



News Bulletin

■GLOBAL

United Nations - More than a decade after world leaders agreed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, their empowerment remains a necessary element in attaining development targets, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today. "Until women and girls are liberated from poverty and injustice, all our goals – peace, security, sustainable development – stand in jeopardy," Mr. Ban said to the Commission on the Status of Women today, as the United Nations marked International Women's Day, which is observed annually on 8 March. This year is the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 – which remains the most comprehensive global policy framework to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace.

United Nations - UNAIDS has launched a five-year plan to focus on issues that contribute to spread of HIV/AIDS among women. HIV/AIDS is now the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age worldwide, and the initiative will look at ways to curb violence against women, provide greater access to health care and promote human rights worldwide

Development & Environment - Realizing that they face a crisis of confidence after two highly public and embarrassing episodes - one over a release of controversial e-mails regarding climate data, the other over a mistaken estimate for the effects of climate change climate scientists are looking to reclaim lost prestige. Among the changes being implemented are new transparency policies at the UN panel on climate change and Britain's official climate agency, which plans to accept external oversight and publish data publicly.

■AFRICA

Africa Region - Floods displace thousands in Somalia-Ethiopia border area - Around 1,000 families have been displaced by flooding after heavy rains in an area straddling the border between Ethiopia and the self-declared independent republic of Somaliland, according to officials.

BURUNDI - Tensions high in run-up to Burundi elections - As Burundi approaches elections designed to cap the country's democratic transition after years of civil conflict, there is growing concern about worsening security and limits to political freedom.

IVORY COST - Around 30,000 people who claim to have fallen ill over the dumping of toxic waste in Ivory Coast are set to receive a 45 million US dollar payout. Tens of thousands of people fell ill after a contractor for Dutch oil trader Trafigura dumped 500 tonnes of toxic waste in landfills around the Ivorian capital Abidjan in 2006. Trafigura denies the waste was toxic. An out of court settlement was reached in September and Trafigura deposited the compensation money in a bank in Abidjan. The payout was blocked for months because of a row over who would distribute it. But local reports on Wednesday said compensation cheques of 1,500 US dollars had started to be given to hundreds of claimants, although many do not have bank accounts. The payout is expected to be completed within three weeks.

TOGO - More than 3,000 local election observers, 6,000 soldiers, and representatives of international election transparency watchdog groups are scattered across Togo on the eve of a presidential election crackling with tension, yet billed as a "national reconciliation" by its leaders.

■ASIA

AFGHANISTAN - Rain and warmer temperatures are expected to melt snow and cause floods in parts of Afghanistan over the coming weeks, government officials and experts warn.

NEPAL - Stalled government policy leaves IDPs in limbo- Efforts to help thousands of families displaced during Nepal's decade-long armed conflict (1996-2006) to return to their homes or resettle have stalled over government inaction, leaving many unassisted, aid agencies say.

■MIDDLE EAST

EGYPT - The Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip amounts to collective punishment for the area's 1.5 million residents and should be brought to an end, United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes says. Israel initiated the blockade in 2006 after a cross-border raid by Hamas

■LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

CHILE - Chilean President Michelle Bachelet made what she describes as a reluctant call for military aid to address the crisis after the powerful earthquake -- a move that has been met largely with approval. Bachelet, who enjoyed soaring approval ratings of 80% before the earthquake, has been criticized in some quarters for not calling in military support sooner

WFWO's Communications Team