Peace & Justice Update

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DOUBLE ISSUE!

Featured Stories

Africa:
Guinea:
Election goes to run-off as violence looms

Asia:
Philippines:
New President of the Philippines sworn into office

Latin America: Cuba:
Government pledges to release political prisoners; dissident ends hunger strike
The countries for the *Peace & Justice Update*
have been chosen as areas of focus at the institute.

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*The Peace & Justice Updates are written by the Summer 2010 interns at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego.*

*The interns are Elizabeth Dean (University of California, Berkeley), Gavin Koenig (University of San Diego), Sarah Montgomery (University of California, San Diego), Maryam Rokhideh (University of California, San Diego), and Paige Wopschall (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo).*
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CARIBBEAN

Cuba:


Government pledges to release political prisoners; dissident ends hunger strike
The Cuban government has pledged to release 52 political prisoners, in what would be the largest release of dissidents since 1998. The decision was announced after talks in Havana between President Raul Castro, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the archbishop of Havana, and the Spanish foreign minister, Miguel Ángel Moratinos. The release is believed to be a move to reduce criticism of the government by the international community and to improve United States-Cuban relations.

The prisoners scheduled to be released were detained during a crackdown on dissidents in 2003 when the government arrested 75 activists and journalists. The 52 prisoners that the government has promised to release are the only remaining dissidents jailed in the crackdown, as the other 23 have either finished their sentences or been released on grounds of poor health.

The Spanish foreign minister has agreed to accept all 52 prisoners and their families into Spain. Five prisoners are scheduled to be released within a few days and the other 47 will be released in the coming months.

The Cuban government has been under increased pressure to release political dissidents since the death of political prisoner Orlando Tamayo Zapata due to a hunger strike in February. His death prompted another prominent dissident, Guillermo Fariñas, to begin a hunger strike in protest of the continued detention of political prisoners who are in poor health. Fariñas ended his 140 day hunger strike on July 8 after hearing the news of the upcoming prisoner release.
According to the Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, an illegal but tolerated non-governmental group in Cuba, there are 167 political prisoners in Cuba today. The Cuban government denies that there are any political prisoners in the country, claiming they are mercenaries sent by the United States to undermine the political system. Many Cubans are unaware of the actions of the dissidents and how many are imprisoned because state-run Cuban media refrains from reporting on such events and Cubans are given little access to foreign media.

The currently incarcerated political prisoners remain as evidence of a government that does not tolerate dissent. U.S. and Cuban relations have been stagnant over these and other human rights issues since the U.S.-enforced embargo in 1960, shortly after Fidel Castro took power. While President Obama has made more progress towards changing relations between Cuba and the United States than many of his predecessors, by removing restrictions on U.S. family visits and, no significant policy reforms have taken place. U.S. legislators remain sharply divided as to whether a change in foreign policy towards Cuba should take place unless Cuba becomes more democratic.

(New York Times, July 7; BBC, July 7, 8, 2010)

Reform of U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba was approved by the House Agriculture Committee

The United States House Agriculture Committee voted to end a decades-long ban against U.S. citizens traveling to Cuba and to ease the restrictions on selling agricultural commodities to the island. After a three hour mark-up session June 30 the committee approved the Travel Restrictions Reform and Export Enhancement Act on a 25-to-20 vote. Although the bill must pass the foreign affairs and financial services committees before it is considered by the full House, supporters of the bill consider the agriculture committee’s decision to be a sign of change to come and an important step towards Congressional approval.

Proponents of the bill argue that reducing restrictions on the sale of agricultural commodities would give a huge boost to American farmers by opening new markets and expanding trade. The measure is supported by several business and agricultural groups for its economic benefits, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Farmers Union. Supporters also argue that a positive image of democracy would be spread by allowing Americans to travel to Cuba. Opponents concede that export restrictions should be reevaluated, but disagree with allowing U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba because they believe that American money spent in Cuba will only serve to support and to validate the current government.

Although many amendments to the bill that would eliminate or delay the travel ban reversal were proposed, the committee rejected each proposal and the travel ban reversal remains part of the approved bill. Votes for the amendments were largely divided along party lines, with Democrats favoring immediate implementation of the travel ban reversal. Only four Republicans voted in favor of the final bill.
The U.S. has enforced a wide-ranging embargo since 1960, shortly after Fidel Castro took power. While President Obama has made more progress towards changing relations between Cuba and the United States than many of his predecessors by removing restrictions on U.S. family visits and remittances, no significant policy reforms have taken place.

(New York Times, June 30; Latin America Working Group, July 2, 2010)

Haiti:

President elections announced for November, 2010
President René Préval announced that presidential elections would be held November 28, 2010. The elections, originally scheduled to take place in February 2010, were put on hold in the devastating aftermath of the January 12 earthquake that killed 200,000 people.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon welcomed Préval’s move to schedule presidential elections. In a statement issued June 30 the Secretary General encouraged the Haitian government, the Provisional Electoral Council, political parties, and the Haitian people to “ensure that the upcoming elections are transparent and credible and serve to reinforce Haiti’s democratic institutions as the country strives to recover from the worst humanitarian crisis in its history.” In his latest report to the UN Security council, the Secretary-General asserted that elections were a vital part of rebuilding Haiti and were central to the government’s vision for a new state.

Préval has been criticized in recent weeks for his disorganized and ineffective approach to reconstruction. A report published by the United States suggests that aid distribution remains the most daunting problem facing Haiti today and explains that the reduced capacity of the Haitian government to coordinate and utilize assistance is responsible. While Haiti’s government was often considered inefficient and corrupt before the earthquake, the disaster toppled government buildings and killed nearly 25 percent of civil personnel, amplifying the government’s weakness. Donors and the international community are now faced with a choice between channeling aid through nongovernmental organizations or through the government, which requires investment in infrastructure and capacity building to be effective.

The report also warns that holding free and fair elections in November will present significant challenges to security and stability and will require leadership that many believe the Haitian government has not demonstrated. The government will have to recreate voter registration lists that were lost during the earthquake; distribute identification cards to those who lost them during the earthquake and to those now of age to vote; determine where and how those displaced by the earthquake will cast their ballots; and register political parties. The report speculates that given Haiti’s history of political turmoil and violence and the current dissatisfaction with the government, organized criminal activity could threaten the integrity of the upcoming elections.

Haiti suffered decades of entrenched poverty, violence, and insecurity throughout the 29 years of the brutal dictatorships of Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude or “Baby Doc.” The
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election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990 was met with a military overthrow. Although a U.S. military intervention in 1994 restored constitutional law, the country remained plagued with violence, corruption, human rights atrocities, and extreme poverty. Since Aristide was forced from the country again in a 2004 rebellion, the country’s fragile democracy has been bolstered by UN stabilization forces.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. The earthquake that occurred caused widespread destruction in a country with few financial resources to respond to the disaster.

(U.N. News Center, June 30, 2010, United States Institute of Peace, June 22, 2010)

LATIN AMERICA

Colombia:

FARC guerrillas killed in military attack as drug-related violence escalates
Thirteen guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed forces of Colombia (FARC) including two FARC leaders were killed in an aerial attack by the Colombian military July 6, 2010. The left wing insurgents were attempting to reclaim a strategic mountain area near the Caribbean coast when the military operation took place. Colombian intelligence sources claim that the rebels were sent by the FARC leader Ivan Marquez, who is believed to be hiding in Venezuela. President Alvaro Uribe explained that the attack was “a message” to Marquez.

Uribe has been praised for his hard-line approach against insurgents. Uribe’s quintessential “Democratic Security Policy” was forceful military response to combating the drug cartels and insurgent groups. While Uribe’s presidency was marked by drops in violence, it was also characterized by scandal, corruption, and social problems. Many criticize that Uribe does not take the paramilitary groups responsible for violence as seriously as insurgent groups and others point to frequent extrajudicial killings, in which the military kills ordinary civilians, dresses their bodies as guerrillas, and then claims to have more success against the insurgents due to the elevated body count, as evidence of corruption. Juan Santos, the president elect, has committed to continuing Uribe’s policies.

Violence in the country occurred earlier in the week as well. On July 2 at least seven persons were killed and nine wounded in a night club shooting outside of Medellín. Armed men entered the night club and began firing machine guns indiscriminately and then escaped the scene on motorcycles. The violence is believed to be caused by conflict between rival cocaine-trafficking gangs. Medellín has seen a surge in drug related crime in recent months. Uribe said that the attacks were an indication that he, the ministry of defense, the armed forces, and the justice system need to be doing more to combat drug-related violence.

Internal violence and armed conflict have existed in the country for the past four decades. The FARC and the ELN are considered to be the most powerful leftist-rebel groups and are mirrored by right wing paramilitary groups. The conflict is largely fueled by the cocaine industry.
suffers up to 20,000 violent deaths per year, human rights violations, and internal displacement as a result of the conflict.

(BBC, July 2, July 6, 2010)

Colombia:

First sentencing of ex-paramilitary chiefs under the Justice and Peace Law takes place
On June 29, 2010, two ex-paramilitary chiefs were convicted and sentenced to eight years in jail under Colombia’s Justice and Peace Law. Estuardo Cobos Téllez, alias “Diego Vecino,” and Uber Banquez, alias “Jancho Dique,” confessed to crimes of massacre, kidnapping, and forced displacement. Banquez and Téllez are each required to pay a fine of $385,000 for restitution to families of the victims.

Because Banquez and Téllez both surrendered under the Justice and Peace Law, they were only sentenced to eight years in jail, the maximum sentence dictated by the law. By submitting to the peace process and confessing their crimes, Banquez and Téllez were able to avoid far harsher sentences for the crimes they committed, which would normally receive sentences of 40 years in prison.

Banquez and Téllez were convicted of three violent acts in the Bolivar State along the Caribbean coast: the displacement of the entire village of Mampujan at gunpoint, the massacre of 11 peasants in the village of San Cayetano, and the kidnapping of nine people in Isla Mucura. Because they laid down arms in 2005, Banquez and Téllez will be up for release in three years.

July marks the five year anniversary of Colombia’s Justice and Peace Law. This is the first sentence of paramilitary chiefs that the law has achieved since its inception in 2005. The trial is widely viewed as a pilot trial that will set a precedent for paramilitary trials to come.

The Justice and Peace Law was established in 2005 to assist in the disarmament of more than 32,000 paramilitaries. So far only 4,100 have cooperated with the Justice and Peace Law and the legal process. More than 8,000 serious crimes have been confessed but only 55 paramilitaries are in the legal process before judges, and only one is ready for sentencing. Meanwhile more than 80,000 victims await the trials of the alleged perpetrators. The trials are thought to be taking longer than expected because far more serious crimes were confessed than had been initially anticipated, requiring additional legal personnel to assist in the process.

Many judges and prosecutors believe that the Justice and Peace process needs a head commissioner to organize and to oversee progress. For many, the first sentencing on the law’s five year anniversary throws into sharp relief the inefficiencies and injustices of the law. The eight year sentence has been criticized as a mere slap on the wrist for individuals who have committed serious human right atrocities.

Despite the disarmament of 32,000 paramilitaries in negotiations between 2002 and 2006, paramilitaries continue to terrorize rural populations and profit from drug trafficking, extorting
businesses, and seizing land from poor peasants. These far right illegal armed groups were initially formed in the 1980s by wealthy land owners as a form of “self-defense” against leftist rebels; however, they have evolved into autonomous criminal gangs. Paramilitary groups and leftist rebels continue to cause internal conflict within Colombia and are responsible for 20,000 violent deaths per year, countless human rights violations, and internal displacement.

(AP, June 29; El Tiempo, June 27; International Center for Transitional Justice, July, 2010)

Guatemala:

Fugitive brothers involved in Rosenberg scandal arrested
Brothers Estuardo and Francisco Valdés Paiz, the alleged masterminds behind the 2009 murder of lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, were delivered to the Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala June 28, 2010. A warrant for the arrest of the Valdés Paiz brothers was issued December 10, 2009. They are suspected to have hired the gunmen responsible for Rosenberg’s murder.

Both Estuardo and Francisco were said to have turned themselves in voluntarily at 8:15 Monday morning to the CICIG. They were then taken by Carlos Castresana, the former head of the CICIG, to the Courts Tower. The brothers were presented to Judge Veronica Galicia, the judge who oversees the criminal proceedings surrounding Rosenberg’s death. Upon delivering the Valdés Paiz brothers, Castresana said, “I am turning over Valdés Paiz, let justice to its work.” Castresana denied the existence of an agreement between the CICIG and the Valdes Paiz brothers, asserting that the brothers had surrendered voluntarily.

Rosenberg’s case has been shrouded in controversy. The lawyer appeared in a video accusing President Alvaro Colom and his wife, Sandra Torres, of ordering his murder. On May 10, 2009, three days after the video was made, Rosenberg was shot and killed. The event was a political crisis for Colom, and sparked protests and reform movements that demanded he step down. However the investigators concluded that Rosenberg had in fact ordered his own murder. He was said to have hired the Valdés Paiz brothers to order an assassination but that they were unaware that the target was himself. The brothers were identified by 11 suspects in the shooting. The investigation cleared Colom of any involvement.

Rosenberg’s motives were thought to include emotional distress caused by the murder of one of his clients, Khalil Musa, and his client’s daughter, Marjorie Musa, with whom Rosenberg had a romantic relationship. Their deaths remain unresolved, and Rosenberg believed Colom to be behind his clients’ murders. In Rosenberg’s video, he accused Colom, his wife, and Colom’s private secretary, Gustavo Alejos, of involvement in the murders and of using a state owned bank for money laundering.

Trials for the Rosenberg murder began Monday, June 28, 2010. Witnesses, including Rosenberg’s friends, colleagues, and his son confirmed the CICIG conclusions surrounding Rosenberg’s death. Many recounted the depression that Rosenberg felt before his death, how upsetting the deaths of
Khalil and Marjorie Musa had been for him, and how he had ensured that his personal and professional life was in order before he was killed.

Judge Galicia ruled July 6 that the Valdes Paiz brothers would face criminal prosecution for complicity in the homicide of Rosenberg, not for murder. Although the Special Prosecutor of the CICIG has blamed them as the masterminds behind Rosenberg’s death, Galicia said that because the brothers were intermediaries between Rosenberg and the assassins their actions did not legally classify as murder. The brothers remain detained at Matamoros headquarters. (Prensa Libre, El Periodico, June 29, 30, July 7; Time, January 14, 2010)

Guatemala:
UN names a new commissioner of the CICIG

Incoming CICIG commissioner Francisco Dall’Anese
Source: Al Día

The United Nations named Costa Rica’s Attorney General Francisco Dall’Anese as the new head of the Commission to Combat Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The former head of the CICIG, Carlos Castresana resigned June 8, protesting the appointment of an attorney general with links to
organized crime and accusing President Alvaro Colom of failing to fulfill his pledge to reform Guatemala’s justice system. During Castresana’s time as head of the CICIG, the commission convicted dozens of officials involved in organized crime.

UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon described Dall’Anese as “a staunch opponent of narco-trafficking and organized crime” with experience in anti-corruption investigations. Since becoming Costa Rica’s attorney general in 2003, Dall’Anese has started campaigns against narco-trafficking and organized crime, led investigations against corruption, and introduced legislation against organized crime.

Guatemala has a long history of impunity with few cases ever coming to trial and few convictions being made. The CICIG provides technical advice to state institutions in the investigation and prosecution of crimes committed by armed groups and clandestine security bodies. The commission also investigates a limited number of sensitive and difficult high profile cases, and attempts to dismantle illegal groups. Ban Ki Moon praised Castresana’s work with the CICIG, saying “The achievements of the CICIG during this time have been praised by Guatemalan authorities, civil society, and the international community alike.” CICIG’s mandate, ordered by the United Nations in 2006, will expire September, 2011 unless an extension is agreed upon.

(BBC, July 1, UN News Center, June 30, 2010)

SOUTH ASIA

Nepal:

Political deadlock continues despite prime minister’s resignation
The resignation of the Communist Party of the Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) leader Madhav Kumar Nepal (Link: link: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/05/23/madhav-kumar-nepal-commun_n_207072.html) has failed to solve political deadlock between three of the major political parties: the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), the Nepali Congress (NC), and the CPN-UML. Any progress on the new constitution and the conclusion of the peace process has consequently continued to be delayed.

Amid intense Maoist pressure, the prime minister of Nepal resigned in order for the Maoists, the majority party in Parliament, to regain leadership through the Prime Minister position. Former Prime Minister Nepal stated that he resigned hoping to end the political stalemate in the country. Following a meeting between the NC and the CPN-UML, the two parties stated July 6th that they could not accept Maoist leadership until the Maoists begin to implement past agreements over the peace process. This includes returning properties seized during the Maoist insurgency, disbanding the paramilitary arm of the Young Communist League, and integrating Maoist combatants. This echoes earlier statements made by the NC that a government can only be formed after the Maoists develop into a civilian party.

It is also possible further disagreements will occur over who will assume the now vacant prime ministerial position. Within the Maoist party, former Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal
(alias Prachanda) and current Maoist vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai. is the most likely candidate, but there are signs that Maoist vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai enjoys strong support in the party. The Nepali Congress has additionally expressed its interest in having an NC member fill the post, claiming that it is now its turn following the Maoist and now UML prime ministerial periods.

The Prime Minister’s resignation and the current political deadlock are the result of the three-point deal made on May 28th to extend the Constituent Assembly for another year, in order to draft a new constitution and avoid political crisis. The Prime Minister’s resignation was part of the agreement. The NC and the CPN-UML are now asserting that since the first two points have been fulfilled, it is time for the Maoists to uphold their end of the deal by carrying out past agreements regarding the peace process.

The Maoists waged a ten-year armed insurgency against the state that came to an end in 2006. Parliament was elected in 2008 with a two-year mandate to complete the peace process following the conflict and to draft a new national constitution. Disagreements between the three major political parties resulted in neither task being accomplished nor the Constituent Assembly being extended. Former Prime Minister Nepal assumed the position in May 2009 following the resignation of Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda over the firing of the army chief.

Further meetings between the parties will be held in an attempt to reach agreement.

Former Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal
Tribune India
(AP, July 1, July 6; Himalayan Times, July 6; Indian Express, July 5; News on All India Radio, July 6; República, July 4, 2010)
Pakistan:

Nuclear weapons deal between China and Pakistan alarms India

Over the past few weeks China has established a bid to construct two nuclear power reactors in Pakistan. The 46-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group or NSG, of which China is a member, bans atomic trade with most countries that have not joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Beijing has claimed that building new reactors at Pakistan’s Chashma site would not violate its NSG Commitments because it had built two reactors at the location before joining the organization. Pakistan’s nuclear work should adhere to NSG amid International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rules, Indian Officials added. Islamabad responded by stating that its nuclear trade with Beijing is strictly peaceful in nature and under IAEA monitoring.

India surpassed this ban when it received the right in 2008 to import nuclear materials and technology from NSG member states, even though New Delhi had not signed the Nonproliferation Treaty. The U.S., backed by a number of other major powers, pushed through the special exemption at the NSG allowing it to sell civil nuclear technology to India. Pakistan has only a minimal chance of winning a similar exemption. Mark Fitzpatrick, the chief proliferation expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, said he remained of the view that the U.S.-India deal set a dangerous precedent.

A further complication lies ahead if both India and Pakistan were to gain exemptions. Israel might then come looking for a deal on civil nuclear technology, as they are also outside the NPT and believed to hold a significant nuclear arsenal.

The NSG’s annual meeting took place last week in Christchurch, New Zealand and provided the first opportunity for other governments to explore what China is proposing. Going into the meeting, China’s logic seemed to be that if the U.S. could get a deal for its friend India, then China should be able to do the same thing for its ally Pakistan.

As of July 6th, the Pakistani government has finalized a deal with China to build the two new nuclear power plants in the country. Pakistani foreign minister Mehmood Qureshi stated that the Pakistan government “has no objection on inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency” because of the transparent manner Pakistan is going about their business. Pakistan is facing a looming energy crisis that is creating rolling blackouts in parts of the country. Some regions experience electricity outages of up to 18 hours a day and it is not uncommon for riots to erupt during these prolonged blackouts.

The Obama administration has chosen to abstain from any condemnation of the Chinese plan to sell nuclear reactors to Pakistan. The White House has worked hard to relieve tense relations with China after declaring the country a currency manipulator and selling arms to Taiwan against the wishes of Beijing. Furthermore, the ongoing war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan necessitates good US relations with Pakistan to maintain supply routes into Afghanistan and assure cooperation in facilitating operations against Taliban havens in Pakistan’s Northwest Province.
Foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang stated that Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari’s visit to China starting July 6 will focus on good relations between Beijing and Islamabad. Both President Zardari and Chinese President Hu Jintao met July 7 to discuss “deepening cooperation and friendship between the two countries” and subsequently six agreements were signed, including one on economic and technology cooperation. The details were not made public.  
(BBC, June 20; GSN, June 22; BBC, June 25; Asia Times, July 2; UPI, July 2, 2010)

Sri Lanka:

**Conflict caused by UN commission set to investigate human rights abuses in Sri Lanka**
In June, UN Security General Ban Ki-Moon announced that a three-person panel would look into human rights abuses in Sri Lanka that occurred at the end of the civil war. Ban stated that the panel would advise Sri Lanka on how to deal with alleged perpetrators of abuses through recommendations but would not initiate a full investigation.

The creation of the UN panel is a response to 7,000 civilian deaths in the war, which ended on May 20, 2009. Both the army and the Tamil Tiger rebels have been considered potential culprits. The UN Panel was set up after the UN faced international pressure for an independent probe into allegations that Tamil civilians were killed by government troops and that surrendering rebels were executed. However, Sri Lanka has been far from compliant. The Government has refused to process visas for the UN panel, who they view as “outsiders”. Marzuki Darusman, former Indonesian Attorney-General and the head of the three-member panel told BBC “everybody loses out if we cannot go to Sri Lanka, it will make it harder for the truth to be unearthed.”

On Thursday, June 8th, The Un Secretary-General ban Ki-Moon recalled the top U.N. official in Colombo, following three days of Sri Lankan protests against the U.N. war crimes panel. The announcement came hours after Sri lankan cabinet minister Weerawansa (pictured below), said he would begin a hunger strike outside of the United nations Office to protest the world’s body investigation of alleged war crimes during the civil war. Minister Weerawansa leads the ultranationalist National Freedom Front, an ally of President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government. The minister's fast and protests appear to have been given the "green light" from the highest levels of the government said Jehan Perera, the head of Colombo's National Peace Council.

Russia and China have also decided to back Sri Lanka’s rejection of the UN panel. Both have come out in support of the government and have expressed the belief that the government can handle its own problems. The Sri Lankan Government has created a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission to probe any violation of human rights during the battles but the international community as a whole remains skeptical.

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission will be led by eight members, appointed by President Mahinda Rajapaska, and will investigate events that have occurred from February 2002 to May 2009. The President informed the cabinet that in order to accomplish the promotion and
protection of human rights, it would become necessary to set in motion a mechanism which will provide a historic bridge between the past of a society characterized by inflicted strife and a future society founded on the continued recognition of democracy and peaceful co-existence. The European Union has decided to withdraw Sri Lanka’s preferential trade access after it failed to improve its human rights record before July 1. The concessions will be stopped August 15 on a temporary basis. High tariffs will apply to imports worth about $1.56 billion annually. External Affairs Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris believes that “Sri Lankan entrepreneurs can overcome this situation through their creativity” and that the market will bounce back.

The EU trade arrangement gives 16 poor nations preferential access to the European market in return for the following strict commitments on a variety of social and rights issues. The EU has suspended Sri Lanka’s benefits until it relaxes some of the provisions of its draconian Prevention of Terrorism Law. This law has been in force since 1971, due to the country’s “state of emergency.” The emergency laws grant state authorities sweeping powers of detention and permit the use of secret prisons, a practice that encourages disappearances, torture and death in custody, and other human rights abuses.

(BBC, June 24; AFP, June 25; The Hindu, July 2; BBC, July 5; Amnesty International, July 6, 2010)

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Philippines:

New President of the Philippines sworn into office
Benigno S. “Noynoy” Aquino III took office as the Philippines’ 15th president June 30. The inauguration, at the Quirino Grandstand by Manila Bay, drew a crowd of about half a million people. In his inaugural speech Aquino stated, “Here, on this day, ends the reign of a government that is indifferent to the complaints of the people… there can be no reconciliation without justice.” Aquino expressed his goal of listening to ordinary Filipinos and working for their welfare. “The suffering of the people will end,” he stated. Over the past two decades, the economy has grown on an average of 3.7 percent per year. In the face of this low economic growth, Aquino is promising to create more jobs and to establish an environment for increased foreign investment. Other challenges that the new president faces include the budget deficit, regional violence between clans, corruption, and the country’s human rights record. Although Aquino failed to mention the problem of land distribution in his speech, it is expected that he will also tackle this issue during his presidency.

Twenty-six cabinet secretaries were also sworn into office during the inauguration. Some of the cabinet members had originally worked under Aquino’s predecessor, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Aquino’s reputation revolves around his family’s dynasty. His legacy of hope is due to his parents, two Filipino democratic icons. The assassination of his father, opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983, sparked the nonviolent “People Power” movement that toppled the dictator Ferdinand Marcos and brought Noynoy’s mother, Corazón Aquino, to the presidency in 1986. However
Noynoy’s tenure in the Senate was characterized by observers as undistinguished. It was not until his mother’s death in 2009 that Aquino’s popularity soared, which helped him to rise to presidency. He won the elections in May with his campaign of fighting corruption and modernizing the judicial system. He has pledged to investigate corruption allegations against former president Arroyo through the use of “Truth Commissions”. Arroyo denies corruption claims against her.

The Philippines has been struggling against corruption, poverty, and armed conflicts for decades. Islamic and communist rebels on the island of Mindanao have continuously been fighting with armed forces. As the new president, Aquino has vowed to pursue peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in the south. However, his administration has yet to address details. Another concern involves an estimated 112 private armies, which are maintained by powerful local warlords. The violence is taking place within a context of severe poverty and inequality. Currently, 10 percent of the population works abroad, while it is estimated that one in four people live on $1 a day.

(BBC, June 30; New York Times, July 5, 2010)

SUDAN & UGANDA

Sudan:

Islamist opposition leader freed
Hassan al-Turabi, Islamist opposition leader, was released by the Sudanese government June 30. Arrested in May, Turabi spent a month and a half in detention due to allegations of having connections to the Darfur rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). His party’s newspaper also closed during Turabi’s period of imprisonment. The Popular Congress Party (PCP) was set up by Turabi after a political falling out with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in 1999 when Bashir dissolved the parliament. Since 2001, Turabi has continuously been detained for his opposition toward the government. Hassan al-Turabi has been accused of trying to destabilize the country through his links to rebel groups in the Darfur region—charges which he denies.
In April 2010, President Bashir won Sudan’s first multi-party elections in 24 years. The elections were criticized by the international community, as well as by various opposition parties, including Turabi’s PCP. Turabi accused Bashir of widespread vote-rigging and intimidation. He told the BBC’s Network Africa Program June 30, “We have to fight for democracy and the rule of law.” Turabi was also detained for two months in 2009 after demanding that Bashir face criminal charges from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. The ICC sent out an arrest warrant for al-Bashir in 2009. He denies the charges against him for various war crimes, including genocide in Darfur.

According to the UN, about 300,000 people have died in Darfur from disease, violence, and displacement since the conflict began in 2003. The Sudanese government states that these numbers are an exaggeration. Most of the fighting has been between the JEM and Sudan’s Army. The JEM has pulled out of peace talks with the Sudanese government in the past, accusing the government of acting in “bad faith”.

(BBC, July 6; Reuters July 5, 2010)

Hassan al-Turabi was once a political ally to President Omar al-Bashir, until their falling out in 1999. (Source: BBC)

Uganda:

Accused perpetrator in Rwandan genocide arrested
A Rwandan pastor, indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on counts of genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, was arrested in Uganda June 30th. Jean-Bosco Uwinkindi was handed over to Interpol by the Ugandan authorities and then transferred to the ICTR in Tanzania to stand trial.

Uwinkindi had been living in the neighboring state of Congo. He entered into Uganda June 27 allegedly to buy land and settle down under the alias Jean Insitu. The ICTR had been tracking Uwinkindi previous to his crossing into Uganda and tribunal authorities informed Ugandan police after Uwinkindi entered the country. He was arrested several days later.
Unwinkindi has been accused of leading Hutus to kill Tutsis and offering refuge to Tutsi women and children in the Pentecostal Church in Kigali, in which he was pastor, only to order their executions. Approximately 2,000 corpses were found near his church after he fled in July 1994. An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in three months in 1994 during the Rwandan genocide.

The U.S. State Department had been offering a $5 million reward for information leading to Unwinkindi’s capture. Previous to his arrest, he was among 11 suspects still wanted by the ICTR for the genocide that occurred 16 years ago; but he is now the second Rwandan genocide suspect to be arrested in Uganda in the past year. (AFP, July 5; AP, July 3; New Vision, July 1; VOA, July 2, 2010)

Uganda:

Rebel group kills 16 in Congo
A Ugandan rebel group killed 16 people in an attack on the village of Mutwanga in eastern Congo, approximately 30 miles from the Ugandan border. The Ugandan military has been put on heightened alert and are “closely monitoring the rebel group’s activities” following the attack. The army has put 15,000 reservists on standby in case of an attempt by the rebel group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), to enter Uganda.

The ADF attack comes following a Congolese army offensive to drive the rebels out of Congo. The rebels were supposedly targeting Edwardo Nyamwisi, the brother of Congo Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi, in the attack. Nyamwisi escaped unhurt.

The rebel group appeared in 1995 in western Uganda claiming to fight against the marginalization of Muslims in Uganda. The ADF became known for carrying out bombings in the capital city of Kampala and a number of massacres and atrocities against civilians through the late 1990s. The group totaled up to 3,000 foot soldiers at one point. That number is thought to have been reduced to near a hundred after a Ugandan government offensive was carried out against the rebel group in 2004. The ADF took refuge in Congo following the government operation and has largely remained dormant since this time. (Eurasia Review, June 30; New Vision, June 28; VOA, June 30, 2010)

WEST AFRICA

Côte d’Ivoire:

In an effort to strengthen the capacity to consolidate stability in Côte d’Ivoire, the UN Security Council has extended the term of its mission until the end of this year. UNOCI will comprise a maximum of 7,392 authorized military personnel.
The Council unanimously adopted a resolution giving UNOCI and the French forces the mandate to monitor armed groups, protect civilians, monitor the arms embargo, promote the peace process, protect human rights, and support humanitarian assistance. The mission was also mandated to help in the organization of free and fair elections, which have been repeatedly delayed.

UNOCI was tasked to continue contributing to the implementation of the peace process by supporting the disarmament, demobilization, and storage of weapons and the reintegration of former combatants. The mission will also support the redeployment of the Ivorian state administration and justice throughout the country.

UNOCI was established in 2004 by the Council to facilitate the peace process in the West African nation, which became split by civil war in 2002 into a rebel-held north and government-controlled south. The mission has been providing logistical and technical assistance for the preparations for the country's presidential elections, which were supposed to have been held as far back as 2005, but have been repeatedly postponed.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has nearly completed election-related tasks and voter identification. About 5.3 million Ivoirians have been confirmed as voters, but since the end of 2009, the main political forces in Côte d'Ivoire have refused to cooperate on the final preparations for the elections. Political tensions began to mount after voter registration was suspended due to violence and President Laurent Gbagbo dissolved government and the IEC in February.

A new government and electoral commission have been established since then, but the Ivorian electoral process remains stalled due to differences on how to address the issue of fraud and resume the interrupted appeals process on the provisional voters list. Participants in a series of meetings aimed at fixing a date for the often-postponed elections said that in view of the peaceful atmosphere at the meetings, a positive resolution of the Ivorian political problem would soon be achieved. (Afrol News, June 29; Jeune Afrique; PANA Press, July 3; UN News Services, June 30, 2010).

Guinea:

Election goes to run-off as violence looms
Guinea’s Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) extended the deadline to announce provisional results of the June 27th elections. Guineans went to the polls Sunday to elect a new civilian president for the first time since independence 52 years ago.

Former prime minister, Cellou Dalein Diallo, and a veteran opposition campaigner, Alpha Condé, are to face off July 18 when Guinea’s presidential election goes to a second round. Cellou Dalein Diallo, an economist by training, won 39.72 percent of the vote in the first round, according to the electoral commission. He is a member of the Fulani ethnic group and has strongholds over middle-Guinea and the capital, Conakry. Alpha Condé, a third-time candidate who has opposed all three heads of state since independence, won 20.67 percent. He is a member of the Malinké ethnic group and has a stronghold in Upper Guinea. The voter turnout was 77 percent with 3.3 million people voting and 24 candidates contended for the leadership position.
The political director of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Abdel Fatau-Musah, has called for calm following heightened tensions in Guinea after the electoral commission extended the deadline to announce provisional the results. Despite relief that the voting process was peaceful, the threat of violence has loomed in the aftermath of the elections. The majority of candidates have also claimed widespread fraud in the election process.

“What is compounding the issue is that all the major candidates, who feel that they must be the ones leading, are becoming jittery and their supporters are jittery. Their leaders are also insinuating that the delay being caused is an excuse to defraud the electoral process. So, there is a lot of tension in the streets,” Fatau-Musah said.

Under Guinea’s constitution, the electoral body was required to announce provisional results of last Sunday’s election within 72 hours, which expired late Wednesday. In a statement Wednesday, some of the political parties alleged widespread fraud, including ballot box stuffing in the capital, Conakry, as well as other parts of the country. However, some international poll observers said they found no evidence of widespread or systematic fraud during Sunday’s vote.

After years of authoritarian military rule and human rights abuses since independence in 1958, Guinea hopes to restore democracy and fair multiparty elections. Independent Guinea has known only two elected leaders and one military head of state. During the reign of all of Guinea’s heads of states the country has experienced widespread violence, killings, and exactions and corruption. After all these killings at the hands of state security forces, many argue this country needs a truth and reconciliation process.

(BBC, Radio France Internationale, July 3; Voice of America News, June 30, 2010)

Liberia:

Government grants temporary amnesty to domestic debtors
President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has issued Executive Order No.26, granting a 9-month amnesty to domestic debtors throughout Liberia. The amnesty is strictly on government collection of penalties and interest relation to arrears of tax payment. The amnesty waives between 30 and 100 percent of all interest and fines accrued on domestic tax payment as a result of delinquent payments. It requests debtors to pay the actual taxes between July 2010 and March 31, 2011.

The primary objective of this order is to encourage noncompliant taxpayers to pay their tax arrears by providing a limited time amnesty period whereby assessed penalties and interest shall be reduced or extinguished. The Executive Order stated that the Government of Liberia is aware of significant tax and fee payment arrears from individuals and businesses as a result of unpaid Income Taxes, Goods and Service Tax, Real Estate Tax, and Annual Vehicle and Business Registration Fees. Deputy Information Minister for Public Affairs Jerolinmek Piah stated in a news conference yesterday that the order was the government’s own way of helping the people to pay their taxes to government, not worrying about the accumulated interest. “This will help to generate revenue for government to enable government deliver to the people,” the Deputy Minister said.
Taxes covered under the amnesty include outstanding assessed penalties and interest due in relation to Income Taxes including Personal Income Tax, Corporate Income Tax, Rental Income Tax and all Withholding covered under PIT/CIT/Real Estate, Goods Tax and Service Tax, Failure to File and Real Estate Taxes calculated by BIR as of June 30, 2010.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund declared Liberia a country that has reached the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) completion point, with a debt of $4.9 billion.

Liberia continues to rebuild in its post-conflict environment. Liberia was embroiled in a 14-year civil war that bred eight different warring factions. Along with thousands of deaths and displacements, massive human rights abuses were rampant. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL), and civil society groups contributed to bringing the factions face-to-face and the peace table. (The Informer, July 2, 2010).

Liberia:

Supermodel Naomi Campbell called to give evidence over blood diamond gift from Charles Taylor

Naomi Campbell has been subpoenaed by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the case of former Liberian President Charles Taylor. The Court believes that Campbell was given a blood diamond by Taylor in 1997 at a party in South Africa hosted by former President Nelson Mandela. A blood diamond is one that has been mined in a war zone for the sole purpose of financing brutal activities.

Among prosecution allegations is the claim that Taylor gave the rebels in Sierra Leone’s 11-year civil war weapons and ammunition in exchange for diamonds. Prosecutors say that Taylor had a joint plan with the rebels so that he could enrich himself with Sierra Leone’s diamond wealth, while being in a position of command over the rebels from his neighboring country and thus in a position to prevent or punish their crimes as they wreaked havoc across the nation. Taylor has denied ever having such diamonds thus Campbell’s testimony could help further the case against him.

Prosecutors say that the allegations, if true, could piece important events together: Sierra Leonean rebels came to see Taylor in Liberia the month before he left for his South African trip with diamonds that they wanted him to exchange for weapons during his travels. A month after Taylor returned a shipment of weapons arrived for the rebel forces. If the allegations about Taylor in relation to Campbell are true, it could place him in possession of the diamonds at a key time.

Campbell, however, does not want to testify. She told talk-show host Oprah Winfrey: “I don't want to be involved in this man's case--he has done some terrible things and I don't want to put my family in danger.” Last week, the Special Court for Sierra Leone ordered Campbell to appear to testify on July 29 or face a prison term of up to seven years, a fine of about $500, or both. Campbell’s spokespeople are not commenting on what the supermodel will do next.
Taylor denies all 11 charges of instigating murder, rape, mutilation, sexual slavery and conscription of child soldiers during wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in which more than 250,000 people were killed. Prosecutors say Taylor armed and directed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels to win control of neighboring Sierra Leone’s diamond mines and destabilize its government to boost his regional influence during the country’s 1991-2002 civil war.

(Color Lines, July 6; Reuters; The Daily Beast July 1, 2010).

Charles Taylor, Naomi Campbell. (Source: Francois Rogon, AFP / Getty Images; AP Photo).

Sierra Leone:

Former Sierra Leonean rebel leader testifies for Charles Taylor
Issa Sesay, who led the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group for a short period in the late 1990s, was released from his jail cell in Rwanda July 5 to testify on behalf of Charles Taylor. He rejected claims that the former Liberian president received diamonds from his neighboring rebel group, nor controlled the rebels’ actions during Sierra Leone’s 11-year civil war. Sesay was serving a 52-year prison sentence on charges including war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the Sierra Leone conflict. Prosecutors allege that Sesay had traveled regularly to Liberia to deliver diamonds to Taylor in exchange for arms and ammunition during the country's brutal conflict and had received direct orders from Taylor.

Sesay is the highest profile witness to appear for Taylor’s defense in the case, which has gone on for more than two years. With his conviction last year, Sesay received the longest prison sentence of the eight rebel commanders brought before the Special Court for Sierra Leone. He is serving his sentence in Rwanda.
Asked by defense attorneys about the atrocities attributed to the rebel forces during the war, Sesay acknowledged that some rebel commanders committed murder, rape and enslavement of their enemies, and that instances of amputating limbs occurred. But he said it was not the rebels’ policy to terrorize civilians to force them into submission.

Contrary to prosecution allegations that Taylor appointed him as interim leader of the RUF, Sesay told the court that he was appointed by the West African leaders during a meeting in Liberia. His appointment was not made by Taylor alone, he told the court.

Charles Taylor is accused of supporting the rebels during Sierra Leone’s 11-year civil war in exchange for diamonds and other natural resources from the West African country. The war killed an estimated 500,000 people, with some of the worst atrocities committed by child soldiers who were drugged to desensitize them. Taylor’s is the last case to come to trial by the special court. He has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes.

(CharlesTaylorTrial.org, The Canadian Press, July 5, 2010).