



News Bulletin

■GLOBAL

UNITED NATIONS - A five-year effort to increase the numbers of women involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations is producing results in police units, but lagging in military units, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations officials say. The presence of female peacekeepers, supporters argue, can be a calming influence during tense security situations and provides a measure of comfort for women and girls who have suffered violent sexual assaults.

HEALTH - Health experts outlined fresh plans to combat polio at a WHO meeting this week, but after 22 years of fighting the disease, some say it's a losing battle. "You don't eradicate polio from 124 countries by doing it wrong," argued WHO's Dr. Bruce Aylward. "Either we finish eradication or we let the virus out and between 200,000 to 400,000 kids every year will be paralyzed."

ENVIRONMENT - The world's oceans have been steadily warming since 1993 in patterns consistent with an increase in greenhouse-gas emissions absorption, scientists report. While other scientists note the study's data to be incomplete, the overall conclusion corresponds with similar studies on ocean warming trends.

ENVIRONMENT - To avoid the water shortages, stakeholders will need to consider four tactics: improving delivery and storage of water; developing water-conserving agricultural innovations; investing in desalination facilities; and most extreme, letting the price of water run to free market value.

■AFRICA

Africa Region - Some 64,000 cases of the measles were diagnosed in Africa last year, and 1,100 people died from the disease, according to the WHO. Without sufficient funding and resources, the annual death toll could escalate to 500,000 in just two years, the WHO reported.

NIGERIA - Nigerian police routinely carry out summary executions of suspected criminals, use torture to extract confessions from detainees, and rape as an interrogation technique, according to a report by the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), a rights group, which appeals to President Goodluck Jonathan to make good on promises to urgently reform the force.

ZIMBABWE - In the winter of 2005 the government uprooted some 700,000 Zimbabweans across the country in Operation Murambatsvina, officially described as a "slum clearance programme", but promises to re-house those who lost their homes and livelihoods five years ago have practically been abandoned, human rights groups say.

■ASIA

MALAYSIA - A increasing number of natives in Sarawak state in north Borneo are alarmed at encroaching forest and oil palm plantations, which are taking over their native customary land and destroying their traditional lifestyles and biodiversity.

NEPAL - Food security for more than 600,000 people in the western hills of Nepal is set to deteriorate, aid agencies warn.

PHILIPPINES - Muslim rebels agree to help de-mine, ready for talks - Muslim separatists blamed for years of conflict and displacement on the southern island of Mindanao have agreed to help the government rid the area of unexploded ordnance and landmines.

SRI LANKA - More than 17,000 people remain displaced because of flooding this week in Sri Lanka and are staying in disaster relief centres, the Disaster Management Centre reports.

■LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

COLOMBIA - Colombian civil society organisations gathered more than two million signatures to ask Congress to hold a referendum on a constitutional amendment that would make access to water a fundamental human right. But Congress gutted the draft referendum bill this week by eliminating the clause on water as a human right.

MEXICO - Supporters of amaranth have been trying for decades to bring this millennia-old grain back from oblivion. Known for its high nutritional content, it is now being promoted as a way to help modern-day Mexico confront two of its dietary ills: malnutrition and obesity.

WFWO's Communications Team