DPI

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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Mr. Nambiar)

DPI Weekly Press Review

With Iran continuing to attract keen media interest around the world, this week's Press Review examines the latest trends in the coverage, particularly the reaction to your statement.

Your appeal for an immediate end to the violence received predominantly favourable news coverage, including in Western outlets.

In this context it is interesting to note that although Iran's critical response to your statement was widely reported, it ended up actually contributing to a largely positive portrayal of your stance as a leader who spoke out strongly for freedom and human rights and who stood up to authority.

Your warning about the impact of the global economic turmoil on the world's poor was a key thread in news reporting on your statement to the General Assembly's high-level meeting on the financial crisis. As the Press Review points out, however, the meeting in general drew mixed reviews, with Western outlets tending to dismiss the event as a waste of time.

At the same time, Western leaders themselves came under fire from an array of experts whose op-ed pieces criticized the leading industrialized nations for their "detachment" from the UN as a unique multilateral organization. In that context, it appears your messages on the financial crisis – in part highlighted in your letter to the G-8 summit – could find a receptive audience ahead of next month's summit in Italy.

The final segment of the review looks at the coverage of two climate change-related events – your joint press conference with Mayor Bloomberg and the launch of the "Hopenhagen" campaign – both of which helped to draw media attention to your stance on this vital issue.

Thank you.

Ahmad Fawzi
Officer-in-Charge
26 June 2009

cc: Mr. Akasaka
Mr. Kim
Mr. Orr
Mr. Meyer
Ms. Montas

PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 26 June 2009

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

IRAN

UN response

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Iran's reaction to the Secretary-General statement was another key thread in the coverage. "Ban. . called on Iran to respect the 'will of the people' after the disputed presidential poll, but Tehran accused him of 'meddling,'" said the **BBC** in a typical report. Many Western outlets quoted an Iranian foreign ministry spokesman as saying that the Secretary-General had damaged his credibility in the eyes of "independent countries" by "ignorantly following some domineering powers which have a long record of uncalled-for interference in other countries' internal affairs and colonization."

While those comments triggered a spate of headlines about Iran's criticism of the UN leader, outlets worldwide tended to report the exchange in the context of Iranian efforts to blame the crisis on foreign interference. As a result, the Iranian authorities were often described as "lashing out," "turning on" or "taking aim" at the Secretary-General for his strong statement on the need to stop arrests and the use of force against the protestors.(**The New York Times**, **al-Jazeera**, **AP**, **The Brisbane Times**, **Ha'aretz**, **The Times** [UK], among others). In that sense, the media's approach showed certain similarities to the coverage of Iranian allegations against President Obama. An impression one got from much of the reporting was of a Secretary-General who was aligned with the forces of freedom and the voice of youth in Iran, and who stood up for human rights while speaking truth to power.

In limited commentary on the UN's role, a negative note was struck by Claudia Rosett whose piece in **Forbes.com** criticized the Organization for what she called "a thundering silence." She described Ban's approach as "lukewarm," adding: "Surely top UN officials such as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon should be leading the charge for liberty and justice, with the strongest possible criticism and measures against the Iranian regime?" Rosett also accused UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay of paying too much attention to "the small print" and ignoring the bigger picture. Countering that charge, the UN-focused blog **UN Dispatch** praised Pillay's comments as "probably as tough a statement as can be expected from the UN Secretariat or its agencies," and said it trod the difficult line between "standing up for human rights – which is the right and proper role of the UN – and meddling in the electoral politics of a member state."

Towards the end of the week, Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi's call for the UN to send an envoy to Iran was reported by **Reuters** and **Deutsche Welle**, with most pick-up in European outlets.

Friends and neighbours mull implications

There continued to be many regional variations in analysis of the week's events. Russian outlets generally took a low-profile stance but did not necessarily back the government's official acceptance of

the election result. A lengthy analysis on **politkom.ru** concluded that "it does not look conclusive that the results were rigged." For his part, anchor Konstantin Semin on Russia's state-owned **Rossiya TV** said that the US Administration had not abandoned its programme to destabilize Iran, adding that if "the orange-green revolution" failed, the use of force against Iran would be "extremely likely." But a piece in **Vedemosti** questioned the position of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and said that the regime could not last long through the use of "brute force." In a similar vein, analyst Georgiy Mirskiy told **Novaya Gazeta** that "it will gradually become clear that the Islamic regime is not so solid and monolithic and no longer meets the requirements of the modern age," adding that even if the protests ended, a damaging "crack" would remain in the government.

In Turkey, the press was divided over the situation, despite the fact that Turkish leaders sent a congratulatory message to President Ahmadinejad. (That move drew criticism from **The Wall Street Journal**, which saw as part of Turkish moves away from the West and towards Hamas and the Iranian regime). Commentators in a range of papers, including **Radikal**, **Milliyet** and **Vatan**, believed the Iranian government had lost its popular legitimacy, and there was a widespread view that electoral fraud had been committed. It was noteworthy that in general, the media did not appear to see Turkey as a major player in the crisis. Sami Kohen, writing in **Milliyet**, said that while the turmoil was an internal Iranian matter, "this should not prevent Turkey from stating what it thinks about what is happening in its neighbourhood." But in the main, debate centred on whether the protests represented a serious threat to the ruling regime, with mixed conclusions. "Thinking that a kind of 'revolution' like those in Ukraine and Georgia will happen seems fanciful," said Hadi Uluengin in **Hurriyet**; but Ibrahim Karagul in **Yeni Safak** believed "the situation is very serious, even if it is not a counter-revolution."

Many commentators in the Arabic press believed that the regime had been fatally wounded, which they saw as a threat to peace elsewhere. Egypt's **al-Ahram** weekly feared "the specre of a bloodbath and chaos," adding that "the resultant turmoil could quickly spill over Iran's borders and engulf the entire region." An editorial in Saudi Arabia's **al-Watan** described the situation as "worrisome," adding that "the stability of Iran does not only matter to the political system in Iran, it matters to all neighbouring countries and the region in general."

Sometimes there was a hint of schadenfreude in commentary, as in Tariq al-Hamid's analysis for the pan-Arab **al-Sharq al-Awsat**: "The international community, which used to say that Iran was a democratic state and was capable of solving regional issues, realized that it cannot even resolve its internal problems." But writing in Beirut's **Daily Star**, Rami Khouri expressed a different view. "Arab regimes and leaders have worked themselves into a lose-lose situation whereby they would be unhappy if the Iranian regime stayed in power, and unhappy if it were removed by popular challenge," Khouri wrote. He believed Arab views reflected the "self-inflicted political incoherence and mediocrity that are hallmarks of the modern Arab world."

Meanwhile, US outlets continued to see the situation primarily in terms of Iran-US relations, and President Obama's second statement on the violence received generally positive coverage. It was "an act of realism," said **The Washington Post**, adding that "the huge stakes of this struggle and the likelihood that it will persist for weeks or months require a fundamental change in US posture." "Obama sharpens response on Iran," said the headline in **USA Today**, while **The Wall Street Journal** welcomed what it hoped was "the beginning of a significant shift in the White House's broader Middle East strategy."

Trita Parsi, quoted by **The New York Times**, was among several commentators who believed Washington would have no choice but to scale back its diplomatic ambitions for relations with Iran

But other voices cautioned that in the long run, diplomacy was the only tool to deal with the Iranian government. Germany's **Der Tagesspiegel** quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler as saying that there was "no realistic alternative to negotiating further with Tehran and to persuading it of the benefits of cooperative behaviour." An editorial in Islamabad's **The Post** concurred: "The opportunity to engage Iran in a dialogue should not be lost… the US and other Western countries should try to look at the issue in an objective manner, rather than exploit the crisis to make political gains."

FINANCIAL CRISIS

Even before it opened, there were mixed reviews of the General Assembly's High Level Meeting on the Financial Crisis, with Western outlets in particular often reducing their news coverage to brief pieces or focusing on why senior Western leaders were not attending. Some typical headlines included "UN Finance Summit a Bust" (**CBS**) and "High hopes for UN Financial Summit appear dashed" (**AP**). "Numerous development agencies have expressed doubt that the UN conference will achieve anything concrete," reported Germany's **Deutsche Welle**. As the meeting drew to a close, **Reuters** said the final document was expected to call for "increasing cooperation" between the UN and global financial bodies, without specifying what this would entail, or setting out a formal follow-up process.

The Secretary-General's comments to the meeting were picked up by major wires and were reported in an array of outlets, from **The Indian Express** and Nigeria's **The Sun** to **VOA**, **al-Jazeera** and China's **CCTV**. "An Appeal on Behalf of the Poor," was the headline chosen for a short news piece by **AP**, published by **The New York Times**. Outlets focused on the Secretary-General's warning that the impact of the global economic crisis could last for years with millions of families pushed into poverty. **CBS** said Ban's message was clear: "Developing countries are the victims of the financial crisis and they need money."

In a notable trend, many Western outlets ran pieces by activists and experts who were highly critical of Western leaders. Such authors included Nick Dearden of the Jubilee Debt Campaign in **The Guardian** (UK) and Michel Egger of Alliance Sud in Switzerland's **24 Heures**, who accused the West of attempting to marginalize the UN's role in the financial crisis. Under the headline "Rich nations shut out the UN," Dearden said G20 leaders had made clear in April that they believed the UN's role should be to "monitor the impact of the crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable."

In an op-ed in Spain's **El País**, Joaquin Estefania said the non-attendance of G20 leaders showed their "detachment" from "the most representative multilateral institution." Jean-Paul Piérot, writing in France's **L'Humanité**, likewise observed that the meeting was taking place amid "total political and media indifference," adding that when he appeared before the General Assembly last year, President Sarkozy had ignored the debate on the MDG's "despite the desperate efforts of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon." Professor Ross Buckley, writing in Australia's **Canberra Times**, praised the UN Commission's proposals and said the current financial system resembled "a playground without rules in which the biggest bullies win." Buckley said that the G20 was acting only in its own interests, and that although the US would not support reform, "the rest of the world must."

Elsewhere, many outlets appeared to be sympathetic to the aims of the meeting. A typical piece in Panama's **America Panama** commented that "rich, industrialized countries are attempting to underplay the legitimate role of the UN in the ongoing process of global economic system reform." China's **Xinhua** reported the government's backing for a "bigger UN role in global fighting against financial countries." New York-based Chinese media cited remarks by China's deputy permanent representative Liu Zhenmin that the Chinese government "attaches great importance to the conference." Russia's

Rossijskaya Gazeta ran a piece by deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Yakovenko, in which he described the meeting as "a landmark event and called for the launch -- "on a UN platform" -- of a comprehensive reconstruction of the global economic system.

But outlets including Austria's **Der Standard** described preparations for the conference as "chaotic" and reported that most world leaders were staying away. **Reuters** quoted diplomats as saying the meeting was a "joke," a "tragedy" and a "waste of time," and said they had accused Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of hijacking the meeting in order to put capitalism on trial. **CBS** said "almost no one showed up," and was among several outlets to speculate that world leaders may have been put off by D'Escoto's background as former Sandinista foreign minister and senior advisor to President Ortega.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Two events over the past week helped to draw additional media attention to the issue of climate change and the UN's efforts to promote a viral international accord on it.

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In the other development, the launch of the campaign by ad agencies in support of the UN to "Seal the Deal" in "Hopenhagen" also attracted some attention from major media outlets (**CNN, UK's The Guardian**), as well as from several outlets specializing in public relations and marketing (**Mediapost.com, PRNewswire**). The Secretary-General was widely quoted in coverage, particularly his description of climate change as "one of the epic challenges facing this and future generations," as well as his call for "a global movement that mobilizes real change" and his statement that the campaign "is about global action for a global climate treaty and a better future for humankind."

The campaign drew some praise for its "unusual" and "eye-catching" slogan and its use of "open-source" campaigning -- the use of a website to serve as the campaign hub, where visitors can contribute their thoughts and feelings on climate change, which will be integrated into new content. **CNN** said the initiative "is aiming to generate active interest and persuade the public into believing they have a say in the negotiations between world leaders that will ratify a new global climate treaty." It quoted the director of the International Advertising Association who called the coalition of media companies involved "unprecedented." A business blog on **The Wall Street Journal** website said the UN was employing "Twitter-like messages" to pressure world leaders to adopt a meaningful climate treaty. But the conservative **The New American**, which publishes skeptical articles on climate change, had a negative take on the campaign, labeling what it called the "ubiquitous 'hope and change'" theme "totally meaningless" as a result of its "overuse and disregard of economic, scientific and social realities."

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