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Quote of the Day:

"There seems to be widespread consensus here that we should not allow ourselves to be set up for failure. ... So we will have a large role in Afghanistan, but the military component is not it. And that suits us extremely well."

-- A U.N. peacekeeping official, expressing satisfaction that the United Nations is not leading the multinational peacekeeping force that is expected to be deployed in Afghanistan this weekend.

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HEALTH

MALARIA: Experiment Gives Hope For Milk-Based Vaccine

Proteins derived from the milk of genetically modified mice have been successful in preventing malaria in monkeys, researchers at the [National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#) said yesterday. If successful in humans, the method could lead to the development of vast quantities of cheap, effective vaccines for the disease, which takes up to 2 million lives every year and infects some 500 million in Africa.

[University of California at San Francisco](#) malaria expert **Philip Rosenthal** said the study is "an important advance" toward a cheap malaria vaccine but leaves many questions unanswered ([Associated Press/Baltimore Sun](#), Dec. 18).

Genetically engineered mice whose DNA was modified to include a protein known to inhibit the malaria parasite's reproduction in the bloodstream were implanted into surrogate mothers and allowed to grow to adulthood. When the mice reached maturity, the females lactated, and their milk contained anti-malaria proteins, which were then refined. The resulting proteins were injected into six Aotus monkeys, while placebo proteins were injected into seven others. After being injected with the proteins, all of the monkeys were given high doses of the malaria parasite, but of the six that were injected with the anti-malaria protein, five did not develop the disease. Of the placebo group, all seven developed the disease.

Scientists have shown that similar technology could be applied to goats. If that experiment is a success, human trials using goat-produced proteins could begin in 2003, study co-author **Anthony Stowers** said ([AP/Philadelphia Inquirer](#), Dec. 18).

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SLEEPING SICKNESS: Cattle Test Offers Promising Solution, Study Shows

Genetic tests on cattle could lead to a test that would help prevent the spread of sleeping sickness, which claims 100,000 lives in Africa every year, [BBC](#) reports.

Scientists from the [University of Edinburgh](#) studying the genetic structure of two sleeping sickness parasites in cattle -- only one of which is transmitted to humans -- discovered a way to differentiate between the two. The [study](#), published Saturday in *The Lancet*, could lead to identification of affected livestock, which could then be treated with drugs to kill the parasite.

Detection of the gene that allows transmission of the parasite to humans "could provide the basis of a simple diagnostic test to enable targeted control of the TB rhodesiense in the domestic livestock reservoir," said **Sue Welburn**, the lead researcher, "thereby reducing the public health burden of sleeping sickness in East Africa."

David Horn, a microbiologist at the [London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#), said the discovery could be significant. "If the team have 100 percent correlation, it sounds at least promising as a diagnostic test," he said. "It seems quite impressive."

Current prevention efforts focus on eliminating tsetse flies, which carry the usually fatal disease. Drug treatment can lead to severe side effects and chemotherapy kills up to 5 percent of those treated (BBC Online, Dec. 16).

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AFRICA: Iron Supplements Improve Child Development, Study Shows

Iron supplements can significantly improve the motor and language development of poor rural African children, a [study](#) published in Saturday's [British Medical Journal](#) shows. The study, conducted by [Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health](#) and the Zanzibar Health Ministry, is the first on iron and early child development in Africa, according to the Bloomberg School.

The yearlong study of children in Tanzania's Pemba Island, where unusually high rates of iron deficiency anemia are found, indicated that younger children benefited most from iron supplements, which improved language development across the board and motor development most significantly in the most anemic children.

"Our results highlight the presence of severely anemic children in malaria-endemic African communities who are not detected by the current health care system and who appear to be at significant developmental risk," said lead author **Rebecca Stoltzfus**. "Nearly one-third of apparently healthy toddlers in this community were severely anemic. Before intervention, children with severe anemia showed distinct delays in both gross motor and language milestones for their age, and daily oral iron syrup helped to correct those deficits."

The researchers also studied the developmental effects of administering the anti-worm drug mebendazole to the children, who are at high risk of the malaria-carrying *plasmodium falciparum* parasite and geohelminths. Children who received the anti-worm drug showed only slightly better development than those who received a placebo. "This could mean that worms don't affect children's development," the Bloomberg School said. "But it may also be true that the developmental assessments used were not sufficiently sensitive, or that mebendazole did not completely treat all the worms" ([Bloomberg School release](#), Dec. 14).

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WOMEN, CHILDREN & POPULATION

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: States Negotiate Changes To Conference Document

YOKOHAMA, Japan -- Government representatives and others gathered here for an international conference on commercial sexual exploitation of children are considering changes to a proposed final conference document, although reports differ over whether the changes under consideration are major or technical.

Official spokesmen at the [Second World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children](#) largely refuse even to acknowledge that a document is under consideration, preferring instead to concentrate on the information- and experience-sharing aspects of the meeting, which opened here yesterday.

Several conference sources have told *UN Wire*, however, that governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and others meeting here are working on a document and that talks are going on over possible changes in the language. Some sources describe the possible changes as purely technical, while others disagree. Those claiming changes are not insignificant refused to provide details on any disputes that may be going on.

A draft of the document prepared before the conference began may provide an indication of how the final document will look. Under the draft, provided to *UN Wire*, the various parties gathered here would affirm promotion and protection of children's rights and interests as their primary interest and welcome various developments since the first such international meeting, held in Stockholm in 1996.

Among the developments cited in the draft are emphasis on children's rights and calls for implementation of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#); increased actions against child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking, including laws with extraterritorial reach; and sustained private sector involvement in increasing child protection.

The draft also specifically lauds the development of standards to protect children from sexual exploitation through such new instruments as the [Rome Statute](#) of the International Criminal Court; last year's [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish](#)

[Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children](#); and this year's [Convention on Cybercrime](#).

The draft also acknowledges that more needs to be done to eliminate child sexual exploitation and expresses concerns at delays in adoption of measures in different parts of the world. It says the participants have gathered for a number of purposes related to commercial sexual exploitation of children, including to reemphasize the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to take measures to address harmful aspects of such new technologies as the Internet.

Sources here say the document, which was reportedly discussed yesterday at a meeting of ministers, will be a consensus document, and a new draft is expected to be prepared by tomorrow (Steve Hirsch, *UN Wire*, Dec. 18).

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RWANDA: UNICEF Plans \$10.9 Million Initiative For Child Rights, Development

UNICEF officials said yesterday that the agency will spend \$10.9 million in Rwanda to promote respect for children's rights and support the country's development efforts, Pan African News Agency reports. In partnership with the **World Food Program** and the Ministry of Health, UNICEF will also work to combat malnutrition, according to PANA.

"The key action in the nutritional intervention is aimed at reducing the level of malnutrition among young children," UNICEF said in a report released from its office in Kigali. According to the report, 29 percent of Rwandan children younger than age 5 are underweight, 43 percent are stunted in growth, 43 percent suffer from chronic malnutrition and 7 percent are wasting.

UNICEF also said nearly one-third of Rwanda's 700,000 children have limited access to quality and equitable education. The agency expressed its intention to support non-formal education in northwest Rwanda.

UNICEF plans to spend \$1.8 million on a vaccination campaign for children under age 5, and its plans for next year include efforts to improve water and sanitation services in the country (PANA, Dec. 18).

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TURKEY: Town Cracks Down On Teen Marriage

Following a recent increase of the legal marriage age for girls in Turkey from 15 to 18 and calls from **UNICEF** for an end to teen-age marriage, the town of Acarlar in western Turkey is cracking down on teen-age marriage by rounding up husbands of teen brides and investigating families for possible exploitation of their daughters, Associated Press reported yesterday. The move comes as the country vies for membership in the **European Union**.

Many girls in Acarlar are married by age 14 and some are married at 10, according to AP. "Anyone, boy or girl, still single by the age of 16 or 18 is considered to be left on the shelf," said Acarlar resident **Burhan Pilar**. "I took my wife at age 15 when she was 13."

Acarlar authorities have in the past two weeks rounded up 40 men -- many of them adolescents themselves -- who have wives age 14 or younger, investigated numerous families, banned wedding ceremonies for underage girls and begun fining parents \$7 for each day their children miss school. School absence is a frequent result of teen-age marriage, and Turkey recently raised the grade level of minimum school attendance from the fifth to the eighth.

"We are willing to change our ways ... We understand the dangers of young marriages," said **Irfan Saka**, whose 17-year-old son, like the other arrested boys, faces a charge of having sex with an underage girl. "But you cannot expect us to cut our traditions away like with a knife" (Suzan Fraser, AP, Dec. 17).

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ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE CHANGE: 2001 2nd-Hottest Year On Record, U.S. Center Says; More

The U.S. [National Climatic Data Center](#) predicted yesterday that this year will go down as the second-hottest on record, with an average world temperature of 57.8 degrees Fahrenheit, nine-tenths of a degree higher than the average of the years 1880-2000. The study was based on 14,000 land and sea measurements.

"This adds evidence to the idea that humans are influencing the climate," said **David Easterling**, the center's chief scientist. "There's no denying the numbers here."

Easterling dismissed claims that strong natural variations are responsible for unusually warm years, saying this year was "a neutral year" with no such variations but still ranks among the warmest ever. The eight hottest years on record -- including 1998, the hottest ever -- have all occurred since 1990 (Seth Borenstein, [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), Dec. 18).

Scientists Say Southern Ocean Needs More Iron To Absorb Carbon Dioxide

The Southern Ocean, which boasts a rich variety of marine plants that help it absorb 25 percent of the climate change-inducing carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, contains less iron than is needed to nourish its single-celled plants, scientists said last week after returning from a climate change research expedition to the region. Some scientists advocate supplementing the ocean's iron to help the ocean absorb carbon dioxide and curb global warming.

Iron is scarce in the ocean's surface water and sea ice, according to chief scientist **Steve Rintoul**, an oceanographer at the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization. Rintoul said the data collected by 70 physicists, biologists and chemists during the trip will take two years to analyze fully but that evidence already shows that a lack of iron is limiting plant growth even as other nutrients continue to be plentiful in the ocean ([Associated Press/Environmental News Network](#), Dec. 14).

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CHINA: Official Disputes Accusation Of Misreported Fish Catches

China today rejected a recent [report](#) in which it was accused of overreporting fishing catches during the past 20 years, masking a decline in global fishing stocks and skewing statistics compiled by the **Food and Agriculture Organization**. China's figures are "basically correct," according to **Yang Jian**, director general of the Chinese Agriculture Ministry's Bureau of Fisheries.

Researchers at the [University of British Columbia](#) published a report Nov. 29 raising serious concerns about fish stocks and world food supplies. The report's authors, **Reg Watson** and **Daniel Pauly**, said China's misreported statistics made global catches appear to be growing by 700 million pounds a year while they were actually falling by 800 million pounds.

Yang questioned the study's method of evaluation. "Fishing in China has its own characteristics, so that foreign scientists' sampling patterns may not fit China," Yang told the official Xinhua News Agency. "For example, people in other countries may not eat jellyfish and crab as regularly as the Chinese, and the output of these two aquatic products account for a considerable portion of our total output."

Yang also contradicted the ministry's statement last month that a policy in effect until two years ago gave local officials promotions based on increases in fishing catches. Yang said fishing is too small a part of China's economy for officials to have any incentive to exaggerate, according to a *China Daily* report ([Associated Press/ABCNews.com](#), Dec. 18).

Although China has said it would like to improve its methods of collecting statistics, which differ from internationally accepted sampling methods, officials said fishing is a profitable and growing business in the country. The number of fishing boats in China has risen by about 231,000 from 49,000 in 1980.

Total Chinese fishing output dropped for the first time last year, by 1.35 percent, and Yang says the country expects a further decline this year. Some 130,000 fishing boats were banned from operating during a two- to three-month ban on commercial fishing, and China plans to ban 30,000 boats from operating over the next five years (Xinhua News Agency, Dec. 18).

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CONSERVATION: Intel Co-Founder Gives Conservation International \$261M

[Intel](#) co-founder **Gordon Moore** and his wife, **Betty Moore**, have pledged \$261 million over 10 years, via their family foundation, to [Conservation International](#). The Moores intend to direct the money toward establishing preserves and scientific field stations worldwide and outbidding loggers who would pay to clear-cut rainforest, Knight Ridder News Service reports.

The donation amounts to four times the [Sierra Club](#)'s annual budget, and conservationists were delighted with the size and timeliness of the donation. "This is a splendid example," said Harvard biologist **Edward Wilson**. "I hope that others will see the environment and the preservation of nature as the new frontier of philanthropy. The returns-to-scale of giving right now are very high."

"This will help maintain the stability of natural processes, which has incalculable value," said **Steve McCormick**, national president of the [Nature Conservancy](#). "You can't do these things on small scale. You can't do it on the margins. It's got to be big."

Conservation International hopes to leverage the Moores' gift into \$6 billion in new funding gathered from private sources, national governments and U.N. agencies to eventually protect 400 million acres of tropical forests, Chairman and CEO **Peter Seligmann** said. Gordon Moore said Conservation International's plan to target specific areas rich in biodiversity caught his attention as a realistic one worth pursuing (Paul Rogers, Knight Ridder, Dec. 18).

The San Jose *Mercury News* in an [editorial](#) last week called the Moores' gift "both generous and astute" and noted that 95 percent of Conservation International's employees are native to the country in which they work (San Jose *Mercury News*, Dec. 11).

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TIGERS: Census In Eastern India Finds Population Stable; More

Authorities conducting a tiger census in the eastern Indian Sunderbans reserve announced this week that the number of tigers has not decreased since the last census in 1999.

India has the largest tiger population in the world, but the number of tigers in the country has fallen from 4,300 in 1990 to 3,500. Conservationists estimate that up to 300 tigers are dying annually due to development projects and poaching, [Reuters](#) reports.

The weeklong census involved 300 people organized into 23 teams who scoured the wetland area in an effort to gauge the total tiger population in the region. Although further analysis is needed, West Bengal chief conservator of forests **Atanu Kumar Raha** said that the number of tigers appears to be similar to that of

1999, when 254 tigers were listed. According to Raha, two tigers were killed in the area due to poaching this year. "It is difficult to stop poaching by villagers living close by unless their economic conditions improve," he said. "But we are taking steps to prevent poaching" (Sumali Moitra, Reuters/Planet Ark, Dec. 17).

Tigers May Benefit From India-Bangladesh Biodiversity Project

Bengal tigers may benefit from cooperation between India and Bangladesh on a biodiversity project in the Sunderbans mangrove forest, [BBC](#) reports. The project involves studying tiger behavior to discover why some attack humans. More than 30 people have been killed by tigers over the last two years in India's Sunderbans.

Sunderbans Tiger Project Director in India **Pradip Vyas** said the tigers' behavior could be affected by harmful effluents entering the Sunderbans from surrounding areas and polluting the water.

UNESCO and the [U.N. Foundation](#) will contribute \$125,000 for preparation of the project, Vyas said. April is the deadline for a report on the feasibility of the project, which will include educating the local population to minimize tiger poaching. The project will offer employment opportunities for the local population, which totals more than 3 million people, most of whom rely on fishing for their livelihood (Ayanjit Sen, BBC Online, Dec. 17).

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Better World Fund, a sister organization of the United Nations Foundation, is the sole sponsor of UN Wire, which is published independently by [National Journal Group, Inc.](#)*

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[ECONOMICS, TRADE & DEVELOPMENT](#)

IMF: World Growth Forecast Lowered Sharply

The **International Monetary Fund** downgraded its global growth forecast in an [update](#) today to its October *World Economic Outlook* report. The IMF predicted that, in light of the economic aftermath of Sept. 11, the global economy will grow next year at this year's growth rate, 2.4 percent, rather than at 2.6 percent as the fund predicted two months ago.

That figure is down from 4.7 percent last year and would be the world economy's smallest growth rate since 1993. "The tragic events of Sept. 11 exacerbated an already very difficult situation in the global economy," the IMF said. "As a result, prospects for global recovery have been set back significantly."

The IMF also said that next year will witness the most severe simultaneous slowdown of all regions of the world in at least 20 years and that there is a risk that growth could be even lower than 2.4 percent. "While there are good reasons to expect a recovery to get under way in 2002, the outlook remains highly uncertain, and there is a significant possibility of a worse outcome," the IMF warned (Martin

Crutsinger, [Associated Press](#)/San Jose *Mercury News*, Dec. 18).

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POVERTY: U.K. Chancellor Calls For New Marshall Plan For Developing States

U.K. Chancellor of the Exchequer **Gordon Brown** lobbied U.S. Treasury Secretary **Paul O'Neill** yesterday in an effort to get the United States to increase spending on foreign aid to support what Brown hopes will become a new Marshall Plan for poor nations, the [New York Times](#) reports.

Brown said yesterday that he believes he will be able to convince the U.S. Congress and the Bush administration to step up anti-poverty efforts in light of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, which demonstrated a link between poverty in the developing world and direct physical threats to people in industrialized countries.

"Today, what happens to the poorest person in the poorest country can affect the richest person in the richest country," Brown said. Development statistics that highlight the growing gap between the rich and poor have strengthened the movement to increase overall assistance, the *Times* reports.

As a percentage of gross domestic product, the United States spends much less on development aid than most other industrialized nations. Brown is calling for an increase in U.S. spending of \$50 billion annually and said several **World Bank** and **International Monetary Fund** projects provide a prototype for the sort of well-designed initiatives the Bush administration could support (Joseph Kahn, *New York Times*, Dec. 18).

Brown repeated the U.N. goal of decreasing world poverty by half by 2015. He first proposed an overall increase in world aid last month in Ottawa during meetings of the IMF and World Bank ([Associated Press](#)/CNN.com, Dec. 18).

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AFRICA: UNECA Head Calls For Reverse To Decline Of Aid To Continent

U.N. Economic Commission for Africa Executive Secretary **K.Y. Amoako** yesterday called for a new model in relations between African countries and international donors to reverse the trend of declining aid to the continent.

Amoako delivered a [lecture](#) at 10 Downing St., part of U.K. Prime Minister **Tony Blair**'s Millennium Lectures series, to an audience including the prime minister and other high-ranking officials. The UNECA chief decried a decline in development aid to Africa -- aid has declined from \$19 billion yearly a decade ago to \$12 billion per year today, and the continent's share of global aid has dropped from 37 percent to 27 percent, he said -- even as the quality of African development is improving. "Shouldn't better performance be better recognized?" he asked.

Amoako's proposed new paradigm would feature greater African leadership in policies and programs, a move toward mutual accountability to replace donor-imposed conditions, guaranteed resource inflows and a special role for those African countries that look to be the forerunners in the continent's economic development. Amoako also called for action to address African countries' indebtedness at next year's [International Conference on Financing for Development](#) ([UNECA release](#), Dec. 17).

Norway Gives UNECA \$1.6 Million For Consensus Building

The [Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation](#) announced last week that it is giving UNECA \$1.6 million for consensus building on the continent to aid development efforts. Amoako and Norwegian Ambassador to Ethiopia **Osken Oskarsson** signed the agreement (Xinhua News Agency, Dec. 13).

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EAST TIMOR: Japan, Portugal Announce Aid Packages

Japan and Portugal have announced plans to provide aid to East Timor, with pledges of \$19 and \$90 million respectively, less than a week after the [conclusion](#) of a donor's conference for the U.N.-administered territory.

Japan announced today it will extend \$19.27 million in emergency aid to East Timor through the **U.N. Development Program** "to rehabilitate and improve the water supply, roads, port facilities and irrigation facilities." The aid is part of the \$100 million Japan pledged in 1999, according to the Foreign Ministry. "The infrastructure, which was damaged by the turmoil in 1999, is still not in good working order and is disrupting the lives of the local people," the ministry said (Agence France-Presse, Dec. 18).

Following a meeting Monday between East Timorese Foreign Minister **Jose Ramos Horta** and Portuguese Foreign Minister **Jaime Gama**, Portugal announced it will give \$90.15 million in aid to East Timor in 2002 to support civil projects and fund the deployment of Portuguese military and security forces on the island.

Ramos Horta also announced that one day after East Timor's declaration of independence in May, "bilateral relations" will begin between the two countries. East Timor will have observer status at the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#), he added ([LUSA Agencia de Noticias](#), Dec. 17).

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HUMANITARIAN AID & FOOD SECURITY

MIGRANTS: Riot Hits Australian Camp As U.N. Marks International Day

As the United Nations today marks International Migrants Day, [BBC Online](#) reports

asylum seekers at the remote Woomera detention center in the state of South Australia have rioted in the worst incident to occur at the camp in 18 months.

Mainly Central Asian and Middle Eastern protestors chanting "visa, visa, visa" caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage after they set fires in the camp last night, BBC Online reports. "Once fires were under way, detainees congregated and threw rocks, chairs and other objects at detention staff in an effort to stop staff and local fire brigade officers from putting out the first [fire]," a government spokesman said.

Australian Immigration Minister **Daryl Williams** said the rioters are mistaken if they think their protest will lead to visas. According to Refugee Council of Australia head **Margaret Piper**, however, problems with the 946 asylum seekers have been exacerbated by the harsh conditions under which they live -- conditions she compared to being "on the moon" (BBC Online, Dec. 18).

U.N. Marks International Migrants Day

In a [statement](#) to mark the international day, U.N. Secretary General **Kofi Annan** called for all U.N. member states to ratify or accede to the 1990 [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#). Annan also called for recognition of the "huge but often unseen contribution" migrants make around the world.

"In our globalizing world, growing migration is a fact of life," Annan said. "More than 150 million migrants -- 2 percent of the world's population -- live and work in a country other than that of their birth or citizenship. ... Migrants not only help enrich the fabric of their host countries, many of them are also unsung heroes of their home countries and families. ... Yet too often, their contribution has been ignored."

"The fate of many migrants lies in stark contrast to the aspirations reflected in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), human rights norms and labor conventions," Annan said, adding that migrants often work under harsh conditions and face discrimination and marginalization. "Unauthorized migration exposes migrants to shocking levels of abuse and exploitation. The scourge of trafficking, in particular, has placed many in horrific situations -- especially women and children" (U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights release, Dec. 12).

The [International Organization for Migration](#) issued a statement today urging "governments and all concerned parties not to close their minds and their doors to migrants following the tragic events of Sept. 11."

According to IOM Director General **Brunson McKinley**, Sept. 11 has not lessened the importance of migration issues, but it has created new opportunities. "The need to address migration challenges in a comprehensive and systematic manner is now receiving the attention it deserves," he said. "This should translate into renewed attention to implementing measures to ensure successful integration of migrants and to create or strengthen legal channels of migration alongside efforts to curtail illegal migration, smuggling and trafficking" ([IOM release](#), Dec. 18).

IOM Convenes Regional Seminar On Migration In West Africa

The IOM and the **International Policy Program** are holding a regional seminar on migration in West Africa today through Friday in Dakar, Senegal. Senior officials from Mauritania and the 15 [Economic Community of West African States](#) countries are attending the event. Observers from South Africa, European countries and the United States will also be in attendance. ECOWAS, the [West African Economic and Monetary Union](#), **UNICEF**, the **International Labor Organization**, the U.N. **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**, the **Joint U.N. Program on HIV/AIDS** and the [Organization of African Unity](#) are also participating ([IOM release](#), Dec. 14).

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FAO: Cereal Stocks To Decline With Production Below Needs, Agency Says

The **Food and Agriculture Organization** warns in its latest [Food Outlook Report](#), released yesterday, that despite a slightly larger global cereal output of 1.8 billion tons, production this year will be less than the anticipated global need, leading to a significant loss of cereal stocks.

The FAO also warns that food emergencies persist in many countries and that, if forecasts for cereal trade, food aid and prices for this year hold true, regions vulnerable to food deficit could face larger cereal import bills than last year.

The world cereal trade for this year will remain unchanged from the previous season's estimated volume of 233 million tons, and increased demand for wheat and rice will be offset by a reduction in the coarse grain trade, according to the report. Wheat prices have fallen below last year's levels, large corn inventories and abundant supplies of feed wheat continue to weigh on feed grain prices, and new rice crop supplies on the market have kept international prices under pressure in the past three months, the FAO says. Total cereal food aid this year could increase by 1 million tons, to 9.5 million tons, after a sharp drop in the previous season.

Global milk output for this year is forecast at 585 million tons, up 2 percent from last year. Global sugar demand this year is forecast to reach 130.7 million tons, up by about 2 million tons from last year and overtaking annual production -- now forecast at 129.4 million tons -- for the first time in seven years. Despite early indications of a production deficit next year, the FAO says adequate global stocks are expected to ensure continued market stability throughout the year ([FAO release](#), Dec. 17).

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HUMAN RIGHTS, JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY

NORTHERN IRELAND: U.N. Rapporteur Decries Slaying Of Murder Witness

U.N. Human Rights Commission special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers **Param Cumaraswamy** last week expressed concern about the murder in Northern Ireland of **William Stobie**, a key witness in the 1989 murder of lawyer **Patrick Finucane**.

"It now appears that those responsible for the murder of William Stobie may have connections with ... Patrick Finucane's murder and the motive for the present murder may be to prevent him from assisting any eventual independent inquiry," Cumaraswamy said.

Cumaraswamy also called for an inquiry to determine why the Royal Ulster Constabulary did not act on Stobie's information that Finucane was to be killed. Stobie reportedly informed the constabulary twice -- the very day Finucane was killed -- that the murder was imminent ([U.N. release](#), Dec. 18).

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PEACEKEEPING & SECURITY

INTERVENTION: Canadian Commission Backs Actions To Protect Civilians

Protecting civilians, while it is primarily the duty of individual states, must be undertaken by the world community when a state cannot or will not protect its people, even if that means meddling in countries' internal affairs, a Canadian-sponsored 12-member panel of global affairs experts says.

In a report being released today at the United Nations, the [International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty](#) says humanitarian military intervention to "prevent, react and rebuild" should be attempted only as a last resort, to avert "large-scale" massacres or ethnic cleansing, and should be only as forceful as needed to alleviate suffering.

The commission urges the U.N. General Assembly to pass a resolution declaring that the concept of sovereignty includes protecting human beings and calls on the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council not to block widely supported humanitarian interventions unless "vital state interests" are involved.

"What is at stake here is not making the world safe for big powers or trampling over the sovereign rights of small ones, but delivering practical protection for ordinary people at risk of their lives," says the commission, which was set up last year by former Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister **Lloyd Axworthy**. "In some circumstances, action must be taken by the broader community of states to support populations that are in jeopardy or under serious threat."

In response to controversial Western intervention during the past decade in Bosnia, Somalia and Kosovo and the world community's failure to avert genocide in Rwanda, the commission was asked to devise ground rules for international action. Despite strong opposition to intervention by major powers in developing countries, Europe and North America have faced growing pressure to act to prevent mass

murder and starvation among populations whose governments have failed to protect them (Paul Knox, [Globe and Mail](#), Dec. 18).

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AFGHANISTAN: Blair Announces U.K. Force Leadership; More

The United Kingdom will lead a U.N.-backed multinational peacekeeping force in Afghanistan and provide 1,500 soldiers, Prime Minister **Tony Blair** announced yesterday. The work of a U.K. advance team now in Afghanistan, which has met with interim leader **Hamid Karzai** and others and is now wrapping up its mission, will help determine the size and composition of the force, Blair said.

"The situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. The new political process remains in its infancy," Blair told Parliament yesterday. "There is therefore an urgent need to ensure that, as the war is being won, we play our part in securing the peace. We are the nation best placed to give that leadership. That is why we have been asked to do it."

Blair said he expects the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution to approve the force in time for deployment in Kabul Saturday, when the country's interim administration is to take power (Jane Wardell, [Associated Press/Boston Globe](#), Dec. 18). [Frankfurter Allgemeine](#), though, reports that German-U.K. disagreement over how the force's work will be coordinated with that of U.S. troops waging a war on the ground is delaying both the Security Council vote and German parliamentary approval. The newspaper says the Security Council is not likely to vote today and that, according to some sources, the vote could come as late as Friday ([Frankfurter Allgemeine](#), Dec. 18).

U.K. Tory party leader **Iain Duncan Smith** expressed "deep misgivings" about London's contribution to the force, citing the danger of peacekeepers becoming a target as U.S. military action continues in the country. Blair promised the force will be "properly protected at all times" (Wardell, [AP/Boston Globe](#)). U.K. Defense Secretary **Geoff Hoon** said the troops' role will go "beyond peacekeeping" and that they will have "robust rules of engagement to ensure their own safety."

Following [disagreement](#) between Afghan leaders and prospective peacekeeping countries over the force's size, Afghan leaders have agreed to a force of 5,000 soldiers, U.K. defense officials in Kabul said yesterday (Agence France-Presse, Dec. 18). Blair named Canada, Australia, Argentina, Jordan and New Zealand as countries that could contribute troops to the force. Australian Defense Minister **Robert Hill** said today that Australia is considering sending troops but has not yet made a decision ([Australian Associated Press/Sydney Morning Herald](#), Dec. 18).

U.S. envoy to Afghanistan **James Dobbins** said yesterday that he expects the "lead elements" of the force to arrive by Saturday ([AFP/Yahoo! News](#), Dec. 18). Karzai said the troops will "probably" be deployed by the time he takes office Saturday. "I can't give you a date but I believe they will," he said ([Reuters/South](#)

China Morning Post, Dec. 18).

Speaking in Dublin, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights **Mary Robinson** stressed the need for strong Afghan support for the U.N.-backed force. Robinson welcomed the force, citing the need for security to help get food aid to "a desperate population" (Marie O'Halloran, [Irish Times](#), Dec. 18).

The [Christian Science Monitor](#) reports that the uneven record of U.N. peacekeeping missions in the last decade is one reason the United Nations will not lead a "blue-helmet" force in Afghanistan, preferring instead to authorize a multinational force. All parties agree the world body should not lead the new peacekeeping force, the newspaper reports, adding that the multinational force will mark a break with the trend of the 1990s, when the United Nations was the world's first option for peacekeeping missions.

The newspaper reports that the results of a review of U.N. peacekeeping led last year by current U.N. Afghanistan envoy **Lakhdar Brahimi** are partly behind the United Nations' new approach. Brahimi's panel, commissioned by Secretary General **Kofi Annan**, said U.N. troops should not be used as "peacebuilders" or deployed with insufficient financial and political backing or without the ability to adequately defend themselves or act against those who work against their mission.

"There seems to be widespread consensus here that we should not allow ourselves to be set up for failure," one U.N. peacekeeping official said. "So we will have a large role in Afghanistan, but the military component is not it. And that suits us extremely well" (Michael Jordan, [Christian Science Monitor](#), Dec. 18).

Karzai Calls For Unity

In Rome for meetings with Italian officials and former Afghan King **Zahir Shah**, who is to lead the convening of a traditional grand council in the next step in Afghanistan's political future, Karzai said today that the country's various armed factions need to band together and serve under a single Defense Ministry (Julia Hancock, [Reuters](#)/Yahoo! News, Dec. 18).

Having reopened its embassy in Kabul yesterday after a 13-year closure, the United States is now set to name **Zalmay Khalilzad**, a native Afghan who is now a special assistant to U.S. President **George W. Bush** and senior director of the U.S. National Security Council, as ambassador to Afghanistan, the [Los Angeles Times](#) reports. Khalilzad would replace Dobbins, who presided over yesterday's reopening (Robin Wright, [Los Angeles Times](#), Dec. 18).

Incoming Afghan interim Women's Affairs Minister **Sima Samar** yesterday challenged U.S. Secretary of State **Colin Powell** to place women in high-ranking positions at the newly reopened embassy (Norman Kempster, [Los Angeles Times](#), Dec. 18).

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WESTERN SAHARA: Nobel Peace Laureates Call For Referendum

Six Nobel Peace laureates led by East Timorese Foreign Minister **Jose Ramos Horta** have sent a [letter](#) to the United Nations and Secretary General **Kofi Annan**, who won this year's prize, appealing for follow through on a U.N.-brokered plan to hold a referendum in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara.

A "Western Sahara referendum is the only path to peace," the laureates said in the letter, released by the **Norwegian Support Group for Western Sahara**. "The credibility of the United Nations is at stake. ... An abandonment of the referendum plan in Western Sahara would constitute a betrayal of the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination."

The laureates also voiced concern about "illegal" contracts awarded by Morocco to French and U.S. oil companies in the former Spanish colony.

Under the terms of a 1991 U.N. plan, the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco in a referendum.

In addition to Ramos Horta, Guatemala's **Rigoberta Menchu**, Costa Rica's **Oscar Arias**, Argentina's **Adolfo Perez Esquivel**, Northern Ireland's **Mairead Maguire** and **Cora Weiss** of the [International Peace Bureau](#) signed the appeal. Following last week's meeting of 30 Nobel peace laureates in Oslo, the Norwegian support group is trying to enlist other laureates, such as Bishop **Desmond Tutu** of South Africa and U.S. anti-landmine campaigner **Jody Williams**, [Reuters](#) reports.

Despite the United Nations' stated commitment to the referendum, Annan in June [endorsed](#) a plan proposed by former U.S. Secretary of State **James Baker** that would postpone the referendum and make Western Sahara an autonomous part of Morocco (Reuters/CNN.com, Dec. 17).

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ANGOLA: Government Agrees To U.N. Contacts With Savimbi; More

Angola announced yesterday that it is open to attempts by the United Nations to renew peace negotiations with **Jonas Savimbi**, the rebel leader of **UNITA**, which has been fighting the government since the country's independence in 1975 ([Angola Press Agency](#), Dec. 18, *UN Wire* translation).

Agence France-Presse reports that following a visit last week to Angola, U.N. Undersecretary General for African Affairs **Ibrahim Gambari** said the United Nations could seek to re-establish contacts with UNITA in an attempt to advance implementation of the Lusaka peace accord. Angola cut all contacts with UNITA after open warfare resumed in 1998, when the rebel group failed to recognize an election it lost.

In Angola's 26-year civil war, 500,000 people have died, 100,000 have been

maimed and 4 million have been displaced (AFP, Dec. 18).

Angola Calls At SADC Meeting For UNITA To Be Branded Terrorist Group

Angola, which is hosting a two-day meeting of the **Southern African Development Community** in the Angolan capital, Luanda, has urged the SADC to label UNITA a "terrorist" group ([Reuters/CNN.com](#), Dec. 17).

"Terrorism is a global problem and, because of that, deserves a global response," said Angolan Interior Minister **Fernando da Piedade**. "In Angola and southern Africa, as in the whole continent of Africa, rebellions and armed insurrections are linked to terrorist actions and to a generalized policy of terrorism" ([Angola Press Agency](#) II, Dec. 18, *UN Wire* translation).

"This is a contentious issue. It is a hot potato," one SADC delegate said. Reuters reports that several states are opposed to the designation, fearing it would destroy any prospects for ending the country's civil war. Reuters reports that Angola was encouraged by the inclusion of three East African rebel groups on a U.S. "terrorist exclusion list" ([Reuters/CNN.com](#)).

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