



In the headlines:

- Ban urges end to prejudice against people living with HIV/AIDS
- UN creates new peacebuilding office in Sierra Leone
- Top UN envoy calls for Somalis to work together to overcome political crisis
- Timorese institutions and people show resilience, Secretary-General reports
- Haiti: UN mission strengthens presence at border town
- UN rights body's 'think tank' kicks off inaugural session
- UNICEF backs Togolese initiative to promote exclusive breastfeeding
- Online anti-doping cartoon launched by UN cultural agency
- Over 200 Chadian police officers complete UN training in law, human rights
- UNICEF provides \$3 million for Mozambican children affected by food crisis
- Professional services firm donates \$500,000 to UN emergency fund
- Head of UN environment agency to attend opening of Olympic Games

Ban urges end to prejudice against people living with HIV/AIDS



Secretary General Ban Ki-moon
addresses opening of International AIDS
Conference 2008

4 August - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for bolstered global efforts to tackle HIV/AIDS, stressing at the world's largest forum on the pandemic that the virus impedes economic development and that discrimination against people living with HIV remains widespread.

“Most countries still have a long way to go to meet the goal” set two years ago at the General Assembly to move towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010, Mr. Ban said last night at the opening of the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City.

These nations will thus have difficulty in reaching the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of curbing and reversing the spread of AIDS by the target date of 2015, he noted.

The Secretary-General stressed that more resources are needed to combat the scourge in the coming decades as greater numbers of people receive treatment and live longer.

He welcomed the recent legislation passed in the United States earmarking \$48 billion to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria over the next five years, and praised the commitment of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized nations to provide universal access to HIV prevention and treatment by 2010.

“Just as important, in most countries, stigma against people living with HIV remains a grave challenge,” Mr. Ban told the Conference. One third of countries lack laws to protect those living with HIV, and in many places, discrimination against women, men who have sex with men, sex workers, drug users and ethnic minorities is still legal.

“This must change,” he said, calling for an end to discrimination against people living HIV and members of vulnerable groups.

Since taking up the post in January 2007, the Secretary-General said that some of his most moving and inspiring experiences have been meeting with colleagues and others living with the virus.

“They are wonderfully courageous and motivated people, and should serve as an example to us all on how to act with dignity in the face of adversity,” he said. “That they should be discriminated against, including through restrictions on their ability to travel between countries, should fill us with shame.”

In those nations with legal protections in place, Mr. Ban pointed out that those living with HIV have greater access to services, resulting in fewer infections, less demand for anti-retroviral treatment and fewer deaths.

Right before he spoke, Keren Jamina Dunaway-Gonzalez, a HIV-positive 11-year-old from Honduras, addressed the Conference. After discussing the problems she faces as a young girl with HIV, she greeted the Secretary-General, whom she had met earlier this year, and gave him a kiss.

Also addressing the Conference last night was Peter Piot, the Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). He told participants that, for the first time, the world was witnessing large-scale results, with fewer people dying of AIDS and fewer becoming infected with HIV.

“This is cause for encouragement. But not cause for complacency, nor for declaring victory,” he added. “Because the end of AIDS is nowhere in sight. Every day, almost three times as many people become newly infected with HIV as those who start taking antiretroviral treatment.”

Dr. Piot quoted Caribbean singer and poet Bob Marley, telling the audience, “Get up, stand up... don’t give up the fight.”

Margaret Chan, Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), said she found it appropriate that the Conference is hosted in Latin America. Many countries in the region have a long tradition of embracing the principle of equitable access to health care as a fundamental human right. The future of the AIDS response rests on this foundation, she said.

As part of his three-day visit to Mexico, which kicked off yesterday, the Secretary-General met last night with the UN Country Team, who surprised him with a mariachi band during a town hall meeting. Mr. Ban sang along as the band played *Besame Mucho* and *Canta No Llores*.

This morning the Secretary-General held a working breakfast with the Global Compact’s Mexico network.

“Some of the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties have not yet entered into force. Several signatories have yet to complete the ratification or accession process... whole regions have been unable to establish such zones, including the Middle East. And some nuclear-weapon States have not concluded the relevant Protocols,” he noted. “Clearly, there is still much work to do before we achieve our shared goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

He also addressed an extraordinary session of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, known by its Spanish acronym OPANAL, stating that international efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and achieve nuclear disarmament continue to face significant challenges.

Also today, he will be meeting separately with Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa and President Felipe Calderón.

He will also address a joint session of the Mexican Parliament and meet with HIV-positive civil society leaders at a side event of the International AIDS Conference.

UN creates new peacebuilding office in Sierra Leone



School girls in Sierra Leone

4 August - The Security Council today authorized the creation of a new peacebuilding office in Sierra Leone to assist the country's continued recovery following the civil war that wracked the West African nation during much of the 1990s.

Starting 1 October, the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) will replace the existing UN political office in the country (known as UNIOSILM) under a resolution adopted unanimously by Council members. It will have an initial mandate of 12 months.

UNIPSIL is tasked with providing political support to national and local efforts for identifying and resolving tensions and threats of potential conflict, whatever the source.

It will also monitor and promote human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law, including efforts to counter transnational organized crime and drug trafficking.

In addition, the new office will work on consolidating good governance reforms, with a special focus on anti-corruption instruments such as the Anti-Corruption Commission. It will support decentralization and review the country's 1991 constitution as well as the enactment of relevant legislation.

UNIPSIL will closely coordinate its work with the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which is already active in the country.

Sierra Leone is one of the first two countries, along with Burundi, to receive support from the Commission, which was established in 2005 to help post-conflict countries determine the priority areas for rebuilding out of the vast array of challenges they face.

Top UN envoy calls for Somalis to work together to overcome political crisis



Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah addressing a Security Council meeting (file photo)

4 August - The top United Nations envoy to Somalia has called on the people of the strife-torn nation to work together to overcome the political problems that are threatening to unravel a peace deal reached in June, amid reports that two-thirds of the country's government ministers have resigned and the Mayor of Mogadishu has been fired.

UN Special Representative Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah has also expressed his deep sadness at the deaths of some 20 Somali women in a bombing in the capital on Sunday.

"These women were killed [while] trying to do their work and improve life in Mogadishu by cleaning the streets. Nothing can justify the deaths of innocent victims, especially wives and mothers such as these who were working hard to make ends meet," he said.

"After so many years of violence, Somalis should use this sad time to regain their sense of dignity through working together for lasting peace," he added.

Voicing concern over the current problems regarding the administration of Mogadishu, the Special Representative urged all Somalis to remain united in the quest for peace and reconciliation in the country, which has not had a functioning government since 1991.

"The Somali people knew there would be challenges on the path to peace and they should not be discouraged," Mr. Ould-Abdallah said in a statement issued on Saturday. "As the end of the transition period is less than a year away, I call on the Somali people to remain united and solve their political problems."

Under the peace agreement reached on 9 June in neighbouring Djibouti, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the opposition Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) agreed to end their conflict and called on the UN to deploy an international stabilization force to the troubled Horn of Africa country.

He added that it was unfortunate that this situation came at a time when the parties which signed the Djibouti Agreement have just submitted the names of their participants in the two key committees.

The envoy said the Joint Security Committee, which is tasked with following up on the implementation of security arrangements, and the High Level Committee, which will deal with political cooperation, justice and reconciliation, will be holding meetings shortly.

“I welcome this important step by the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia and their continuing commitment to the Agreement,” said Mr. Ould-Abdallah. “We must keep moving forward to ensure the Agreement is fully implemented as soon as possible.”

The political problems also come at a time when the country is facing a humanitarian crisis caused by conflict, drought, and price rises in basic commodities. Some 2.6 million Somalis – representing 35 per cent of the population – are believed to be in need of humanitarian aid.

Timorese institutions and people show resilience, Secretary-General reports



4 August - Timor-Leste's institutions and people have shown impressive resilience after the violent attacks in February that almost claimed the life of the country's President, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in his latest report on the work of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the tiny nation.

But he warns that the national police will still need long-term training and support for many years and greater efforts are required to strengthen the rule of law, boost economic and social development, and promote a culture of democratic governance.

The report, made public today, is the first since an armed group headed by the fugitive Alfredo Reinado launched a series of attacks on 11 February that almost led to the assassination of President José Ramos-Horta.

Mr. Ban writes that the Timorese Government took a restrained approach to the aftermath of the attacks and tried to focus on achieving national stability.

“The leaders and people of Timor-Leste did not allow these events to jeopardize the country's overall stability,” he states. “The security situation remained calm. Efforts to foster dialogue and reconciliation continued.”

The Secretary-General notes that his Special Representative Atul Khare has also used his ‘good offices’ role to promote “a more conciliatory atmosphere among the political leaders and aimed at instilling among political actors the appreciation of the value of a strong opposition and an effective Parliament.”

Progress is being made in reconstituting the national police, although he stresses that “a continuing robust UNMIT police presence” is needed across the country, which the UN helped shepherd to independence in 2002.

He writes that creating job opportunities, especially for youth, remains a major priority, as well alleviating persistent and widespread poverty.

Given the fragile security situation and the struggles faced by the country, no change in the mandate of UNMIT is currently necessary, Mr. Ban observes.

Haiti: UN mission strengthens presence at border town



View at Ouanaminthe, border points between Haiti and Dominican Republic

4 August - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is bolstering its presence in a key north-eastern border town as part of efforts to clamp down on illegal drug trafficking and improve security in an area prone to smuggling and other crimes.

Military troops and UN Police (UNPOL) officers have been dispatched to Ouanaminthe, one of the largest border points between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, according to a press report issued on Friday by MINUSTAH.

The blue helmets are supporting local police, customs officers, quarantine staff and immigration officials in their work supervising the border between the two Caribbean nations.

They have also secured the perimeter of a bridge connecting Ouanaminthe with Dajabon, a town in the Dominican Republic that is home to a large market on Mondays and Fridays that attracts many Haitians.

MINUSTAH has paid for the manufacture of a metal gate to control the border bridge and the rehabilitation of a nearby customs warehouse.

Ouanaminthe's mayor, Rony Pierre, has welcomed the increased MINUSTAH presence, saying it is helping to reduce banditry and insecurity.

UN rights body's 'think tank' kicks off inaugural session



4 August - A new body serving as a "think tank" to provide advice and conduct research for the United Nations Human Rights Council began its first-ever session today in Geneva.

The 18-member panel, which will meet twice a year, is tasked with supplying its expertise on the promotion and protection of all human rights. While it cannot adopt resolutions or decisions, it can provide suggestions to the Council.

The Committee replaces the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and its membership is subject to a predetermined geographical distribution, with five members each from Africa and Asia; three from Latin America and the Caribbean, three from Western European and other States; and two from Eastern Europe.

The body's members will serve for a three-year terms and can be re-elected once.

Addressing the opening session today, Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-Wha Kang said that the beginning of the Committee's work is a key moment for the international community and that all sides – the Council, victims of human rights violations and others – have high hopes for it.

Council President Martin Ihoeghian Uhomoibhi stressed that the Committee must work as an independent expert body, voicing hope that it would provide an objective point of view.

Miguel Alfonso Martinez of Cuba was elected as the Committee's Chairperson, and its current session will run through 15 August.

UNICEF backs Togolese initiative to promote exclusive breastfeeding



A mother-to-mother breastfeeding support group

4 August - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is working with the Togolese Government to back community support groups and local initiatives to promote exclusive maternal breastfeeding in a country where other traditional practices are often more welcome.

Encouraging mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies is particularly difficult in Togo, according to a press release issued by UNICEF on Friday, the first day of World Breastfeeding Week.

Pregnant and lactating mothers in the West African country face many problems in trying to obtain a healthy and well-balanced diet, said M. Vincent Maku, a UNICEF staff member in Togo.

"To secure a diet sufficient in both quantity and quality is no easy task in a country where a food crisis already poses a considerable challenge," Mr. Maku said.

Only 28 per cent of Togolese mothers exclusively breastfeed and as many as 108 out of every 1,000 children in the poor nation die before they reach the age of five, frequently because of malnutrition.

Traditional feeding practices in Togo can lead to malnutrition and unhealthy lifestyles, and many mothers supplement their infants' diets with water or porridge within six months of the child's birth.

One breastfeeding adviser involved in the project said both elderly women and husbands are sometimes hesitant to support groups for exclusive breastfeeding.

"The problem is that people are having a hard time accepting that traditional practices can be bad for the health of babies," the adviser said. "And since it is the women who must provide many of the household resources, they tend to abandon exclusive breastfeeding before their children reach the age of six months in order to free themselves to carry out their chores."

Yet now, in one village at the focus of a UNICEF-backed programme, nearly seven out of every 10 women are choosing exclusive breastfeeding.

Online anti-doping cartoon launched by UN cultural agency



4 August - The latest adventures of Rattus Holmes and Felis Watson – a tale of sport and athletes who cheat by taking banned drugs – can be found on a website run by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), starting today.

The website features *The Case of the Spoilsports*, a comic strip, in English, Spanish and French, which dramatizes UNESCO's anti-doping role and explores the importance of the International Convention against Doping in Sport, adopted by UNESCO's member states in 2005.

In five chapters published weekly, the story – inspired by the famous Sherlock Holmes detective stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – will trace how twin athletes react differently to the pressures of competitive sport.

One gives in immediately to the pressure put on him by his trainer and teammates, while the other athlete suffers because his competitors use performance-enhancing drugs.

From one sports event to the next, the plot leads to the 29th Olympic Games in Beijing, which open on Friday.

Over 200 Chadian police officers complete UN training in law, human rights



Graduation ceremony for Chadian officers completing UN course

4 August - Some 231 Chadian police officers today completed a United Nations programme which trained them to ensure the safety and security of an estimated 250,000 refugees and 180,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in the east of the country.

The officers – part of a new unit known as the *Détachement Intégré de Sécurité (DIS)* – join 71 other police and gendarmerie commanders who graduated from the same scheme in June.

The six-week course, conducted by staff from the UN mission in Chad and Central African Republic (CAR), known as MINURCAT, was held in the capital N'Djamena and trained the participants in law and order, human rights and humanitarian law, among other topics.

“The sooner they get to the field the sooner will they contribute to the improvement of the security situation in our zone of operation,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative Victor Angelo said at today’s graduation ceremony.

By October, MINURCAT expects that 850 DIS officers will have completed training.

The mission was set up last September to help protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian aid to thousands of people forced to flee due to insecurity in the northeast of the CAR and eastern Chad and in the neighbouring Darfur region of western Sudan.

UNICEF provides \$3 million for Mozambican children affected by food crisis



Veneman greets young girl at UNICEF-supported shelter for children affected by HIV/AIDS

4 August - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is to provide \$3 million in additional support for its child nutrition programmes in Mozambique, Executive Director Ann M. Veneman announced as she wrapped up a three-day visit to the country.

“An estimated 41 per cent of children in Mozambique suffer from chronic malnutrition,” Ms. Veneman said on Friday. “These resources will help children and their families who are at high nutritional risk.”

UNICEF says that Mozambique is one of the leading examples in Africa of effective post-conflict reconstruction and economic recovery. The country has experienced an eight per cent average annual economic growth in recent years.

The under-five child mortality rate in Mozambique has been reduced by 42 per cent since 1990. It is one of the few developing countries to experience a significant decline in maternal mortality, putting the country on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets on child and maternal mortality.

However, UNICEF warns that this progress is threatened by rising food prices as well as the AIDS pandemic.

Ms. Veneman travelled to Sofala, a province with one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the country. While there, she visited a community obstetric care facility and programmes for children made vulnerable by AIDS.

During her visit to the country, Ms. Veneman met with the President of Mozambique, Armando Guebuza, Prime Minister Luisa Diogo and senior government officials. They discussed continuing socio-economic progress and current challenges.

Professional services firm donates \$500,000 to UN emergency fund



4 August - The United Nations humanitarian arm today welcomed a donation of \$500,000 by PricewaterhouseCoopers, on behalf of the company's partners and staff, to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

CERF is the UN's central donation facility which collects contributions from Member States and other donors year round so that funds are on hand for immediate humanitarian relief in emergencies.

"This generous donation by PricewaterhouseCoopers, its partners and staff, could not have come at a more opportune time. Humanitarian needs have risen considerably because of various natural disasters around the world, but above all rapid increases in the price of food and energy globally have left many vulnerable people in need of extra aid," Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes said today.

The company's donation is the largest so far by a private firm to the humanitarian fund. It is part of a larger grant prompted by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in early May, which led PricewaterhouseCoopers to pledge \$1 million divided equally between the CERF and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The firm also contributed to the earthquake relief efforts for the people of China. The company donated \$250,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to help provide emergency food and health to children affected by the earthquake.

PricewaterhouseCoopers has a long history of collaborating with the UN, including contributing toward the Indian Ocean tsunami relief efforts, by being a member of the UN Global Compact, and by assisting the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help people displaced by the conflict in Darfur, Sudan. Globally, PricewaterhouseCoopers has donated \$4 million to UNHCR.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that in Myanmar, devastation caused by the cyclone left more than 2 million people in need of help, while in the Horn of Africa, at least 14 million people are estimated to be in need of immediate emergency aid as a result of drought, coupled with rising food prices.

Since it was launched in 2006, donors to the CERF have contributed more than \$800 million for rapid disaster relief, helping UN agencies, funds and programmes to save tens of thousands of lives in 62 countries struggling with disasters, armed conflicts or both.

Head of UN environment agency to attend opening of Olympic Games



Beijing 2008

Olympic games in Beijing

4 August - The head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Achim Steiner, is to attend the opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics on 8 August as part of the agency's continuing support for the greening of the games, it was announced today.

UNEP has been working with the Beijing Olympic Committee for the last three years with the aim of making the games environmentally-friendly.

The Chinese Government has spent \$17 billion on a large-scale green drive ahead of the games, including a series of long-term environmental improvements for the city.

As part of this, the city has introduced tougher standards for vehicle emissions and phased out ozone-depleting substances. The authorities have also expanded Beijing's public transport network with three new subway lines and have introduced 3,800 compressed natural gas buses – one of the largest fleets in any city in the world.



UNEP says that the Olympic venues themselves also have many green features: 20 per cent of their energy comes from clean wind sources; solar power features prominently in the Olympic Village; and the Bird's Nest stadium has an advanced rainwater recycling system.

Mr. Steiner will visit several of the green facilities built for the Olympics including Beijing's newly-inaugurated subway lines and the Solar Wall – 2,000 square metres of solar panels.

On 8 August, he will take part in the Olympic torch relay before attending the Opening Ceremony. While in the city, Mr. Steiner will also meet with China's Environment Minister, Zhou Shengxian, and Wan Gang, the Minister for Science and Technology.

Mr. Steiner will also take part in a special event on volunteering for the Olympics on 7 August alongside film star Zhou Xun, who is the Chinese Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and Khalid Malik, the UN Resident Coordinator in China.

In the second half of 2008, UNEP will produce a post-games environmental report to assess the successes and challenges of the environmental measures taken by Beijing for the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

UN human rights expert on toxic waste holds talks in Côte d'Ivoire



Special Rapporteur Okechukwu Ibeanu

4 August - A United Nations human rights expert has held talks in Côte d'Ivoire with senior officials from the UN peacekeeping mission in the West African country at the start of a week-long visit to investigate the illegal movement and dumping of toxic wastes.

Okechukwu Ibeanu, the Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes, met this morning with Y. J. Choi, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and the head of the UN peacekeeping mission (known in English as UNOCI).

Mr. Ibeanu also met with Abou Moussa, the Principal Deputy Special Representative, to discuss measures undertaken by the UN country team to manage the toxic waste situation, according to a press release issued in Abidjan today.

In August 2006 hundreds of tons of highly toxic waste were dumped at sites around Abidjan after the Probo Koala ship unloaded, killing several people and causing thousands of others to seek medical assistance, complaining of nausea and vomiting after inhaling fumes.

Mr. Ibeanu is slated to meet with Ivorian authorities, community figures and other people affected by the 2006 dumping to give him a broader picture of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire.

Special rapporteurs serve in an unpaid capacity and report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

Plutonium contamination contained inside UN atomic agency's laboratory



4 August - The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported that no plutonium has been released into the environment following a weekend incident in one of its laboratories.

A storage room at the IAEA's Safeguards Analytical Laboratory in Seibersdorf – some 35 kilometres from Vienna – was contaminated with plutonium yesterday due to a pressure build-up in a small sealed bottle kept in a storage room.

Radioactivity was also detected in two other rooms in the facility, which is equipped with a filter system to prevent the

release of contaminants into the environment, and access to the affected areas has been restricted until they are decontaminated.

The IAEA has informed the Austrian authorities of the incident, which will be fully investigated, according to a press statement released yesterday.

As part of the agency's safeguards verification work, the Laboratory regularly analyzes small samples of nuclear material, such as uranium or plutonium.

In a related development, the IAEA said in its most recent annual report that nuclear development is being driven increasingly by the need to respond to challenges posed by climate change, the food crisis and energy needs.

Accessing modern energy is crucial to promoting development, according to the agency's Annual Report for 2007.

"Faced with a growing shortfall of energy and rising fossil fuel prices, many countries are now looking to nuclear power as a way to increase the diversity of their energy supplies," the publication, released today, said.

It also noted that there is renewed interest in nuclear power since it releases practically no greenhouse gases into the environment.

"Millions of people benefit from a wide range of applications of nuclear technology," such as plant breeding to enhance food security, insect pest control and life-saving medical procedures, the report said.

UN-African Union officials confer with Sudan on Darfur peace force



People of Darfur

4 August - Senior officials from the joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur have received reassurances from the Sudanese Government that it will facilitate the full deployment of the mission in the strife-torn region.

During their meeting yesterday in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, the Acting UN-AU Joint Special Representative for Darfur, Henry Anyidoho, and senior AU officials were also reassured by the Government that all obstacles concerning the use of land by the mission, known as UNAMID, would be removed.

In addition to issues related to UNAMID's deployment, the officials also discussed support for Djibril Yipènè Bassolé, who as the new Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur is tasked with rejuvenating efforts to resolve the five-year conflict that has raged between rebels, Government forces and allied militiamen known as the Janjaweed, as well as the strengthening of the offices of the Joint Mediation Support Team.

An estimated 300,000 people have been killed in Darfur since 2003, either through direct combat or disease, malnutrition or reduced life expectancy, while another 2.7 million people have been displaced from their homes.

Insecurity and unrest continue to plague Darfur, an arid and impoverished region on Sudan's western flank, and attempts to broker a peace deal have also been hampered by the splintering of the many rebel movements.

Last week the Security Council extended until 31 July 2009 the mandate of mission, which took over from an AU peace monitoring force at the start of this year. UNAMID currently has nearly 10,000 uniformed personnel in place, far short of the approximately 26,000 troops and police officers expected when the force reaches full deployment.

Haitian farmers receive much-needed seeds and tools from UN agency



Farmers receive urgently-needed seeds and tools

4 August - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has started distributing urgently-needed seeds and tools to Haiti's most vulnerable farmers to help them cope with the rising costs of food, fuel and fertilizer, ahead of the new planting season.

Some 600 tonnes of seeds, including beans, maize and sorghum, as well as tools such as hoes and machetes, are being distributed for the July/August planting season under FAO's ongoing international Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (ISFP).

Launched in December 2007, the Initiative now covers 57 of the food-deficit countries most vulnerable to high prices.

Haiti, already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, was particularly hard hit by the global rise in food prices, which led to deadly riots in April.

"The food riots did not come as a surprise," said Javier Escobedo, FAO's Emergency Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean. "Haiti was already in a deep crisis, when farmers were badly hit by floods last year. The international price increases made matters worse."

FAO's Representative in Haiti, Ari Toubo Ibrahim, underscored the need to help the country boost agricultural production in addition to providing emergency relief. "This crisis may present a unique opportunity to reverse the state of neglect of Haiti's agriculture," he said.

Mr. Ibrahim added that Haitian farmers not only have a potential to feed much more of the country's population, they can also generate surpluses and incomes.

The \$4 million FAO operation, which will reach about 70,000 farming families in the poorest parts of Haiti, is being funded by the Government of Spain, the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and FAO.

If more funds become available, FAO plans to extend the distribution for the next two planting seasons, in October/November 2008 and February/March 2009, which would aid another 400,000 families.

FAO is also working on a \$10 million programme funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for the October/November planting season.

But the agency stressed that more is needed – a total of \$64 million is required to cover the needs of almost 500,000 vulnerable families for the next three seasons. "They need help urgently to produce," Ibrahim said.

Angola: UNICEF supports programme to improve maternal and child health



Fernanda Ngueve and children visit a UNICEF-supported outreach team in Angola

4 August - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is backing an Angolan Government initiative to provide better health-care services to expectant mothers and newborn babies as part of efforts to improve maternal and child survival in the poor African country.

UNICEF staff are working with health authorities in five Angolan provinces to implement the project, monitoring local health facilities and providing educational, technical and financial assistance, according to a release issued by the agency on Friday.

The aim of the programme is to deliver health services that are high impact but still low in cost and accessible to women, especially in rural or isolated areas, who would otherwise not have access to such services and would give birth at home without the help of trained health workers.

Expectant mothers are given intermittent preventive treatment for malaria, vaccination against tetanus, voluntary testing and counselling for HIV, education about good hygiene practices, free insecticide-treated bed nets to protect against malaria, and also iron and folic acid supplements.

UNICEF said mothers are given advice on potential danger signs that should prompt them to seek medical assistance for their newborn babies, which are also immunized against tuberculosis and polio.

Improving maternal mortality is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the set of anti-poverty targets which world leaders have agreed to strive to achieve by 2015.

The five provinces involved in this programme, which is part of a revitalization of Angolan health services that started in 2006, are Bié, Moxico, Huíla, Cunene and Luanda.