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NEPAL

Nepal's Constituent Assembly Election: an "Historic" Milestone

Following a decade of armed conflict and nearly a year of delays and uncertainty within the peace process, Nepal's landmark Constituent Assembly election of April 2008 was, as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proclaimed, an "historic" achievement for the people of Nepal. The United Nations has been privileged to make important contributions to a peace process fully owned and led by the Nepalese.

Leading the UN effort on the ground has been the United Nations Mission in Nepal, UNMIN, a special political mission established in early 2007 under the management of the Department of Political Affairs. With staff reaching more than 1,000 at its height and monitors deployed across the rugged South Asian nation, UNMIN, at the request of the parties in Nepal, has assisted in numerous ways in the transition to peace.



UNMIN / Nayantiara Kakshapati

Women turned out to vote in large numbers in Nepal's Constituent Assembly election

UN arms monitors were deployed only weeks after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November 2006, stationed in rural cantonments housing the former combatants of the Maoist insurgency. Along with similar confinement of Nepal's army to barracks, the storage and monitoring of the Maoists' weapons under UN surveillance inside these camps provided the country with a critical guarantee that the election could go forth without the threat of arms or armies.

Strengthening DPA: Efforts Continue

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UNMIN's electoral advisers provided technical advice to electoral authorities around the country and a small team of UN election monitors conducted assessments and made recommendations on how to best organize the vote. The

the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Nepal, Ian Martin.

Political disagreements and security concerns forced two postponements of the election, as social

more remains to be done in the period ahead. "The election was the centerpiece of Nepal's far-reaching political transition, but there is still significant unfinished business to complete the peace process," he said.

During its first meeting on 28 May, the 601-member Constituent Assembly made the historic decision to abolish Nepal's 240-year monarchy, declaring the country a federal democratic republic. Yet during the Assembly's first weeks and months in existence, political disagreements among many parties complicated efforts to form a new government. UNMIN called for unity and consensus, for looking beyond short term and partisan interests.

"Drafting the new constitution will be a profound challenge," says Ian Martin. "During the election campaign, political parties put forward very different views on a number of fundamental constitutional issues: in particular, what kind of federalism should Nepal develop, in order to take into account the geographical and ethnic circumstances of the country?"



UN monitors observed campaign rallies to dissuade violence

Mission's civil affairs teams helped to promote dialogue and awareness of the peace process at the local level. And UN monitors from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights worked closely with the Mission to observe respect for human rights during the election campaign.

During critical moments throughout the past two years, Nepal's leadership also expressed appreciation for the presence of a high-level UN envoy able to provide counsel and encouragement to the parties, as needed, to reach agreements to overcome the inevitable obstacles in the peace process. UNMIN is headed by

tensions erupted in various parts of the country led by groups who have been traditionally marginalized in Nepal. A violence-plagued election campaign raised fears that the Constituent Assembly vote would itself be marred by bloodshed. But those fears were allayed on the 10th of April, when Nepalis turned out to vote peacefully and in large numbers for the constitution-making body.

While looking back at that accomplishment with admiration, Martin has stressed that much

"The election was the centerpiece of Nepal's far-reaching political transition, but there is still significant unfinished business to complete the peace process," Ian Martin said.

Tamrat Samuel, a senior official in the Department of Political Affairs who until recently served as the deputy chief of UNMIN, agrees. "It will be no easy task to create a federal republic out of this mosaic of a nation," he said.

For several years before the signing of the peace agreement, Samuel maintained discreet

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Strengthening DPA: Efforts Continue

The Department of Political Affairs is shouldering expanding responsibilities despite chronic budget limitations that strain its ability both to manage existing political mandates and to meet the expectations for a United Nations that is more effective at preventing crises before they escalate.

Efforts to redress this long-standing problem took further shape in the first half of the year in the extensive discussions with and between Member States on the Secretary-General's proposals for the strengthening of the Department. As that process moves forward, DPA is appealing separately for increased voluntary contributions, to allow for a more flexible response to developments in the field.

PREVENTING CRISES FROM ESCALATING

The Secretary-General's report on the Strengthening of DPA (A/62/521) documented in detail the constraints facing the Department. The \$21 million plan would significantly reinforce DPA's regional desks, enhance its mediation support and policy planning capabilities, allow for stronger servicing of Member States in areas such as electoral assistance, and improve its management and oversight capacity.

"Member states would be the first beneficiaries of a Secretariat that is better prepared, better staffed and better situated to assist them, when and where the need arises, in dealing with problems before they become larger and more costly," the Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, told the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly in March.

While many Member States expressed strong support for strengthening DPA, the Committee decided to defer its consideration of this and a several other proposals of the Secretary-General to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly. Nevertheless, the deliberations provided a welcome and overdue opportunity for dialogue between DPA and Member States. The Department was able to illustrate the breadth of its expanding responsibilities and the financial obstacles to fulfilling its mandates, while also responding to questions about the proposals.

"DPA came away with a better understanding about what the membership wants and expects from the political department of the United Nations and I believe the membership also came away with a greater appreciation of our

role and our constraints," said Pascoe.

"The Secretary-General and I will keep making the case for what are modest but necessary enhancements that could save far more in the long run by helping us to be more successful at prevention," he added.

DONOR ROUNDTABLE

In June 2008, meanwhile, the Department launched a new appeal for voluntary contributions as a necessary complement to



UN Photo / Mark Garten

B. Lynn Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, speaks to correspondents at UN Headquarters in New York

the regular budget push. Extra-budgetary funds have come to fill an increasingly important function for DPA, enabling a more rapid response to unanticipated "surges" in activity that simply cannot be planned for in the regular, biennial budget process.

Under-Secretary-General Pascoe presented the latest needs at a well-attended Donor Roundtable in New York on

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Crisis Mediation in Kenya: a Support Role by the United Nations

International mediation was critical to ending Kenya's shocking post-electoral violence and to averting a larger tragedy in a country that had previously been known as a beacon of stability in Africa. Though little has been said about its supporting role in the process, the United Nations provided valuable assistance to the successful mediation efforts of its former Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

A visit to Nairobi by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the beginning of February 2008 gave a boost to the negotiations at a critical time, even as UN agencies were stepping up their humanitarian assistance to the thousands of Kenyans displaced by the violence. Throughout the ensuing political negotiations, staff of the Department of Political Affairs worked quietly behind the scenes, assisting in the international mediation.

Joao Honwana, Director of the DPA regional division covering southern and eastern Africa, was in Kenya for more than a month during the talks, serving as

chief-of-staff the mediation support "secretariat" that assisted Annan with everything from logistics to note-taking to advice on technical, procedural and political questions.

The United Nations often plays a support role to regional organizations in conflict mediation.

The team was comprised of DPA officials, Kenya-based staff of UNDP and the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON), several former UN aides to Annan, as well as representatives of

the Switzerland-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, an NGO specializing in conflict mediation.

Looking back, Honwana credits the UN's willingness to work in background while Annan and his two colleagues from the African Union's Panel of Eminent

Personalities — former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and Dame Graca Michel — steered the process. It is increasingly common for the United Nations to play that kind of support role to regional organization, who are often better placed to lead a mediation effort in their neighborhood.

"Rather than fighting for the limelight we had the maturity to accept playing a support role and we did everything we could to play it as best we could," said Honwana.

ELECTORAL ADVICE

Another participant was Craig Jenness, Director of DPA's Electoral Assistance Division, who spent several weeks in the country at a delicate moment in the negotiations as Annan was trying to get the parties past a deadlock in discussions. In an effort to eliminate distractions, Annan had spirited the negotiators for President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga away from the glare of the news media, to a hotel at a popular game reserve that was all

SG Ban Ki-moon embraces former SG Kofi Annan during peace talks in Nairobi, Kenya. ASG Haile Menkerios is at left



*Woman watches
as fire guts homes
and shops in
Mathare slum of
Nairobi, Kenya,
31 December 2007*

IRIN

but empty of guests and staff. Safari-seeking tourists had called off their Kenyan vacations in light of the spiraling violence.

According to Jenness, Mr. Annan was convinced that only a power-sharing agreement could resolve the crisis and that a recount of the vote or rerun of the election — options the two sides were still debating — would be a recipe for disaster and confrontation and more violence. “His approach was ‘let’s try to move them beyond that,’” Jenness recalled.

But Annan needed technical opinions that supported his best political instincts, and that’s where DPA’s electoral advice came in. An options paper prepared by Jenness and aides looked at Kenya’s choices in light of both the situation in the country and disputed elections elsewhere. It concluded that it would be extremely difficult to determine with any certainty who had won the vote and that a rerun under existing conditions would be an uncertain and drawn out process. With violence still raging in the countryside, Kenya didn’t have that much time to wait.

“This was in fact our best technical advice, but it was also important politically because it supported the mediator’s strategy and gave the two parties arguments they could accept and sell to their constituents,” said Jenness.




At the same time, there was consensus at the negotiating table and in Kenyan public opinion that it would be unacceptable to simply turn a “blind eye” to what had happened in the vote. The parties agreed to establish an independent review commission, comprising Kenyan and international experts to examine the process as a whole, as opposed to the final result. The agreement was aimed not only at clarifying what went wrong. Kenya would eventually need to hold new elections. It was hoped that the findings of the review panel would be critical to implementing electoral reform measures and avoiding a repeat of the problems that occurred this time around.

Drawing again on comparative experiences, the DPA electoral experts helped the parties and the mediator shape the agreement to establish the review panel and then assisted in the search for its international commissioners. The Independent Review Commission took up its duties at the end of March and was expected to complete its task by September.

LONGER TERM REFORMS?

Annan’s mediation efforts culminated on 28 February with a power-sharing agreement which ended the political crisis and led to the formation of a broad-based cabinet and the appointment of Mr. Odinga as Prime Minister. Progress has been relatively slower, however, in implementing other agreements dealing with underlying, longer-term causes of the violence. These include commitments on land and judicial reforms, constitutional and electoral changes, and stepped up efforts to address the social resentments that fueled the killing.

Honwana fears events could repeat themselves if complacency sets in, with political elites returning to “business as usual” now that the economy has stabilized and tourism returned. “It would be a shame, because people told us in Kenya that this didn’t just happen overnight. It was a long time in the making... we just didn’t see it coming,” he said. 

New UN Mediation Team Hitting Stride

Between scrambling on short notice to crisis talks in Kenya, flying to Djibouti to help broker negotiations on Somalia and giving advice “by remote” on structuring peace talks for Darfur, members of DPA’s new Mediation Support Standby Team are off to a busy start in their role as an “on-call” resource for peace envoys around the world.

In unveiling the group at a March 2008 press conference at UN headquarters, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs likened the five-member outfit to a United Nations “SWAT” team for conflict mediation. Even as he spoke, two of the team members, Jeffrey Mapendere, a security expert from Zimbabwe, together with Andrew Ladley, a constitution-making expert from New Zealand, were on route to Kenya, to assist international mediators in resolving the post-election crisis there.

GROWING DEMAND

Since its launch, awareness of the team and demand for its services has been rising from UN envoys and missions in the field as well as

regional organizations interested in beefing up their own capacity for preventive diplomacy and mediation.

“One of the strengths of the stand-by team is that we can respond very quickly,” said Team leader Joyce Neu, a former Carter Center conflict resolution expert who left her post as Executive Director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego in order to join the team. “The UN has

tremendous expertise but sometimes when something unpredictable happens, it may be difficult to wait for the right person with the right expertise to become available for deployment,” she added.

The Standby Team is managed by DPA’s Mediation Support Unit, which was established in 2006 as part of a broader effort to strengthen and professionalize the work of the United Nations in preventive diplomacy and conflict mediation. The Unit functions as a centre of expertise, best practices and knowledge management for the Department on mediation-related activities.

DIVERSE EXPERTISE

Team members were selected from several hundred candidates

through a rigorous process that included an open invitation for nominations from the United Nations Member States. Their expertise covers a range of issues that arise frequently in peace talks — from mediation strategy to security arrangements, justice and human rights, power-sharing and constitution-making.

Rounding out the team, along with Neu, Ladley and Mapendere are Patrick Gavigan, an expert on human rights and transitional justice, and John McGarry, an expert on power-sharing arrangements. During its first year, the program is being fully financed by the Norwegian government.



Members of the Security Council arriving in Djibouti for peace talks on Somalia

UNPOS



UN Photo

Talks between Darfur rebel groups mediated by the United Nations and the African Union

Neu's first assignments included a deployment to Kenya as well as two stints in Djibouti where she provided advice and assistance to the Secretary-General's envoy for Somalia during talks that culminated in a June cease-fire agreement. She is quick to deflect any credit, however, emphasizing the support nature of the Standby Team.

"We are not here to lead the process...we are the 'behind-the-scenes' people who serve in an advisory capacity," she points out.

SUPPORT ROLE

Mapendere's assignment to Kenya in March had him carrying out consultations at the request of mediators on the issue of police reform — one that was

not immediately on the bargaining table, but which could arise in future talks. Mapendere has also been engaged with peace talks on Darfur, and was sent in July to a workshop organized by the South African Development Community in order to better develop its own conflict mediation capabilities. The event came just as the SADC played a lead role in trying to broker a political solution to Zimbabwe's political and electoral crisis.

While the SWAT team metaphor is apt at times, the experts do not spend every moment in the field. Between deployments they are advising DPA in the development of mediation policy and providing advice by long-distance to UN missions and mediators


The common denominator is helping envoys think through the complex issues and choices that arise in peace negotiations.

in the field. The United Nations-African Union mediation team on Darfur and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) are among those who have been on the receiving end of advice.

Mapendere, a former liberation fighter turned army officer in his home country, is currently on a one-year leave from his job as Executive Director of the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation. His work on Darfur involved providing the UN-AU mediation team with ideas on how to structure talks involving rebel groups. "I

drew from my personal experience," he said. "I do workshops, training, just small things like how to facilitate people to move from one position to the other, what kind of a climate should you create, how to create an environment conducive to the productive interaction between hostile groups."

COMPLEX ISSUES

Although each situation provides a unique challenge for the experts, the common denominator is helping envoys think through the complex issues and choices that arise in peace negotiations. "If you do a peace agreement, you have to ask questions about whether it will be a participative process, how it will fare, how you decide what goes into it, and who decides that," says Neu. "These are the questions we can ask people we are supporting in the peace process." 

SCAD: Serving the Security Council

The tiny “Consultation Room” adjacent to the Security Council chamber is cramped with ambassadors and their staff listening to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, report on development in Cyprus after a visit to the island. Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders had just agreed to launch a new effort at reunification, and the Under-Secretary joked that for once he had some good news to share with members of the Council.

The scene playing out earlier this year in New York — a top official providing a briefing to the Council — is a common one at UN headquarters. Less visible in the hectic activity of the powerful body is the continuous work by UN staff behind the scenes to help the Security Council organize and manage its critical affairs.

This is the function of DPA’s Security Council Affairs Division of DPA, or SCAD, which serves discreetly as the professional Secretariat to the Council. The division and its staff of about 70 provides procedural advice and logistical support, drafts speaking notes, and assists in the administration of its various sanctions regime. It acts informally as a well-placed node of communication between the Council and the UN Secretariat.

During meetings around the horseshoe table in the Council’s iconic chambers in New York, SCAD Director Horst Heitmann — a DPA official who worked previously on Asian and Pacific Affairs — can be seen frequently in the second row, keeping track of a list of speakers or whisper-

“Our job is to advise and assist them as they carry out their work — and hopefully to do so without too many complaints”

SCAD’S SUPPORT ROLE TAKES ON MANY FORMS

With the Council’s rotating presidency changing every month, the division is constantly working with its current and incoming leadership and their staff to prepare and deliver a forecast of what lies ahead and a monthly calendar of work. SCAD staff are frequently detailed to assist the Security Council president, who has a small office outside



UN Photo / Jenny Rockett

Members of the Security Council voting on a Zimbabwe sanctions resolution (14 July, 2008, United Nations, New York)

ing advice about the fine points of procedure. Remaining in the background, he said, is an important part of the job.

“We’re not in the spotlight and nor should we be. The Council members and only the Council members make the decisions and negotiate the resolutions,” he said.

the Council chambers. The division also assists with the drafting of the Council’s Annual Report to the General Assembly on its activities.

Even for seasoned diplomats, the complex rules and procedures of the Security Council may seem daunting. But mastering them is essential given how often

substantive debates at the United Nations are played out through procedural maneuvers on anything from the agenda to invitees, speakers and the format of meetings.

To enable permanent and outgoing members to share their experience with incoming members, SCAD, with support from voluntary contributions, organizes an annual training workshop outside New York on the workings of the Council. 'There are so many details and intricacies on procedures and precedents that the Member States cannot possibly be aware of, and that is where we have our expertise,' says Norma Chan, Chief of SCAD's Security Council Secretariat Branch.

Among the beneficiaries are elected "non-permanent" members of the Council, who serve two-year terms but often without the sizeable staff and experience of the five permanent veto-wielding members of the body. Heitmann was interviewed at the beginning of July 2008, on the day that Viet Nam was taking up the Council Presidency for the first time. SCAD had been busy helping the Mission of Vietnam prepare to assume its duties — an historic opportunity for the country.

Assisting the Council has become more demanding over the years, as the Council itself transformed from a deadlocked institution during much of the Cold War to a dynamic forum it is today, authorizing dozens of complex field missions, establishing tribunals and debating anything from HIV/AIDS to climate change to gender to human rights.

UN Photo / Devra Berkowitz



SCAD's Horst Heitmann (right) and Norma Chan (left) motioning as US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad addresses the Security Council on Afghanistan (11 June 2008, United Nations, New York)

ALWAYS ON CALL

SCAD's Secretariat branch is on 24-hour call, and late night and weekend sessions are common. "It started to pick up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when you had Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Somalia, South Africa," recalls Heitmann. "Today the Council is meeting practically every day."


The Council's Sanctions committees are assisted by SCAD's Subsidiary Organs Branch. Its work has not evolved so much as exploded as the Council imposes more, and more complex sanctions than ever before in an effort to deny arms to parties in conflict; curtail funds for the purchase of arms through revenues from commodities such as diamonds, stop nuclear proliferation, and combat terrorism. The Branch also recruits and administers panels of experts, which gather and analyze information on sanctions implementation and violations. There are currently six such monitoring groups in place: on Al-Qaida and the Taliban; Cote d'Ivoire; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Liberia; Somalia; and the Sudan.

SCAD's Practices and Charter Research Branch maintains the Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/repertoire/>), which serves as the institutional memory of the evolving practice of the Council. The Repertoire is widely consulted by Member States, UN-staff, academics, international law scholars, journalists and the public at large to gain a deeper understanding of the Council. It is also being rapidly updated thanks to the financial support of Member

States. As SCAD's in-house research advisor, the Practices and Charter Research Branch responds to queries and requests from Member States and the Secretariat at large on procedural and historical matters relating to the work and methods of the Security Council.

CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

As SCAD assists the Council, its presence there facilitates two-way communication. The Division channels messages from the Council to the Secretariat and vice-versa. At the same time, it helps the Secretariat and its senior officials keep abreast in real-time of the Council's deliberations. Unofficial notes of meetings, and the urgent phone call from the lobby after a vote, are a highly valued service of the division.

For staff, this carries both a big responsibility as well as the excitement of being close to action as events play out in the Security Council. "You are ahead of the information curve," said Heitmann, adding: "You are often the first to know what's going on." 

Another Opportunity for Somalia

With its reputation as one of the most lawless countries in the world, Somalia might seem an unlikely subject for an international conference of business investors. But the UN-sponsored event held in Nairobi earlier this year was typical of the bullishness that UN envoy Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah has brought to the job of leading a reinvigorated international push for peace in this long-troubled nation in the horn of Africa.

Since his appointment in September 2007 as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, the former foreign minister from Mauritania has been an outspoken voice for putting Somalia back on the international agenda. He has brokered cease-fire talks between Somalia's fledgling transitional government and insurgents, while helping Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council chart out a comprehensive new strategy for stabilizing the country.

"It is a reality that Somalia is a very difficult place," he says. "But at the same time many people are so focused on the headlines of violence that they don't see the changes taking place in Somalia. The majority of people are yearning for peace."

An agreement reached in Djibouti under Ould-Abdallah's

mediation in June provides for a cease-fire between Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, or TFG, and a key opposition group in arms, the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia, or ARS. Additional talks were underway at this writing to bring other sectors of the opposition into the fold.

Under the same agreement struck in Djibouti, the sides also appealed for an international stabilization force to be deployed to Somalia once the cease-fire takes hold, thus permitting Ethiopian troops currently stabilizing the TFG to withdraw from the country without leaving a security vacuum

behind. Insurgents have made such a withdrawal one of their conditions for ending fighting that has reached levels not seen since the early 1990s.

The strategy set forth by the Secretary-General earlier this year envisions security options including a UN-authorized stabilization force or a UN peacekeeping force, depending on developments in the peace process. Contingency planning for the latter is currently underway.

Meanwhile, the United Nations is also taking steps to beef up its Nairobi-based political office for Somalia, UNPOS, and is considering its possible relocation to Mogadishu. Such a move would increase not only UN effectiveness on the ground, but boost UN credibility in the eyes of the Somalis. The office, currently headed by Ould-Abdallah and overseen from New York by the Department of Political

Affairs, has been working for many years to support Somali reconciliation attempts. The Special Representative believes that the United Nations Country Team with all of the agencies should also consider a move to Somalia.

For now, all eyes will be on the political process launched in Djibouti

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, observing goods being unloaded at a port in Somalia, February 2008

UNPOS



Cyprus — a New Drive to Reunify the Divided Island

Winds on the divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus are blowing once again in the direction of resolving one of the oldest conflicts on the UN agenda. Though an attempt four years

ago ended in disappointment, Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders moved swiftly during the first half of 2008 toward new reunification talks. The United Nations was assisting their efforts and gearing up for the resumption of its own role in brokering negotiations.

The Department of Political Affairs, which anchors UN “good

offices” on Cyprus, has worked closely with the UN peacekeeping mission on the island, UNFICYP, to help lay the ground for successful talks.

On 12 July, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the

appointment of Australia’s former Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, as his Special Adviser on Cyprus, to facilitate talks between Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat. Days later, the Secretary-General met both leaders separately in Europe to assure them of strong UN

support to a process owned and led by the Cypriots.

Full-fledged negotiations were scheduled to begin in September.

The new momentum on Cyprus follows the February election of Christofias, a politician with close previous associations with Talat and evident personal chemistry with the man who will be on the opposite side of the negotiating table. Both have expressed strong desire for an agreement.

In a first direct meeting hosted by the United Nations in late-March, Christofias and Talat agreed to move toward negotiations later in the year based on progress in working groups and technical committees tasked with narrowing as many differences as possible before the start of full-fledged talks. With UN funding and UN-provided facilitators, the groups began working in earnest in April and held more than 150 meetings over three months. Discussions have focused on a wide range of issues likely to be addressed in any settlement, including power-sharing, territory and security, criminal matters, health and the environment. Experts were able to draw on the substantial body of work from previous efforts on Cyprus.

Two visits to the island by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, permitted the UN to offer continued encouragement. Speaking to reporters at the conclusion of two-day stop in June, Pascoe said he came away “very impressed” by both leaders’ commitment to a settlement. “The United Nations and,

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Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias (right) and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat (left) meeting under UN auspices in March 2008

UNSCO — Walking a Fine Line in the Middle East

In a year of feverish diplomatic efforts for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, crisis management has been a constant preoccupation for Robert Serry, who in December 2007 was appointed as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process. ‘The violence and on-going humanitarian emergencies in and around Gaza, have kept me very busy’, he says from his office overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem.

FRAGILE CALM

At the time of this writing, a fragile Egyptian-brokered ceasefire had taken hold. But UN agencies have faced a very difficult situation in recent times with restrictions upon fuel into the territory

by the Israeli authorities as well as the occasional halt to activities following attacks by Palestinian militants on the crossing points into Gaza. Prior to the ceasefire there were frequent rocket and sniper attacks on Israel, particularly on the town of Sderot, and the Israeli army carried out regular military operations within the Gaza Strip.

Additionally, internal Palestinian divisions have seen Gaza become increasingly separated from the West Bank. In the midst of all this, Serry has gained first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground and been heavily engaged in working with the parties to try to improve it, while

navigating a careful diplomatic path in a notoriously difficult diplomatic environment.

FOCUS ON GAZA

‘After I arrived in the region I decided that I must go and see the situation for myself,’ Mr Serry says, ‘I went to Gaza and saw the half-finished housing of halted UN development projects as well as the very difficult situation Gazans

Eighty per cent of Gazans are dependent on UN assistance.

find themselves in, eighty per cent of whom are dependent on UN assistance.

I also visited the nearby Israeli town of Sderot and was shown how the then almost daily rocket attacks were affecting the lives of the people there. It was clear that a different and more positive strategy for Gaza was needed.”

The ceasefire which took effect in June marks an important milestone. “The calm must be respected. We need to get more supplies into Gaza. We need to work for the crossings to be

reopened with the presence of the Palestinian Authority,” says Mr. Serry. “Ultimately, Gaza must be reunified with the West Bank within that framework, while the Annapolis track is pushed forward. Otherwise the situation threatens to worsen for the Palestinians, their Israeli neighbors, and for Egypt and the wider region.”

UNSCO, as the office headed by Mr. Serry is known, is a political mission overseen from headquarters by the



An officer in the Israeli town of Sederot showing Robert Serry fragments of rockets fired frequently on the town by Palestinian militants in Gaza

UNSCO

Department of Political Affairs. It maintains a permanent office in Gaza, as well as others in Jerusalem and Ramallah. Its staff has an extensive network of contacts on all sides. The role of the Special Coordinator is to bring together the UN country team and give political direction.

Robert Serry visiting a housing project in Gaza of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees of the Near East

UNSCO



EXPERIENCED

Prior to taking up his post at the start of the year, Robert Serry had considerable experience as a Dutch diplomat in Europe and elsewhere, as well as with NATO where he worked on crisis management, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. He worked on the Middle East as head of the regional desk at the Dutch Foreign Ministry in the 1990's. "In the 1980's and 1990's I was involved in trying to get exports out of Gaza, to create a viable economy, and sadly I now see things going in reverse, with little getting in or out. I also perceive on the Israeli side a sense of disillusionment that after their disengagement from Gaza, rockets kept coming."

REGIONAL MANDATE

UNSCO has a regional mandate given its responsibility to address the Arab-Israeli conflict comprehensively. Since taking up the post, the Special Coordinator has visited Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Security Council resolutions remain the benchmarks by which much of the international community sees a way to end the decades of strife.

Shuttling between Jerusalem, Ramallah and Tel Aviv, Mr Serry regular meets with senior Palestinian and Israeli figures as they continue with their peacemaking efforts following Annapolis. He also acts as the Secretary-General's envoy-level

representative in the Quartet for Middle East Peace, which comprises the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation.

"This is a vital time, and I believe that both sides are serious about


trying to make it succeed, despite the considerable difficulties," he says. "My job is to offer the UN's support bilaterally and through our position on the Quartet, to find ways to bring the parties closer together, and where necessary to remind them of their commitments and obligations."

Mr Serry believes that changes on the ground are essential, such as further easing Israeli closures

in the West Bank, freezing settlements there and increasing the presence of a reformed Palestinian security force. 'Progressing with a political agreement becomes very difficult if you don't close the gap between the negotiations and the reality of daily life.'

COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS

Security Council resolutions remain the benchmarks by which the international community sees a way to end the decades of strife. Their end goal: to end the occupation that began in 1967, the establishment of an independent, viable, and democratic Palestinian state living in peace and security with Israel, as part of just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

"Palestinian statehood will help Israel achieve its aims and Israeli security will help the Palestinians achieve theirs," said Serry, adding: "Both sides need the support of the international community to do this." 

** Contributed by Richard Miron/UNSCO*

Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau: a Critical Electoral Process

Guinea-Bissau, a small West African country and one of the poorest in the world, has long been beset by political instability. A prolonged independence struggle until 1974 was followed by civil war in the late 1990s and a series of bloody mutinies and coups.

Now, as the Guinea-Bissau heads towards November's legislative elections seen as a barometer of its democratic progress, United Nations efforts to help stabilize the country are increasing against a background of existing and emerging challenges.

Guinea-Bissau's placement on the agenda of the United Nations Peace-Building Commission (PBC) in December 2007 is already helping to bring much-needed international attention and a more holistic approach to consolidating peace. At the same time, the country's emergence as a major hub for drug trafficking from South America to Europe, is causing increasing

concern for the international community.

Anchoring United Nations efforts on the ground is the United Nations Peacebuilding Support

Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), a political mission of the Department of Political Affairs established in 1999 following a brief but debilitating armed conflict. The Mission, currently headed by Shola Omoregie, Representative of the

Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau, has a broad mandate from the Security Council. It works to promote democratic governance and political dialogue; facilitate security sector reform and the fight against drug trafficking and

The country's emergence as a major hub for drug trafficking from South America to Europe is causing increasing concern.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau, Shola Omoregie, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs during a ceremony on the United Nations Convention Against Corruption

UNOGBIS

organized crime; help curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; promote human rights and the rule of law; and mobilize international support.

UNOGBIS has been active in recent months in efforts to attract international financial and technical support for the forthcoming elections, while also making preparations to coordinate international election observers. "After every election in the country there has been violence," Omoregie said. "We are trying to help ensure that the upcoming elections are well managed so that we can avoid problems."

The Mission's longstanding efforts to consolidate peace in the country are receiving an added boost from the UN's peacebuilding architecture, which has taken a strong interest in Guinea-Bissau.

"The PBC's engagement in Guinea-Bissau has helped in enhancing the image of the country and building confidence among international donors to engage and increase their support," said Omoregie, whose role in mobilizing international attention on the



country, along with the continuing advocacy efforts of DPA, was a driving force in getting the country onto the PBC agenda.

The PBC's engagement was followed in April this year by the allocation by the Secretary-General of a financial package of \$6 million from the UN Peacebuilding Fund for several

short-term, "quick impact" projects identified in consultation with the Government, other national and international partners. These involve electoral assistance; vocational training and employment for youth; and the rehabilitation of military barracks and prisons.

The Government of Guinea-Bissau, in consultation with the PBC, is currently drafting a Strategic Framework for peacebuilding that will guide efforts over the medium to long-term.

Even with greater international attention and support, fighting drug trafficking is just one of the hurdles lying ahead for Guinea-Bissau. Though the economy has been growing faster and inflation coming down, the Government continues to battle budget deficits. Persistent difficulties in paying the salary arrears of civil servants have caused tension and discontent in the public sector.

Reforming and reducing the country's top-heavy military also

A Peacebuilding Commission delegation visits a cashew processing plant in Bissau, in April 2008. Cashew nuts are the country's main export commodity

UNOGBIS



remains a major challenge. A recent UNDP-financed census found that officers made up an astounding two-thirds of the country's 4,500 member armed forces.

HOPES HINGE ON ELECTIONS

A distracting political stalemate in April this year was resolved through an agreement to extend

the expiring term of the national legislature through to the November elections.

Now the hopes and efforts of the international community hinge on ensuring those elections are peaceful, credible and transparent — a step forward in consolidating democracy in Guinea-Bissau.

Official name: Republic of Guinea-Bissau

Area 36,120 sq. km

Population: 1,533,000 (2005 World Development Report)

Ethnic groups: Balanta (24.7%), Fula (25.4%), Mandinga (13.7%), Manjaca (9.3%), Papel (9%), Caucasian and biracial (less than 1%)

Religion: Muslim 46%, Traditional indigenous beliefs 36%, Christian 14%, Others 4%

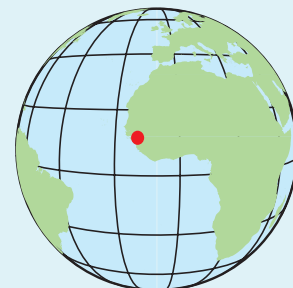
Languages: Official — Portuguese; Local — Creole, French, many indigenous languages

Literacy: (adult rate) Total population: 42%; male: 57%; female: 28% (2002)

Health: Infant mortality rate: 122/1,000 (2005); life expectancy: 44.6 yrs (2005 est.)

HIV/Aids: 5% (14-59 year old — 2008)

UNDP Human Development Index ranking: 175 (2007)



The Central African Republic — Toward an Inclusive National Dialogue

Plagued since the 1960s by coups and rebellions, the Central African Republic (CAR) is garnering more international attention than before due to the border it shares with the Darfur region of Sudan. Peacekeepers were recently deployed to its lawless northeast to provide safety for Darfuran refugees and humanitarian activities.

Nations Peace-building Support Office in the CAR (BONUCA), a political mission of the Department of Political Affairs, which has been operating in the country now for nearly a decade.

Under the current leadership of Guinean diplomat François Lonseny-Fall, the Secretary-General's Special Representative

Preparations have been picking up since the end of 2006 when President François Bozizé called on all parties to participate in such a dialogue and invited the assistance of the international community in organizing it. Cease-fire agreements were soon concluded with three separate rebel groups. And in June 2008, the government and two of those insurgent groups signed a "Comprehensive Peace Agreement", which formalized an end to the fighting in the northern provinces of the country. This was also an important step toward bringing rebels into the political process.

The current momentum towards peace in the Central African

Republic follows many years of efforts. Since BONUCA's initial deployment in the country in 2000 to help consolidate the fragile peace secured by BONUCA's predecessor peacekeeping mission, MINURCA, the CAR has repeatedly slid back into conflict. President Bozizé himself came to power through a 2003 coup. But while he was confirmed in power through elections two years later, new rebellions that broke in the North of the country reflected continued discontent and undermined hopes for the advent of a new political order in the country.

The upsurge in violence since 2005 spared few. Government and rebel forces were accused of widespread abuses of human rights, especially during counter-insurgency sweeps through rural villages. Some 300,000 people are

At the same time, the United Nations, neighboring countries and regional organizations are making a major effort to help the CAR resolve its own internal sources of political instability. Spearheading those efforts on behalf of the United Nations is the United

for the CAR, BONUCA's priority focus is on assisting national efforts to bring the government, its armed and political opponents, as well as civil society into one all-inclusive political dialogue aimed at setting the country on a peaceful and stable path.



Demobilizing and rehabilitating child soldiers is a major challenge in CAR

UNICEF/
CAR/2008

General Information on Central African Republic

Official Name: *Central African Republic*

Population: 4.4 million

Area: 622,984 sq km

Life Expectancy: *Total Population: [43.97 years] Male [43.94 years]; Female: [44 years]*

Languages: *French (official), Sangho (lingua franca and national language), tribal languages*

Literacy: 48.6%

reported to have fled their homes. The countryside has also become a haven for armed highway bandits, poachers and rebel groups from neighboring countries, including Uganda's notorious Lord's Resistance Army. The presence and authority of the central government remains precarious outside the capital city of Bangui.



Throughout the past year, BONUCA has been deeply involved in efforts both to launch the national political dialogue and to persuade the various armed groups to take part in the process. One of the main movements still active on the ground, the APRD, only announced that it would join the preparatory talks following a visit by SRSF Fall to its north-western stronghold near the border with Chad.

A Dialogue Preparatory Committee completed its work in April 2008 recommending that the dialogue be held in the capital Bangui, involving some 150 participants chosen from around the country. The Committee itself brought together representatives of the main political, social and rebel groups, and its meetings were facilitated by BONUCA, the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), the African Union and the Swiss-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, an NGO. A follow-on committee is now working to organize the dialogue, which was expected to take place by the Fall.

BONUCA has also encouraged troop contributions to a small sub-regional peacekeeping force (FOMUC/MICOPAX1), deployed since 2002 to help

Women displaced from their communities by fighting, town of Kobo, Central African Republic, March 2008

IRIN / Anthony Morland

stabilize the country. Now, under the operational command of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the

mission has reoriented its mandate to also support the country's political dialogue. BONUCA has also facilitated the deployment this year of a UN presence, MINURCAT, which is working along with a European force, EUFOR, to provide security for humanitarian operations in the border area with Darfur.



Francois Lonseny Fall, SRSF for the Central African Republic, briefs journalists at UN Headquarters

As an added boost to the process, the Secretary-General designated the CAR as a beneficiary for financing from the United

Nations Peacebuilding Fund. In June 2008, the Central African Republic became the fourth country to be placed on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission — after Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. BONUCA along with United Nations Country Team assisted the government in developing a priority peace-building plan. Assistance from the Fund's "emergency window" is the main source of funding for the organization of the inclusive political dialogue, including for the work of the Dialogue Preparatory Committee.

As a country in a volatile neighborhood, the Central African Republic remains vulnerable to events beyond its control. The national dialogue will be an important test of the country's capacity to resolve its internal conflicts peacefully and begin building a more prosperous future for its people.

Nepal's Constituent Assembly Election: an "Historic" Milestone

continued from page 2

contacts on behalf of DPA and the Secretary-General with the parties to the conflict in Nepal. This proved invaluable in positioning the United Nations to be of assistance in the peace process.

The Constituent Assembly is the most diverse elected body in Nepal's history, with unprecedented levels of representation among traditionally marginalized groups and women. Women make up 33 per cent of the 601-seat Assembly, pushing Nepal into 14th place worldwide in women's representation in national elected bodies. The same groups will be expecting similar representation in other structures of the State. But as Martin highlights, "a failure to meet these expectations and commitments would risk further damaging disruption when Nepal needs peace, stability and development."

One strength of the peace process throughout the ups and downs

of the past two years has been the capacity of the political actors to remain in dialogue, even at times of profound disagreement. But many commitments have yet to be implemented.

"Compensation for victims of the conflict, investigation of disappearances, the return of property and displaced persons to their homes" — Martin lists some the unfinished business of the peace process. "When you add to these the fresh wounds of election violence, they require an active process of local reconciliation."


Public security remains a major concern in many parts of the country, and, as Martin says it will not prevail until Nepal's consistent pattern of impunity is brought to an end. "There has not been a single prosecution in civilian courts for even the most egregious human rights violations on either side of the armed conflict, or of the many killings since."



UNMIN

Resolving the future of the armies is another major challenge. The 90,000 strong Nepal doubled in size during the conflict. The Maoist army includes 23,000 personnel in cantonments. Over 2,000 minors are among this group, and UNMIN has called for their unconditional release.

Following the successful conduct of the election, UNMIN has reduced the size of its operations. In late-July, however, as its mandate was concluding, the Security Council approved a government request for a six-month extension of a more narrowly focused mission in order to help address the outstanding commitments of the peace process.

Nepal has come a long way in a short time. But as one phase comes to a close another has begun. As DPA's Tamrat Samuel summed it up: "Now, in a sense, the hard work begins." 

** Contributed by Kieran Dwyer/UNMIN*



People queue to vote in Kathmandu's famous Patan Durbar Square

UNMIN / Stephen Malloch

Strengthening DPA: Efforts Continue

continued from page 3


24 June. He reported on past and ongoing projects, and circulated a new proposal for future support amounting to \$13.5 million over the next 18 months.

DPA's new Standby Team of Mediation experts, its assistance to preparatory reunification talks on Cyprus, its deployment of staff

to assist mediators in Kenya, and its recent support to electoral observation in Zimbabwe, were just some of the projects that would not have been possible without voluntary contributions, Pascoe told the donor gathering.

NEW PROCEDURES

The Roundtable was also an opportunity for the Department to outline for donors some important changes to DPA's project management procedures to ensure that funds are used efficiently and transparently. Additional efforts

will be made to keep donors regularly informed, thanks in particular to the recent recruitment of a full-time Donor Relations Focal Point. DPA is also improving its monitoring and evaluation capacity in order to ensure greater transparency and accountability across all trust funds. 

For additional information on DPA's current Proposal for Extra-Budgetary Support, please contact: Delphine Bost, Donor Relations Focal Point, in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, at bostd@un.org.

Another Opportunity for Somalia

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as a barometer of the commitment of the Somalis to peace.

Longtime Somali watchers remain cautious about the prospects, given the many previous failed efforts at peace. Ould-Abdallah says he is also "realistic" but feels that simply abandoning Somalia to its fate can no longer be an option for the international community. "After 18 years of conflict, we have to make it a serious priority to try to bring people together," he said.

In the months leading up to the talks in Djibouti, Ould-Abdallah, visited Somalia several times to speak with officials of the TFG and also held consultations with government opponents in Asmara and the Somali business community. He says he was encouraged by the TFG's increasing


Militiamen in Baidoa, Somalia

UNPOS

willingness to reach out to opponents who do not feel sufficiently represented in the government. He has also been encouraged by contacts with business leaders and members of the Somali diaspora abroad who are eager to see peace, and whose activities and remittances have helped keep the country's economy afloat over the years.

The business investment conference in Nairobi in March, which followed a similar event in the United Arab Emirates "reminded me that Somalia is not only about conflict," Ould-Abdallah said. "Somalis are successful businessmen not only in their country but also overseas. There is an economy in exporting services, exporting livestock, fruits to the Middle East, hides and also fish."



Ultimately, peace will rest not on outside interventions but on overcoming the factionalism that has plagued Somalia for so long. Says Ould-Abdallah, with characteristic bluntness: "Somalia has been hostage to its political leadership. The leadership needs to get its act together to reconcile and save this country." 

Cyprus — a New Drive to Reunify the Divided Island

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I think, the entire world community is solidly behind them, solidly behind their statements and the direction they are heading,” he said.

The new UN envoy, Alexander Downer, will operate with close support from Taye Zerihoun, an experienced UN political and peacekeeping official appointed in April to head UNFICYP. The mission has been in place since 1964 and now patrols the buffer zone, clears mines and promotes confidence-building measures.

Once underway, talks are expected to go forward with strong regional and international support. European Union countries are eager to see the resolution of an issue now involving one of its member states.

Ordinary Cypriots, meanwhile, got a taste of what might lie ahead with the opening on April 3 of the



Scene from the opening of the Ledra Street crossing in the divided city of Nicosia, April 2008

Ledra Street crossing in the heart of the divided city of Nicosia. The street’s barriers had long been a symbol of division. After UN minesweepers cleared the area, Cypriots from both sides poured through the crossing in joyous scenes flashed around the world.

DPA Director for European affairs Elizabeth Spehar addressed the street opening ceremonies during an assignment as acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the island. “We all know that the opening of Ledra Street does not mean the Cyprus problem has been solved. That will require much more work among Cypriots as well as support from all those who wish to see a just and durable

settlement,” she said. “But the opening gives us a glimpse of what is possible when those elements come together.”

The high hopes of the moment are tempered only by the awareness of past disappointments and an appreciation of the political challenges before the leaders. The last attempt at reunification failed in 2004 when a UN-brokered plan submitted to simultaneous referenda was accepted by the Turkish Cypriots and rejected by the Greek Cypriots.

A POSITIVE DIRECTION

“An issue that has been around this long is inevitably going to have problems arise, but my strong sense is that the overall direction is a very positive one,” Pascoe said. “All of us hope that the future of Cyprus is united as a very strong member of Europe — a strong outpost of Europe in the south.”



Food delivery to Cypriots in the North

UNFICYP

Activities and Events

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe traveled extensively to areas under his responsibility and briefed the Security Council on issues including the post-election crises in Kenya and Zimbabwe, the Middle East peace process, Cyprus and Lebanon, and as well as on cooperation between the United Nation and the African Union in conflict prevention.

USG Pascoe visited **Guatemala** to attend the January launch of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the inauguration of President Alvaro Colom Caballeros. In February, he visited **Japan** for high-level consultations, continued to the **Republic of Korea** for the inauguration of the President Lee Myung-bak, and then to **Moscow** for further discussions on UN issues. In March, the Under-Secretary was in **Damascus, Syria** to represent

the Secretary-General at a summit of the League of Arab States.

USG Pascoe conducted two missions to Cyprus to assess and encourage momentum in reunification talks. He visited **Greece, Turkey and Cyprus** in April and returned to the island of Cyprus for follow-up discussions in June. The Under-Secretary-General traveled to **Baghdad** in April for three days of discussions with senior Iraqi officials and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). He continued to **Kuwait** to represent the United Nations at a regional ministerial meeting of Iraq and its neighbors.

In May, USG Pascoe addressed the **Council on Foreign Relations** in New York on preventive diplomacy at the United Nations and the Secretary-General's proposals to strengthen DPA. Earlier in the year, he accompanied the Secretary-General to **Houston** for an address at the George Bush Presidential Library.

In July, USG Pascoe accompanied the Secretary-General in his first visits to **China** and the Republic of Korea as head of the United Nations. Later he visited **Singapore and Indonesia**.

Haile Menkerios, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs led a two-week mission to **West Africa** in May, stopping in **Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea**. High-level discussions with leaders of the region focused on possible threats to peace and stability, mediation needs, and UN cooperation with governments and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region.

In the context of the election-related crisis in **Zimbabwe**, ASG Menkerios undertook, at the request of the Secretary-General, several visits to the Southern African region to urge free and fair elections and support regional efforts to address the crisis. In late June, as the runoff election approached, he visited **Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola**, and then accompanied the Deputy Secretary-General to the **African Union Summit**, in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 30 June to 1 July 2008. ASG Menkerios returned to Pretoria in July for further consultations on Zimbabwe.

Cooperation with ECOWAS.

Through joint missions and increased contacts both in New York and Abuja, DPA has been working to strengthen cooperation



The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe (center), viewing damage from incoming mortar fire into Baghdad's International zone, home to UNAMI. DPA staff member Julian Davis is at left

UNAMI

with ECOWAS in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in the sub-region. In February, Said Djinnit, head of United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), conducted a joint visit to Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mohamed Ibn Chambas. Their mission focused on improving the region's emergency response capacity to existing and newly emerging concerns such as soaring food prices, drug and human trafficking and environmental degradation. UNOWA military advisers are working with ECOWAS on the development, training and evaluation of an ECOWAS standby force.



Lisa Bутtenheim, Director of DPA's Asia and Pacific Division, briefs the Security Council on the Middle East

The Department was also working to strengthen peace and security capabilities in **Central Africa** through increased collaboration with the **Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC)**. A conference on trans-border insecurity in the CEMAC sub-region planned for September 2008 in Yaoundé, Cameroon was shaping up as a key opportunity of further those efforts.

Staff News

DPA was honored and delighted by the promotion in May 2008 of one its top officials, **Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane**, to the position of **Under-Secretary-General for Management**. Prior to her new appointment by the Secretary-General, Ms Kane had served in DPA for nearly three years as the ASG for Political Affairs, with responsibility for the Asia-Pacific, Europe and Americas regions, as well as Decolonization affairs. During a distinguished career in the organization, Ms. Kane had also previously served DPA, from 1999 to 2003, as Director of the Americas and Europe Division.



In other senior DPA staff news, **Sam Ibok of Nigeria** was named **Deputy Director in the Africa II Division**, which focuses on West, Central and Northern Africa. Before joining the United Nations, Mr. Ibok served in his country's foreign service as a career diplomat, rising to the rank of ambassador, and has held numerous positions in conflict prevention and mediation with the African Union and its predecessor, the OAU. He was most recently, since September 2007, AU chief mediator and Principal Adviser to the AU Special Envoy for Darfur. In 2002, he became the AU's first Director for Peace and Security, after serving from 1996-2002 in positions at the OAU including Head of the Conflict Management Center and Director of Political Affairs.

Tamrat Samuel of Eritrea returned to the Department as a **Deputy Director in the Asia and Pacific Division** after spending nearly a year in Nepal as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and deputy head of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). Mr. Samuel previously led discreet DPA diplomatic efforts on Nepal prior to the signing of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He has served the United Nations since 1983 in various capacities. Between 1992 and 2000, he was the focal point for the Secretary-General's good offices on the question of East Timor and during the process of popular consultation headed the office in Jakarta of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET).

DPA is also pleased to welcome back **Christopher Coleman** as **Chief of Policy Planning and Mediation Support**, a position he held in 2006-2007 before taking up a one year assignment as Chief of Office, Office of the Deputy Chef de Cabinet, Executive Office of the Secretary General. Mr. Coleman was Team Leader for East Africa in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations from 2001-2005 and participated in the UN delegation to the signing of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He was Chief of Policy and Analysis in DPKO from 1993-2001, and a UN consultant to the UN System on Peacekeeping and Mediation Training from 1990-1993. He has also held a series of positions at the International Peace Academy, including that of Director of Conflict Resolution Studies, from 1984-1990, and worked at the Organization of American States, focusing on conflicts in Central America from 1983-84.

DPA also teamed up with **Jan Egeland**, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on conflict prevention, for a week-long mission to **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** designed to focus public attention on the links between **climate change and conflict in the Sahel**. Mr. Egeland was

accompanied by staff of DPA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Environment Program, an aide to Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals, UN resident coordinators in the region, UNOWA and DPI.

The mission visited the Lake Chad area of Niger and Lake Faguibine in Mali, both of which have been drastically diminished due to climactic changes, severely straining the local populations.

The first DPA-AU Consultative Meeting on Prevention and Management of Conflicts was held on 26-27 July 2008 in Bahar Dar, Ethiopia — part of the 10-year UN-African Union Capacity Building Programme. The objective of two-day “Desk-to-Desk” meeting was to ensure better coordination between the DPA, the AU and Regional Economic Commissions in the area of prevention and management of conflicts. **Staff from** DPA and UN political missions for Somalia and the Central African Republic were joined on the AU side principally by staff from the Departments of Peace and Security and Political Affairs.



Joao Honwana, Director of DPA's Africa I Division, briefing the Security Council on tensions between Djibouti and Eritrea

Cooperation with the Organization of American States was also an increasing focus for DPA. In June, the **Director of the Americas and Europe Division, Elizabeth Spehar**, attended the

General Assembly of the OAS in Medellin, **Colombia**, whose ministerial meetings focused on fostering democracy, economic growth and security in the hemisphere. DPA also continued to participate as an observer in meetings of the **Bi-National Dialogue Group of opinion-makers from Colombia and Ecuador**, organized by the Carter Center with support from UNDP, to promote mutual understanding and improved relations between the countries.

Maldives. A United Nations Inter-Agency Fact-Finding Mission, led by **Jehangir Khan, Deputy Director in DPA's Asia and Pacific Division**, visited the **Maldives** in May 2008 at the government's request, to carry out a comprehensive assessment of democratic reform efforts, focusing particularly on the environment for presidential elections slated to be held by 10 October 2008. While concluding the timeframe was too tight for UN assistance for the presidential election, the Secretary-General, based on the mission's report, suggested steps the Government could take to help build confidence in the process. The UN has also indicated the possibility of providing electoral assistance for parliamentary and local elections in 2009.

DPA's Decolonization Unit organized and supported the Special Committee on Decolonization's Pacific regional seminar, hosted this year in Bandung, **Indonesia**, from 16 to 18 May. The Unit also assisted the Special Committee during its annual session held at Headquarters from 27 May to 23 June.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon confers on Zimbabwe with Haile Menkerios, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, New York, April 2008

Gender Mainstreaming in the field. With funding from the government of Canada, DPA provided training on gender mainstreaming during April 2007 for staff of the UN peace-building offices in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) and Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), as well as the United Nations Office on West Africa (UNOWA), in Dakar. The workshops organized by DPA's gender focal point focused on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 and the mainstreaming of gender in the missions' activities on conflict prevention, security sector reform, democratic institutions, elections and national dialogue processes.

Elections. The work of DPA's Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) went forth on firmer legislative ground this year following the passage in December 2007 of GA Resolution 62/150 on strengthening the UN role in elections and the promotion of democratization. The resolution reaffirmed the role of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as the UN focal



USG Pascoe in Cyprus with the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders

UNFICYP

point for electoral assistance in ensuring system-wide coherence. It also emphasize the importance of ensuring adequate lead time and in-country conditions for credible elections to take place before providing assistance. The resolution placed a new emphasis on providing assistance throughout an entire electoral cycle — not just shortly before and during a specific election.

In addition to its support to Nepal's Constituent Assembly elections and its involvement in crisis mediation in Kenya, EAD conducted Needs Assessment Missions during the first half of 2008 in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Iraq, Lebanon, Moldova and Rwanda. The division provided advisory services in preparation for 2009 elections in Afghanistan and EAD participated in the inter-agency fact finding mission to the Maldives in May. EAD prepared a capacity building plan for the African Union's newly established Electoral Assistance Unit and

provided logistical and operational advice to SADC in its observation of the presidential runoff election in Zimbabwe.

DPA's Mediation Support Unit and its Asia Pacific Division, in cooperation with the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, organized a consultation on "Operationalizing Mediation Support in the Asia-Pacific Region" on 15-16 July 2008 in Singapore. The seminar reviewed previous experiences in mediation and conflict resolution in the region. It was the fourth in a series of regional consultations on mediation, following previous events on Africa, Latin America and the OSCE region.

DPA and its Standby Team of Mediation Experts also took part in a July seminar organized by the Southern African Development Community, in Gabarone, Botswana, on building SADC's own capacity in mediation and preventive diplomacy. DPA was able to provide insights from the establishment of its own Mediation Support Unit.

DPA's innovative UN Peacemaker databank (www.un.org/peacemaker) was announced in June as a **winner of the UN**

21 Award for 2007 in the category of "knowledge management" projects. United Nations envoys and staff, Member States, regional organizations, NGOs and research institutions are frequent users of the site, which since its launch has accumulated more than 6,500 registered users. It has become an important source of data and knowledge for practitioners and academics and has promoted greater collaboration between them on peacemaking issues.

DPA's Palestinian Rights Division organized a number of events under the auspices of the Palestinian Rights Committee. The United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People was held on 19-20 February 2008 in Amman to build on the positive momentum created by the Annapolis Conference and the Paris Donors' Conference of 2007. At the end of April, the UN International Conference on Palestine Refugees was held at UNESCO in Paris and in early June, the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Qawra, Malta. The objective was to foster greater support by the international community for permanent status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The Committee also held a Special Meeting to Mark 60 Years of Dispossession of Palestine Refugees at UN Headquarters on 20 June 2008, in order to highlight the continuing plight of millions who remain refugees as a result of the 1948 hostilities. More information on all these events can be found on the web site maintained by the Division at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/calendar.htm>.

POLITICALLY speaking

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