



BACKGROUND PRESS RELEASE

Countries invited to sign, ratify or accede to multilateral treaties during the Treaty Event 23-25 and 29 September and 1 October 2008

Annual Event to Focus on Treaties Associated with the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Year of Planet Earth, the International Year of Sanitation and the International Polar Year

In a continuing effort to bolster international law and promote its implementation, the United Nations will organize the tenth annual treaty event at United Nations Headquarters on 23-25 and 29 September and 1 October.

This year's event, entitled "Universal Participation and Implementation – Dignity and Justice for All of Us", echoes the theme of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his letter of invitation to Member States, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that the treaty event provides "the opportunity to reach the goal of universal participation in a number of treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" in an effort to work towards "dignity and justice for all of us."

Among the human rights treaties highlighted in this year's event are the Disabilities Convention,¹ which entered into force in May this year – one of the fastest ever human rights treaties to do so – and which currently has 35 State Parties.² The Convention sets global standards on human rights for the 10 per cent of the world's population experiencing some form of disability who continue to face discriminatory practices in their daily lives.

Another recently adopted treaty, the Convention on Enforced Disappearances,³ includes an absolute prohibition on the practice of enforced disappearance, outlaws practices such as secret detention and requires countries to maintain detailed records on all detainees. The Convention currently has 73 signatories, but only four State Parties.

The Optional Protocol to the Torture Convention,⁴ which establishes a system of independent monitoring of detention locations in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, entered into force in mid-2006 and has 35 State Parties.

The recently adopted Convention on Cluster Munitions, which prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of these weapons, is not part of this year's Treaty Event; however, it will open for signature in December this year. The Convention is a major step forward for the protection of civilians, requiring that States clear areas contaminated with unexploded cluster munitions and provide assistance to victims.

¹ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006

² The participation figures of States in the treaties mentioned in this press release are as of 3 September 2008. For daily updates, please see the website of the UN Treaty Section, Office of Legal Affairs, at <http://treaties.un.org>

³ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, 2006

⁴ Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 2002



In line with 2008 being the International Year of Planet Earth, the International Year of Sanitation and the International Polar Year, several highlighted treaties reinforce the relationship between protecting the environment and advancing development goals.

The 1997 Watercourses Convention,⁵ which addresses the use and management of rivers, lakes and other bodies of water that cross borders or are shared by States, has enormous potential to address water mismanagement and overuse and promote the sustainable management and protection of these precious resources, as well as prevent future conflicts over shared water supplies. Yet the Convention currently has less than half the parties required to enter into force. The current status of law governing international watercourses means that 60 per cent of transboundary basins are without agreements governing their proper use and management.

While the majority of the 50 treaties highlighted in this year's Treaty Event are in the area of human rights (17) and protection of the environment (15), treaties covering trade and transit, disarmament, privileges and immunities and the safety of UN and associated personnel are also included.

During the Treaty Event, the more than 500 treaties deposited with the Secretary-General are all open for either signature, ratification, acceptance, approval or accession in accordance with their respective provisions.

Background

In September 2000, the United Nations invited world leaders attending the landmark Millennium Summit to take advantage of their presence at United Nations Headquarters to sign a wide range of major international treaties. That year, a successful side event called "An Invitation to Universal Participation" offered a platform for Governments to showcase their commitment to strengthening the rule of law at home and in the global arena. Since then, the treaty event has been held annually, usually coinciding with the General Debate of the General Assembly in September. Nine treaty events have been held since 2000, which have resulted in more than 1350 new signatures, ratifications, acceptances, accessions and other treaty-related actions.

⁵ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, 1997