



Between

**United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison (NGLS)
Serving the UN system and NGO community since 1975**

UN UPDATE

NEW PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The former Foreign Affairs Minister for Nicaragua, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, was elected by acclamation on 4 June 2008 as President of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly.

Mr. D'Escoto was elected without a vote by the 192-nation assembly to the rotating leadership post, which falls this year to Latin America and the Caribbean. He was the choice of that region and had no challengers. The presidency will be transferred from Srđjan Kerim of Macedonia, when the 63rd General Assembly session starts in September 2008.

SG: TASK FORCE ON GLOBAL HUNGER

Acting on a Bangladesh proposal made from the chair of the LDC Ministers' Conference on the sidelines of UNCTAD XII, held in Ghana (see *NGLS Roundup 133*), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced on 29 April 2008 that he would lead a task force to address the current global food crisis.

The Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis will bring together the heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes and the Bretton Woods institutions, as well as experts within the UN and leading authorities from the international community to create a series of measures for immediate and longer term challenges in addressing the food crisis (see Focus Page 11).

NEW SR ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

On 26 March 2008, the Human Rights Council appointed S. James Anaya (US), for an initial period of three years, as the new Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people. Mr. Anaya, who assumed the mandate on 1 May 2008, succeeds Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Mexico) who held the mandate from 2001-2008.

(continued on page 2)

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

On 3 April 2008 Ecuador became the twentieth country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, allowing it to enter into force on 3 May 2008. The convention, which is designed to protect the rights of the world's estimated 650 million people with disabilities, needed 20 ratifications to take effect, and a Conference of the Parties must be convened within six months. On 12 May, a special ceremony was held, which highlighted the need to make development and social progress benefit all people, as well as the link between development and the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Progress towards moving the convention into force has been relatively quick and has been attributed to the strong commitment of UN Member States, as well as advocacy by the global disability movement, which was instrumental in drafting the pact. NGOs played an important and active role in the negotiations of the convention which was eventually adopted by the General Assembly on 13 December 2006 (see *Go Between 111*). Since opening the convention for signature and ratification over a year ago, 126 countries have signed the convention and 71 have signed the convention's optional protocol.

States which ratify the convention must enact laws and other measures to improve disability rights, and also abolish legislation, customs and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities. The convention does not see disability as an unchangeable medical condition but as the result of interaction between people and removable hurdles. "Disability," it says, "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

As many as two-thirds of UN Member States do not have any legal protection for people with disabilities, according to the UN Focal Point on Disability Akiko Ito, even though they comprise one in ten of the global population. "The convention, together with its optional protocol, is deeply rooted in the firm commitment of the international community to rectifying the

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Migrant Remittances

The top five recipients of migrant remittances in 2007 were India (US\$27 billion), China (US\$25.7 billion), Mexico (US\$25 billion), the Philippines (US\$17 billion), and France (US\$12.5 billion). While South-South migration nearly equals South-North migration, rich countries are still the main remittances source, led by the U.S., according to the Bank's new *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008*. Among low-income countries, India had the highest immigration volume (5.7 million), followed by Pakistan (3.3 million). The *Factbook* provides statistics on migration, recorded remittances flows, and skilled emigration for 194 countries.

Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008 is available online: (www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances).

egregious neglect and dehumanizing practices that violate the human rights of persons with disabilities," Mr. Ban's spokesperson Marie Okabe concluded, calling on all States that have not yet done so to accede or ratify it without delay.

More than 20 UN departments, agencies, programmes, and funds have pledged their support to implementing the convention. The newly-formed Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention said that support will focus on six main areas: policies to support the purpose and objectives of the convention; programmes including international cooperation; capacity building of Member States, civil society, and the UN system; research and access to knowledge on disabilities; accessibility; and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol are serviced by a joint Secretariat, consisting of staff of both the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), based in New York, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva.

The full text of the convention and its optional protocol are available online: (www2.ohchr.org/english/law/disabilities-convention.htm). See also the quarterly *Enable Newsletter* available online: (www.un.org/disabilities).

NEW SR ON IP (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

In the fulfillment of the mandate, the Special Rapporteur: presents annual reports on particular topics or situations of special importance regarding the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples; undertakes country visits; exchanges information with governments concerning alleged violations of the rights of indigenous peoples; and undertakes activities to follow-up on the recommendations included in his/her reports.

In carrying out these different activities, the Special Rapporteur is also requested to work in close cooperation with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and to participate in its annual session (see article be-

low); to develop a regular cooperative dialogue with all relevant actors; to pay special attention to the situation of indigenous children and women; to consider relevant recommendations of the world conferences and treaty bodies on matters regarding his/her mandate; and to submit a report on the implementation of his/her mandate to the Council in accordance with its annual programme of work.

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur is serviced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Further information is available online: (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/rapporteur>).

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SEVENTH SESSION UNPFII

The seventh session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), held at UN headquarters in New York from 21 April - 2 May 2008, brought together more than 3,300 indigenous participants from all regions of the world as well as State representatives, UN officials, civil society and academia under the theme "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges."

In the first-ever address to the Forum by a Head of State, President Evo Morales of Bolivia urged the body to develop a model for "how to live well," to counter an economic system where a thirst for wealth had overwhelmed a sense of respect for sustainable living. He further proposed a set of "10 commandments" that would offer an alternative to "egoism, regionalism and the pursuit of luxury."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his video message to the Forum made reference to the recently adopted Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a non-binding text that outlines the rights of the world's estimated 370 million people. "You will work to translate the Declaration into a living document at the national and international levels," he said. "As you do, you will promote the UN development agenda

and its vision of development for all. This includes the poorest and most vulnerable, a group to which many indigenous peoples belong.”

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chairperson of the Permanent Forum, said that both the problem of climate change and its solution were concerns for indigenous peoples who – according to a World Bank report – contributed the “smallest ecological footprints” on Earth, but suffered the worst impacts from climate change and mitigation measures, such as the loss of land to biofuel production.

During the session, Forum members heard from delegates on the multiple ways in which their respective countries needed to take measures to implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and discussed how the body could be more effective in encouraging implementation. The Forum therefore decided to convene an international expert group meeting before the eighth session to formulate concrete proposals.

In his last address to the Forum before ending his tenure on 1 May, Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Mexico), the Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, said he saw “great possibilities” in applying the recently-adopted Declaration as a framework for the promotion and protection of indigenous rights.

As he reflected on the state of indigenous peoples’ rights over the past few years, Mr. Stavenhagen said it had improved greatly in numerous countries, but showed “signs of retreat” in other countries. He said he had made 11 official visits to different countries, along with numerous semi-official trips, each resulting in a country report to the Council. But Mr. Stavenhagen noted that the submission of a Special Rapporteur’s recommendations were “the weakest point of all the special procedures, since neither the Council nor the United Nations had implementation mechanisms.”

In its discussion on climate change, the Forum urged States, the World Bank, and other multilateral and bilateral financial institutions to consider alternative systems beyond the perpetuation of highly-centralized fossil fuel-based energy supplies and large-scale bioenergy and hydropower dams. The Forum also called for an increase in support for renewable, low-carbon and decentralized systems.

Delegates also examined the value of increased collaboration of the Forum with the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms, including its Universal Periodic Review mechanism (see Focus Page 16), and called for indigenous rights to be prominently addressed at those reviews.

Following a half-day discussion devoted to indigenous languages, the Permanent Forum issued recommendations intended to raise the prestige of indigenous languages through supporting efforts towards standardization, by establishing indigenous universities

and by promoting the use of indigenous languages in public administration. It urged States, UN agencies, donors, research institutions, the media and NGOs to ensure the proper and correct identification of the names of indigenous languages and their protection and development.

At the conclusion of its seventh session, members of the Permanent Forum made a number of recommendations on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, among other issues. Members of the Forum announced that the 2009 session will examine six UN agencies in-depth as a new method of work, and discussions will be devoted to economic and social development, indigenous women, the Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and the Arctic.

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DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE PREPCOM

A two-week meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2009 Review Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance was held in Geneva from 21 April – 2 May 2008. The 2009 conference will review progress and assess implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by the 2001 World Conference in Durban, South Africa (see *NGLS Roundup 82*).

The review process seeks to: identify concrete measures and initiatives for combating and eliminating these phenomena; assess the effectiveness of the existing follow-up systems and other relevant UN mechanisms; promote universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and identify and share good practices.

“The Durban review conference is not, and should not be seen as, a repetition of the 2001 World Conference,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said in her opening statement to the PrepCom. “It is rather a platform to evaluate progress, an opportunity to reinvigorate commitments, and a vehicle to fine-tune responses in a purposeful and contextual manner.”

Speaking at the opening session, the PrepCom President, Najat Al-Hajjaji of Libya, said progress since 2001 has been patchy. On the plus side, she highlighted the fact that the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action had been “instrumental in prevailing on a number of countries to establish individual State bodies to implement

Int’l Day of Remembrance

“The forced movement of West Africans across the Atlantic happened on an unprecedented scale of brutality and inhumanity, killings and massive abuses. Millions died without a burial, without a trace.

“This chapter in human history is all the more reprehensible because the trade yielded significant prosperity in countries where slavery was perpetrated under colour of law. These States paid no monetary price for their progress, but they incurred a terrible cost in the form of the entrenched racism that we still battle today. The slave trade left an indelible mark, not only because it offended the human conscience, but also because it was a result of a shocking complicity of nations that participated in the name of ‘commerce’ for 400 years.

“The question of how to atone for this crime is difficult to answer. We must acknowledge the great lapse in moral judgment that allowed it to happen. We must urge present and future generations to avoid repeating history.

“In our time, forced labour, sexual exploitation and human trafficking afflict millions of people worldwide, including children toiling under unspeakably abusive conditions. Racism and racial discrimination still take a serious and sometimes deadly toll. We are all shamed by these repugnant crimes. And we are all challenged to respond.

“How fitting, therefore, that this historic first International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade falls in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 4 of the Declaration tells us, and I quote: ‘No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.’

“Let us give life to those words. Let us honour the victims of the slave trade by remembering their struggle. Let us carry it forward until no person is deprived of liberty, dignity and human rights.”

— extracts from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message on Int’l Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, observed on 25 March

its recommendations, to adopt concrete measures as national legislations and affirmative action policies.”

Progress on the ratification of key international treaties that address issues related to racism and related issues has been less impressive, Ms. Arbour pointed out, citing a recent overview which revealed that across the world, States “still fail to recognize the existence of the phenomenon of racism. National laws and measures to ensure its elimination in most countries are either inadequate or ineffective. As a result, vulnerable groups continue to suffer aggression while abusers enjoy impunity... Very few States have adopted national action plans to correct all these serious shortcomings and effectively prevent discrimination.”

The PrepCom postponed making decisions on where the review conference will be held and its duration, with some States wanting it to last for three days and others wanting five. On 26 May, a special extension of the PrepCom session was held to decide on these issues, and following deliberations, the Preparatory Committee announced that the review conference would be held in Geneva from 20–24 April 2009.

The PrepCom reached agreement on a number of fundamental issues including the process involved in drafting the review conference’s outcome document. An intergovernmental working group, which held its first session from 26–30 May, began negotiations on the content of the outcome document.

Decisions on NGO accreditation for the review conference were also made. NGOs which already have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) are automatically entitled to take part in the process, as are over 1,000 others who participated in the original 2001 World Conference, providing no government objects and the objection is not upheld by the PrepCom. NGOs that do not belong to either of these existing groups are subjected to an individual examination by the PrepCom.

The United Nations Human Rights Council is acting as the PrepCom for the Durban Review Conference, which is expected to hold a second and final substantive session towards the end of the year. Four regional sessions will also be held, with the first scheduled to take place in Brasilia from 17–19 June 2008. The decision to hold a review conference some time in 2009 was laid down in a 2006 UN General Assembly Resolution (61/149).

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SPECIAL HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF ECOSOC

The special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the Bretton Woods institutions (BWIs), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and De-

velopment (UNCTAD) took place on 14 April 2008 at UN headquarters in New York. The overall theme of the meeting was “Coherence, coordination and co-operation in the context of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, including new challenges and emerging issues.”

The meeting also addressed a number of sub-themes through roundtable discussions:

1. New initiatives on financing for development;
2. Supporting development efforts and enhancing the role of middle-income countries, including in the area of trade;
3. Supporting development efforts of the least developed countries, including through trade capacity-building;
4. Building and sustaining solid financial markets: challenges for international cooperation;
5. Financing of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The meeting included an opening plenary meeting with statements by the President of ECOSOC; the UN Secretary-General, who emphasized the negative impact of the current food crisis; the heads of relevant intergovernmental bodies and other senior officials plus the presentation by the World Bank on its *Global Monitoring Report 2008*, followed by simultaneous multi-stakeholder roundtable discussions on sub-themes 1 to 3. The afternoon session featured consecutively the thematic debate on sub-theme 4 and the special event on sub-theme 5. Each of the debates began with three keynote presentations and included an informal interactive dialogue among all participants.

The morning statements presented a rather worrisome outlook for the global economy with participants stressing that developed countries face risks of major growth deceleration, which would impact adversely on all countries. At the same time, many developing countries face a considerable degree of uncertainty regarding their exports and financial flows. These difficulties are compounded by substantial increases in international food and energy prices. If deceleration in developed countries is severe and long, and the prices of food and energy remain high, the development gains of the last half dozen years may be reversed, some speakers warned.

After the opening plenary, the meeting split into three simultaneous roundtables. Roundtable 1 saw participants recognizing that a substantial number of new initiatives have been undertaken since the Monterrey Conference and some of them have already contributed to the mobilization of new resources for development, especially in health-related areas. At the same time, the discussion pointed out a need for better focus and coordination of the new initiatives going forward, in order to maximize their impact on development.

Roundtable 2 saw wide agreement between participants that international support should be maintained for the development efforts of middle-income coun-

New Head of WIPO

The Coordination Committee of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has nominated Francis Gurry (Australia) to become the next Director General of WIPO. The candidate will have to be appointed by the WIPO General Assembly at its next meeting scheduled from 22–30 September. The Director General-elect will assume his duties on 1 October 2008 following appointment by the WIPO General Assembly. Mr. Gurry will become the fourth Director General of WIPO, following Kamil Idris of Sudan (1997–2008); Arpad Bogsch of the United States (1973–1997); and Georg Bodenhausen of the Netherlands (1970–1973).

New Executive Director of UNIFEM

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) announced on 7 April 2008 the appointment of Inés Alberdi of Spain as the new Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Ms. Alberdi, who succeeds Noeleen Heyzer, was selected by UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis in consultation with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UNIFEM Consultative Committee.

Ms. Alberdi is the fourth Executive Director of UNIFEM. She succeeds Noeleen Heyzer of Singapore (1994–2007), Sharon Capeling-Alakija of Canada (1989–1994) and Margaret Snyder of the US (1978–1989).

tries (MICs), in order to help them consolidate their development gains and prevent reversals of these gains. Many members of this large and heterogeneous group of countries continue to face high levels of poverty and inequality, as well as a large degree of vulnerability due to their integration into international financial markets.

During Roundtable 3 a number of participants noted that the challenges faced by LDCs are becoming more complex due to their integration into the international economy. In this context, increased international assistance to these countries, including through enhanced synergies with the private sector remains critical, they stressed.

In the afternoon, two consecutive events were held: the thematic debate on "Building and sustaining solid financial markets: challenges for international cooperation" and a special event on "Financing of climate change mitigation and adaptation." The thematic debate focused on the role of multilateral institutions as well as innovative financial instruments and mechanisms to ensure macroeconomic stability and growth. The discussion during the special event demonstrated that the task of dealing with climate change mitigation and adaptation requires involvement of all countries and development actors. The focus of the international community should be on supporting developing countries that lack the financial and technical resources necessary to respond appropriately to climate change and whose populations could be severely affected by climate change, participants stressed.

Further information is available online: (www.un.org/esa/ffd/ecosoc/springmeetings/2008/index.htm).

NGLS/UNIFEM: SIDE EVENT ON FFD

On 15 April at UN headquarters in New York, NGLS and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) co-sponsored a side event on "The Role of Aid in Financing Development," in conjunction with the Review session on Chapter IV of the Monterrey Consensus, entitled "Increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development." The event brought together four panelists and two respondents and was moderated by Elisa Peter, Acting Coordinator of NGLS.

Eckhard Deutscher (Chair of the Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) began by recognizing the important contribution that NGOs have in the crafting and delivery of development policies. In this regard, he mentioned a recent meeting that he participated in with NGOs as part of the preparations for the Third High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, scheduled to take place in Accra (Ghana) in September 2008. His focused his comments on official development assistance (ODA) flows; aid architecture; and the Accra Action Agenda (the outcome document of the upcoming Forum).

Ambassador Byron Blake (Deputy Permanent Representative, Mission of Antigua and Barbuda) stressed that development policies need to be "long term" and designed to build up and strengthen the weak. Therefore, aid has to be able to deal with and overcome long-term constraints. In his view, that is why ODA was a particular focus within the Monterrey Consensus — ODA has the ability to stimulate the flow of revenue in other areas. It can be used for social infrastructure projects, such as improvement in health or educational services, which do not necessarily have short-term results.

Cyrille Pierre (French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs) began by expressing France's commitment to developing innovative mechanisms for financing development and brought up the recent initiative to impose an air ticket levy, the proceeds of which fund UNITAID, an international drug purchase facility (see *Go Between 111*). So far, the levy has collected 160 million euros per year for UNITAID, he noted. France sees three main objectives of innovative financing: all mechanisms should provide predictable funding; these mechanisms are methods of redistributing the resources produced by globalization; and, they should be coordinated amongst various countries.

Lucy Hayes (European Network on Trade and Development—EURODAD) began by noting that the Monterrey Consensus makes important commitments on improving the quality of aid and one shouldn't rely solely on the Accra HLF to deliver stronger aid commitments on aid quality. She delivered a presentation on a recent report that EURODAD has produced entitled *Turning the Tables: Aid and accountability under the Paris framework*. She focused on four of the report's main findings, including: continued conditionalities contradict the concept of ownership; the dialogue on aid is currently disconnected from democratic processes; there is not enough data on the impact of technical assistance and there is still too much "tied aid"; and there is insufficient donor transparency in aid relationships.

Responding to the presenters, Roberto Bissio (Social Watch) compared the process leading to the Accra HLF to that of the process leading to the Doha Review Conference. Regarding civil society participation, Mr. Bissio noted that the rules leading to Doha are very clear. Organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council or accredited to the FfD process can participate at any of the official events in the lead-up process. However, for the Accra HLF it is still not known who or what NGOs will be invited to participate or how they will be selected.

Speaking from a gender perspective, Gigi Francisco (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era—DAWN) first pointed out that supporting women in business in developing countries using the World Bank framework is not an effective method of achieving Millennium Development Goal 3, nor is imposing gender promotion as a conditionality on ODA.

World Book and Copyright Day

On 23 April 2008, more than 100 countries took part in the 13th celebration of World Book and Copyright Day, proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1996. Publishers, book shops, libraries, schools, cultural institutions and authors' societies from all over the world celebrated the Day and promoted the enduring importance of books. On 23 April 1616, the writers Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega died.

As 2008 is the International Year of Languages, UNESCO is emphasizing the linguistic aspect of publishing: "When a language has no access to the world of publishing, it is excluded — together with those who speak it — from a significant part of the intellectual life and economic activity of society," UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura said in his message observing the Day. "In this context, it is then a matter of urgency to give languages broader access to publishing, so as to promote the exchange of books and editorial content."

On 23 April, Amsterdam succeeded Bogotá as World Book Capital City, in keeping with an initiative launched by UNESCO in 2001. The Netherlands' capital is planning to hold a wide range of events of international scope throughout the year including: conferences on copyright, scientific publishing, interculturality in literary creation, and children's books. New libraries and cultural centres will be opened, and seminars will be held alongside artistic and festive events.

The following cities have been designated World Book Capital to date: Madrid (Spain, 2001), Alexandria (Egypt, 2002), New Delhi (India, 2003), Antwerp (Belgium, 2004), Montreal (Canada, 2005), Turin (Italy, 2006) and Bogotá (Colombia, 2007). Beirut will be World Book Capital City in 2009.

World Health Day: Climate Change

"Climate change is sometimes debated as if it affected only the planet and not the people living on it. This year's World Health Day is an opportunity to broaden this view by spotlighting the major health threats we face as a result of global warming.

"Climate change endangers the quality and availability of water and food, our fundamental determinants of nutrition and health. It is causing more frequent and more severe storms, heat waves, droughts and floods, while worsening the quality of our air. The result is an upsurge in human suffering caused by injury, disease, malnutrition and death.

"We need to give voice to this often overlooked reality, ensuring that protecting human health is anchored at the heart of the global climate change agenda.

"The impact will be most severe in poor countries, which have contributed least to this global crisis. By 2020, up to a quarter of a billion Africans will experience increased water stress and crop yields in some African countries are expected to drop by half.

"Malnutrition and climate-related infectious diseases will take their heaviest toll on the most vulnerable: small children, the elderly and the infirm. Women living in poverty face particular risk when natural disasters and other global-warming-related dangers strike.

"We must do more than decry these circumstances. We must act to ensure that the health of the vulnerable is protected during climate change.

"We must respond with urgent action to stabilize the climate, achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and encourage individual action. Our collective efforts can foster social and economic development for the world's poorest peoples, improving their health systems and their lives."

—Extracts from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for World Health Day, observed on 7 April

She advocated for a set of policies at the international and national levels that will create a more stable environment for more effective aid. At the national level, it is important to assess the amount of financing required to achieve full employment. Additionally, she advocated for the support of the so-called "care economy" in national budgets, institutions that are able to deal with financial crises and provide for social security and for land and asset reform so that women can be asset holders. Turning to the discussion on aid effectiveness leading to the Accra HLF, Ms. Francisco said that this process and its outcome should not be allowed to overtake the process leading to the Doha Review Conference. It is important to ensure that the Accra process and its outcomes are subsidiary to the Doha Review process and that an effective forum for that might be the upcoming Development Cooperation Forum (see *Go Between 114*).

During the open discussion that followed, questions from the floor were raised by representatives of both civil society and Member States, and a number of topics were raised. See the NGLS website (www.un-ngls.org) for a full report of the meeting and the *Road to Doha* newsletter on financing for development.

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4TH SESSION OF THE WORLD URBAN FORUM

The 4th session of the World Urban Forum (WUF4) will be held from 3-7 November 2008, in Nanjing (China) with "Harmonious Urbanization: The Challenge of Balanced Territorial Development" as its main theme. It will be supported by six sub-themes, discussed in a series of dialogues:

Dialogue 1: Territorial balance in urban development;

Dialogue 2: Promoting social equity and inclusiveness;

Dialogue 3: Making cities work and economically productive;

Dialogue 4: Harmonizing the built and natural Environments;

Dialogue 5: Preserving the historical roots and soul of the city; and

Dialogue 6: A city for all generations.

A number of roundtables have also been scheduled, including for ministers; mayors; global parliamentarians; urban researchers; business; women and harmonious cities; youth; civil society; and indigenous people in urban areas.

WUF4 will also include networking events, training sessions, an exhibition, private sector events, and a World Urban Youth Forum, being held from 31 October - 2 November. It will allow youth leaders from around the world to exchange views on sustainable

urbanization. Their recommendations will be officially presented to delegates at WUF4.

The World Urban Forum is a biennial gathering that is attended by a wide range of partners, from NGOs, community-based organizations, urban professionals, academics, to governments, local authorities and national and international associations of local governments. It provides a common platform to discuss urban issues in formal and informal ways.

The number of people attending the World Urban Forum has risen sharply from 1,200 at the first World Urban Forum in Nairobi in 2002 (see *Go Between 91*), to 4,400 at the second World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004 (see *Go Between 102*) and 11,400 at the third session of the World Urban Forum in Vancouver in 2006 (see *Go Between 110*).

Further information is available online: (www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=535).

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CLIMATE CHANGE TALKS IN BANGKOK

Over 1,100 delegates from more than 160 countries attended the first round of UN climate change talks in 2008, held in Bangkok from 31 March - 4 April, marking the beginning of a new negotiating phase, as set out in the Bali roadmap adopted at the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2007 (see *NGLS Roundup 131*).

This involves drawing up a work programme to craft a future international climate agreement that will halt the increase in global emissions within the next 10-15 years and dramatically reduce emissions by mid-century. The two-stranded talks also involve taking forward work under the Kyoto Protocol process. These processes are expected to culminate in a strengthened and effective international climate change deal, to be concluded at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009.

"The challenge is to design a future agreement that will significantly step up action on adaptation, successfully halt the increase in global emissions within the next 10-15 years, dramatically cut back emissions by 2050, and do so in a way that is economically viable and politically equitable worldwide," Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said.

During the meeting, the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) met for the first time and agreed on the work programme that will structure the two-year negotiations on a long-term climate change accord. During the discussions, participants engaged in a debate on all five main elements of the negotiations - adaptation, mitigation, technology, finance and a

shared vision for long-term cooperative action. Given the interlinkages between them, they also agreed to discuss all five issues in conjunction with each other at each of the three sessions due to take place this year. Focused discussions will also begin at an early stage on financing and technology, with the latter addressing research and development as well as technology transfer.

The Ad hoc Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) began the second phase of its work, aimed at revisiting the rules that govern and define the emission reduction commitments of Annex I Parties. While at Kyoto a deal was struck before establishing such rules, which were only agreed upon four years later, the aim of these negotiations is to have a clear set of rules before a political deal is reached. One of the main outcomes of the discussion of this working group was an agreement that the use of emissions trading, the Clean Development Mechanism and joint implementation should be continued and improved as a way for developed countries to meet emission reduction targets and at the same time contribute towards sustainable development.

Three climate change meetings are scheduled for 2008: Bonn (Germany) from 2–13 June; Accra (Ghana) from 21–27 August; and the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in Poznan (Poland) from 1–12 December.

Contact: Barbara Black, UNFCCC Secretariat, Haus Carstanjen, Martin-Luther-King-Strasse 8, D-53175 Bonn, Germany, telephone +49-228/815 1000, fax +49-228/815 1999, e-mail <secretariat@unfccc.int>, website (www.unfccc.int).

EDUCATION FOR ALL ACTION WEEK

Over seven and a half million children, adults and teachers joined politicians in over 100 countries to learn about the importance of everyone having the chance for a quality education during the Global Campaign for Education's (GCE)'s Action Week, which took place from 21–27 April 2008. This year the theme of the Action Week was "Quality Education to End Exclusion," and a major highlight of the week was "The World's Biggest Lesson," held on 23 April.

The GCE – a coalition of NGOs, civil society organizations and teachers unions – along with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), coordinate the Global Action Week each year aimed at putting pressure on political leaders to provide more money and political leadership for the Education For All Initiative that targets the goal of universal primary education by 2015, as agreed to by 164 governments in Dakar in April 2000 (see *Go Betweens* 91, 100 & 103).

Poverty and marginalization are major causes of exclusion and children living in rural or remote communities and in urban slums have less access to education. Disabled children suffer from blatant exclusion and

account for more than one third of all out-of-school children. Working children, those of indigenous populations and linguistic minorities, nomads and children affected by HIV/AIDS are also among the vulnerable groups. Seventy-two million children are still not enrolled in school: 70% of them live in sub-Saharan Africa or South and West Asia, but there are groups excluded from education in one way or another in all countries of the world.

"Global Action Week offers us an opportunity to highlight an unacceptable situation that is slowing progress towards the provision of education for all," UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura said. "It also provides an opportunity to signal clearly what needs to be done to address issues of marginalization and exclusion."

During the Action Week, the World's Biggest Lesson focused on providing quality basic education to everyone, especially the 72 million children and 774 million adults who are currently missing out. Politicians and ministers all over the world went back to school, with children in the teachers' role, and were asked by children what they planned to do to make sure everyone has access to quality education.

"The most promising reason to believe that the world will achieve its goals of Education for All by 2015 has been the emergence of strong civil society movement and this mobilization of millions of children, women and men during the Global Action Weeks each year," Kailash Satyarthi, GCE President, said. "We will not fall silent until we have ensured quality education for all."

UNESCO organized a series of events during the week, including a roundtable on "Quality Education to End Exclusion" on 23 April that brought together young people with disabilities, teachers and youth from the suburbs of Paris. A DVD entitled "A world for Inclusion: Ensuring Education for All through the UN Disability Convention," was launched on the same day, helping to commemorate the entry into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see article page 1). It also contains toolkits and policy guidelines.

See also the *2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report* (available online: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49591&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

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DPI: TOP TEN STORIES LIST

In its continuing efforts to highlight important issues and developments that do not always receive sufficient attention, the Department of Public Information (DPI) has released the fourth annual list of stories it feels the world's public and media may wish to find out more about.

World Malaria Day

"[I]n the time it takes me to read this message, six more children will die of the disease. Malaria still kills more than 1 million people every year. The toll it is taking is unacceptable – all the more so because malaria is preventable and treatable.

"In recent years, several African countries have made dramatic strides in malaria control. But the most affected nations remain off track to reach the goal of halting and reversing the incidence of the disease. As we pass the midpoint in the race towards the Millennium Development Goals, we desperately need to step up our efforts to roll back malaria.

"That is why today, together with the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, and my Special Envoy on Malaria, I am putting forward a bold but achievable vision. The aim is to put a stop to malaria deaths by ensuring universal coverage by the end of 2010.

"This initiative will offer indoor residual spraying, and bednets treated with long-lasting insecticide, to all people at risk, especially women and children in Africa.

"It will ensure that all public health facilities have access to effective malaria treatment and diagnosis. It will provide ways to train, and retain, community health workers dealing with malaria. And it will encourage research and development for longer-term efforts to control, eliminate and eradicate malaria.

"We have the resources and the know-how. But we have less than 1,000 days before the end of 2010. So we urgently need your leadership and commitment. Let's get to work."

—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message on World Malaria Day, 25 April

“The media are our partners in getting the word out about what needs to be reported. But we all work with constraints and are guided by different priorities. I believe we can help highlight stories that may otherwise be forgotten,” Kiyu Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said.

The list is not meant to be representative of the spectrum of issues the UN is involved in — nor does it reflect the Secretary-General’s priorities as such. The stories are intended to engage a global audience in further inquiry, with a view to promoting a better understanding of how some issues might be given greater exposure.

The Ten Stories include:

- Northern Uganda: Major steps towards peace in a decades-old conflict;
- The Excluded: The hidden world of the stateless;
- Extreme weather events are part of a “new normal” trend;
- The suffering of the girl soldier;

- At a fragile crossroads: Afghanistan and the international community must pull together;
- A deadly disease no more—advances in malaria prevention and treatment;
- Promotion and protection of human rights: The role of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council;
- Policing for peace: The law-and-order role played by blue berets;
- Southern Sudan: A path to “indivisible peace” in the country;
- Bird flu pushed back—but threat of a human pandemic remains.

All of these topics are featured on a special Ten Stories webpage (www.un.org/events/tenstories) that also provides further information and links to other resources.

Contact: Juan Carlos Brandt, DPI NGO Section, Room S-1070L, New York NY 10017, USA, telephone +1-212/963 6842, fax +1-212/963 6914, e-mail <dpingo@un.org>, website (www.un.org/dpi/ngo-section).

FMR: Burma Issue

The latest issue of *Forced Migration Review* (FMR 30) with its feature section on “Burma’s displaced people” is available online: (www.fmreview.org/burma.htm).

With the “Saffron revolution” of September 2007, Burma was catapulted into the centre of international attention. It was briefly headline news as people monitored the regime’s response and watched for hints of progress towards democracy and the restoration of rights. This issue of FMR aims to help bring the crisis of forced displacement of Burmese people back into the international spotlight.

The feature section on Burma includes 29 articles exploring the extent of the displacement crisis, factors affecting displaced people and the search for solutions. The issue also includes 19 articles on other aspects of forced migration.

The feature themes of the next two issues of FMR in 2008 are climate change/environmental displacement (www.fmreview.org/climatechange.htm) and statelessness (www.fmreview.org/statelessness.htm).

Contact: *Forced Migration Review*, Refugee Studies Centre, 3 Worcester Street, Oxford, OX1 2BX, UK, website (www.fmreview.org).

• • • • • OTHER NEWS • • • • •

20TH SESSION OF THE ICC

From 14-18 April, the 20th session of the meeting of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) was held in Geneva, bringing together over 144 delegates from 62 national human rights institutions for their annual meeting.

The ICC — a representative body established for the purpose of creating and strengthening national human rights institutions (NHRIs) — meets to discuss specific human rights issues, and twice a year its sub-committee on accreditation reviews the performance of accredited institutions or the status of new institutions. Some 60 national human rights institutions have now been accorded “A Status” under this system which means they comply with the Paris Principles, a set of internationally accepted performance standards regulating various aspects of their work, including their responsibilities and methods (contained in GA resolution 48/134).

The ICC is the principal representative of NHRIs at the global level, and is a mechanism for the coordination of, and liaison amongst, NHRIs. The ICC meetings also provide an opportunity for NHRIs to engage with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and to consider the UN Secretary-General’s report to the Human Rights Council. The 20th session included regional group meetings, an ICC general meeting and a number of parallel events. UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights Louise Arbour addressed the opening session of the meeting. Poverty reduction and the human rights implications of the ways businesses operate were among a wide range of issues that were discussed. The meeting also sought to take stock of major achievements and challenges over the past year, as well as ways to further enhance human rights protection.

Of the 62 national institutions attending the meeting, 21 were from Europe, 18 from Africa, 14 from the Asia-Pacific region and 9 from the Americas. In order to further strengthen its standing within the United Nations human rights framework, ICC has placed a representative in Geneva.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) chaired the 20th session and further information is available on their website: (www.chrc-ccdp.ca/whats_new/default-en.asp?id=465&content_type=2).

IDPs: TRENDS & DEVELOPMENTS IN 2007

The global internal displacement crisis continued to worsen in 2007, according to an annual survey released today by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). In 2007, the estimated number of people displaced within their countries by armed conflicts and violence passed the 26 million mark, the highest global total since the early 1990s. Although international attention to the plight of internally displaced people (IDPs) continued to grow, there was no breakthrough in reducing their number or measurably improving their situation.

According to *Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2007*, IDPs in over 50 countries, and particularly the women and children among them, were too frequently victims of the gravest human rights abuses. They faced continuing attacks as well as hunger, disease and the effects of inadequate shelter. "Despite being responsible for the wellbeing of citizens within their territory, many national governments in 2007 were still unwilling or unable to prevent people being forced from their homes, or provide adequate protection and assistance to those who had been displaced," said NRC Secretary-General Elisabeth Rasmusson.

People fled their homes in 2007 mainly to escape long-standing internal conflicts. The numbers of IDPs rose sharply in Iraq (where there were almost 2.5 million IDPs by the end of 2007), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.4 million IDPs) and Somalia (1 million), while the massive internally displaced populations of Sudan (5.8 million) and Colombia (up to 4 million) continued to grow.

At the same time, millions of people continued to endure protracted situations of internal displacement with few prospects of returning home or resettling

elsewhere, even in countries where conflict had ended and rebuilding had begun. Often they continued to face violence in their areas of origin, for example where the demobilization of former combatants had not been effectively completed.

"The challenges and obstacles to providing assistance and protection are numerous, and we have yet to address them coherently through diplomatic engagement, humanitarian assistance and development programmes," Ms. Rasmusson said. "Our knowledge of, interest in and response to people trapped in protracted displacement situations is far from impressive."

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.

Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2007 is available online: (www.internal-displacement.org).

Contact: Edmund Jennings, NRC Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Chemin de Balexert, 7-9, 1219 Chatelaine, Geneva, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/799 0718, fax +41-22/799 0701, website (www.internal-displacement.org).

••••• NGO UPDATE •••••

WORLD AIDS ORPHANS DAY

World AIDS Orphans Day takes place each year on 7 May as more than 15 million children worldwide have lost one or both parents to AIDS — equivalent to the number of people living in New York, Paris, Rome and Bangkok combined. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 12 million children have been orphaned by the pandemic. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), in spite of advances in HIV treatment and access to antiretroviral drugs, the number of AIDS orphans is projected to exceed 25 million by the end of the decade, and the need for programmes that address this crisis—already in short supply—will only increase.

Furthermore, some experts believe that millions more orphans remain unaccounted for in India, China and Russia. Stigmatized, facing profound financial and emotional despair, AIDS orphans have no means of making themselves heard. In addition to being especially vulnerable to all forms of exploitation, these children face financial difficulties and disease.

FXB International, an NGO dedicated to combating poverty and the AIDS pandemic, initiated World AIDS Orphans Day in 2002 to raise awareness about the plight of these orphaned children. This year the focus is on advocating for the establishment of programmes and urgent measures to support AIDS orphans and those children made vulnerable by the disease and the consequences of their social and economic exclusion. In particular, FXB is calling on supporters to lobby governments to consider these children as a priority and

ensure that urgent measures are taken to reintegrate them back into their society.

A new website for World AIDS Orphans' Day has been launched, designed to provide all organizations supporting children infected or affected by HIV an opportunity to exchange their experience and provide information on their activities in the field. Through the site, visitors can join the movement, search and post events, and add photos and stories reflecting their support.

Further information is available online: (www.fxb.org/FXBinAction/orphansday.html).

Contact: FXB International, 82, rue de Lausanne, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland, telephone +41-22/741 7180, fax +41-22/731 1757, e-mail <info@fxb.org>, website (www.fxb.org).

SOCIAL WATCH: GENDER EQUITY INDEX

According to Social Watch, more than half the women in the world live in countries that have made no progress in gender equity in recent years. This is the main conclusion of Social Watch's *2008 Gender Equity Index (GEI)* which, for the first time, shows recent evolution and trends in bridging the gap between men and women in education, the economy and empowerment.

The *GEI 2008* illustrates that the greater equity levels to be found in education are not paralleled by acceptable levels in the economic field nor in the empowerment of women. Political empowerment is the area

New Head of BOND

BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development), the UK's largest network of voluntary organizations working on international development, has appointed Nick Roseveare MBE as Chief Executive. He will take up the post on 30 June 2008.

Mr. Roseveare has 20 years' experience in international development, most recently as Humanitarian Director for Oxfam and as Deputy Director of Oxfam's International Programme. He has a wide range of high level experiences on a global scale, including in the UK and Africa, where he spent ten years working in Sudan, Ethiopia and Mozambique. He served for five years on the Management Board of The SPHERE Project (the sector-wide initiative on common principles and standards) and was a founder member of the innovative US/UK collaborative alliance, the Inter-Agency Working Group. He is also a Trustee of the Diana, Princess of Wales, Memorial Fund.

where most progress has been made in recent years as a result of active policies, yet economic equity shows disparate results, with as many countries regressing as those where there is progress. In education equity is comparatively closer, but the trend for many countries is to regress.

Difficulties in reaching equity cannot be justified by a lack of resources: the GEI mapping and that of each of its components show that – regardless of income levels – each country can reduce gender disparity through adequate policies.

The report is available online: (www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrocesos/IEG_2008/index.htm).

Contact: Social Watch, Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay, telephone: +598-2/419 61 92, e-mail <socwatch@socialwatch.org>, website (www.socialwatch.org/en/portada.htm).

CI: JUNK FOOD GENERATION CAMPAIGN

To commemorate World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) on 15 March 2008, the world federation of consumer organizations, Consumers International (CI), and the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF) launched proposals to help restrict the scope and scale of junk food marketing to children across the globe.

The coalition of consumer groups and obesity experts is calling for the International Code on Marketing of Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children to be adopted by national governments, as part of the World Health Organization's (WHO) strategy to tackle obesity and diet-related disease. In 2007 a WHO resolution was drafted during the World Health Assembly, calling on the WHO to "promote responsible marketing including the development of a set of recommendations on marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children." The WHO has until May 2009 to develop a set of proposals on the marketing of food and drinks to children. Adoption of the Code would be major step in helping to protect children. There are currently 177 million children threatened by obesity related diseases and 22 million children around the world are overweight before they start going to school. The WHO predicts 2.3 billion people over the age of 15 will be overweight by 2015.

The WHO report, *Marketing of Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children*, explains that the exposure to the commercial promotion of foods high in saturated fat, trans-fatty acids, sugars or salt has a direct effect on children wanting and eating these unhealthy foods (available online: www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/Oslo%20meeting%20layout%2027%20NOVEMBER.pdf).

Further information on CI's Junk Food Generation Campaign is available online: (www.junkfoodgeneration.org).

Contact: Luke Upchurch, Consumers International London Office, 24 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RX, UK, telephone +44-20/722 66663, e-mail <consint@consint.org>, website (www.consumersinternational.org).

IFAD: CALL FOR IP GRANT APPLICATIONS

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility is calling for applications from indigenous peoples' organizations and communities, as well as organizations that work with them, for grants to fund projects, innovative approaches and partnerships that promote the development of indigenous peoples and help them fulfil their aspirations.

Grants range from US\$10,000 to US\$30,000. Applicants must meet specific requirements and their proposals should respond to the needs of indigenous peoples in any of IFAD's Member States. The closing date for applications is 30 June 2008. IFAD will not accept applications after that date. E-mail and mail applications to IFAD.

A panel made up primarily of indigenous members will work closely with IFAD staff to review proposals and make final recommendations on grant awards. The panel will review grant proposals on the basis of project relevance, feasibility and institutional capacity and make final recommendations on awards.

Activities likely to be considered for funding will build on indigenous culture, identity, knowledge, natural resources, intellectual property and human rights. Projects should improve indigenous peoples' access to decision-making processes, empower indigenous peoples to find solutions to the challenges they face and promote collaboration in the public and private sectors.

To apply for a grant, read the call for proposal, the guideline for completing the application form and complete the application form (available in English, French and Spanish). Information is available online: (www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/grants/application.htm).

Contact: Antonella Cordone, Coordinator for Indigenous and Tribal Issues, Policy Division, IFAD, Via Paolo Di Dono, 44, 00142 Rome, Italy, e-mail , website (www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/index.htm).

CI: SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Consumers International (CI) has been formally appointed as the NGO advisor to the United Nations on sustainable consumption and production.

CI will represent the NGO position to the Marrakech Process, the UN programme set up to promote and develop a global framework of action on sustainability.

Further information on the Marrakech Process is available online: (www.unep.fr/scp/marrakech). Information on CI is also available online: (<http://www.consumersinternational.org/HomePage.asp?NodeID=89645>).

World Conference of Women's Shelters

From 8-11 September 2008, the first World Conference of Women's Shelters featuring 120 presenters from over 35 countries will be held in Edmonton Alberta, organized by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. The conference aims to provide an opportunity for family violence workers in Alberta and around the world to learn from international experts and each other. Too often, women's shelter work is overlooked in discussions on family violence, when in reality they are at the forefront of dealing with this issue, according to the organizers. This will increase the capacity of shelters in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world to affect change in their organizations and their communities to better meet the needs of ethnocultural, multicultural and racial communities when dealing with family violence.

Workshops and plenary sessions will include panel discussions presenting global perspectives on such things as shelter best practices, children exposed to family violence, indigenous women's issues and trafficking.

Further information is available online: (www.womenshelter.ca).

WORLD FOOD INSECURITY: GLOBAL MOBILIZATION TO TACKLE THE CRISIS

Acting on a Bangladesh proposal made from the chair of the LDC Ministers' Conference on the sidelines of UNCTAD XII, held in Ghana, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced on 29 April 2008 that he would lead a task force to address the current global food crisis. It met for the first time on 12 May in New York.

Task Force on Global Food Security Crisis

Mr. Ban's announcement of the Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis came after a two-day meeting on 28–29 April of the Chief Executive Board (CEB) in Berne, Switzerland. The Task Force will bring together the heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, will be chaired by the Secretary-General, and has two coordinators – Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes in New York and Senior UN System Influenza Coordinator David Nabarro in Geneva. Mr. Ban said the first priority of the Task Force would be meeting the US\$755 million shortfall in funding for the World Food Programme (WFP).

In over 30 countries around the world there has been civil disturbance and food riots caused by food shortages and higher prices. Mr. Ban stressed that escalating energy prices, lack of investment in agriculture, increasing demand, trade distortion subsidies and recurrent bad weather are among the reasons for the surge in prices, and that new measures had to “go farther than just providing emergency food relief when crises hit.” He warned that “without full funding of these emergency requirements, we risk again the spectre of widespread hunger, malnutrition and social unrest on an unprecedented scale.”

Meeting on 12 May in New York, the Task Force (www.un.org/issues/food/taskforce) will create a series of measures for immediate and longer term challenges related to addressing the food crisis and will promote a comprehensive and unified response to the global food price challenge in support of governments and affected populations. The first meeting sought to develop a comprehensive framework that it presented to the High-Level Conference on World Food Security held in Rome from 3–5 June 2008 (see below).

UN agencies are already taking concrete measures to address the crisis. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has proposed an emergency initiative to provide low-income countries with the seeds and inputs to boost production and is calling for US\$1.7 billion in funding. In addition, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is making available an additional US\$200 million to poor farmers in the most affected countries to boost food production.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which is also participating on the Task Force, announced that it would be focusing on the long-term structural problems at the root of the crisis, including by promoting measures to bolster agricultural sectors in developing countries, highlighting market distortions and backing policies that lead to higher incomes for small producers.

On 20 May 2008, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) held a special meeting on the crisis, which brought together high-level UN and government officials and a range of experts on hunger and poverty. Deputy UN Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro warned that the crisis could virtually wipe out the gains made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. She said the episodes of violence in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean “may only be the beginning. . . .” To avoid worse suffering and instability, farmers had to get the assistance

they needed to boost production. According to Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, who spoke at the meeting, if special financing facilities were made available to smallholder farmers that could not finance the inputs they needed to increase productivity – such as seeds, fertilizer and irrigation – the result could be to triple (or even in some cases to quintuple) production on the same parcel of land. The President of ECOSOC Léo Métorès (Haiti), who insisted that agriculture had to be “put back at the centre of the development agenda,” said ECOSOC had the advantage of bringing all stakeholders together for meaningful dialogue to promote more coherent and coordinated policies. To that end, the high-level and coordination segments of ECOSOC's substantive session in July 2008 would be focused on various aspects of the food crisis.

On 22 May, the Human Rights Council held a special session to discuss “the negative impact on the realization of the right to food of the worsening of the world food crisis, caused inter alia by the soaring food prices.” The request was submitted by Cuba on behalf of 41 Council members (out of a total of 47 Council members). According to the explanatory note provided by these 41 countries, lack of purchasing power for those people in need – rather than lack of food per se – was at the heart of the problem. “In a world overflowing with riches, hunger is not inevitable. It is a violation of human rights.” The Council adopted a resolution stressing that States had the primary obligation to make their best efforts to meet the vital food needs of their populations, while the international community should provide support to national and regional efforts to provide the necessary assistance for increasing food production.

A joint NGO statement to the Human Rights Council (which included FIAN, Cetim, ActionAid, Habitat International Coalition, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and *Vía Campesina*) stated that: “Differently from the diagnosis that the UN presented at the creation of its Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, we recognize the present crisis as deeply rooted in decades of misguided international policies – decided and implemented under the auspices of the Bretton Woods Institutions and, more recently, the WTO – that have failed to create and maintain an enabling environment for states to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to adequate food.” The role of structural adjustment policies – including unilateral trade liberalization in developing countries – in undermining food security and the livelihoods of small farmers in South was also strongly emphasized by NGOs in a joint statement to UNCTAD XII (see *NGLS Roundup 133*).

Another concern widely expressed by civil society in a number of venues is that, in the rush to boost agricultural production through “green revolution”-type efforts, there is a risk that the same ecological mistakes of the past may be repeated. Many cite a report released in early April 2008 by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology (IAASTD) – an intergovernmental body resembling in governance structure the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and regrouping some 400 scientific experts – that warns against agriculture based on genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) and advocates safeguarding natural resources, agro-ecological practices and indigenous knowledge systems in agriculture.

WFP: High Food Prices a Silent Tsunami

On 22 April 2008, WFP warned that high food prices are creating the biggest challenge that WFP has faced in its 45-year history, a "silent tsunami threatening to plunge more than 100 million people on every continent into hunger." WFP is calling for large-scale, high-level action by the global community – from governments to UN agencies to NGOs – to focus on emergency and longer-term solutions in a comprehensive approach.

"This is the new face of hunger – the millions of people who were not in the urgent hunger category six months ago but now are," said WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran, speaking in London. "What we are seeing now is affecting more people on every continent, destroying even more livelihoods and the nutrition losses will hurt children for a lifetime," she warned. "I would argue that we are seeing a structural shift and we need to look at both the immediate challenges and the long term benefits, opportunities and challenges," Ms. Sheeran stressed, noting that the new face of hunger that is emerging is more urban than it has been before. "Sometimes we are seeing large amounts of food on the shelves and people simply unable to afford it."

"We feel a key challenge today is recognizing that economic growth and food security require separate strategies. We will work very closely with FAO, IFAD and AGRA [Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa] to be supportive of such strategies."

Alongside other partners, WFP is following a 3-track response to the current food crisis:

- In the short term, WFP will seek full funding for targeted food safety nets and mother-child health programmes in extreme situations, scale up school feeding and use it as a platform for urgent, nutritional interventions;
- In the medium term, WFP will offer its logistics capacity to support life-saving distribution networks; it will also expand cash and voucher programmes and support local purchases from small farmers; and
- In the longer term, it will support policy reform and provide advice and technical support to governments engaging in agricultural development programmes.

World Bank: New Deal for Global Food Policy

Analysis being carried out by WFP supports World Bank estimates that about 100 million people have been pushed deeper into poverty by high food prices. Speaking at the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington on 14 April, Bank President Robert B. Zoellick called for a "New Deal for Global Food Policy" that requires a shift from traditional food aid to a broader concept of food and nutrition assistance that can help build local food markets and farm production, and create a "Green Revolution" for sub-Saharan Africa.

"This New Deal should focus not only on hunger and nutrition, access to food and its supply, but also the interconnections with energy, yields, climate change, investment, the marginalization of women and others, and economic resiliency and growth," Mr. Zoellick stressed. "Food policy needs to gain the attention of the highest political levels, because no one country or group can meet these interconnected challenges."

According to a Bank policy note, "Rising Food Prices: Policy Options and World Bank Response," increases in global wheat prices reached 181% over the 36 months leading up to February 2008, and overall global food prices increased by 83%. Food crop prices are expected to remain high in 2008 and 2009 and then begin to decline, but they are likely to remain well above the 2004 levels through 2015 for most food crops. The policy note is available online: (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWS/Resources/risingfoodprices_backgroundnote_apr08.pdf).

IFAD: Soaring Food Prices and the Rural Poor

IFAD, in its policy paper on food prices, notes that poor rural people do not face a single and uniform crisis: the situation varies considerably from one country to another and in the urban and rural areas of each country. Not only does the extent of the price hikes differ enormously, but also the factors shaping these prices vary profoundly. Some of the factors are those which are recognized as contributing to the current high level of global food prices; others less so, the paper suggests.

Factors range from the rising cost of fertilizer to soaring petroleum prices, which have boosted demand for agricultural crops used as feedstock in the production of biofuels. Food price increases have also followed increases in transportation costs. In a number of countries, rising prices reflect above all else unfavourable agro-climatic conditions, including drought, floods, frost and in some cases a combination of these conditions. The paper warns that "These factors will become ever more important as determinants of production levels, food prices, and food security for poor rural people."

The rural poor, as consumers, are responding by reducing the quantity they eat, and are shifting to lower costs – and in some cases lower quality – foods. There are suggestions from a number of countries that malnutrition is on the rise. As producers, they are responding either by withdrawing from the market and reverting to low-input low-output production, for home consumption; or, where they are able, by shifting into higher value market-oriented production, as a means to earn the income to assure their food security. To date, government responses to rising food prices have been principally short term and aimed at urban consumers. A number of countries have also introduced measures aimed at stimulating increased market supply. Yet poor rural people risk being excluded from both, the paper warns.

In his statement to the 77th Development Committee in Washington D.C. on 13 April, IFAD President Lennart Båge called for concerted, comprehensive, and coordinated action at all levels to avert greater poverty, hunger, and malnutrition and to build a foundation for the sustainable production of adequate food, fuel, and fibre.

Mr. Båge noted that along with urban populations, smallholder farmers and landless labourers are among the groups that are typically net purchasers of food. "Higher food prices threaten increased hunger, asset depletion, and forced migration. In addition, there are already examples of social volatility and unrest resulting from rising food prices, as well as displacement of poor people from their increasingly valuable land," he stressed.

Urgent action needed includes increasing food supplies, managing risk, and strengthening social protection systems. He also noted that special initiatives were needed to assist the "newly-hungry populations." An im-

mediate response is also needed to assist poor smallholder farmer to boost production in the short-term. He said this could be accomplished by expanding their access to vital production inputs such as seeds and fertilizer.

"In the world's fifty least developed countries, agriculture is the backbone of the economy, accounting for 30%–60% of gross domestic product (GDP) and employing as much as 70% or more of the work force. Investment in agriculture, therefore, is key to generating the kind of economic growth that reduces poverty. This was confirmed by the finding of the *2008 World Development Report* that GDP growth based on agricultural growth is as much as four times more effective in reducing poverty than growth in other sectors. From the vantage point of today's soaring food prices, it is nearly incomprehensible that official development assistance for agriculture has fallen from 18% in 1979 to a mere 3% in 2006," he stressed.

He noted that across diverse environments, there are a number of common areas of critical importance to rural poor people: land and water management, agricultural technologies and production services, market access, rural financial services, off-farm employment, and local planning and programming processes. Mr. Båge emphasized that strategies, approaches, and tools must be tailored to respond to different needs and demands given the context of profoundly different patterns of rural poverty.

"Poor farmers and landless labourers are critical to solving the triple scourge of poverty, climate change, and rising food prices. How they manage their land matters to us all. Whether or not they grow more food or store or release carbon depends on the opportunities they have and the incentives they are offered. Investing in their abilities, aspirations, and interests pays dividends for them and for the world as a whole," Mr. Båge concluded.

Further information is available online: (www.ifad.org/operations/food) and (www.ifad.org/events/op/2008/dc.htm).

30th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

During the 30th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, held from 14–18 April in Brasilia, the difficult balancing act between fighting hunger, producing biofuels and defending the environment was debated between experts from 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries, international agencies and NGOs.

The aim of the conference was to assess conditions in the region, especially in light of concerns caused by rising food prices. FAO Regional Representative José Graziano da Silva stressed that the challenge is to support the small farmers to produce more and better, strengthening both their food security and their incomes.

Participants noted that bio-energy presents both opportunities and risks to food security and the environment in the region. The spokesman for the Brazilian delegation at the conference noted that Brazil believes that biofuels have the potential to combat poverty. However, the idea of biofuels combating poverty has been rejected by other countries such as Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, which fear that ever larger agricultural areas will be devoted to producing biofuels rather than food. Argentina and Brazil have proposed that a voluntary regional code of

conduct be adopted to prevent environmental damage or reduction of food production.

FAO has emphasized that it is indispensable to implement a set of policies that diminish the risks and contribute to the sustainable and equitable development of bio-fuels. It is up to governments to create policies and suitable support mechanisms (financial, technical, logistical, etc.) that will guarantee and promote access to food for the most vulnerable groups. Mr. Graziano further proposed that the State should resume a regulatory role in the agricultural sector as a means of confronting the crises that periodically affect producers, and especially small farmers.

Further information is available online: (www.rlc.fao.org/es/larc).

FAO: High Level Conference on World Food Security

From 3–5 June 2008, FAO organized a high-level conference on "World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy" at its headquarters in Rome to discuss the pressing challenges facing global food security and to define measures that will help alleviate the situation.

The summit concluded with the adoption of a declaration calling on the international community to increase assistance for developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and those that are most negatively affected by high food prices.

"There is an urgent need to help developing countries and countries in transition expand agriculture and food production, and to increase investment in agriculture, agribusiness and rural development, from both public and private sources," the declaration stresses.

Donors and international financial institutions are urged to provide "balance of payments support and/or budget support to food-importing, low-income countries. Other measures should be considered as necessary to improve the financial situation of the countries in need, including reviewing debt servicing as necessary."

It also calls on governments to "assure" UN agencies "the resources to expand and enhance their food assistance and support safety net programmes to address hunger and malnutrition, when appropriate, through the use of local or regional purchases."

Further information is available online: (www.fao.org/foodclimate/hlc-home/en).

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SEVENTH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Meeting from 3 March to 1 April 2008 in Geneva, the Human Rights Council at its seventh regular session adopted 36 resolutions on a wide range of issues, extended the mandates of 13 Special Procedures and established the mandate of an Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Unable to conclude its seventh session as planned on 28 March, the Council extended its session through the morning of 1 April to finish hearing statements from delegations and to adopt its report to the General Assembly on the session.

Opening the session, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that to make human rights a reality for all, clear commitments and clear accountability for those commitments were needed. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which the Council was about to embark on, was conceived to prompt, support, and expand the promotion and protection of human rights on the ground. He stressed that no country, however powerful, should escape scrutiny of its record, commitments and actions on human rights.

A high-level segment was held from 3-5 March in which 67 high-level dignitaries addressed the Council, raising a wide range of issues, including the relationship between poverty eradication and upholding human rights, the upcoming UPR process, the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the linkage between climate change and human rights, the rights of refugees and displaced persons, and the respect of human rights in the fight against terrorism, amongst others.

Following the high-level segment, the Council considered the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, as well as reports presented by mandate holders on extreme poverty, migrants, arbitrary detention, the effect of economic reforms, toxic waste, freedom of expression, violence against women, mercenaries, torture, the right to adequate housing, enforced disappearances, sale of children, human rights defenders, minority issues and the right to health. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide also addressed the Council, and mandate holders on the situation of human rights in Sudan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, Somalia and Liberia presented their reports. After the presentation of each report, an interactive dialogue was held with the participation of Council Member States, observer States and NGOs.

The Council held a number of general debates, including on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Palestinian territories; on the promotion of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development; on racism, in the context of follow-up to the Durban Conference and complementary standards; and on follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

During the 7th session, the Council also continued the review, rationalization and improvement of mandates of its Special Procedures. Following the reviews, it decided to extend for three years the mandates of its Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs on the effects of foreign debt on the full enjoyment of all human rights; on human rights and

international solidarity; on minority issues; on human rights defenders; on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; on violence against women; on the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and on contemporary forms of racism; as well as the Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances and the Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights.

The Council further decided to extend for one year the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; and of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia. However, the Council did not renew the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

One of the most contentious resolutions adopted by the Council was draft resolution A/HRC/7/L.24 and, in particular, an amendment to the draft. The draft renews the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The amendment to the draft mandates the Special Rapporteur, in addition to its "traditional" functions, to report on any instances of "abuse of the right to freedom of expression that constitutes an act of racial or religious discrimination." Many States opposed this amendment, arguing that it would unduly change the focus of the Special Rapporteur from the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression to a regulation of that right, and that the amendment alters the fine balance between freedom of expression and other human rights found in several international human rights instruments. Despite these concerns, the amendment and the amended draft resolution were adopted by a vote, the first time that the Council had to vote on an amendment to a resolution.

On 26 March the Council elected the members of its 18-member Advisory Committee, which replaces the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. It will meet for the first time from 4-15 August 2008. Functioning as a think-tank, the Committee will provide the Council with expertise and advice and conduct substantive research and studies on thematic issues of interest, at the Council's request.

During its 7th session, the Council also adopted by consensus a resolution on human rights and climate change. The resolution is seen by many observers as an important stepping stone towards increased global awareness about the immediate and compelling human dimension of climate change. The Maldives Government, which tabled the resolution, said it hopes that this will in turn enhance the "moral and ethical imperative" for the world's climate change negotiators to act decisively to halt and reverse global warming.

The resolution calls on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to conduct a study into the effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, especially economic, social and cul-

tural rights. The study will then form the basis of a full Council debate on the issue during its March 2009 session. The conclusions of the study and the debate will be fed into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) ongoing negotiating process in order to raise political awareness about the human dimension of global warming.

The resolution was co-sponsored by 69 countries from all regions. Speaking after the adoption of the resolution, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Maldives, Abdulla Shahid, said: "It is vital for the future of vulnerable countries like the Maldives that the world takes serious and meaningful steps, within the Bali Process of UNFCCC negotiations, to arrest and reverse climate change. In order to do so, the world's climate change negotiators must possess a clear understanding of the massive impact that global warming is already having on people and communities around the world."

On 28 March, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on human rights and access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Through this resolution, the Council established a new "Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation." The Independent Expert will work for three years on two primary tasks. First, to identify, promote and exchange on best practices related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and in that regard to prepare a compendium of best practices; and second, to carry out further clarification of the content of human rights obligations, including non-discrimination obligations, in relation to access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The Council also approved candidates for its Special Procedures on the right to adequate housing, the right to food, human rights of indigenous people, sale of children, effects of economic reform policies, human rights in Myanmar, human rights in the Palestinian territories, human rights and extreme poverty, contemporary forms of slavery, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, people of African descent, human rights in Somalia and human rights defenders.

The Council adopted texts on: a global call to concrete action against racism; freedom of opinion and expression; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the role of good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights; the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the right to food; combating defamation of religions, amongst several others.

In a resolution on human rights of persons with disabilities, the Council decided to hold an annual interactive debate on the rights of persons with disabilities and that the first such debate should be held at its 10th session, focusing on key legal measures for ratification and effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and requested OHCHR to prepare a thematic study to enhance awareness and understanding of the Convention.

In a resolution on human rights and extreme poverty, the Council noted with satisfaction the report of the High Commissioner on the draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights and invited her Office to further consult relevant stakeholders, and thereafter to submit a report to the Council, no later than its last session of 2009.

Several States commented on the preparation for the Universal Periodic Review that started its inaugural session in April, with a number of countries commenting on the need for "finishing touches" on the modalities for the UPR (see Focus Page 16). A number of delegates stressed that

the UPR should be genuinely universal and should steer clear of double standards, selectivity and politicization. Furthermore, it should be used as a crucial step to engage in constructive engagement and dialogue to advance the causes of human rights, they emphasized. Council President Doru Costea circulated a non-paper on modalities for the UPR on 27 March to serve as a guiding document for the 1st session. However, he warned that the procedure and fine-tuning of modalities was an ongoing process to be completed over time.

Further information on the UPR is available online: (www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx).

Eighth Session of the Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council held its eighth regular session from 2-18 June and considered for the first time the outcome of the first and second sessions of the Universal Periodic Review's Working Group on the fulfillment of human rights obligations held in April and May 2008.

During the session, the 32 States already reviewed had the opportunity to submit their views on the recommendations and/or conclusions made during their review. Council members and observers, as well as NGOs having status with the Economic and Social Council were able to make general comments.

In her final address to the Human Rights Council on 2 June, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour sounded a cautious note of optimism about progress in the new UPR system, noting that it "could provide a vehicle for scrutiny of the implementation of rights and norms beyond anything ever attempted by the Commission on Human Rights" (the State body that was replaced by the Human Rights Council in June 2006).

"The constructive participation of all States under review has already made absolutely clear that consideration of human rights at the national level is no longer regarded as a taboo," Ms. Arbour said. However, she added that she believes it will take "two whole cycles of reviews . . . before we can fully measure the added value and real impact of the UPR."

She also noted improvements in the system of "special procedures" — mostly independent human rights experts known as Special Rapporteurs, with mandates ranging from torture to housing — and urged the Human Rights Council to continue its support "to further strengthen this system as a crucial tool in the promotion and protection of all human rights."

Louise Arbour, former Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and Canadian Supreme Court judge, completed her four-year mandate as High Commissioner of Human Rights on 30 June 2008. Her successor, who will be chosen by the UN Secretary-General after consultation with UN Member States, has not yet been named.

For further information, see also the website of the International Service for Human Rights: (www.ishr.ch).

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INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

From 7-18 April 2008, the Human Rights Council held its inaugural session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), scrutinizing the human rights records of the first 16 countries selected to undergo review. Under the UPR's work plans, 48 countries are scheduled to be reviewed each year, so that the United Nations' complete membership of 192 countries will be reviewed once every four years.

Speaking to the Human Rights Council at its 7th session in March 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Council members to assure that all countries were scrutinized equally in the UPR process. "The review must reaffirm that just as human rights are universal, so is our collective respect for them and our commitment to them," he stressed. Bahrain was the first country reviewed during the first session, followed by Ecuador, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Finland, United Kingdom, India, Brazil, Philippines, Algeria, Poland, Netherlands, South Africa, the Czech Republic and Argentina.

The President of the Council, Doru Romulus Costea of Romania, described the opening of the first meeting of the UPR as a "historic moment" for the UN human rights system. Prior to the session, there was considerable uncertainty regarding the precise modalities of the UPR.

President Costea is also the Chairperson of the UPR Working Group, composed of the 47 Member States of the HRC. The key task of the Working Group is to engage in an interactive dialogue with the country under review. Three rapporteurs selected from various regional groups and drawn from lots, known as "troikas," facilitate the review of each State and are also responsible for writing the report of the country under examination.

During the interactive dialogue, the State under review is asked questions about the documentation provided in advance of the session on its human rights practices as well as on the human rights situation in their country. Information submitted to the Working Group includes: national reports submitted by the country under review; a compilation prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) of the information contained in the reports of treaty bodies and special procedures and other relevant official UN documents; and information from other stakeholders (NGOs, national human rights institutions and academics) and summarized by OHCHR.

Those UN Member States not on the Council (Observer States) are able to participate in the review and in the interactive dialogue. Although other stakeholders, such as NGOs, are eligible to attend the review, they are not allowed to make oral presentations. The State under review has 30 minutes at its disposal for an opening statement.

An impressive range of issues were brought to the table during the 16 country reviews making up the UPR's first session, including: the role and status of a national human rights institution; the rights of women (including issues such as violence against women, forced sterilisation, forced marriage, harmful traditional practices) and the need for a gender perspective; the state of freedom of expression and association (as well as freedom of the press); the death penalty and torture; the rights of the child (protection of children from sexual exploitation, arbitrary removal of children from their biological parents, street children, child labour); the rights of the disabled; the rights of non-citizens and migrants; the treatment of asylum-seekers and the conditions of detention centres; counter-terrorism; human rights education, training and awareness raising; prison conditions; access to social services including health care and housing; transitional justice and compensation for past

human rights violations; the misuse of State force; the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) persons; trafficking in human beings; and the protection of human rights defenders, to name only some of them.

The outcome of each country's review is a report consisting of a summary of the proceedings, conclusions and/or recommendations, and the voluntary commitments of the State concerned. These reports are drafted at the same time as the Review and are adopted shortly after the individual sessions.

In preparation for the 2nd session, an informal meeting on the modalities was held that aimed to draw lessons from the experience of the 1st session and to adapt accordingly.

Civil Society

The Conference of NGOs in consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) organized a number of briefings around the UPR process. A debriefing for NGOs held on 18 April looked at whether the 1st session met civil society expectations and tried to draw some lessons learned. NGO participation, including the level of engagement of national NGOs during the session, and how to strengthen collaboration between national NGOs and those based in Geneva was also discussed. Participants stressed the need to maximize the capacity of all NGOs to collectively better address cross-thematic issues. Concerning the information used for the review itself, participants highlighted the need for the three types of documentation (national, UN and other stakeholders) to be considered on equal footing, rather than focusing mainly on the national report. They also made comments on the UPR reports and the recommendations, including the role of civil society in follow up after the adoption of the conclusion and recommendations. Further, they stressed the need for recommendations that are specific and lead to tangible results.

On 30 April, President Costea held a UPR briefing with NGOs to provide for an exchange of views and to assess the first session of the UPR. He mentioned that all States under review in the first session had embarked on a process of national consultation prior to the session, and this was important. He said that during the reviews, there were a number of very vivid interactive dialogues and speaking slots had to be adjusted accordingly. He noted also that a number of sensitive issues were able to be raised and respectfully debated, and he said he hoped it remains the case in upcoming sessions. NGOs in their comments to him raised a number of issues, such as the speaking order of Member States in asking questions to the State under review and the lack of NGO representatives during some of the reviews. Another issue raised was recommendations that were not accepted by the State and how they would appear in the outcome document.

An NGO orientation session and an NGO briefing were held on 6 May 2008 in preparation for the 2nd session, which was held from 5-16 May. It saw the review of Gabon, Ghana, Peru, Guatemala, Benin, South Korea, Switzerland, Pakistan, Zambia, Japan, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, France, Tonga,

Romania and Mali. A third session will be held from 1–12 December 2008. Further information on the UPR is available online: (www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx).

The eighth regular session of the Human Rights Council, held from 2–18 June, considered for the first time the outcome of the first and second sessions of the Universal Periodic Review's Working Group. In the discussions on the individual State reports, a number of speakers welcomed the process and outcome of the Universal Periodic Review, with some of them highlighting the importance of having non-governmental organizations participate in all human rights debates. Others noted that the recommendations and questions they had received would help them find answers for the challenges they were facing. A number of participants pointed out that major human rights issues in every State under review had been brought forward in a constructive manner, and that an

increasing openness and transparency was experienced as the sessions evolved.

NGOs wishing to submit information for consideration and possible inclusion by OHCHR in the summary of stakeholders' information should send their contribution to <UPRsubmissions@ohchr.org>. Further information is available online: (www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/NoteNGO.aspx).

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Civil Society Opinion Piece on the First Session of the UPR— by Claude Cohn, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE)

The first UPR session exceeded the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions' (COHRE) expectations, and in particular some of the more gloomy prospective scenarios of 2007, when it was feared that the first round might only examine the current status of a given country's international law ratifications or reporting to treaty bodies. The UPR as it has manifested itself during the first round is evidently much more substantive than that, and it has managed to raise some very crucial issues for many of the countries in the first round. A number of features of the outcome reports, such as explicit ownership of some recommendations by the State concerned, may in time prove to considerably improve human rights compliance.

However, some States' reports included considerable levels of rose-tinting in an attempt to give a good impression and a number of the sessions were weighed down with praise of States' practices. In many cases the basis for such praise was questionable and it wasted valuable time which might have otherwise been spent discussing human rights issues. Other impediments included, among other things, the evident lack of balance of criticism of some States as compared with others. In the medium- and long-term, the more this process is seen as unfair, unbalanced and weighted against certain States than others, the less credibility it will have.

As for NGO input, the fact that civil society is at best one step removed from the actual review mechanism is unfortunate. In effect, the Council has designed a mechanism which hinders the transparency of NGO input, by compelling organizations into the shadows of the UPR margins. It would be important to rectify this aspect of the process at the earliest possible opportunity.

A number of COHRE's concerns are reflected throughout the UPR documents. We would have liked to see a number of the concerns we raised better reflected in the recommendations however. For example, Romania's very productive intervention on housing rights issues in the South Africa review for some reason never found its way into the recommendations in the troika's report. There and elsewhere, it is not clear how, first of all concerns from the OHCHR documents were filtered into States' concerns, and then States' concerns were rendered as recommendations. We would like to see all matters raised reflected in recommendations.

There are a number of implementation challenges. The clear recommendations will evidently be easier to implement than the vague ones. There should be no reason, for example, why the Czech Republic cannot implement the Algerian and Russian recommendation to "acknowledge the harm done to the victims of sterilization, in particular Roma, and to bring perpetrators to justice and provide reparations to the victims." Moreover, it is the kind of recommendation which can be monitored and assessed with some degree of efficacy. However, it is less clear how Brazil should be assessed in its efforts to comply with Ghana's recommendation to "continue its commitment to a programme of land reform." The Council would be well served to reflect that it is not actually easier for a government to implement a vague recommendation than a clear one.

It was unfortunate that not all of the issues raised in the OHCHR documents made it into the actual review. It would be encouraging to see coordination among States to ensure that all matters raised in the OHCHR documents are adequately raised during the review.

COHRE is an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit human rights organization campaigning for the protection of housing rights and the prevention of forced evictions. COHRE is registered in Switzerland and the Netherlands, and coordinates its global activities from its headquarters in Geneva.

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52nd SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held from 25 February – 7 March and 13 March 2008, reached consensus on the agreed conclusions on the priority theme, “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women,” a week later than expected due to difficult negotiations. Reform of UN gender architecture was also another important issue discussed during the session.

The Commission considered three main items during its 52nd session: its priority theme, “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women,” based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly; an emerging issue, “Gender perspectives on climate change;” and progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “Women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding,” adopted in 2004 at its 48th session (see *NGLS Roundup 111*).

The session attracted high-level participation from Member States and other stakeholders with more than 130 Member States represented, and over 2,000 civil society representatives registered for the Commission. More than 200 parallel events were held during the session, organized by UN entities, governments and civil society organizations.

A parallel event on the priority theme for the 53rd session in 2009, “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS,” was also held in order to introduce the issue and prepare Member States and civil society organizations for next year’s discussions.

The 52nd session saw a strong emphasis on violence against women with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launching his multi-year Campaign to End Violence Against Women (see *Go Between 115*). Mr. Ban also announced the organization of a high-level meeting in 2010 to review the progress made on eliminating violence against women and girls.

In addition to the agreed conclusions adopted on the priority theme (E/CN.6/2008/L.8), the Commission approved five draft resolutions: the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts (E/CN.6/2008/L.1); ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2008/L.2/Rev.1); the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2008/L.3); strengthening of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (E/CN.6/2008/L.4); and women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS (E/CN.6/2008/L.5/REV.1).

Priority Theme

As its priority theme the CSW discussed “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.” The topic was given added weight as 2008 will also see the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development taking place in Doha later this year and the third High-level Forum on the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness that will be held in September 2008 under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

As women represent over half of the world’s poor, it is essential that any development initiative take their special concerns into account, participants stressed.

During the session, the high-level roundtables and expert panels on the priority theme touched upon various issues related to gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming. There was widespread agreement among the participants that the achievement of the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women was essential for economic growth and development.

In the course of the discussions, Members States reported on measures taken at the national level to promote gender equality, especially gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming initiatives. These included the creation and strengthening of national women’s machineries, the development of national gender equality plans of action, the establishment of gender focal points in different governmental entities, capacity building for gender budget policies, etc. Many speakers acknowledged the crucial role that NGOs and community-based organizations play in raising awareness and implementing policies.

During the debates, a number of participants highlighted some of the current challenges and obstacles to gender equality, in particular: the lack of technical capacities and resources; the imbalance between resources for mainstreaming initiatives and resources for targeted activities for gender equality; the lack of sex-aggregated data and gender statistics; the limited attention paid to the differential impact of macroeconomic policies on men and women, amongst others.

During the negotiations on the agreed conclusions, the most contentious issues were funding for women’s organizations and movements, sexual and reproductive health and rights and “more development aid” vs. “better development aid.” The Commission was unable to reach consensus on the agreed conclusions on the last day of the session and the final text was adopted at a resumed session held on 13 March.

The agreed conclusions address various issues, including the six chapters of the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development (see *NGLS Roundup 91*), financing for national machineries and funding for the women’s movement.

Among other things, the Commission urges Members States to “increase the investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;” calls for the integration of gender perspectives into all economic policymaking at all levels; and recommends actions to strengthen methodological tools and data on gender.

Following the adoption of the agreed conclusions, some Members States made statements to clarify their position and express their satisfaction – or the lack thereof – with the document. Both Chile and the European

Union (EU) regretted that the important role of civil society and women's organizations had not been sufficiently recognized.

To make sure the outcome of CSW's session is fully integrated into the preparation of the Doha Review Conference on FFD (29 November – 2 December 2008), the Commission decided that the agreed conclusions should be brought to the attention of the General Assembly. The modalities on this are still being worked out.

Civil Society Engagement and the Agreed Conclusions

The 52nd session saw an enormous amount of participation by non-governmental actors. As in previous sessions, they tried to influence the outcome of the negotiations on the agreed conclusions and the other proposed resolutions by submitting written statements, making oral interventions and lobbying governments. Many of them took part in regional and/or thematic working groups, or "caucuses." The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with ECOSOC (CONGO) Committee on the Status of Women organized daily NGO briefings to facilitate the flow of information between the different caucuses. In a show of cooperation with civil society, several members of the CSW Bureau attended the meetings every morning to brief NGOs on the progress of the negotiations.

Civil society groups' assessment of the session is mixed. In general, they thought that the Commission remained an important forum for exchanging ideas and networking with other groups. However, they felt that their influence over the final outcome, especially the agreed conclusions, was limited. According to them, the main reason for that was the decision taken by the members of the Commission to conduct negotiations behind closed doors. Civil society representatives were allowed in the room only during the first day of informal consultations. In the last session, they could attend some of the informals during the second week.

In spite of this, they were able to have some impact on certain aspects of the agreed conclusions. In particular, they managed to get references to "girls" – not included in the first draft – and to decent work (paragraph 20 (z)). They welcomed other parts of the text as well, including:

- the recognition of the critical role of national machineries for gender equality;
- the call for an increase in investments to promote gender equality;
- the recommendation to strengthen data and indicators for measuring progress in financing gender equality;
- the recommendation to incorporate gender perspectives into all economic policies.

Overall, however, civil society organizations felt that the text did not go far enough. According to WIDE, a European network of women's organizations and NGOs, "one of the main disappointments is the vague and weak language used, 'recommending and encouraging' the governments instead of strong commitment towards financing for gender equality." In a statement issued after the conclusion of the session, the Linkage Caucus regretted "that there [were] few meaningful commitments in the agreed conclusions related to financing for gender equality, with no concrete targets or timetable and no strong mechanisms for effective tracking or monitoring of financial resources spent on gender equality." The lack of strong recommendations on funding for women's

movements and on the participation of civil society was another cause of concern for civil society representatives.

UN Gender Equality Architecture

Reform of the gender architecture of the UN was another important issue discussed during the session. In the first week, a group of civil society organizations launched the GEAR (Gender Equality Architecture Reform) Campaign. The campaign calls on Member States to establish a strong UN women's entity:

- headed by an Under-Secretary-General;
- with substantial and predictable resources (initially between US\$500 million to US\$1 billion);
- with a strong presence on the ground;
- with strong accountability at all levels (especially through the involvement of women's movements).

The campaign is also asking other UN entities to evaluate and strengthen their work on gender issues. In April 2008, more than 260 organizations had undersigned the campaign statement.

The initiators of the GEAR Campaign were pleased to see that some of their demands were included in the agreed conclusions. In the text, the Commission recognizes the "under-resourcing in the area of gender equality in the United Nations system, including UNIFEM, and INSTRAW, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women, and stresses the need for more effective tracking of resources allocated to and spent on enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women across the United Nations system, including on gender mainstreaming" (paragraph 19). It also calls for strengthened "coordination, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency in the United Nations system" (paragraph 21 z (kk)).

Member States did not go so far as to overtly support the more specific recommendations of the GEAR Campaign. During the negotiations, the issue was actually quite controversial, with some Member States stating that the CSW was not the appropriate forum to discuss that matter – as it was already dealt with in the General Assembly. Others argued that the reform of the gender architecture should not be disassociated from the rest of UN reform.

The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women will be held at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 2–13 March 2009. The following themes will be considered:

Priority theme: "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS"

Review theme: "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels."

Further information will be posted online as it becomes available: (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm).

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Disarmament

- Conference on Disarmament, 3rd part, 28 July - 12 September, Geneva
- Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, 14-18 July, New York

ECOSOC/General Assembly

Economic and Social Council

- Substantive session, 30 June - 25 July, New York
- High-Level Segment, 30 June - 3 July, New York
- First Biennial Development Cooperation Forum, 30 June - 1 July, New York
- 2nd Annual Ministerial Review, 2-3 July, New York

General Assembly

- Opening of the General Assembly, 16 September, New York
- Millennium Development Goals, High-Level Event on the MDGs, 25 September, New York

HIV and AIDS

- 17th International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA), 3-8 August, Mexico City

Human Rights

- 41st Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 30 June-18 July, Geneva
- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 73rd session, 28 July - 15 August, Geneva
- Fifteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 30 July, New York
- Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, first session, 4-15 August, Geneva
- Social Forum, 1-3 September, Geneva
- Human Rights Council, Forum on Minorities, first session, 8-9 September, Geneva

Refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- Executive Committee, 59th session, 6-10 October, Geneva
- UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs, 25-27 June, Geneva

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NGLS is an inter-agency programme of the United Nations system that facilitates dialogue, cooperation and constructive engagement between NGOs and the UN system. The NGLS mission statement, endorsed by its then governing body, the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC), states: "The Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) promotes dynamic partnerships between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. By providing information, advice, expertise and support services, NGLS is part of the UN's efforts to strengthen dialogue and win public support for economic and social development."

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