/index.shtml>) and (www.un.org/women/endviolence/press.shtml). To see launch events via webcast: (www.un.org/webcast).

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IFAD: 2ND FARMERS' FORUM

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) convened the second global meeting of the Farmers' Forum from 11-12 February 2008, in conjunction with the 31st session of IFAD's Governing Council (13-14 February), bringing together over 75 farmers' leaders from around the world to review progress achieved in enhancing collaboration between IFAD and farmers' and rural producers' organizations; review progress achieved; discuss IFAD strategic and policy documents; share positions on the following three critical issues for the future of smallholder family agriculture; access to natural resources; climate change; and policy making and policy influence.

Discussions over the two days looked at trends and developments in partnerships between IFAD and farmers' and rural producers' organizations (FOs), with three representatives of FOs reporting on their experiences working with IFAD in the context of Country-Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOPs), project design/implementation, regional/sub-regional policy dialogue processes. Discussions also focused on progress achieved and future goals for IFAD/FOs partnerships, which were broken down into regional working group sessions that drew upon a number of previous national and regional consultations.

Two plenary sessions were held, one which sought feedback from the regional working groups on general directions and scope of partnerships between IFAD and FOs, and the other which provided a general discussion on assessment of, and way forward in, the partnerships between IFAD and FOs.

The Forum included several thematic working group sessions on topics such as access to land: trends, challenges and opportunities; FO experiences with, and lessons learned from, engagement with policy processes regarding smallholder, family agriculture; and climate change and smallholder agriculture. Parallel meetings of Forum participants with IFAD staff were also held.

Participants in the Farmers' Forum were invited to IFAD's Governing Council with observer status and had the opportunity to participate in three roundtables on 14 February on the topics of biofuels; climate change and commodity prices.

The Farmers' Forum Synthesis of Deliberations was delivered to the Council during its plenary sessions on 14 February. The two-day Governing Council, which marked the start of IFAD's 30th anniversary year, ended with delegates expressing wide agreement on the

Int'l Day Abolition of Slavery

"The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery should be a remembrance by now, a companion to history books recounting humanity's worst offences. It isn't.

"Instead, millions of our fellow human beings continue to live as contemporary slaves, victims of abominable practices like human trafficking, forced labour and sexual exploitation. Countless children are forced to become soldiers, work in sweat shops or are sold by desperate families. Women are brutalized and traded like commodities. Entire households and villages labour under debt bondage.

"The fact that these atrocities take place in today's world should fill us all with shame. The realization that, in many instances, such practices are sanctioned, supported or ignored by those with the power and the responsibility to end them should lead us to outrage. But, above all else, the needs of the enslaved must inspire us to action.

"The UN is deeply committed to the fight against slavery. This year, the Human Rights Council has established a new Special Procedures mandate and appointed a Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. This mandate will play a leading role in confronting slavery in close collaboration with UN Member States, our civil society partners, and victims' groups.

"On this International Day for the Abolition of Slavery let us reaffirm the inherent dignity of all men, women and children. And let us redouble our efforts to build societies in which slavery truly is a term for the history books."

—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, observed on 2 December

urgency of increased investment in agriculture in the face of rising food prices and climate change.

"We have seen price rises in the past, but we have rarely seen such an increase across so many commodities all at the same time," said Suleiman Al-Herbish, Director General of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development at a roundtable on food prices held at the meeting.

"Historically, smallholder producers have shown resilience in commodity price increases and their potential to increase production is significant," the roundtable members concluded, noting that it was key to ensure that smallholders reap the benefits of higher prices.

Reducing transportation costs, creating safety nets for those who buy more food than they produce and boosting productivity through public research and microcredit schemes are all measures that should be taken, the roundtable recommended.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), poor countries could see their cereal import bill rise by more than a third this year, with Africa faring worst of all. International wheat prices have risen 83% in the past 12 months. Increased global demand, low grain stocks, the rapid rise of biofuels and changing weather patterns were all factors contributing to the rise in prices.

Delegates at the roundtable on climate change called on IFAD to be a voice for poor farmers in international discussions on climate change and to increase the transfer of knowledge and know-how to poor farmers in the developing world.

The biofuel roundtable called on the international community to examine setting up a mechanism to regulate and monitor the impact of biofuel policy and usage, and its social and cross-border impacts.

Further information is available online: (www.ifad.org/farmer/2008/index.htm) and (www.ifad.org/events/gc/31/index.htm).

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CEDAW MOVES TO GENEVA

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been transferred from the Division the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat in New York to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva, effective 1 January 2008.

CEDAW held its 40th session from 14 January to 1 February in Geneva to review the reports of Bolivia, Burundi, Saudi Arabia, France, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Morocco and Sweden on how those countries are implementing their obligations under the CEDAW Convention.

During the two-week session, the Committee and each State Party presenting a report held a dialogue on women's human rights situation in that country. The outcome of that dialogue is contained in the Committee's concluding comments, which recognize progress a State has made in implementing the Convention, detail the Committee's concerns about gaps in implementation or insufficient compliance with the provisions of the Convention, and contain recommendations on measures that can be taken by the State to achieve more complete and consistent application of the Convention.

The Committee encourages wide dissemination of their concluding comments, which are available on the OHCHR website (www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/index.htm). The comments will also be incorporated into the Committee's annual report to the General Assembly.

Also during its 40th session, the Committee considered communications from individuals or groups of individuals claiming to be victims of a violation of their rights under the Convention by States that are Parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

NGO representatives can also submit reports and present information to the Committee, and during the 40th session they were able to address the Committee on 14 and 21 January 2008 (the NGO reports are available online: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws40.htm).

The 185 States Parties to the CEDAW Convention legally commit themselves to ending all forms of discrimination against women, be they political, economic, social, cultural, civil or of any other type. The CEDAW Committee is a 23-person expert body established to monitor compliance with the treaty.

Women's organizations and civil society have voiced support for the transfer of CEDAW to OHCHR, believing that the transfer will have a positive impact on women's rights and contribute towards the goal of ensuring that women's rights are viewed as central to human rights. They have suggested that centralizing the physical location of treaty bodies would consolidate them and allow the OHCHR to strengthen its services to them, benefiting the human rights machinery as a whole.

Further information is available online: (www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws40.htm).

FIRST ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS FORUM

The First Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) Forum, organized by the Government of Spain, was held in Madrid from 15-16 January 2008, bringing together political leaders, representatives of international and regional bodies, donor agencies, civil society groups, religious figures, media heads and foundations to explore ways of addressing the growing polarization between nations and cultures worldwide and to develop initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding.

Int'l Day of Rural Women

On 8 November the General Assembly's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) approved a draft resolution declaring 15 October of each year as the International Day of Rural Women as Member States stepped up collective efforts to better the lot of women living in rural areas.

Besides establishing an international day, the text (A/C.3/62/L.19/Rev.1) requests the Assembly to urge Member States, along with the United Nations and civil society, to attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women, including indigenous women, in national, regional and global development strategies.

The Forum included high-level debates about emerging trends in relations between diverse cultures and religions and provided space for government agencies, international organizations and civil society bodies working in the area of intercultural and interreligious engagement to share lessons on best practices and develop joint work platforms. It also featured project-specific working sessions on topics such as “the role of religious leaders and communities in promoting shared security” and “youth approaches to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.”

The Forum was opened by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and Jorge Sampaio, High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Opening the Forum, Mr. Ban said, “The Alliance of Civilizations is an important way to counter extremism and heal the divisions that threaten our world.” The Spanish Prime Minister suggested that “The Alliance of Civilizations aspires to build bridges that can help us to manage the differences existing in the world, particularly those linked to religious or cultural issues,” while the Turkish Prime Minister noted that Turkey was in itself “an answer to the clashes in the world between civilizations.”

A number of Alliance projects were announced during the Forum ranging from the AOC Rapid Response Media Mechanism, an online directory of experts on intercultural issues whom the media can turn to in times of international crises, to the AOC Clearinghouse, an online educational tool on multiple issues aimed at improving cross-cultural understanding. Other initiatives include a media fund which will support major film productions that help promote cross-cultural understanding and combat stereotypes; a global youth employment initiative; and a youth solidarity fund, which will disperse small grants for cross-cultural cooperation between youth organizations.

The Alliance was formed in June 2005 at the initiative of Spain and Turkey. Since then, a high-level group of experts, established by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has submitted several reports suggesting a variety of practical steps to address the issue of cross-cultural tensions (see *Go Between 111*).

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SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2007

During 2007 the Security Council focused its efforts on resolving, monitoring and managing a range of complex situations already on its agenda, as well as developing new peacekeeping arrangements and other strategies aimed at strengthening global security.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, when he addressed the Security Council for the first time in January 2007, outlined the suffering in Sudan’s Darfur

region and elsewhere in Africa, the volatility of the Middle East, final status arrangements in Kosovo and other post-conflict areas, non-proliferation, terrorism, protection of human rights and a number of other difficult issues as top priorities.

In 2007, the Council convened 170 public meetings, issued 50 presidential statements and adopted 56 resolutions, 32 of which concerned Africa. The Council established two innovative African peacekeeping missions, in coordination with regional and international stakeholders, to deal with violence in Darfur and its border areas. A September summit on Africa, peace and security resulted in the projected 26,000-strong African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT).

In support of Burundi and Sierra Leone, the Council also worked on forging a relationship with the Peacebuilding Commission, and recommended that Guinea-Bissau be the third case on the Commission’s roster.

In its effort to take into account the multidimensional nature of peace and security, the Council was frequently briefed by humanitarian and human rights officials, often in a regional context. Thematic issues, particularly terrorism and the protection of civilians, remained high on the agenda through public meetings and subsidiary committees. Climate change was added to the agenda, and on 17 April 2007 more than 50 speakers addressed the Council during its first ever debate on the impact of climate change on international security.

A day-long debate on natural resources and conflict was held on 25 June and concluded with the Council issuing a presidential statement (S/PRST/2007/22) that recognized the role played by natural resources in armed conflict and stated that the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations should consider helping the governments of resource-rich countries prevent the illegal exploitation of natural resources from fuelling further violence.

Underlining the need to address the issue of small arms and light weapons, in a presidential statement it issued on 29 June, the Council asked the Secretary-General to submit to it, on a biennial basis beginning in 2008, a report on small arms, containing his analysis and recommendations, as well as his observations on the implementation of the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

Further information is available online: (www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/sc9219.doc.htm).

UNAMID OPERATIONAL IN SUDAN

On 31 December 2007 the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) formally took over from the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) in a ceremony at the new mission’s El

S-G: Ten Years of the Ottawa Convention

“Ten years ago, the landmark Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction opened for signature in Ottawa.

“Since the Convention’s inception, the international community – through a partnership uniting civil society, governments, and the United Nations – has come a long way in its quest to achieve a mine-free world. Legal trade in anti-personnel landmines has stopped, and no State Party to the Convention still uses these horrendous devices. Tens of millions of stockpiled landmines have been destroyed. Land has been cleared and returned to communities for safe and productive use. Survivors and their families are increasingly recognized as having rights to social and economic reintegration into their communities. One hundred fifty-six countries have joined the Convention.

No major multilateral disarmament treaty in history became law as quickly as this one.

“The ambitions of the Convention are great, and its scope is vast. But ultimately, the Convention and the actions to implement it are all about the individual – clearing the path for a woman in Sudan who collects water from a community well; allowing a child in Cambodia to walk safely to school; helping a refugee in Ethiopia learn new skills after having lost a limb to a landmine.

“The road to a mine-free world is long, but an end is in sight. But even after all the mines are out of the ground, a major challenge will remain: to provide the hundreds of thousands of people who have survived landmine accidents with all the support they need to become and remain active and productive members of the communities.

“The Convention is a reality because people and governments all around the world agreed that anti-personnel landmines have no place in our world. On this anniversary, let us recommit ourselves to their elimination.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message on 3 December, commemorating the Ottawa Convention.

Fasher headquarters. At full strength, the new mission, authorized by the UN Security Council on 31 July 2007, will be the Organization's largest peacekeeping operation, with some 20,000 troops and more than 6,000 police and civilian staff.

Over 9,000 uniformed personnel are currently on the ground, including 7,000 troops and 1,200 police serving with AMIS, which was established in 2004 to help bring peace to Darfur, as well as United Nations soldiers and police officers serving as part of the United Nations "heavy" and "light support packages" deployed to support AMIS over the last year. More than 50 African Union troops have lost their lives in Darfur since 2004, with 12 killed as the result of an attack at Haskanita, South Darfur, in September 2007.

Headed by Rodolphe Adada, African Union-United Nations Joint Special Representative for Darfur, UNAMID is mandated to protect civilians where possible, facilitate humanitarian assistance and help provide a secure environment in which peace can take root.

UNAMID's work is complemented by the peace process led by the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Darfur, Jan Eliasson, and the African Union Special Envoy for Darfur, Salim Ahmed Salim, who are pursuing a political settlement to the Darfur crisis through negotiations aimed at achieving a peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Darfur rebel movements.

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Int'l Year of Sanitation 2008

In order to call attention to the fact that at least 2.6 billion people – some 41% of the global population – do not have access to latrines or any sort of basic sanitation facilities, the UN General Assembly has declared the year 2008 the International Year of Sanitation (GA Resolution 61/192). The goal is to raise awareness and to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

Lack of proper sanitation contributes to the deaths of thousands of women and children every day from largely preventable causes, including diarrhoeal diseases. Though more than 1.2 billion people worldwide gained access to improved sanitation between 1990 and 2004, an estimated 2.6 billion people – including 980 million children – have yet to be reached, representing one of the single biggest development challenges facing the world today.

Progress on sanitation will contribute to the achievement of all the MDGs. Improved sanitation includes clean, safe toilets, wastewater management and hygiene promotion, all of which prevent the transfer

of pathogens in human excreta. When not treated safely, it adversely impacts health, often deprives children of getting an education, and impedes social and economic development. Lack of improved sanitation in schools is an important underlying factor in absenteeism and poor classroom performance due to illness, low enrolment and early school dropout. Lack of toilets also exposes women and girls to violence and abuse. Improving sanitation leads to improved health, dignity, social and economic development, protects the environment and helps people break the cycle of poverty.

The year will include major regional conferences on sanitation to share best practices and help accelerate progress, including those that focus on school sanitation. It will also help encourage public and private partnerships, to help tap into the comparative strengths of each sector, advocate and raise awareness on sanitation, leverage additional funding, and develop country-level plans of action.

A number of activities and events are planned throughout the year, including Sanitation and Hygiene Week (15-21 March) and World Water Day (22 March) that will focus on sanitation this year (further information is available online: (www.worldwaterday.org/page/1088)).

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UNDP: Human Development Report 2007/2008

According to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), climate change is the defining human development challenge of the 21st century. Failure to respond to that challenge will stall and then reverse international efforts to reduce poverty, the *Human Development Report 2007/2008* warns. The poorest countries and most vulnerable citizens will suffer the earliest and most damaging setbacks, even though they have contributed least to the problem. Looking to the future, no country—however wealthy or powerful—will be immune to the impact of global warming.

The *Human Development Report 2007/2008 Fighting Climate Change: Human solidarity in a divided world* shows that climate change is not just a future scenario. Increased exposure to droughts, floods and storms is already destroying opportunity and reinforcing inequality. Meanwhile, there is now overwhelming scientific evidence that the world is moving towards the point at which irreversible ecological catastrophe becomes unavoidable. "Business-as-usual climate change points in a clear direction: unprecedented reversal in human development in our lifetime, and acute risks for our children and their grandchildren," the report notes.

UN Enable Newsletter

Published by the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of DSPD/DESA, the monthly *UN Enable Newsletter* provides information about the work of the UN system on disability issues. It is available online: (www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=313).

The UN Enable website also includes the latest developments around the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol; information, factsheets and a Handbook for Parliamentarians; as well as news stories, press releases and media resources.

There is a window of opportunity for avoiding the most damaging climate change impacts, but that window is closing: the world has less than a decade to change course. Actions taken—or not taken—in the years ahead will have a profound bearing on the future course of human development. The report finds that the world lacks neither the financial resources nor the technological capabilities to act: what is missing is a sense of urgency, human solidarity and collective interest.

As the *Human Development Report 2007/2008* argues, climate change poses challenges at many levels. It challenges all to reflect on social justice and human rights across countries and generations. It challenges political leaders and people in rich nations to acknowledge their historic responsibility for the problem, and to initiate deep and early cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Above all, it challenges the entire human community to undertake prompt and strong collective action based on shared values and a shared vision, available online: (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008>).

Contact: Human Development Report Office, 304 E. 45th Street, 12th Floor, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/906 3661, fax +1-212/906 3677, website (<http://hdr.undp.org>).

World Youth Report 2007

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has launched the *World Youth Report 2007*, entitled *Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*, which focuses on the obstacles faced by youth in finding decent work. With youth unemployment rates high in most countries, many young people turn to the informal economy where they work long hours, are paid low wages and lack social protection. While youth have benefited from globalization and related policy changes, they have also been victims of this process, the report argues. Contractions in labour markets associated with globalization often affect youth first because they are often among the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

According to the Director of the Division of Social Policy and Development, Johan Schölvink, educational gains have not been translated into increased employment opportunities. The report reveals that, although education enrolment rates have increased, inadequate and low quality education perpetuates a mismatch between the skills acquired by youth at school and the demands of labour markets.

The report calls on governments to undertake measures to address the obstacles that limit youth participation in the development of their societies and to facilitate access to quality education and decent work opportunities. Policies are needed to build youth potential and open doors for their participation in soci-

ety, particularly in the areas of employment, civic engagement, political participation and volunteerism.

The report also examines other challenges and opportunities existing for the roughly 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15–24 in the world. Distinct from the 2003 and 2005 editions, it provides a regional overview summarizing the major youth development trends in the 15 priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It explores major issues of concern to youth development, including education, health, poverty and violence. At the same time, it highlights youth as a positive force for development and provides recommendations for supporting their essential contributions.

The report particularly calls on all stakeholders to work towards eliminating discrimination against young women, to increase their access to education and literacy, including non-formal education, and to develop gender-sensitive programmes, including sexual and reproductive health services. It notes that improvements in girl's education have not translated into better employment opportunities for young women. Specific efforts must therefore be made to provide skills training for young women, to increase their employment opportunities and to remove gender wage gaps.

World Youth Report 2007 is available online: (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr07.htm).

Contact: Joop Theunissen, Youth Unit, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2 UN Plaza, Room DC2-1308, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 7763, fax +1-212/963 0111, e-mail <youth@un.org>, website (www.un.org/youth).

UN Action: NGO Briefing

The 12 United Nations agencies that form the joint initiative UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict met in Geneva from 16–17 October 2007 to analyze achievements of the initiative in its first year, identify challenges and set priorities for 2008. UN Action aims to improve the quality of programming to address sexual violence, to increase the coordination of efforts for comprehensive prevention and response services, and to improve accountability.

The 12 UN system entities include the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Cyberschoolbus: Ask the S-G

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will respond to questions from children and youth around the world in a new feature on the United Nations Cyberschoolbus (www.cyberschoolbus.un.org) titled "Ask the Secretary-General."

Students in primary, intermediate and secondary schools around the world can send in questions about the UN, the role of the Secretary-General and global issues on the Organization's agenda. Questions will be collected by the United Nations Cyberschoolbus between now and 31 March 2008 and a representative selection will be chosen for the Secretary-General to respond to and posted on the United Nations Cyberschoolbus site.

This initiative will also help the United Nations get a sense of what questions and issues young people are thinking about today and at the same time help make the Organization more accessible to them by giving young people the opportunity to ask questions directly of the Secretary-General.

The United Nations Cyberschoolbus website is an educational resource created by the United Nations Department of Public Information to develop classroom materials for schools about the Organization and the global issues on its agenda and help create a global online community where teachers and their students can exchange information about issues on the United Nations agenda and participate in finding solutions to global problems.

Contact: Bill Yotive, telephone +1-212/963 1400, e-mail <yotive@un.org>.

Prior to the meeting, UN Action organized a briefing with Geneva-based NGOs on 15 October at UNHCR and highlighted some of its achievements in 2007:

- (1) UN Action was launched in March 2007;
- (2) participating entities have expanded from seven to 12 members;
- (3) a range of advocacy materials have been developed to publicize both the issue of rape as a method of warfare as well as the goals of UN Action (including a website: www.stoprapenow.org);
- (4) policy organs within the UN, including the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, have endorsed UN Action's approach;
- (5) technical support has been provided to UN Country Teams in Sudan (Darfur) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC);
- (6) capacity building for gender-based violence (GBV) coordinators has commenced and a pool of GBV experts created;
- (7) a preliminary mapping of the UN system's response to GBV has been undertaken; and
- (8) knowledge generation has begun.

Participants noted that with achievements come challenges and highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability, the need for greater ownership of UN Action goals within each participating UN entity, the need for clarity on UN Action's "value added" compared to other coordination instruments and programmes, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and the need to build strategic partnerships with a wide range of actors.

UN Action is particularly keen to work with NGO partners in developing a global advocacy campaign to Stop Rape in War. It also wants to generate more funds for civil society organizations working to address sexual violence during and after conflict through mechanisms such as the UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

Despite the efforts of the UN system and its partners to stop sexual violence during and after conflicts, the problem continues to grow. The UN Action initiative is designed to highlight and create awareness of these abuses and, ultimately, end sexual violence to make the world safer for women and girls. Above all, the initiative aims to build and sustain a global public and political commitment to prevent and to respond to sexual violence in conflict.

UN Action has three main pillars:

1. Country Level Action: support to UN action at country level, including efforts to build capacity and train advisers in GBV programming and coordination, as well as targeted support for joint UN programming in selected countries;

2. Advocating for Action: action to raise public awareness and generate political will to address sexual violence as part of a broader campaign to Stop Rape Now; and

3. Learning by Doing: creation of a knowledge hub on sexual violence in conflict and effective responses.

Contact: Bethany Blum, UN Action Focal Point, e-mail <blum@unfpa.org>, website (www.stoprapenow.org).

IASC GUIDELINES ON MENTAL HEALTH

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has published new guidelines stressing the need for a rapid and coordinated response to psychological and social needs during emergencies. The *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* cover every aspect of psychological and social wellbeing in emergencies, including the impact of health, education, protection and social services.

Emergency situations not only undermine normal life, they also exacerbate existing problems such as poverty, existing mental illness and discrimination. Those who are already vulnerable, such as children, women, the elderly, the poor, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face even greater stress and pressure during emergencies.

When communities provide protection and support during emergencies, most people have been shown to be remarkably resilient. The new guidelines stress the need to treat survivors with respect and dignity as well as include them in the emergency response. They also highlight the importance of building on existing ways in which community members deal with difficulties.

"These inter-sectoral guidelines are critical for protecting and promoting psychosocial and mental wellbeing in emergency situations," Hilde F. Johnson, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), stressed. "However they must be matched by commitment to protecting populations from harm, effective law enforcement and supportive basic services, allocation of adequate resources and the engagement of all levels of society."

The guidelines set out three key stages: emergency preparedness before the emergency occurs; the minimum response required during the most acute phase of the emergency and; the comprehensive response required, typically during the stabilized and early reconstruction phase of the emergency.

They require partners and governments to prepare, coordinate and collaborate not only during an emergency, but also before an emergency occurs. The guidelines are designed for use by all humanitarian actors, including community-based organizations, government authorities, UN organizations, NGOs, and donors operating in emergencies at local, national and international levels.

Singapore Joins UNESCO

On 8 October 2007 Singapore became the 193rd Member State of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), following the deposition in London of its instrument of adhesion. This ceremony marks return of Singapore to UNESCO after 22 years absence.

The Director-General of UNESCO Koïchiro Matsuura welcomed the return of Singapore, saying, "Universality is UNESCO's main source of strength. It opens the way for global responses to increasingly complex situations."

Over the course of the present Director-General's mandate, UNESCO has seen the return of the United States (2003), and the adhesion to the Organization of Serbia (2000), Timor-Leste (2003), Brunei Darussalam (2005) and Montenegro (2006). Tokelau became an Associate Member in 2001. UNESCO now has 193 Member States, one more than the United Nations.

The IASC is an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making by the executive heads of key humanitarian agencies.

Further information on the guidelines is available online: (www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_mhps/default.asp?bodyID=5&publish=0).

UNESCO: WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the US Library of Congress have joined forces to build a World Digital Library, which will digitize unique and rare materials from libraries and other cultural institutions around the world and make them available free of charge on the Internet. These materials include manuscripts, maps, books, musical scores, sound recordings, films, prints and photographs.

A prototype of the World Digital Library was demonstrated, and tested, during UNESCO's General Conference in October 2007. The prototype was developed by the Library of Congress and UNESCO with five other partner institutions: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the National Library of Egypt, the National Library of Brazil, the National Library of Russia, and the Russian State Library.

The prototype functions in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish, the six official languages

MRG: WORLD DIRECTORY OF MINORITIES & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

On 27 February 2008, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) launched the first online directory of the world's minorities and indigenous peoples. The *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples* covers 220 of the world's countries and dependent territories, and features profiles of about 700 minorities/indigenous peoples. For each country, the database provides a country overview, country data, a list of minorities, resources, sources and further reading.

To accompany the *World Directory*, MRG also launched its annual *Peoples Under Threat* survey that seeks to identify those peoples or groups that are most under threat of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression in 2008. The survey finds that over half of the top twenty countries in the world where people are most under threat of genocide or mass killing are in Africa. The spread of cross-border conflicts has emerged as a major destabilizing factor in Africa and sees States such as Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and the Central African Republic dominate the top twenty list of MRG's 2008 global ranking of *Peoples Under Threat*.

Chad has risen fourteen places up the rankings table since 2007. Widening inter-communal violence in the eastern part of the country has seen civilian communities targeted in the fighting between "black"

of the United Nations, as well as in Portuguese. It features search and browse by place, time, topic, and contributing institution.

The World Digital Library was designed to promote international and inter-cultural understanding, increase the quality and diversity of cultural content on the Internet, and contribute to education and scholarship.

Under the terms of the agreement, the Library of Congress and UNESCO will cooperate in convening working groups of experts and other stakeholders to develop guidelines and technical specifications for the project, enlisting new partners, and securing support from private and public sources.

Founded in 1800, the Library of Congress is the oldest federal cultural institution in the United States, and the largest library in the world, with more than 134 million items in more than 450 languages. Its collections are universal in scope and are in all formats in which information is recorded.

Further information is available online: (www.world-digitalibrary.org).

Contact: UNESCO, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 PARIS 07 SP, France, telephone +33-1/45 68 17 44, fax +33-1/45 68 56 52, website (www.unesco.org).

toroboro militias and Arab fighters — a cruel replica of the ethnic conflict now familiar across the border in the Darfur region of neighbouring Sudan.

"The international failure to respond to the human rights crisis in Darfur has now cost tens of thousands of lives, not only in Sudan, but in Chad and the Central African Republic," MRG's Executive Director Mark Lattimer said, "and the killing threatens to spread further in 2008."

Alarming, States widely considered to be stable, such as Kenya, have been catapulted up the table — disputed elections in December 2007 exposed the tribal fault-lines in Kenyan society where competing political interests overlapped with ethnic differences.

"Lesser known indigenous groups in Kenya such as the Ogiek have suffered as militias, profiting from the general insecurity, have attempted land grabs," Mr. Lattimer stressed.

In Asia, Burma, Afghanistan and Pakistan feature amongst the top seven countries in the rankings.

The *Peoples Under Threat* survey is available online: (www.minorityrights.org/peoplesunderthreat). The directory can be accessed online as well: (www.minorityrights.org/directory).

Contact: Minority Rights Group International, 54 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT, UK, telephone +44(0)20/7422 4200, fax +44(0)20/7422 4201, e-mail <minority.rights@mrghmail.org>, website (www.minorityrights.org).

UNESCO: Global Education Digest

The education budget of a single country like France, Germany, Italy or the United Kingdom outweighs education spending across the entire sub-Saharan African region, according to a new report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS).

The *Global Education Digest 2007* presents the latest education statistics from primary to tertiary levels in more than 200 countries. This edition focuses on the financing of education and provides a series of indicators to compare spending patterns across countries and levels of education.

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa spend only 2.4% of the world's public education resources. Yet about 15% of the school-age population lives in these countries, according to the report. In contrast, the United States, which is home to just 4% of the world's children and young people, spends 28% of the global education budget.

The US is the single greatest investor in education. According to the report, its public education budget is close to that of all governments in the six regions combined: the Arab States, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

East Asia and the Pacific has the second-highest share of global public spending on education at 18% (after the North American and Western European region). Yet governments in the region are investing considerably less than their share of global wealth at 28% of GDP on 29% of the school-age population.

The opposite scenario is found in South and West Asia, where 7% of the world's public education resources are spent on 28% of children and young people. A more balanced situation emerges in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region which accounts for 8% to 9% of global education spending, the school-age population and global wealth.

The report is available online: (www.uis.unesco.org/publications/GED2007).

VIENNA CONFERENCE ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Representatives from 138 States and civil society participants from 50 countries attended the Vienna Conference on Cluster Munitions (VCCM) from 5-7 December 2007, with the majority also attending the CMC International Forum on Cluster Munitions on 4 December. The meeting was the 3rd international conference of the "Oslo Process" seeking a global ban on cluster munitions, which continue to maim and kill civilians worldwide through scattered bomblets that can explode years after they were dropped. The conference, organized by the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), is part of a Norwegian initiative launched in February 2007 when 46 governments supported the Oslo Declaration to establish a legally binding instrument by 2008 to prohibit cluster munitions.

The 2nd international Oslo Process meeting took place in Lima (Peru) where a first draft of the treaty text was discussed. A comprehensive discussion text was issued on 14 November 2007, prior to the 3rd meeting, setting out the draft provisions of the treaty. Among the main topics on the agenda at the Vienna conference was a definition of cluster munitions, what will be prohibited, victim assistance, clearance, stockpile destruction, and international cooperation and assistance.

"The presence today of over two thirds of countries in the world is in itself a strong and encouraging sign. It's a significant push towards awareness of the problem," Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik said at the start of the meeting. Over 80 nations have voiced their support for the move, but key countries such as China, Russia and the United States — the main producers of such munitions — remain opposed to an outright ban.

These weapons were used last year during the war in Lebanon and are still being used in Iraq today. They have also made many victims in Laos, Afghanistan and in the Balkans.

The meeting saw participants voicing strong support for a comprehensive ban treaty from the developing world, including a united voice from African States; calls from affected States for a treaty that puts humanitarian imperatives first, responds to their needs and recognizes the responsibility of past user States; broad consensus on the victim assistance provisions as drafted and calls from a number of States and organizations for even stronger provisions. There was also broad consensus on the approaches for clearance and stockpile destruction with certain elements requiring more work and on the international cooperation and assistance provisions. The third meeting saw increased involvement from survivors and other participants from affected countries, with survivors intervening on many of the substantive agenda items as well as the opening and closing sessions.

"All kinds of cluster munitions, no matter how sophisticated, are deadly. Everyone can become a victim," said for Sladan Vuckovic, a Serb who lost both his arms and part of one leg while trying to remove the remaining bombs from his land. He was one of several cluster bomb victims who made it to the conference in a wheelchair or with the help of synthetic limbs to testify about the damage done by these weapons.

CMC, which consists of about 200 civil society organizations, estimates that at least 34 countries continue to produce cluster munitions, while 75 States have a significant stock in their possession. No figures are available on how many people have been maimed or killed by cluster munitions, but Handicap International estimates about 98% of victims are civilians, usually children.

The Wellington Conference on Cluster Munitions, held from 18-22 February 2008, was the 4th International Oslo Process Conference and will be the last discussion-focused conference before the negotiating conference to be held in Dublin in May 2008.

Contact: Cluster Munition Coalition, 89 Albert Embankment, 2nd Floor, SE1 7TP London, UK, telephone +44(0) 207 820 0222, e-mail <info@stopclustermunitions.org>, website (www.stopclustermunitions.org).

TALKING POINT - A NEW IAW E-PUBLICATION

Together with the journal *IWNEWS*, the monthly electronic newsletter and the *urgent-take-action FLASH*, the International Alliance for Women (IAW) has introduced an electronic publication, entitled *Talking Point*, that will present articles on specific subjects. The subject of this first *Talking Point* was Environment and Sustainable Development, which focuses on the lack of gender in Conferences up to now.

Talking Point is available online: (www.womenalliance.org/talk.html).

SOUTH BULLETIN: REFLECTIONS AND FORESIGHTS

In October 2007 South Centre launched the inaugural issue of a re-vamped version of the *South Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* has a new look and format, and puts greater emphasis on sharing knowledge that matters for the South. The *Bulletin* is an outcome of ideas shared by several colleagues, including officials from Member Countries of the South Centre in Geneva, New York, Brussels and in the capitals, and will enable cross-sharing of experiences and fulfil specific knowledge needs on current and emerging issues in which developing countries are stakeholders.

The latest issue of the *Bulletin* is available online: (www.southcentre.org/southbulletin/Issue10-1March.pdf).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 62ND SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A “dynamic and vital” General Assembly succeeded in laying the groundwork for crucial negotiations ahead on important issues on the United Nations agenda, such as global warming, counter-terrorism, development financing and Security Council reform, according to the GA President, Srđjan Kerim (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), which allowed the body to make its work “more effective and more relevant to the lives of the global public.”

Speaking at a press conference recapping the 192-member body’s work for the main part of its 62nd session in late December 2007, Mr. Kerim said, “We must forge a lasting consensus — a global alliance for action — by bringing together Member States, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society.”

At the beginning of the session in September 2007, the GA President had laid out his five priorities: climate change, which would be the focus of this year’s general debate; financing for development; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); countering terrorism; and renewing the management and effectiveness of the Organization, including Security Council reform. Summing up the general debate, Mr. Kerim said that global warming had clearly become the “flagship issue” of the 62nd session. He noted that during the debate there had been broad consensus that the UN must remain at the centre of the process to reach a global agreement — including the strengthening of international environmental governance.

Later in the session, the Assembly adopted a resolution requesting the Secretary-General to compile a report on all UN activities in the area of climate change, in anticipation of the Assembly’s February 2008 thematic debate, which was expected to build on the outcome of the recently concluded thirteenth Conference of State Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (see *NGLS Roundup 137*).

In his first opening address to the general debate as UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon noted that “Our changing world needs a stronger UN.” He called on Member States to pay less attention to rhetoric and more attention to results — “to getting things done.”

At the midpoint to the Millennium Development Goals (see *NGLS Roundup 129*), both Mr. Kerim and Mr. Ban flagged 2007 as a crucial year for action, especially since it was clear some countries would fall short, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. To achieve those and other development goals, Mr. Kerim stressed, “We should demand more of ourselves, as well as of the Organization, [. . .] and whether we get anywhere near fulfilling them will depend crucially on how we provide for their financing.” To that end, the Assembly held a three-day High-level Dialogue in October laying the ground for a review of anti-poverty promises pledged by world leaders in the Monterrey Consensus (see Focus Page 16).

Another session highlight was the convening of the Assembly’s first ever High-level Dialogue on Interreligious, Intercultural Understanding, Cooperation for Peace, held in October 2007, during which more than 90 delegations took the floor on a range of challenges, with calls to embrace rather than reject what seemed “different” in members of other ethnic, religious or social groups, and to recognize that living together in a globalized world implied a commitment to promoting “unity in diversity” and to the free and honest exchange of

ideas and knowledge. The meeting also included informal hearings with civil society in the form of two panel discussions (see Focus Page 18).

From 18–19 October, the annual discussion of ways to help African countries meet the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was held, with speakers urging the international community to dismantle trade-distorting subsidies, improve the quality of development assistance and forge creative partnerships to help African countries consolidate gains. The two-day joint debate, which heard from some 40 speakers, also examined the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace in Africa, as well as efforts to meet the goals of the 2001–2010 Decade to Roll Back Malaria. The Assembly later adopted a resolution on progress in implementing and international support for NEPAD, stressing the need for the international community to stand by all commitments regarding the continent’s economic and social development.

In December 2007, the Assembly convened a commemorative high-level plenary session to mark the mid-decade point for the Plan of Action “A World Fit for Children (WFFC)” that was adopted in May 2002 during the historic UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Children (see *NGLS Roundups 92 & 130*). The 2007 session wrapped up with the adoption of a consensus declaration in which States pledged to realize promises by, among other ways, scaling up their efforts through resource allocation and political action, increased cooperation and more focused partnerships with the private sector.

Other highlights included the Assembly’s informal thematic debate on terrorism, which paved the way for the review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy scheduled for September 2008. The Assembly also adopted a resolution setting the stage for the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in realizing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, deciding to convene a High-level Meeting from 10–11 June 2008.

First Committee

The Assembly adopted 52 texts on the recommendation of its First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) on such issues as nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, disarmament aspects of outer space, conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, other disarmament measures and international security, as well as the United Nations disarmament machineries.

The Assembly adopted a series of texts dealing with the nuclear issue and the risk of terrorist acquisition of nuclear weapons, including a resolution that calls for immediate and urgent steps to reduce the dangers of the unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons.

Adopting a resolution on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Assembly also stressed the vital importance and urgency of signature and ratification of that Treaty, without delay and without conditions, so as to achieve its earliest entry into force. Concerned by the threat of terrorism and the risk that terrorists might acquire, traffic in or use radioactive materials, the Assembly adopted a resolution calling on Member States to support global efforts to prevent the acquisition and use of such materials by terrorists.

Recognizing that illicit brokering in small arms was a serious problem that the international community should address urgently, the Assembly adopted a resolution calling upon all States to implement the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, among others, through the provision of information to the Secretary-General on the name and contact information of the national points of contact and on national marking practices related to markings used to indicate country of manufacture and/or country of import, as applicable.

Second Committee

Thirty-four development-related resolutions and one decision were recommended for adoption by the Second Committee (Economic and Financial), including a consensus resolution on the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review, which would shape the Organization's development activities over the next three years, specifically on funding national capacity development and development effectiveness. In an attempt to interlink poverty eradication, sustainable and economic development and the achievement of the MDGs, the Assembly also adopted a consensus resolution declaring the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017), urging governments and the international community to continue seriously to pursue that objective.

Trade as an engine for development and growth was a recurring message among Second Committee delegates, with many underscoring an urgent need to even the playing field for developing countries in the international trade arena. Another message delegates sent repeatedly was that developing countries bore the brunt of the negative effects of climate change when it was developed countries that produced most damaging emissions.

The Assembly adopted resolutions on issues including the newly emerging fields of sustainable mountain development, as well as science and technologies for development. The Assembly also approved another landmark resolution on the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the first of its kind that sets a new standard in forest management.

Third Committee

On the recommendation of its Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural), the Assembly adopted 54 resolutions and 12 decisions, including a landmark text calling for a moratorium on executions to be established in all States that still maintained the death penalty. A resolution strongly condemning sexual violence against women and girls in all its forms, including in conflict situations, was also adopted, as were resolutions on human rights in Belarus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran and Myanmar. As in past years, there was heated debate over the value of such country-specific resolutions, especially given the establishment of the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, which aims to submit the situation of human rights in every Member State to regular scrutiny.

On 27 November 2007, the Third Committee adopted a resolution that establishes a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children. A number of other draft resolutions would have the General Assembly address issues as varied as the right to food, which also expresses concern that women and girls are disproportionately affected by hunger, food insecurity and poverty, partly due to gender inequality and discrimination; violence against women migrant workers; efforts to end obstetric fistula; and promotion of the rights of disabled persons.

Fourth Committee

On the recommendation of its Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization), 24 resolutions and two decisions were adopted. In an effort to strengthen the Organization's role as global facilitator in various special political cases, the Assembly agreed to adopt resolutions stressing the importance of upholding international law in the occupied Arab territories, especially with regard to the smooth functioning of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Fifth Committee

Breaking a stalemate that threatened to leave the United Nations without a budget as 2008 approached, the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), on 22 December, arrived at an amount of US\$4.17 billion for the Organization's core activities in 2008-2009. It was forced to vote on the budget for the first time in some 20 years with a vote of 141 to 1 against (United States).

Presenting his US\$4.2 billion budget proposal to the Committee on 25 October, the Secretary-General had said that it was "not much, considering the demands upon us." Requesting just US\$23 million, or just half a percentage point, increase over the previous biennium, he said: "Never has the world so needed a strong United Nations, yet never have our resources been stretched so thin."

The Committee also provided recommendations to the Assembly on a wide range of other administrative and budgetary issues, including financing of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia, newly established missions in Darfur and Central African Republic and Chad, overhaul of the Organization's system of justice and the Capital Master Plan for renovation of UN headquarters.

Sixth Committee

On the recommendation of its Sixth Committee (Legal), and acting without a vote, the Assembly adopted 18 resolutions and two decisions, deciding by the text of one resolution to call on States to take measures for holding UN officials accountable for criminal misconduct on mission. The resolution also urged States to consider establishing jurisdiction over serious crimes committed by their nationals on mission, and to cooperate with each other and the Organization in their investigations and prosecutions. The Committee addressed an array of other issues, including articles on diplomatic protection and the work of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Further information is available online: (www.un.org/ga/62/meetings.shtml).

SIXTH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Human Rights Council concluded its resumed sixth session on 14 December 2007, after having, among other things, extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Sudan for one year and the Independent Expert on human rights in Liberia for one year as well. It requested the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to conduct a follow-up visit to that country before its seventh session, and created a new expert mechanism on the human rights of indigenous peoples to provide the Council with thematic expertise.

The first part of the session, held from 10–28 September, suspended its sixth session until 10–14 December after having, among other things, extended the mandates of the Working Group on arbitrary detention, the Special Rapporteur on human rights of indigenous people and the Independent Expert on human rights in Burundi. The Council also created the post of a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery to replace the Working Group on contemporary forms of slavery, and set up the Forum on Minority Issues to replace the Working Group on minorities.

Established on 28 September, the new Forum will identify issues and best practices; make recommendations on the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities; and provide the Independent Expert on minority issues with vital information. It will be open to the participation of States, UN mechanisms, bodies and agencies, national human rights institutions, academics, and NGOs. NGOs without ECOSOC status will be permitted in the Forum as well, provided that their organization runs in conformity with the UN Charter. The Forum will meet for two days every year and the Forum Chair will be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, in consultation with regional groups and in accordance with regional rotation. The Independent Expert on minority issues will direct the work of the Forum as it convenes by recommending focus topics and bringing issues to the Council.

An important part of the work of the Council during both the first and second part of the sixth session was assessing the mandates of its Special Procedures. Continuing with its institution-building process, the Council adopted the general guidelines for the preparation of information under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), technical and objective requirements for eligible candidates for mandate holders, and the technical and objective requirements for the submission of candidatures for the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council. It also adopted a resolution on establishing a UPR Voluntary Trust Fund and a Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance.

The Council selected the countries to be reviewed in the Universal Periodic Review, providing a calendar of work for the Council for the next four years, from 2008 to 2011. The countries selected to undergo the UPR process at the first session of the UPR Working Group in 2008 are Bahrain, Ecuador, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Finland, United Kingdom, India, Brazil, Philippines, Algeria, Poland, Netherlands, South Africa, Czech Republic, and Argentina.

In general debates, the Council discussed a wide range of issues and human rights situations that required its attention. The Group of Experts on Darfur presented their interim report. The Council also considered issues concerning follow up to the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the

defamation of religion; follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; and technical cooperation and capacity building. During the resumed session in December, the Council continued with its process of review, rationalization and improvement of the mandates of Special Procedures. It also heard reports by and presentations on: rectifying the legal status of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—to put it in on a par with other treaty monitoring bodies—and the Open-Ended Working Group on an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Council adopted a number of resolutions and decisions during its sixth session. In a resolution on elaboration of human rights voluntary goals to be launched on the occasion of the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council decided to initiate an open-ended intergovernmental process in order to elaborate, on a consensual basis, a set of human rights voluntary goals, to promote the realization and implementation of the Universal Declaration.

In a resolution on integrating the human rights of women throughout the UN system, the Council calls upon all relevant actors to implement General Assembly resolution 59/164 of 20 December 2004 on improvement of the status of women in the UN system, in order to realize significant progress towards the goal of fifty/fifty gender distribution in the very near future and to guarantee the full participation of women in higher levels of decision making in the Organization.

In a decision on the Alliance of Civilizations, the Council invited the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations to address the Council at the High-level Segment of its seventh session on the ongoing activities within the framework of the Alliance (see related article, page 4).

A number of Special Rapporteurs saw their mandates renewed for a period of three years, including: on adequate housing; on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; on the protection, promotion and universal implementation of the right to freedom of religion or belief; and on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, amongst others. The Council extended the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons for a period of three years as well.

The seventh session of the Council will be held in Geneva from 3–28 March 2008.

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54TH SESSION OF THE UNCTAD TDB: SETTING THE STAGE FOR UNCTAD XII — GHANA

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held the 54th session of its Trade and Development Board from 1–11 October 2007 in Geneva. It included a high-level segment on globalization and inclusive development, which brought together high-ranking government officials to discuss the kinds of policies required to ensure that all developing countries, and all segments of their populations, benefit from increased international trade and economic growth. It also sought to forward preparations on UNCTAD's upcoming Ministerial Meeting in April 2008.

UNCTAD XII's theme, "addressing the opportunities and challenges of globalization for development" — and the subject of making the world economy work for everyone were addressed from numerous angles during the TDB's 54th session. The high-level debate on 1 October—"globalization and inclusive development"—looked at agenda items on least developed countries (LDCs) and Africa, with participants expressing concern that while economic growth has improved in such nations recently, it hasn't spread to all. More has to be done to turn this expanded trade into significant poverty reduction, they urged. It was noted repeatedly that the current rate of progress will not be enough to meet the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the halving of extreme poverty by 2015.

Member States, in their agreed conclusions on LDCs, said it was critical that LDCs improve their productive capacities through capital accumulation, technological progress, structural change, and good governance. Such steps were vital for reducing poverty and creating more jobs, they said, endorsing the findings of UNCTAD's *Least-Developed Countries Report 2007* (see *Go Between 114*). To accomplish these goals, the Board called for national and international action to promote business formation and upgrade the core competences and technological capabilities of domestic firms in LDCs.

On Africa, Member States agreed with the conclusion of the UNCTAD *Economic Development in Africa 2007* report that, while the support of their development partners is important and appreciated, African countries need to take steps to mobilize their domestic financial resources to reduce their dependence on external resources in the medium to long term. The Board stressed the need to learn from the experiences of successful developing economies which have pursued economic growth, development, and poverty reduction, while keeping in mind the specific situations of African countries. They called on international institutions such as UNCTAD, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to play a strong role in helping African countries boost internal economic growth to complement external links to the world economy.

During its two weeks of meetings, the Board also discussed the implications for developing countries of the ongoing WTO Doha round of trade negotiations. It debated "interdependence and global economic issues from a trade and development perspective: regional cooperation for development — which included review of the UNCTAD *Trade and Development Report 2007* (see *Go Between 114*). It also considered UNCTAD's 2007 *Report on Assistance to the Palestinian People*. On 2 October, it held its annual hearing with civil society organizations (see section below).

In closing remarks, UNCTAD Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi said that the Board had made "good progress on the road to UNCTAD XII," which will be held from 20–25 April in Accra, Ghana.

A preparatory committee (PrepCom) composed of UNCTAD's 151 Member States will begin meetings on 15 October. Negotiations on a draft text for the outcome began in November, with a first reading by member countries from 26–30 November. A number of preparatory events were held in December, including a conference on "Biofuels: An option for a less carbon-intensive economy" from 4–5 December; "Science, Technology, Innovation and ICTs for Development" on 6 December; and "Globalization of port logistics: opportunities and challenges for developing countries" on 12 December. Other preparatory process meetings for UNCTAD XII were held from 10–14 December and 17–21 December, and from 7–11 January and 16–18 January 2008. Further information on UNCTAD XII is available online: (www.unctadxii.org/en).

UNCTAD Hearing with Civil Society and the Private Sector

UNCTAD held a hearing with civil society and the private sector on 2 October 2007, which focused on two topics: The "New Regionalism" and Capturing the Benefits of Globalization. The annual hearing brought together representatives from civil society organizations, Member States, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and "l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie" to help exchange views and voice concerns in the lead-up to UNCTAD XII.

During the segment that focused on the "new regionalism," four main questions were debated:

1. What is the rationale for regional trade agreements in light of free trade agreements?
2. What is the impact of regionalism on developing countries in the context of globalization?
3. What is the impact of North-South agreements on developing countries' policy space?
4. What national policies are countries developing to address regionalism?

The second segment, which focused on capturing the benefits of globalization, also addressed four questions:

1. What kind of policies can be put in place at various levels to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of globalization?
2. What is the assessment of the expected benefits and costs of the Doha round proposals for WTO?
3. How can an enabling environment be created at all levels to strengthen productive capacities?
4. How can intermediaries' share of profits in commercial transactions be reduced so that the value added along the supply chain can really benefit small producers at the national, regional and international levels?

UNCTAD Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi made the opening address of the hearing, calling for globalization with a human face. In introducing the first segment, he mentioned that UNCTAD's latest *Trade and Development Report 2007* examined different types of regionalism. He stressed that regional economic cooperation should not be driven by the trade or the financial agenda alone, and that middle ground was needed. The task at hand was to move toward inclusive development and inclusive globalization.

The "New Regionalism"

Speaking on regional integration, one participant noted that North/South free trade agreements (FTAs) and regional agreements such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) currently negotiated by the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the EU were not always optimal for developing countries. Calling into question the rules and procedures that govern such negotiations, another speaker noted that this issue was also raised during UNCTAD XI and that since then things were becoming worse, with new agreements even less advantageous for developing countries. The speaker suggested that there was a need to look at structural changes in some countries and infrastructure at the regional level as well as to find alternative solutions to mitigate negative impacts.

Several participants said the "new regionalism" and multilateralism were not incompatible, as the WTO provided for derogations with respect to free trade agreements. Bilateral free trade agreements and regional integration schemes involving such agreements provided a basis for further trade liberalization at the WTO and for the integration of developing countries into the global economy. However, some participants considered the growing number of free trade agreements to be a consequence of developing countries' dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in WTO negotiations. Free trade agreements between developed and developing countries were thought by some to undermine the development potential of less developed countries, even though such agreements were also seen to have some benefits. Since there was asymmetry in supply capacity, the developing countries could not benefit as much as developed countries from reciprocal market access to trade or from other measures related to free trade agreements such as investment or public procurement, as stressed in the *Trade and Development Report 2007*.

It was thought to be in the best interests of developed countries to allow developing partners some room for manoeuvre in their development strategies, although it was pointed out that the concept of "policy space" needed to be defined more clearly. Each country was sovereign

in its decisions on free trade agreements, some of which provided for adequate transitional periods for developing countries. Participants called on UNCTAD to elaborate further at UNCTAD XII on developing countries' policy space and to continue research in that area. At the national level, they said, appropriate social measures would be needed to cushion the negative impacts of free trade agreements. Another way to mitigate those impacts would be to link aid disbursements to trade reform, particularly through Aid for Trade. The importance of building up national institutions to enable them to evaluate the impact of free trade agreements was also stressed.

Capturing the Benefits of Globalization

One participant stated that globalization is neither gender nor socially neutral, and recalled that the assumptions that at the national level women would automatically benefit as a result of the cascade effect from global economic development, while in the process of socio-economic development women would increasingly enter stable employment and be equally treated has not been confirmed by reality in most regions of the world. The participant further noted that women continue to have more difficulties not only in participating in labour markets, but also in finding stable and productive wage and salaried employment. Additionally, women are more likely to earn less than men both in developed and developing countries for the same type of work, even in traditionally female occupations.

A number of other speakers focused on the need to address the social costs of globalization. Delegates noted increasing disparities between and within countries as a result of increased economic liberalization and globalization, even if, overall, poverty was being reduced. Populations in developing countries, especially women, were subject to increased social and economic insecurity, which was exacerbated by a multilateral trading system that was poorly reconciled with people's needs and was unable to fulfil the development aspirations of the Doha round of WTO trade negotiations. The South-to-North brain drain was said to undermine the ability of developing countries to develop through knowledge accumulation.

A number of delegates said action was needed at the international level. They called on UNCTAD to place greater emphasis on the promotion of inclusive globalization through exploring social protection and social dialogue; through studying the gender perspective of globalization; through attention to environmental damage; through greater accountability and transparency in the multilateral trading system; through reforms to the international financial architecture; and through ways to increase official development assistance flows and ensure a better distribution of benefits in the supply chain.

Several delegates said governments of developing countries needed to do more to ensure social protection, promote pro-poor and gender-neutral growth, and regulate transnational corporations. Civil society had a role to play in helping governments to create investment- and business-friendly environments and promote social investment. In addition, it was felt that promoting small and medium-sized enterprises could help create a bridge between the activities of transnational corporations and the social and economic needs of populations in developing countries.

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HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE AND INFORMAL INTERACTIVE HEARINGS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ON FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT

From 23–25 October 2007 the third UN General Assembly High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development was held on the theme “The Monterrey Consensus: status of implementation and tasks ahead.” GA President Srgjan Kerim chaired the meeting, which heard statements from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Economic and Social Council President Dalius Čekuolis. It follows up on the High-Level Dialogues (HLD) held at UN headquarters in October 2003 and June 2005.

The Dialogue brought together relevant participants in the financing for development process—governments, business, civil society and multi-lateral financial institutions—and contributed to the preparation of the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Doha (Qatar) from 29 November to 2 December 2008.

The HLD touched on all aspects of the Monterrey Consensus as well new and emerging issues over the three-day period and consisted of plenary meetings and a number of roundtables which addressed the thematic areas of the Monterrey Consensus. An informal interactive dialogue on 24 October focused on the implementation of the Monterrey Conference outcome and the link between financing for development and the achievement of internationally agreed development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both the roundtables and the interactive dialogue included the active participation of representatives of civil society. Side events addressed such topics as innovative mechanisms of financing, South-North capital flows, and gender perspectives on the development agenda.

During the debate, many participants expressed the view that a sustained expansion of the world economy was by no means assured as risks in financial markets had increased measurably. Tackling the uncertainty of financial markets and the danger posed by global imbalances was seen as the key challenge to be addressed in Doha. There was also a widespread concern over growing income disparities between and within countries.

On the domestic front, according to several speakers, there was a crucial need to increase tax revenue through effective tax systems. This could reduce disparities but also assist in the public financing of basic infrastructure. Good governance, an effective and transparent regulatory environment and the rule of law were also stressed as key factors.

Many participants welcomed the increase of foreign direct investment (FDI) in developing countries; yet only a few developing countries absorbed the bulk of such flows. The major challenge was to implement effective and development-friendly measures that would enable lower-income, more vulnerable countries, to obtain a more significant flow of private resources, participants stressed.

The critical importance of making decisive progress in the multilateral trade negotiations was also stressed. To that end, it was essential to fully implement the Doha Development Agenda and to finalize the negotiations soon.

Regarding official development assistance (ODA), participants reiterated the need to achieve the 0.7% target, which was critical for achieving the MDGs. Others pointed to the decrease in aid in 2006 as a reason for concern while some stressed that in-depth consideration must be given to innovative sources of finance. The debt landscape, in the view

of several participants, had improved. But the debt overhang persisted in a significant number of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries (LDCs). Participants put forth a number of proposals for debt restructuring and arbitration mechanisms.

Others brought up the issue of enhancing the voice and effective participation of developing countries in international economic decision making. Progress had so far been meager and much remained to be done. Enhanced tools for crisis prevention and resolution and effective emergency liquidity instruments were also proposed.

Several new issues emerged during the HLD. Many speakers referred to the funding needs for climate change mitigation and adaptation, international support for South-South cooperation and addressing the problems of middle-income countries. Several participants expressed a wish for enhancement of international cooperation in tax matters (including combating tax evasion and other illegal activities) and strengthening of FfD follow-up mechanisms.

Throughout the various aspects of the debate the crucial role of civil society in the process and in development planning and implementation was reaffirmed by government representatives. Civil society representatives expressed their support for the process and for the commitments contained in the Monterrey Consensus, however, they made it clear that they still feel that their voice is not being adequately taken into account. They called for the Review Conference in Doha to be at the highest level in order to effectively deal with the lack of implementation of the Consensus. Additionally, they called for a new outcome document with new commitments that would take into account issues that were not appropriately addressed in the Monterrey Consensus, such as gender empowerment and decent work, as well as a formal process, including regional PrepComs, leading up to Doha.

During the informal interactive hearings with civil society on 22 October 2007, panelists reaffirmed their commitments to staying engaged in the Monterrey process and to ensuring proper review of the agreements made in 2002 at the Monterrey Conference.

The President of the General Assembly chaired the meeting and opened the hearings by recognizing the “instrumental” role of civil society in the FfD process. He noted that “global partnership for development cannot be achieved without the full and constructive engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including national governments, international institutions, civil society and the business sector.” He emphasized that it was imperative that the views of civil society be fully understood and taken into account when considering financing for development strategies—the Monterrey Consensus itself recognizes this.

Rosario Romero (Programme Coordinator for Social Development, Forum Solidaridad, Peru), the first civil society representative to address

the meeting, began her statement by discussing the role of civil society in the FfD agenda. She noted that civil society has a crucial function in monitoring government actions and promoting equitable and ethical economic systems. Civil society organizations also help generate resources at both public and private levels by attracting official funds and assisting small entrepreneurs, especially women.

Ms. Rosario made three suggestions for strengthening the role of civil society: first, governments need to create progressive and development-friendly fiscal policy; second, debt burdens and debt services need to be decreased in order to liberate resources; and third, state power needs to be decentralized for the purpose of enabling citizens and communities to facilitate the setting of spending priorities.

Celine Tan (Senior Researcher of Third World Network, Malaysia) discussed the systemic inadequacies within the international trade and financial architecture which continue to challenge efforts to meet the goals of the Monterrey Consensus; concurrently, she stressed that there is little indication of building “a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system” as put forth by the Monterrey Consensus.

The current methods of managing, regulating and coordinating international economic relations have not leveled out economic polarization but have instead intensified this imbalance. Furthermore, with regards to policy space, Ms. Tan said that there has been a selective application of economic policies which reflect the interests and priorities of developed countries while limiting flexibility for national policy space in developing countries.

The limited policy space felt by developing countries is compounded by issues such as competition in their domestic markets from foreign imports as a result of rapid import liberalization, constraints to the expansion of their exports, trade deficits, and the absence of effective multilateral rules over exchange rates, macroeconomic and other financial policies. Effective FfD can only be achieved through a comprehensive rethinking of the mechanism of the design of a multilateral economic governance system which has greater coherence between the trade and financial regimes and better balance of obligations between developed and developing countries cognizant of the different developmental stages of each country, she stressed.

“Aid to Africa has not guaranteed rapid growth and has not contributed sufficiently to the reduction of poverty,” Vitalice Meja (Programme Director of AFRODAD, Zimbabwe) said. Rather, it has led to lower growth, corruption and weakened internal, governmental aid management. Mr. Meja recommended that aid architecture should take into account the political interest of both the donor and the recipient, however, conditionalities in the aid architecture continue to pose problems for many African countries. He argued that aid will only be effective when governments take effective ownership over their own development strategies.

Mr. Meja said that non-governmental actors are not included in aid architecture reform at the national level. Civil society organizations have a role in advocacy and monitoring progress of the impact of aid, he said, and information flow between the national level and civil society needs to be more transparent.

Panelist Rodney Schmidt (North-South Institute, Canada), spoke on the Currency Transaction Tax (CTT) as an innovative source of FfD. He said that the CTT is a new method of raising “large amounts of independent, global, and stable monies” that could be used to finance international development projects. The CTT is a percentage tax on individual foreign

exchange transactions, assessed on dealers in foreign exchange markets and collected by financial clearing or settlement systems. The CTT is a small percentage, only about 0.005% on every foreign exchange transaction in dealer markets, and would expand foreign exchange markets greater than they have ever been in the past. Not only would the CTT not disturb foreign exchange markets, but it is safe and easy to implement, and can instantly raise at least US\$33 billion of global, independent, and steady revenue each year, he stressed.

Hellen Grace Akwii-Wangusa (Anglican Observer and Personal Representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the United Nations) said that policies set forth by the international financial institutions (IFIs) impinged on the sovereignty of nation-states and were generally ineffective. She described the mechanisms used by these institutions to assess the economic performance of countries—mechanisms that often become tools used universally for debt management. She further noted that debt sustainability analysis “does not include an audit of legitimacy or illegitimacy of all previous debts” and is therefore a weak tool.

Furthermore, Ms. Akwii-Wangusa said that the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative “only covered about a quarter of all the people thought to be living in poverty” and that the programme “did not reduce countries dependence on significant levels of concessional external assistance.” Regarding policy space, she suggested that governments in debt need the space to initiate their own policies in order to battle debt challenges. She pointed out that instruments such as safer debt structure, new forms of lending and credit default swaps were often inadequate. Ms. Akwii-Wangusa suggested that in order to improve debt management, borrowing countries and civil society organizations must fully engage in policy dialogue and take into consideration issues of accountability. Funds must also be targeted towards women’s empowerment and gender equality.

The floor was then opened for interactive discussion. Civil society participants highlighted important issues while also raising others that currently lie outside the Monterrey framework, which they advocated for inclusion at the Review Conference in Doha. Several participants raised the issue of unpaid work and its relationship to the economy within the context of pro-poor development policies, an issue that was stressed as critical in efforts to achieve the MDGs. Unpaid work, or the “care economy,” covers all the work done in the household or community which includes all care activities including personal care, studies, socializing and leisure time. Unpaid work is disproportionately carried out by women and children and some participants argued that it has not been sufficiently integrated in the formulation of public investment policies and pro-poor alternative macroeconomic strategies. The issue of decent work also emerged as a strong thread in the discussion with participants stressing that it is necessary for national and international actors to commit to the objective of creating quality jobs and maintaining high labour standards, including high wages and proper working conditions.

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HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION FOR PEACE

The first ever High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace was held at UN headquarters on 4-5 and 8 October 2007. On 25 May 2007, the GA adopted draft resolution A/61/L.60 in which it requested the President of the General Assembly to convene a two-day High-Level Dialogue (HLD) that encouraged Member States, the UN system, and civil society to carry out a range of initiatives in an effort to promote tolerance and respect.

The meeting included plenary and informal hearings with civil society in the form of two panel discussions on “Challenges of Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation” and “Best Practices and Strategies on Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation: Going Forward,” respectively. It brought together government ministers and senior diplomats from over 70 countries, while the informal hearings also included leading academics, religious leaders, and civil society.

The Dialogue, an initiative led by Pakistan and the Philippines, aimed to provide a forum through cooperation and understanding between cultures, religions, and civilizations “. . . to remedy negative effects of the globalization process, international travel and migration, fast expanding abuse of communication capacities, tensions amongst diverse ethnic and religious groups, realities of war, worldwide threats of terrorism and grave consequences of global climate change.”

One of the main themes of the dialogue was the emphasis placed on education through structured curriculums, religious and local leaders, and the use of positive media outlets. Dato’ Kamilan Makson of Malaysia, one of many who spoke on education, emphasized the role of youth and education. He called on the international community to work harder to bridge the growing gap between religions and cultures, and education was one way to do that. Another theme during the HLD was the importance of every member of society, whether an individual or major organization, to take an active role in engaging with all members of society. The Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt said dialogue was not the concern of government alone, it was also the concern of every individual in society, all non-governmental organizations, and thinkers.

Due to interconnectedness spurred by the age of globalization, many participants suggested that the need for interreligious and intercultural dialogue has increased. Basilio Antonio Gutierrez Garcia (Cuba) called on the international community to strive to create a democratic and equitable international order and to “vigorously oppose” the so-called “clash of civilizations.” Liu Zhenman (China) said that cultural diversity was a valuable asset to human society and could be used as an engine for creativity and progress. While globalization presented the opportunity for diverse groups to learn from one another, it also exposed different groups to the possibility for conflicts between them.

In their addresses, many States made reference to the Alliance of Civilizations, which seeks to forge collective political will and to mobilize concerted action at the institutional and civil society levels to overcome prejudice, misperceptions and polarization (see related article page 4).

Informal Hearings between Civil Society and Member States

The first panel, working under the theme “Challenges of Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation Today,” offered causal factors of tensions,

such as the high levels of marginalization, violence, and terrorism. A number of the panellists suggested that in order to alleviate these strains in society, civil society must engage within local communities. S. L. Ghandi, President of the Anuvrat Global Organization, pointed out when followers of different faiths sat together in fellowship, they found they had much in common, and superficial differences quickly fell away. He further noted that civil society groups had been creating an environment of reconciliation, implementing many joint action plans, such as poverty elimination projects. Muhammad Nurayn Ashafa, Joint Executive Director of the Interfaith Mediation Centre, stressed the importance of research, study, and documentation of interreligious models at the regional and community level.

Gamal Serour of the Al Azhar Centre suggested that “To achieve successful cooperation between donors and recipients, donors must understand the cultural and religious context of their recipients, who were typically more traditional; not insist on a one-size-fits-all solution; understand that local populations must be convinced, not coerced, into accepting major structural changes, particularly if from a foreign source; and respect a recipient’s freedom to reject changes they deem unacceptable from a cultural or religious perspective.”

In concluding remarks, Mr. Ashafa called for the creation of an interreligious advisory council to mediate religiously motivated conflicts worldwide. He further stated the importance of honouring religious leaders, perhaps through universities or the Alliance of Civilizations.

The second panel, entitled “Best Practices and Strategies for Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation Going Forward,” offered concrete strategies to promote interreligious and intercultural cooperation in order to relieve societal pressures. Josef Boehle, UNESCO Coordinator, Chair in Interfaith Studies, University of Birmingham, stressed the agency’s role in promoting encounters and dialogue among cultures and religions.

A number of strategies were put forth during the discussion, including an appeal to build an inter-cultural civilization; educational policy to counter ignorance; collaborative leadership built on trust between businesses and social activists; a peace education system; recognition of the role local and religious leaders play; a UN body to heighten interfaith dialogue; and dialogue within one religion, including mainstream and extremist elements.

Concluding the HLD, the GA President commended the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that had been displayed, and hoped the Dialogue would be something the General Assembly could continually strive to exemplify.

Further information is available online: (www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/hld-interreligious.shtml).

ILO FORUM ON DECENT WORK

An International Labour Organization (ILO) Forum on Decent Work for a Fair Globalization was held in Lisbon (Portugal) from 31 October - 2 November 2007. The Lisbon Forum gathered around 400 representatives of the ILO tripartite social partners – governments, workers and employers – as well as representatives of parliaments, civil society and government to discuss a wide range of globalization issues, and seek ways of promoting decent work as the key to economic, social and environmental sustainability and inclusiveness.

Specifically, the Forum sought to broaden and strengthen dialogue, share knowledge and experience, generate fresh and practical ideas for action, and build partnerships for decent work and a fair globalization amongst a diverse range of actors.

The three days of discussion revealed a strong convergence of views around decent work for a fair globalization. The current governance of globalization was viewed by many as unsustainable—economically, socially, environmentally and politically. To avoid a possible backlash of untold consequences, it was essential to reshape policies at national and international levels to deliver on people's demands for decent work. This implied greater policy coherence centred on decent work, which had to begin with fairer and more coherent policies at national level, both on domestic agendas and in positions taken in international organizations. Appropriate policies varied depending on national contexts and countries needed adequate room for manoeuvre to calibrate policies to local conditions, capacities and needs. Among others, fostering a combination of greater social justice and inclusion, entrepreneurship and innovation, endogenous productive capacities and domestic demand, were seen as essential ways forward.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavia said the true test of development was not only about reducing poverty but also reversing the global tendency toward greater inequality. He emphasized the need to agree internationally that people in every society have a right to a "social floor" defined according to national circumstances, means and priorities, and which would combine social investments with market opportunities to expand social mobility based on increasingly better jobs.

The Portuguese Minister for Labour and Social Solidarity, José António Vieira Da Silva, suggested that the reasons that the decent work debate had become a global debate in such a short number of years was because of its strong "ethical density" and the fact that it encompasses many facets which could be applied flexibly and effectively from local community or company levels to the global level. It was not just a response to the fractures and wounds of globalization, but also a tool capable of changing decisive aspects of the way globalization is developing. He further described it as a galvanizing concept for society at large to mobilize political will, because it was an effective instrument for scrutinizing decisions that influence life in the community. Decent work, he said, could be "transformed into a gauge of our collective decisions and the sustainability of those decisions."

The impressive degree of global political consensus emerging around decent work for a fair globalization was viewed as a significant achievement of the last few years, but the challenge was now implementation. The Forum thus appeared to mark a shift towards a new phase in the realization of the decent work agenda, which had to focus on delivering results and building effective partnerships to that effect. In this context, the Toolkit recently adopted by the UN system's Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) to mainstream employment and decent work across the multilateral system was widely discussed throughout

the meeting as a practical path to coherent action. Key agencies working on the interface with employment and decent work issues (including the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization) expressed their strong commitment to engage in the Toolkit process of self-evaluation and peer learning to achieve greater coherence. The litmus test remained how far this process would be taken up at the national level and without imposing new conditionalities.

Strengthening partnerships with parliamentarians was also a major outcome of Lisbon. A meeting convened by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) recommended the setting up of an international "parliamentary advisory group" on employment and decent work that would report annually to the IPU Governing Council. The IPU would also be mandated to adapt the "toolkit approach" to improve knowledge and strengthen the capacities of parliamentarians to promote policy coherence on decent work and a fair globalization at national and international levels.

In addition, a Call to Action for Decent Work was launched in Lisbon by a coalition between the international trade union movement and civil society organizations to build on the global campaign "Decent Work – Decent Life" that was launched at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January 2007. In commending all those involved in the campaign, Mr. Somavia suggested that a global "decent work movement" was emerging. It took strong political will to ensure that the benefits of globalization were more fairly shared, he said, and strong advocacy and mobilization of people to come to action.

The Forum also looked at specific themes including the challenges of skill development; the upgrading of informal economies; migration for work; extending social protection; and overcoming disadvantage and discrimination, especially among young people.

Decent Work refers to opportunities for women and men to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The Decent Work Agenda is built on four pillars: standards and rights at work; employment creation and enterprise development; social protection; and governance and social dialogue.

See also: *The quest for a fair globalization three years on: Assessing the impact of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization* (www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inst/download/dp17507.pdf); the Lisbon Forum website: www.ilo.org/lisbonforum; and the "Decent Work – Decent Life" campaign and Call to Action: www.decentwork.org.

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January

27 January: International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust

February

21 February: International Mother Language Day

March

8 March: International Women's Day and United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace

21 March: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

22 March: World Day for Water

23 March: World Forecast Day

24 March: World Tuberculosis Day

April

7 April: World Health Day

23 April: World Book and Copyright Day

May

3 May: World Press Freedom Day

15 May: International Day of Families

17 May: World Telecommunication Day

24 May: International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament

25 May: Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories

31 May: World No Tobacco Day

June

4 June: International Day of Innocent Children Victim of Aggressions

5 June: World Environment Day

17 June: World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

20 June: World Refugee Day

26 June: International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

26 June: UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

July

5 July: International Day of Cooperatives

11 July: World Population Day

August

9 August: International Day of the World's Indigenous People

12 August: International Youth Day

23 August: International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade

September

8 September: International Literacy Day

16 September: United Nations General Assembly Opening of 63rd Session

16 September: International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

21 September: International Day of Peace

October

1 October: International Day of Older Persons

5 October: World Teachers' Day

6 October: World Habitat Day

8 October: International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction

10 October: World Mental Health Day

15 October: World Rural Women's Day

16 October: World Food Day

17 October: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

November

16 November: International Day for Tolerance

18–26 November: Week for International Solidarity

20 November: Africa Industrialization Day

20 November: Universal Children's Day

21 November: World Television Day

25 November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

December

1st December: World AIDS Day

2 December: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

3 December: International Day of Disabled Persons

5 December: International Volunteer Day

10 December: Human Rights Day

18 December: International Migrants Day

29 December: International Day for Biological Diversity

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