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Quote of the Day:

"Those who would like to separate religion from the state are simply dreaming."

-- Nassar Hussein Musawi, an Iraqi schoolteacher, on Iraq's future government.

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U.N. AFFAIRS

UNDP: Mark Malloch Brown Confirmed For Second Term As Agency Head

The U.N. General Assembly yesterday confirmed Mark Malloch Brown as administrator of the U.N. Development Program for a second four-year term.

General Assembly President Jan Kavan said after the confirmation that during Malloch Brown's tenure as UNDP head, the agency has emerged from a funding crisis, and confidence in the program has increased dramatically.

"Today, if UNDP is a strong voice for the United Nations in development, if it has become an efficient, result-driven and increasingly better-funded organization, it is to Mark Malloch Brown's credit," said Kavan ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

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HEALTH

SARS: China Failed To Report Some Cases Among Military, WHO Says; More

China has left a number of cases of the deadly severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) unreported in Beijing military hospitals, World Health Organization officials said today, confirming rumors that the epidemic is more widespread than the Chinese government has acknowledged.

WHO researchers investigating Beijing cases of SARS visited two military hospitals in the Chinese capital, where they said they saw SARS patients and got data on the cases. The officials would not disclose how many SARS patients they saw during the visits, saying Chinese authorities told them not to air the information.

"There indeed have been cases of SARS, there is no doubt about that," said Wolfgang Preiser, a member of the WHO team. He added, "The military seems to have its own reporting system that doesn't link in presently to the municipal one."

Preiser's statements, made to reporters in Beijing, followed assertions by Chinese officials in recent days that they had reported all SARS cases in the country.

WHO official Henk Bekedam said the WHO researchers' finding seems to match statements last week by a senior Chinese military surgeon who criticized the government for keeping hospital infections secret (Christopher Bodeen, [Associated Press/Yahoo! News](#), April 16).

WHO officials have said accurate records of the outbreak's spread through China are essential to understanding whether the outbreak could emerge as a long-term disease, like malaria or tuberculosis.

"The jury is still out on whether this will occur, and that depends a lot on understanding what is going on in China," said WHO's communicable diseases chief, David Heymann. He added, "What is dangerous is that we don't know its potential."

Heymann stopped short of criticizing China for its alleged efforts to cover up the scale of the outbreak, which is thought to have begun in southern China in November. So far, mainland China and Hong Kong account for about two-thirds of the 3,529 known SARS cases worldwide and 121 of 152 deaths ([Agence France-Presse/Yahoo! News](#), April 16).

Yesterday, nine people died from SARS in Hong Kong, the highest single-day death toll from the outbreak yet. Five of the dead were younger than 45, including a pregnant woman and four patients who had no other health problems (Lawrence

Altman, [New York Times](#), April 16).

Speaking to reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York, Heymann said the "Chinese government is now working very closely with us. We hope this will set a precedence in China."

Heymann said the WHO will host a meeting of scientists from around the world who are researching SARS in Geneva tomorrow and Friday. Researchers at the meeting are to pore over epidemiological data and laboratory studies, as well as clinical management findings, in an effort to develop global control strategies ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

Meanwhile, organizers postponed a conference of the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific that was scheduled for April 24-25 in Bangkok. A U.N. spokesman in Bangkok, David Lazarus, said the postponement "was not only because of SARS but the global and regional uncertainties and security reasons" (Agence France-Presse, April 15).

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HIV/AIDS: Global Fund Says South Africa Drags Its Feet On Contract

South Africa's delay in signing an agreement for a \$41 million grant from the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](#) spells needless suffering for the 4.7 million people in the country who have HIV/AIDS, the fund's executive director said Friday.

Richard Feacham said infected South Africans were likely to feel let down by the government's failure last week to sign a deal releasing the first installment of a \$165 million grant to fight HIV/AIDS over the next five years. One in nine South Africans is infected with HIV.

"After all, we are talking life and death here," Feacham said in a joint press conference with Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane.

South Africa's government, which has been accused of responding sluggishly to the pandemic, has reportedly blamed "complex legal procedures" for the delay. The ministry of health has promised the deal will "without fail" be signed by the end of May.

"I have no words to express my dismay," said Ndungane. "It seems that the health ministry or whoever is responsible for this are fiddling while Rome is burning. People are dying" (Associated Press, April 11).

The holdup reportedly centers on how funds are allocated in KwaZulu-Natal province, which was awarded a \$72 million, five-year grant in the Global Fund's first round of grants, when the central government was allocated \$93 million (Tamar Kahn, Johannesburg *Business Day*, April 11).

KwaZulu-Natal applied directly to the Global Fund for the grant. The fund's decision to award the money infuriated South African Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, who accused the fund of trying to bypass the federal government ([UN Wire](#), July 22, 2002).

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WOMEN, CHILDREN & POPULATION

TAJIKISTAN: UNICEF To Grant \$5 Million

UNICEF will allocate \$5 million to implement its cooperation program in Tajikistan before next year, a senior UNICEF official said yesterday in Dushanbe.

Deputy Executive Director Karin Sham Poo said after meeting Tajikistani President Emomali Rakhmonov the agency would continue to provide aid to Tajikistan because more than 50 percent of the country's population are children and young people.

Sham Poo praised the government for establishing a national commission for children's rights and support of a project aimed at promoting girls' education. She added that Rakhmonov promised to consider the frequent refusal by parents to register babies partly because of birth certificates' cost (Gridneva/Zhukov, ITAR-Tass, April 15).

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AWARD: UNFPA Recognizes U.S. Advocate, Kenyan NGO

The U.N. Population Fund this week announced the winners of this year's U.N. Population Award, honoring U.S. activist Werner Fornos and the [Family Planning Association of Kenya](#) for their contributions to increasing awareness about population problems and solutions.

Fornos has been president of the [Population Institute](#) since 1982, advocating population-related funding in the United States. He makes as many as 75 presentations a year for the institute, which is primarily devoted to creating

materials and promoting techniques to increase awareness of population growth and family planning programs. He established the publications *Popline* and *Towards the 21st Century*, which are widely used throughout the world.

The Family Planning Association of Kenya was founded in 1962 as a volunteer-based nongovernmental organization. The United Nations said the association has pioneered the family planning movement in Kenya, bringing more community participation to the country's family planning program. According to the United Nations, the association was among the first to experiment with community-based contraceptive distribution and was an early advocate for gender equality and equal rights, the eradication of female genital mutilation and the discouragement of early marriage.

The association, also a leader in extending sexual and reproductive health services to unmarried adolescents, began targeting males in family planning 20 years before the approach was identified as a key component of the plan of action of the 1994 [International Conference on Population and Development](#) ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

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ENVIRONMENT

POLAND: UNDP Rewards Grassroots Green Work In Contest

The U.N. Development Program this week announced the winners of a contest aimed at supporting grassroots initiatives to reduce poverty and reverse environmental degradation in Poland. The competition, which drew more than 150 entries, was meant to generate input for a national strategy linking [Millennium Development Goals](#) on poverty and the environment.

The [Mielnica Foundation](#) won the first prize, \$2,100, for its effort to transform a farm in western Poland into an inn in a bid to attract tourists. The foundation is employing local people with disabilities for the project and reintroducing rare plants to the farmland.

The Narew Ecology Association in eastern Poland took second prize for an ecotourism proposal, and the Social Help Center in central Poland won third prize for a project to provide poor families with wood for home heating.

The contest organizers set up a network to link local leaders, academic experts and representatives from the private sector and civil society with the Ministry of Economy, Labor and Social Policy. "We want to publicize the most successful (of the local initiatives) and help incorporate their experiences into a national strategy,"

said contest coordinator Ewelina Pusz.

The ministry "will definitely take the results of the competition into account in formulating a national social inclusion plan to help poor and marginalized communities," said the ministry's secretary of state, Jolanta Banach ([UNDP release](#), April 14).

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AWARD: Seven Activists Receive Goldman Environmental Prize

Seven grassroots environmentalists from around the world were awarded the [Goldman Environmental Prize](#) this week.

The awards, known to some as the "green Nobel Prizes," are given annually and provide \$125,000 each to environmentalists representing six geographic areas: Africa, Asia, Europe, island states, North America and South and Central America.

Among this year's winners was Odigha Odigha of Nigeria, who was instrumental in creating a logging moratorium to protect the country's last rainforests and has educated hundreds of communities on sustainable forestry.

Von Hernandez of the Philippines organized a campaign to institute the world's first nationwide ban on waste incinerators, which release carcinogenic dioxins into the air.

Pedro Arrojo-Agudo of Spain led an effort to end failed policies of damming and diverting the country's remaining free-flowing rivers.

Eileen Kampakuta Brown and Eileen Wani Wingfield of Australia, Aboriginal elders and twin sisters, are leading a bid to block the construction of a nuclear waste dump in their desert homeland.

Julia Bonds of the United States is organizing the campaign to stop mountaintop removal coal mining, a destructive practice that ruins river valleys and displaces communities.

Maria Elena Foronda Farro of Peru spearheaded a campaign to clean up the country's fish meal industry and worked to institute environmentally sound and profitable business practices for fish meal production.

The winners' efforts demonstrate "how much can be accomplished when ordinary

people take extraordinary action to protect the health of our planet," said the prize's founder, Richard Goldman (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 15).

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ECONOMICS, TRADE & DEVELOPMENT

DIAMONDS: U.N. General Assembly Backs Certification Plan

The U.N. General Assembly approved a resolution yesterday to support international efforts to combat the illegal trade in rough diamonds, which often fuels armed conflict. The assembly welcomed a decision by countries party to the [Kimberley Process](#) of diamond certification to participate in the process, which came into effect Jan. 1.

The assembly said the process – a negotiating procedure involving participation by governments, industry and civil society in a bid to set international standards for certification of rough diamonds – could help to ensure effective implementation of relevant U.N. Security Council sanctions.

Encouraging all countries to participate actively in the process, the assembly also decided to include a discussion of diamonds and armed conflict in the provisional agenda for its next session ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

In related news, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives last week approved measures to curb the import of diamonds that fuel rebel activities in Africa and may provide funding for the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

An act that was unanimously approved Thursday by the Senate would require diamond dealers to keep and make available records of all diamond shipments (AFP, April 11). The House of Representatives passed a similar measure last Tuesday, seeking to finalize the structure of the Kimberley Process and oversee the diamond trade worldwide using certificates verifiable at government level.

The two measures are now to be presented to U.S. President George W. Bush for his signature (AFP, April 9).

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EDUCATION, SCIENCE & CULTURE

IRAQ: U.S., UNESCO Meet; U.S. Says Looting Took It By Surprise; More

By Joe Fiorill, *UN Wire*

WASHINGTON – An envoy dispatched by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell is in Paris today for initial consultations with UNESCO officials on how to address the widespread looting and destruction of cultural artifacts that have followed the toppling of President Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Culture Mounir Bouchenaki said today.

The envoy, Bonnie Magness-Gardiner, is a consulting archaeologist with the U.S. State Department's Cultural Property Advisory Committee. She was expected to give UNESCO its first official indication of U.S. plans to protect Iraqi artifacts and of the financial resources Washington is prepared to commit to such activities, Bouchenaki, who is spearheading efforts to recover and restore Iraqi treasures, told *UN Wire*.

The United States has been widely criticized for failing to provide sufficient security to prevent events such as the looting of up to 170,000 items from the National Archaeological Museum in Baghdad, among them some of the earliest extant examples of written language. A spokesman for U.S. Central Command in Qatar, Vincent Brooks, acknowledged yesterday that U.S. forces were taken by surprise by the attack on Iraq's cultural heritage. Brooks said a security "vacuum" was created as U.S. troops took the capital that "will be filled as time goes on."

"I don't think that anyone anticipated that the riches of Iraq would be looted by the Iraqi people, and indeed, it happened in some places. So while it may now be after the fact that that looting has occurred, it's still important to try to restore it as much as possible," Brooks said.

"It's simply not useful," Brooks added, "to speculate as to why we did, did not, what could we have done differently. We did what we did, and our operations were focused on objectives at hand at the time. And we believe that as time goes on, we will be able to sort out this issue as well."

With a U.S. military-led interim administration apparently set to be installed in Iraq, Powell [said](#) Monday that the "United States will be working with a number of individuals and organizations to not only secure the facility, but to recover that which has been taken, and also to participate in restoring that which has been broken."

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan yesterday called on the United States and the United Kingdom to make good on such promises by acting "immediately to prevent further losses by protecting Iraq's archaeological and religious sites and other cultural institutions." He also urged Iraq's neighbors, Interpol, customs

organizations and the art world to "join forces with UNESCO to prevent trade in stolen Iraqi objects."

A senior Interpol official contacted today by *UN Wire* said the United States appears sincerely committed to recovering Iraqi cultural property.

"Interpol has already received a request from the U.S. authorities to transmit to its 181 member countries ... an alert that they should give heightened scrutiny to any suspicious transaction or shipment involving Middle Eastern antiquities or artworks," the official said.

"The fact that the United States alerted Interpol quickly about this is an indication of how seriously they're taking it," the official added. "In the middle of a conflict, they took the time to alert Interpol."

The official said Interpol's usual tools to combat art theft and looting – a telecommunications network involving police around the world, bimonthly CD-ROMs updating police and art dealers about stolen works – will be drawn on heavily in Iraq. The official acknowledged, though, that the current chaos in the country is so far making it difficult to obtain reliable information about what is missing.

"That kind of communication is being done at the moment, and they're trying to assemble what they need for the next step in the investigation," the official said of Interpol officers working on the case.

UNESCO Pushes Active Measures

Besides the museum, key archives and libraries in the capital have also been ravaged by fire and looters. UNESCO is hosting a meeting tomorrow of about 30 Iraqi and non-Iraqi experts in a bid to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the state of Iraq's cultural heritage and decide on steps to be taken. The U.N. agency also plans to send an expert assessment mission to Iraq when conditions permit.

Bouchenaki said the unusual situation in Iraq – a massive removal of artifacts from a single location, all at once – will require an extraordinary response by UNESCO, Interpol, the United States and Iraq's neighbors, all of which are already communicating to coordinate their efforts.

The typical approach to recovering looted and trafficked cultural property is essentially reactive, not active: Artifacts and works of art are often intercepted by customs services or collectors, or at auction. In Iraq, though, UNESCO is pushing more active measures, and Bouchenaki said Washington has already indicated its

support for the agency's approach.

Among the steps planned is the wide distribution of photographs of objects that were in the Baghdad museum, as well as a total ban on the movement out of Iraq of artifacts and works of art, whether or not they are initially thought to have been looted. In addition, Bouchenaki said customs officials in neighboring countries are likely to receive new, specific training in cultural property and trafficking, a program he said would take place under a UNESCO mandate.

Bouchenaki played down the importance of the reported destruction in the Baghdad museum of key catalogs of the collections. "Practically all the objects in the Baghdad museum have been published," he said.

British Museum Sending Team To Iraq

The [British Museum](#) has also emerged as a potential key player in recovering Iraqi artifacts. This week, an anonymous donor provided the museum with funding for a nine-member expert mission to Iraq. Museum spokeswoman Hannah Boulton said the team does not know what to expect in Baghdad, given the chaotic nature of current events there. "We don't really know what the situation is," she said.

Boulton also expressed hope that the donation will allow the experts enough time to carry out their work, saying, "I hope it will be for a reasonable amount of time, and I don't think much can be done in, say, a week."

In a statement issued yesterday, British Museum Director Neil MacGregor called for museums and archaeological sites to be secured and for the "market in looted antiquities" to be, "as far as possible, killed," including via "a declaration by UNESCO and as many governments as possible that all looted antiquities could not legally be acquired and would be returned to Iraq."

"There will be a large conservation task to be done, extending over many years and requiring the widest possible international cooperation," MacGregor said. "We hope that under the aegis of UNESCO, an international team of expert curators and conservators, experienced in handling antiquities of this sort, can be put together, so that they can provide the help our Iraqi colleagues decide they need once civil order is restored."

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HUMANITARIAN AID & FOOD SECURITY

IRAQ: Future Leaders Agree On Little; Annan Seeks European Unity; More

Iraqi participants in a U.S.-sponsored meeting near Nasiriya yesterday on Iraq's future government agreed on a broad set of principles but aired differences on such fundamental issues as the separation of religion and state. Meanwhile, as questions linger over what role the United Nations should play in postwar Iraq, Secretary General Kofi Annan meets with European leaders today to try to forge a consensus.

While anti-American demonstrations took place in nearby Nasiriya, the 80 or so religious, tribal and community leaders gathered at Tallil Air Base adopted a set of [13 points](#) to serve as a foundation for their next meeting 10 days from now. Among the agreed-upon principles were that Iraq must be democratic, the Baath party must be dissolved and the new system must be a federal one under Iraqi leaders, not those "imposed from outside." The group, comprising Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis from inside Iraq as well as exiles, also declared that the new government must be open to all national political groups.

[Associated Press](#) reports that one of the several dozen participants who dominated the conference was Shiite cleric Sheik Ayad Jamal al-Din, who argued for a secular state. "The Islamic community can only flourish in circumstances of freedom which separates religion from politics, so that dictators will no longer be able to speak in the name of Islam," he said.

Another delegate, however, said that would be impossible in Iraq, where religious differences have become tantamount to political ones and where the Shiite majority – about 60 percent of the population of 24 million – has been ruled by a Sunni minority since the early 20th century.

"Those who would like to separate religion from the state are simply dreaming," said Nassar Hussein Musawi, a schoolteacher (Nicole Winfield, AP/ *Washington Post*, April 16).

People raised the matter of the United Nations, as well. "What model will we use?" wondered Hoshyar Zebari, representing Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani. "Will it be the Afghan model, will the United Nations be involved, what will be the role of the opposition?" (Santora/Tyler, [New York Times](#), April 16).

Prominent Iraqis issued loud calls for Iraqi sovereignty and indicated distaste for an interim government hand-picked by the United States. Abdul Aziz Hakim, the Iran-based leader of Iraq's biggest Shiite group, said "Iraq needs an Iraqi interim government. Anything other than this tramples the rights of the Iraqi people and will be a return to the era of colonization."

White House envoy to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad sought to assure the group that the

United States has "no interest, absolutely no interest, in ruling Iraq."

"We want you to establish your own democratic system based on Iraqi traditions and values," he said (Winfield, AP/ *Washington Post*).

Outside the gates of the air force base, the uninvited and the shut-out echoed Hakim's sentiments and voiced suspicion of U.S. intentions.

"We came here to attend, but they won't allow us to attend," said Sheik Mehdi Abdulhussein, representing the small al-Najin tribe. "All of them are agents of the Americans. All of them are working for the American interest. ... I refuse such treatment! All the Iraqi people will resist such a government that is formed under the American umbrella!"

In Nasiriya, crowds demonstrating against the meeting welcomed the arrival of Sheikh Mohammed Bakr Nasri, leader of the outlawed Shiite Dawa Party, a group reportedly dedicated to forming an Islamic republic in Iraq. Nasri, who returned to Iraq Monday for the first time since he fled a death sentence in 1979, denounced the United States for admitting only those opposition figures it supports and said "people don't trust the Americans because they have an experience with them in 1991" – a reference to the Shiite rebellion of that year, which the United States failed to support (Keith Richburg, *Washington Post*, April 16).

Annun Seeks European Agreement On U.N. Role

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan is meeting today with key European leaders gathered in Athens in the hope of forming a unified front regarding the U.N. role in Iraq.

The special European summit was officially convened to mark the accession to the EU of 10 new members, many of them formerly communist, but Iraq will be the main behind-the-scenes topic, the *Financial Times* reports. The newspaper reports that the strained relationship between British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac will be in the spotlight.

Annan will reportedly hold private talks with the United Kingdom, Germany, France and others on what the United Nations' next step should be (Parker/Newman, *Financial Times*, April 16). Reuters reports that the United Nations wants to organize a conference for Iraq along the lines of the one in Bonn held for Afghanistan in 2001, but the United States has not agreed to that and both France and Russia are pushing for a broader U.N. role. Annan has said he does not want to administer Iraq or be responsible for security there.

"The secretary general is nudging the Europeans to get back together and then get the Americans to play ball," one diplomat told the news agency. "But right now the Europeans and the Russians want a piece of the world action and the United Nations seems to be the way to do it" (Evelyn Leopold, [Reuters](#), April 16).

In a sign that the trans-Atlantic rift over the war on Iraq may be on the mend, Chirac telephoned U.S. President George W. Bush yesterday and told him during a 20-minute conversation that France would adopt a "pragmatic approach" on postwar issues. Chirac also told the U.S. leader that he welcomed the fall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime and hoped nothing would happen in Syria "to increase tensions in the region" ([AP/Chicago Tribune](#), April 16).

Karzai Offers Advice

Afghan President Hamid Karzai told [AP](#) in an interview yesterday that experience in Afghanistan had shown that coalition forces must make security in Iraq a priority.

"The allied forces must take very, very special care that security is immediately provided to the Iraqi people until the institutions are back in full service," he said.

The leader of Afghanistan's struggling central government also said the coalition forces should be careful not to create powerful coalitions in their hunt for deposed Baath Party members. U.S. forces engaged regional warlords in Afghanistan to help find Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives with the result that the regional commanders reaped the rewards of U.S. arms and cash and now threaten the central government. "The regional powers still exist," said Karzai, adding that "they are stronger today than before, and that has to change."

Karzai, who was living outside Afghanistan until his return in the fall of 2001, also said Iraqi exiles should be involved in Iraq's new government. He added that Iraq was well ahead of Afghanistan because, unlike Afghanistan, its institutions had not been destroyed and it was basically a "much, much, much richer country" (Kathy Gannon, [AP/USA Today](#), April 16).

U.N. Agency Says Iraqi Farmers Need Help

The Food and Agriculture Organization said today that if Iraqi farmers are to harvest the spring wheat and barley crop next month, they will need spare parts and fuel for their tractors and other equipment.

FAO Special Emergency Programs Service Chief Laurent Thomas said the outlook for the spring crop, as shown by satellite images, was about 1.7 million metric tons – about 30 percent of Iraq's cereal requirements for a year.

"A successful harvest would definitely improve access to food and could help stimulate the rural economy," Thomas said.

The U.N. agency recently launched an appeal for \$86 million to secure crop and livestock production in Iraq ([FAO release](#), April 16).

U.N. Aid Agencies Report Some Progress

Despite some progress in securing relief services inside Iraq, U.N. aid agencies said yesterday that serious problems persist due to lack of security and clean water.

UNICEF said it had successfully delivered two giant 5,000-liter water bladders to Umm Qasr on Sunday and would deliver four more today and another set of four by the end of the week. The agency had been reluctant to bring the containers into town because it feared looting, but locals had pitched in to help build protective fences, so the program was going ahead.

The World Health Organization said it had contributed to new assessments of the health situation in northern and southern Iraq and found severe problems in hospitals due to a lack of security for medical staff, patients and supplies and a shortage of clean water and electricity. The WHO also said the threat of diarrhea outbreaks was high ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

The U.N. [Office of the Iraq Program](#), which oversees the oil-for-food program, said it had identified \$395 million worth of supplies that could be shipped by May 12. That is the final day of operation for the OIP, as determined by Security Council [Resolution 1472](#) last month. Of that, \$181 million will be for food, \$103 million for agriculture and \$46 million for the health sector ([U.N. release II](#), April 15).

The U.N. Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) announced yesterday it is assisting in providing emergency shelter for internally displaced people in northern Iraq. The agency said it will be providing services for close to 6,000 families including conducting site preparation and layout for shelters, building of roads leading to and within shelter areas, building temporary structures such as health centers and stores and constructing water and sanitation facilities.

"We have considerable experience from other post-conflict zones rehabilitating local institutions and authorities, building capacity of local professionals and self-help groups of men and women," said UN-HABITAT Executive Director Anna Tibaijuka (UN-HABITAT release, April 16).

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees called on Jordanian authorities to admit

Iraqis, Iranians and Palestinians stranded in the "no-man's land" between Iraq and Jordan into the kingdom. Some have reportedly been waiting there a week.

"This is no place to live, particularly when there is a refugee camp 50 kilometers away (in Ruweished)," said UNHCR spokesman Peter Kessler.

According to the [Jordan Times](#), about 200 of the people there are Iranian refugees, some of whom were living in a camp inside Iraq and others of whom are holding refugee documents from European and North American countries.

Jordan has reportedly allowed 923 third-country nationals fleeing Iraq to stay at the Ruweished camp. More than 700 have since moved on to their respective home countries (Dina al-Wakeel, *Jordan Times*, April 16).

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GUINEA: UNHCR Steps Up Efforts To Repatriate Sierra Leoneans

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees yesterday said it is conducting a campaign to step up repatriation of Sierra Leoneans from Guinea.

Working with Sierra Leonean officials, UNHCR is providing refugees in Guinea with details of the security situation in their homeland, information that the agency said enables them to make an informed decision about whether to return. UNHCR also provides refugees with information on U.N. and government efforts to improve education and health care and to provide shelter for those returning to Sierra Leone.

Many refugees have shown a willingness to repatriate, UNHCR said, citing a recent survey conducted among the 35,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in camps in Guinea that indicates that up to 80 percent are willing to return this year.

UNHCR said repatriation has speeded up since April 4, when a more direct route between the two countries was opened up on a new causeway across the Moa River. The agency has increased the frequency of repatriation convoys, each of which carries 500 people, to six per week. UNHCR said it hopes to return up to 26,000 refugees to Sierra Leone before the rainy season starts and to complete repatriations by the end of next year ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

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AWARD: UNHCR Honors Italian For 33 Years Of Work With Somalis

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has named Annalena Tonelli of Italy winner of the [Nansen Refugee Award](#) for devoting the last 33 years to helping Somalis, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said yesterday in Kenya, which is home to more than 130,000 Somali refugees. The award includes \$100,000 for a refugee project of the recipient's choice.

Tonelli has worked with Somalis in Somalia and neighboring Kenya, establishing tuberculosis clinics, educating people about HIV/AIDS and campaigning against ritual genital mutilation. She runs a 200-bed hospital in Borama in Somalia's breakaway Somaliland region (Tom Maliti, Associated Press, April 15).

Tonelli said she has always shunned publicity, but decided to accept the Nansen Award in order to draw attention to Somalia's chronic problems.

Lubbers said Tonelli takes no payment for her work, lives modestly and "is living proof that individuals can still make a tremendous difference."

The award was created in 1954 and is named after the League of Nations' first high commissioner for refugees, Arctic explorer Fridtjof Nansen. UNHCR will present Tonelli with the award in Geneva June 25 ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

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HUMAN RIGHTS, JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY

RIGHTS COMMISSION : U.N. Blasts Pyongyang, "Mass Killings" Of Palestinians

North Korea today was censured by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva for the first time in the panel's history. With a vote of 28-10 and 15 abstentions, the commission criticized Pyongyang's "systemic, widespread and grave" violations of human rights and expressed "deep concern" about reports that North Korea was practicing torture and executing political prisoners.

The resolution was sponsored by the European Union and supported by the United States. South Korea, one of the countries that abstained, said it wanted to avoid offending Pyongyang at a sensitive time amid diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving a crisis over North Korea's nuclear program (Agence France-Presse, April 16).

Resolution Condemning Russia For Violations In Chechnya Fails

The commission also today rejected for the second consecutive year a resolution

condemning Russia for violations by its military forces in Chechnya. The vote on the resolution, which was also sponsored by the EU, was 21 against, 15 in favor and 17 abstentions.

[Human Rights Watch](#) said it was "extremely disappointed" by the vote (AFP II, April 16).

In 2000, Russia became the first permanent Security Council member to be censured by the commission, a move that includes no penalties but draws international attention to the matter. The commission censured Russia again in 2001, but last year, Russia escaped censure by one vote.

Greek Ambassador Tassos Kriekoukis, speaking on behalf of the EU, said commission members this year had attempted to reach consensus on a resolution regarding Russia, but that Russia "did not want to enter into any discussion on the subject."

Russian Ambassador Leonid Skotnikov countered that Russia "never attempted to avoid discussing the human rights situation in the Chechen Republic" (Jonathan Fowler, Associated Press, April 16).

Israel Condemned For "Mass Killings" Of Palestinians

Yesterday the commission condemned the "mass killings" of Palestinians and called for an end to human rights abuses in the Palestinian territories.

A resolution affirming the right of the Palestinian people to resist Israeli occupation and condemning human rights abuses by Israel, including extrajudicial executions carried out by the army, passed 33 in favor and five against, with 15 abstentions. The measure condemned the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and the war against Palestinian towns and camps, which had resulted in "mass killings" of civilians, including women and children. In response, the Israeli representative said that if the resolution were intended to end violence, it would have demanded that Palestinians end armed attacks and suicide bombings. The Palestinian representative replied that the situation had deteriorated to the point where Israel was practicing state terrorism.

In another resolution, the commission yesterday requested that Israel stop changing the physical and demographic character of the Syrian Golan Heights and allow displaced persons to return home and recover their property. The resolution passed 31 in favor, with 21 abstentions and one dissenting vote cast by the United States.

A third resolution called for an end to the construction of Israeli settlements in the Arab-occupied territories, as they were "a major obstacle to peace and to the creation of an independent, viable, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State." It passed 50 in favor with two abstentions and one dissenting vote cast by the United States.

The three resolutions were discussed under yesterday's agenda item on the "question of the violation of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine" ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

A fourth resolution concerning Palestinians, under an agenda item on "the right to self-determination and racism and racial discrimination," was approved Monday. It reaffirmed the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, "including their right to establish their sovereign and independent Palestinian state," and passed by a vote of 51 in favor, one opposed and one abstention. The United States cast the sole dissenting vote.

In response to the resolution, the representative from Israel said self-determination was a matter to be negotiated between the two parties. The representative claimed the Palestinian Authority had chosen not to pursue negotiations but to use violence to try to force an outcome in its favor. The Palestinian representative said the statement of the Israeli delegation was meant to mislead the commission's members.

Measures Adopted On Western Sahara, Mercenaries, Religious Freedom

Under the same agenda item, the commission adopted without a vote a resolution reaffirming the responsibility of the United Nations toward the people of Western Sahara, as called for in the settlement plan and evidenced by U.N. plans to organize a referendum for self-determination with the help of the African Union.

A resolution condemning the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights passed 37 in favor, with nine against and seven abstentions. The resolution stated that armed conflicts, terrorism, arms trafficking and covert operations encouraged the demand for mercenaries.

The commission passed a resolution deploring negative stereotyping of religions, especially of Islam, which it said is frequently and wrongly associated with terrorism. The resolution, which also condemned ethnic and religious profiling of Muslims following the events of September 11, 2001, passed by a vote of 32 in favor, with seven abstentions and 14 against. Several delegations voting against the measure said it placed too much emphasis on Islam at the risk of ignoring other religions whose practitioners suffer discrimination ([U.N. release](#), April 14).

Debate Concluded On Rights Of The Child

Also on Monday, the commission concluded its general debate on the rights of the child, hearing from a number of national delegations, international groups and nongovernmental organizations.

Christa Nickels, president of the Bundestag Commission on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, said the war in Iraq was a challenge in terms of human rights and called on the speedy distribution of aid to the most vulnerable Iraqis, including women, children and the elderly. Several delegations noted that children are highly vulnerable to poverty, armed conflicts, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS. Many emphasized the importance of education and the need of all countries to eliminate human trafficking and ratify protocols on child sexual exploitation ([U.N. release II](#), April 14).

Commission Postpones Vote On Cuba Until Tomorrow

After hearing two hours of debate today over Cuba's crackdown on political dissidents, the commission postponed until tomorrow a vote on a resolution calling on Cuba "to release immediately all these persons" arrested and detained for their political views.

The original text of the resolution only asked Cuba to accept a visit by a U.N. human rights monitor, but Costa Rica, one of the sponsors of the resolution, today proposed amending it in response to the conviction and [sentencing](#) of a large number of political dissidents in the past week.

Cuba said the resolution was sponsored by the "vile lackeys of the Empire," referring to the United States ([AP/MSNBC.com](#), April 15).

Rights Experts, Ivory Coast Minister Address Commission

The commission yesterday heard a report from Hina Jilani, the special representative on human rights defenders, outlining her fear that dangerous trends are obstructing the work of human rights workers and organizations. Jilani said some nations had adopted the strategy of associating human rights activities with support for terrorism, and a rapid expansion of policy and procedures restricting the work of defenders was undermining their work.

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Human Responsibilities Miguel Alfonso Martinez said visits to several countries had highlighted the need for a clear definition of human responsibilities of individuals and nongovernmental organizations. He said many human rights violations resulted directly from the lack

of a sense of individual responsibility.

Minister of Human Rights for Ivory Coast Victorine Wodie told the commission yesterday that since a 1999 coup, Ivory Coast had been progressively recovering, as evidenced by the organization of a reconciliation forum. Wodie also said that respect of human rights was a process that would take a long time, and she expressed disappointment that despite the government's efforts to integrate the foreign population into its workings, it was considered a "xenophobic state" ([U.N. release II](#), April 15).

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BALKANS: Muslim Srebrenica Defender Pleads Innocent At U.N. Court; More

Former Bosnian Muslim commander Naser Oric yesterday pleaded not guilty before the [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia](#) in The Hague to charges of war crimes allegedly committed in 1992-93.

Seen as a war hero by many Muslims for his defense of the city of Srebrenica before the 1995 massacre of 8,000 Muslims there, Oric was arrested last week by NATO peacekeepers in Bosnia on six war crimes charges, including murder, cruel treatment and destruction of cities, towns and villages. According to ICTY's indictment of Oric, police under his command beat Serb detainees to death or until they lost consciousness, while other Serbs suffered humiliations including being forced to drink urine. Oric is also accused in the burning of dozens of Serb villages around Srebrenica ([BBC Online](#), April 15).

Srebrenica survivors have criticized the arrest of Oric in light of the fact that former Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic and military chief Ratko Mladic, held responsible for the Srebrenica massacre, are still at large ([UN Wire](#), April 11).

Police in Serbia on Sunday arrested wealthy businessman Momcilo Mandic, who is accused of providing financial assistance to Karadzic and other people indicted for war crimes. International High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Paddy Ashdown said last month that his office's pursuit of Mandic was meant "to disrupt Karadzic's support network in a practical way. If you want to destroy this poisonous tree," Ashdown said, "you need to strike at its roots" (Stevan Zivanovic, [United Press International](#), April 15).

International Monitors Given Full Access To Suspects In Djindjic Assassination

Human rights representatives from the United Nations and the [Organization for](#)

[Security and Cooperation in Europe](#) have been given full and free access to prisoners held in connection with the [assassination](#) last month of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic.

In a statement issued yesterday, the two organizations said they have also been permitted to inspect registers and medical notes. A delegation spent two days inspecting prisons in Belgrade, a prison hospital and police holding cells following an invitation from the Serbian government.

Serbia has declared a state of emergency in the wake of the Djindjic assassination, prompting criticism that it is using the assassination as an excuse to crack down on political rivals ([B92.net](#), April 15). Djindjic's successor, Zoran Zivkovic, said officials are planning to lift the state of emergency before Sunday to allow people to mark the Easter holiday.

In an interview last week with [B92](#) radio, Zivkovic denied that the opposition is being suppressed. "As far as I can see, the opposition is very present, very active in the Parliament, and that's how things should stay," he said. "Only a fool expects to strengthen his power by destroying the opposition. Do we look like people who will use the stupid methods and procedures of [former Yugoslav President Slobodan] Milosevic? Certainly not. The opposition should exist, but not criminals hiding behind this political address and engaging in criminal activities," he said ([Antonela Riha](#), [B92.net](#), April 10).

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CRIME, CORRUPTION & DRUGS

DRUGS: Critics At Vienna Conference Assail U.N. Approach

Think tanks, nongovernmental organizations and activists yesterday urged the United Nations to change its antidrug programs, pointing to a lack of progress in recent years against drug use and trafficking.

"After years of continuous setbacks, and with billions of dollars spent on destroying crops and putting people in jail, it is now time to look at more promising alternatives," the [European Drug Policy Fund](#) said in a statement distributed in Vienna as delegates from 116 countries gathered for talks about the U.N. anti-drug campaign that started in 1998.

Modeled on the U.S. anti-drug effort, the U.N. plan calls for increased interdiction efforts and a focus on law enforcement to stamp out the global drug trade by 2008. Critics say the approach is failing by all current measures, however, and call for an

overhaul of U.N. drug policy.

The [Open Society Institute](#), a foundation backed by financier George Soros, said U.N. drug control treaties that encourage tough law enforcement undercut health care efforts in poor countries and worsen the HIV/AIDS problem.

"In countries that are experiencing a rapid increase of drug use, the reflex reaction is to become tougher on drugs," said OSI drug abuse expert Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch. "Locking up users in prisons is not a solution. It only serves to drive users underground, making them less likely to seek out what few services do exist for them," Malinowska-Sempruch added (William Kole, Associated Press, April 15).

Last week, U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa said in a report to the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs that worldwide efforts against illicit drugs have shown "signs of progress" in demand reduction, supply reduction, international cooperation and overall drug control policy ([UN Wire](#), April 9).

[Transnational Institute](#), an independent think tank based in Amsterdam, reviewed the report and said last week that "encouraging progress cannot be substantiated on the basis of available evidence. Levels of cultivation of coca and opium poppy as well as the supply of cocaine and heroine have shown fluctuations but the trend seems to be relatively stable. No indications point at any substantial decline. The situation regarding the supply of cannabis and synthetic drugs has even deteriorated."

The institute suggested the commission "start to acknowledge that international drug policy should shift its focus to reducing the harm of drugs for users and society as a whole" (Transnational Institute release, April 8).

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PEACEKEEPING & SECURITY

IRAQ: No U.S. Response To IAEA Call For Inspectors' Return; More

The International Atomic Energy Agency yesterday said the United States had not responded to its call for U.N. weapons inspectors to be allowed back into Iraq after the war.

"We have not been contacted, and we have not been informed," said an unnamed nuclear expert close to the IAEA.

IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei said he plans to return to Iraq with full U.N. Security Council authority, but Washington has made it clear it plans to hunt for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction itself and that the IAEA and [U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission](#) may have only limited inspection authority in Iraq (Louis Charbonneau, [Reuters](#), April 16).

U.S. military officials said they have 30 to 40 former U.N. weapons inspectors in the pipeline for Iraq and are working to recruit another 20. They said 1,000 military and civilian workers will likely participate in the search. U.S. Defense Department officials said no date has been set to send civilian inspectors back into Iraq because of security concerns. "We don't want to risk them before we know it's safe to go in," said an unnamed official.

The [New York Times](#) reports that at least two kinds of military arms hunters are already at work in the country. According to the newspaper, troops on the front lines are using detectors to identify suspected deadly germs, chemicals and sources of radioactivity and are followed by a better-equipped unit that includes civilian experts and mobile laboratories.

"What we're trying to set up is a more muscular organization to go in with even more talent," a military official said. "They're the high-quality expertise meant to tell the difference between [former Iraqi President] Saddam [Hussein]'s strategic talcum-powder reserve or the anthrax," the official said.

Some of the civilian experts, however, said bureaucratic confusion and infighting have delayed their efforts. So far, they said, the military's search efforts seem superficial and misguided. One unnamed expert called the military effort naive.

"They're reinventing the wheel," the expert said. "It doesn't seem to be a well-executed plan."

"It's been known for some time that this has to go, and it's not moving," another expert said of the civilian effort. Others expressed frustration that, although Washington cited the need to disarm Iraq as a main reason for the invasion, it has so far offered no firm evidence of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons (William Broad, [New York Times](#), April 16).

U.S. special forces today raided the Baghdad home of microbiologist Rahib Taha, who was reportedly in charge of a laboratory that weaponized anthrax under Hussein's regime. They recovered boxes of documents and brought out three men, but Taha's whereabouts remained unknown.

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Richard Myers, said he remains

worried that Iraqi chemical or biological weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists. "We still have a lot of work to do in finding and securing weapons of mass destruction sites and making sure that those biological and chemical weapons don't fall in the hands of terrorists," he said yesterday on CNN's *Larry King Live*.

Former Palestinian Terrorist Arrested In Baghdad

U.S. officials said yesterday that Abu Abbas, the leader of a Palestinian terrorist group that hijacked the cruise liner *Achille Lauro* in 1985, killing one American, has been captured by U.S.-British forces in Baghdad.

The arrest underscores a link between Hussein's regime and terrorism, according to U.S. Central Command spokesman Frank Thorp (David Crary, [Associated Press](#)/Yahoo! News, April 16). Central Command said Abbas' capture "removes a portion of the terror network supported by Iraq and represents yet another victory in the global war on terrorism" (Edmund Blair, [Reuters](#), April 16).

According to a senior U.S. administration official, Abbas had attempted to flee to Syria, but Syria turned him away (Thomas Ricks, [Washington Post](#), April 16).

The Palestinian Authority today demanded Abbas' release, saying his arrest violates a 1995 agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

In related news, a U.S. military unit has reportedly found an abandoned terrorist training camp said to have been jointly operated by Iraqi and Palestinian groups, where recruits were allegedly taught to make bombs (Crary, AP/Yahoo! News).

U.S.-Trained Police Force Patrols Baghdad

More than 2,000 Baghdad police officers who served under Hussein are reemerging as part of an Iraqi security force being set up by U.S. and British forces (Mary Beth Sheridan, [Washington Post](#), April 16). U.S. forces have trained about 700 members of the Free Iraqi Forces in Baghdad this week, with joint patrols being conducted to prevent looting and restore security ([CNN.com](#), April 16).

U.S. civil affairs officers screened the Iraqi returnees, and the military is providing some weapons to the poorly equipped officers and warning them to respect citizens.

"They do their jobs. We provide security from the crowd," said U.S. Staff Sergeant Kevin Fountain. "We need to make sure nobody in the population gets at them."

The patrols provide only the illusion of a criminal justice system, according to the *Washington Post*. The officers are not paid, and there are no jails. "That's on their priority list, some kind of detainee center," said one U.S. Marine. "The next step will be getting the judiciary system up and running" (Sheridan, *Washington Post*).

U.S.-British forces are also collecting large stockpiles of weapons and ammunition left behind by Iraqi forces, which have left them with a sizeable storage task, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Times* reports that the recovered weapons – including rifles, mortars, grenades, pistols, rockets and land mines – and recovered Iraqi vehicles will be held until a new government and army are ready to receive them (Mohan/Zucchini, April 16).

U.S. and British media have reported several deaths and injuries in recent days involving Iraqi civilians handling unexploded cluster bombs that were used by coalition forces during the attack on Baghdad. Hussein's "regime has in many instances placed military targets near civilian areas to increase the chances of collateral damage," said U.S. Central Command spokesman Herb Josey.

"In general, we try to target legitimate military targets only. If cluster bombs are the best weapons to use against a target, they are the weapons of choice," he said. "We take into account the chances of civilian casualties all the time" (Ford/Peterson, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 16).

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SYRIA : Powell Says There Is "No War Plan Right Now"; More

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday the United States has no war plans against Syria or any other country in the region, despite continued accusations by Washington that Syria has banned weapons and has harbored fleeing Iraqi leaders.

"There is no war plan right now to go attack someone else, either for the purpose of overthrowing their leadership or for the purpose of imposing democratic values," Powell said (William Neikirk, *Chicago Tribune*, April 16).

On Monday, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pointed to intelligence reports that reportedly show Syria has tested chemical weapons in the past year. Rumsfeld also accused Syria of allowing members of ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime to flee to Syria. Officials in Damascus denied the accusations, with the Cabinet saying in a statement that the U.S. stance reflects Israeli influence.

"The Cabinet rejected these accusations and allegations and saw them as a response to Israeli stimulus and service to (Israel's) goals and expansive greed," the statement read. The Cabinet went on to say the "escalated language of threats and accusations by some American officials against Syria are aimed at damaging its steadfastness and influencing its national decisions and (Arab) national stances" (Emily Wax, [Washington Post](#), April 16).

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara said Syria would support a treaty making the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. "The Syrian government is ready to sign a treaty under U.N. supervision to make the whole Middle East a zone free from all mass destruction weapons, nuclear, chemical and biological," al-Shara said.

At the United Nations, Arab diplomats said they would seek a Security Council resolution banning weapons of mass destruction. They pointed to Israel's arsenal, which is thought to contain as many as 200 undeclared nuclear warheads ([Reuters](#)/Yahoo! News, April 16).

In London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said he talked to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who Blair said promised to stop anyone from Iraq from entering Syria.

"I have talked to President Bashar al-Assad by the end of the week, and the (Syrians) stressed to me they will prevent any person crossing the border from Iraq to Syria to get in," Blair said, adding, "I think this is what the Syrians are doing." Blair also said "there is no plan to invade Syria" ([ArabicNews.com](#), April 15).

Arab suspicions about U.S. motives in the region following the U.S. invasion of Iraq have deepened as relations have worsened between Washington and Damascus.

"Everyone in the region, and outside it too, questions these accusations," said political analyst Saleh Khathlan, who spoke on government television from Saudi Arabia. "Iraq has fallen, and now it's Syria's turn," he added ([Syrian Times](#), April 16).

U.S. Cuts Off Oil Pipeline From Iraq To Syria

Yesterday, Rumsfeld said U.S.-led forces in Iraq have cut off oil flow along a pipeline from Iraq to Syria that reportedly pumped about 200,000 barrels a day in violation of U.N. sanctions on Iraq.

"I am hopeful that they have shut it off, and I have heard that that has happened. But I cannot assure you that all illegal oil flowing from Iraq into Syria is shut off; I

just hope it is," Rumsfeld said (Janine Zacharia, [Jerusalem Post](#), April 16).

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IVORY COAST: Security Council To Press Government On Helicopter Attacks

The U.N. Security Council plans to press Ivory Coast's government to halt helicopter attacks against rebels, [Agence France-Presse](#) reports today.

In a closed-door session, according to an AFP diplomatic source who attended the meeting, members decided to have the current council president, Mexican Ambassador Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, take up the matter with Ivory Coast's delegate to the United Nations, Djessan Philippe Djangone-Bi.

The report follows claims by guerrilla fighters that government attack helicopters have killed numerous people in attacks on rebel positions in the west. Ivorian military officials have denied the accusations (AFP/Yahoo! News, April 16).

Publicly, Aguilar voiced the council's concern "at recent violations of the cease-fire" in Ivory Coast, calling "on all parties to respect the commitments they made and to immediately end attacks that undermined the process of peace and reconciliation" ([U.N. release](#), April 15).

[Panafrican News Agency](#) today cites French military and other sources as saying Ivory Coast's two main western rebel groups, the Mouvement Patriotique Ivoirien du Grand Ouest and the Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix, have retaken the towns of Zouan-Hounien and Bin-Houye, which government troops captured last week. The sources said the rebel offensive also involved troops from the country's main rebel group, the northern Mouvement Patriotique de Cote d'Ivoire (PANA/*Le Soleil*, April 16, *UN Wire* translation).

In a letter addressed Friday and published today in the pro-government [Fraternite-Matin](#), Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo has told U.N. special envoy Albert Tevoedjre that renewed fighting, particularly in western Ivory Coast, demonstrates a "will of the rebels to resume the war and to take control of the state by military means, damaging the ongoing peace process, which I have always supported and will not stop supporting."

Gbagbo said he wished to express his "vigorous" condemnation of the developments to a cease-fire monitoring committee headed by Tevoedjre, "which has as its principal task the monitoring of failures and obstructions and the taking of appropriate measures of rectification" (Laurent Gbagbo, *Fraternite-Matin*, April 16, *UN Wire* translation).

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NORTH KOREA: Nuclear Crisis Talks Scheduled To Begin Next Week

The United States, North Korea and China will hold talks in Beijing next week to begin a direct discussion on the North Korean nuclear crisis, the [New York Times](#) reported today.

China's participation was key to bringing about the meeting, according to a U.S. official, as the United States has refused to meet with North Korea alone, insisting instead on a multilateral forum.

"What's new here is that there is an active, bold participatory role for the Chinese," the official added.

Having only three parties at the table represents a compromise between the earlier North Korean demand for bilateral talks and the U.S. demand for multilateral talks including South Korea, Japan and Russia, according to the *Times*. In planning next week's meeting, the United States "reserved the right" to bring in other nations in the future, the official said.

U.S. President George W. Bush approved the plan to hold negotiations with North Korea, according to the *Times* (David Sanger, April 16).

Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly is slated to head the U.S. delegation that travels to Beijing next week, the [Washington Post](#) reported today.

"We've been working this very subtly ... in a way that we think is going to be effective," a senior White House official said, adding, "There has never been any fear of talking with the North Koreans, but the idea you would just rush into bilateral talks would bring you back to where you were in 1994" (Karen DeYoung, *Washington Post*, April 16).

U.S. military success in Iraq might have paved the way for the diplomatic breakthrough, after months of tension and threats, the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported.

"Everybody has been motivated post-Iraq to respond. Not just the North Koreans, but the Chinese as well," said Scott Snyder, the Seoul representative of the Asia Foundation (Barbara Demick, *Los Angeles Times*, April 16).

Regional neighbors South Korea and Japan could join the talks at a later date, according to officials.

"We understand that South Korea and Japan will participate in the talks in the future. We believe this is also the understanding on the part of the U.S. We will watch how this will develop," said a Japanese Foreign Ministry official (DeYoung, *Washington Post*).

South Korea also agreed to the Beijing talks, even without Seoul's involvement.

"We decided to accept trilateral talks because it is important to begin talks at an early date so that we can prevent an escalation of nuclear tension and find a breakthrough on the matter," a South Korean Foreign Ministry official said (Seo Hyun-jin, *Korea Herald*, April 16).

Attempting to keep relations calm on the Korean Peninsula, Seoul announced it would abstain from a U.N. vote today on a resolution condemning human rights violations in North Korea.

The 53-member U.N. Human Rights Commission is scheduled to vote on the European Union-sponsored resolution, which would provide the first U.N. condemnation of North Korea's human rights record, [Agence France-Press](#) reported.

"At a time of seeking to urgently address the nuclear issue, we have concerns that it may be undesirable to publicly provoke North Korea," said South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim Sun-heung. "The U.N. resolution could not help ease the situation if North Korea overreacts to it. Pyongyang could take it as an insult on its sovereignty," Kim added.

Human rights activists and the Grand National Party, the South Korean opposition, criticized the decision.

"The abstention is such an unjust decision, a wrong step to show the government itself gives up its identity as a human rights advocate," the opposition said in a statement (Agence France-Press/Yahoo! News, April 16).

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TAJIKISTAN: IAEA Concerned About Radioactive Waste

The International Atomic Energy Agency is concerned for the security of radioactive waste storage sites in Tajikistan, it was reported today.

"Since 11 September, the idea of there being dirty bombs being made from

radioactive waste is of concern, particularly if the terrorists get hold of them," Gordon Linsley, head of the IAEA's waste safety section, said yesterday.

Tajikistan is the focus of increased concern partly because it is rich in uranium, according to the [Integrated Regional Information Networks](#) report. "We know that Russians were mining uranium here, and that is why Tajikistan is being asked to control its sources," Linsley said.

One issue facing all former Soviet states, including Tajikistan, is a lack of expertise in material security issues, which were mainly handled by Russian officials during the Soviet era, according to Linsley. "They need help in re-educating experts to make sure the sources are managed in a safe way," he said (Integrated Regional Information Networks, April 15).

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