



News Bulletin

■GLOBAL

UNITED NATIONS Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on Turkmen President Gurbanguli Berdymukhamedov to focus on the Turkmenistan's adherence to international human-rights law in a conference in which Berdymukhamedov emphasized the country's neutrality and efforts to develop new water supplies. Human-rights advocates have asked Ban to use his Central Asian tour to promote human-rights standards throughout the region - where many countries are disinclined to address the issue.

UNITED NATIONS Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asked Central Asian countries to take action to halt the decline of the Aral Sea, which has been shrinking since Soviet planners used the water in the 1960s for cotton irrigation projects in Uzbekistan. Much of the bed of the world's fourth largest lake stands as deserts, and the people living around the Aral Sea have suffered from declining fish stocks and increased sandstorms.

ENVIRONMENT - An unusually mild winter has kept seal hunters from pursuing their annual harp seal hunt in eastern Canada, but is contributing to stress on harp seal pups that normally live on the region's ice. Seal pups are dying as a result of slipping off small pieces of ice or crushed by moving ice, and even those who survive will face challenges in finding spots to rest when they head out to sea.

ENVIRONMENT - Countries along the Mekong River are lashing out at China over a drought that is starving millions of farmers and fisherman out of their livelihoods, despite evidence that low rainfall is primarily responsible. China's critics charge the building of dams and hydroelectric plants along the Mekong is robbing neighboring countries of water supply.

■AFRICA

Africa Region - Health officials in East African countries and UN representatives warned that anti-counterfeit legislation being considered in the region could impede access to anti-retroviral drugs instrumental in the treatment of HIV. Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda could be effected by the regional regulation.

ETHIOPIA / SOMALIA - Puntland begins repatriating Ethiopian migrants - Authorities in Somalia's self-declared autonomous region of Puntland have begun repatriating hundreds of Ethiopian migrants.

LIBERIA - Sexually transmitted diseases are among the top causes of morbidity in Liberia, and more young people are going for counselling and sexual disease tests, but most still fear an HIV test.

MALAWI - Court case drives MSM deeper underground - An engagement ceremony has landed a same-sex Malawian couple in jail, propelled their country into international headlines, and pushed men who have sex with men (MSM) further towards society's risky margins.

MOZAMBIQUE - Time is everything in responding to a natural disaster. Mozambique's disaster management specialists are worried that they are missing key data on the small tremors that take place almost daily in the quake-prone country.

RWANDA - The Rwandan ambassador to the UN who served during the genocide, Jean Damascene Bizimana, disappeared shortly after the government was overthrown in 1994. Since then, he has apparently been living and working in Opelika, Ala., and is a U.S. citizen. Questions are being raised as to the extent of Bizimana's knowledge of and collaboration with perpetrators of genocide.

ZAMBIA - Bumper crop prospects raise spirits - News of a bumper harvest could not have come at a better time in Zambia, where rising food and fuel prices have made it more and more difficult for John Banda, a taxi driver in the capital, Lusaka, to provide for himself and his family of four.

ZIMBABWE - The plumes of smoke rising above the dense working class suburbs of Bulawayo are a sign of the environmental impact of Zimbabwe's electricity crisis.

■ASIA

AFGHANISTAN - Unofficial moratorium on capital punishment - Up to 200 people have been sentenced to death in Afghanistan over the past 15 months but President Hamid Karzai has refused to sign any execution orders, according to the Supreme Court.

INDIA - Indian authorities hope the introduction of a new law requiring all children between the ages of 6 and 14 attend primary school will help foster the country's future development. The law calls for one teacher for every 30 students and the provision of free textbooks and transportation, but some observers predict authorities will be unable to fully implement the new requirements.

NEPAL - Haiti wake-up call for earthquake preparedness - Experts in Nepal have expressed concern over levels of earthquake preparedness after the recent disaster in Haiti.

PHILIPPINES - Risk of fresh violence puts IDPs in danger - Muslim separatists waging a bloody insurgency to carve out an independent Muslim state in the southern Philippines are warning of fresh violence after rejecting an offer for limited autonomy from the government. The warning comes 20 months after fighting forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes on the island of Mindanao.

■MIDDLE EAST

IRAQ - Health system needs years of work - Much more time and effort is needed to improve Iraq's health system and institutions, which have been battered by decades of conflict, underinvestment and neglect, the country's top health official said.

WFWO's Communications Team