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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 interns at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego.

The interns during the Fall 2012 term are:

Andres Bernal (University of San Diego, School of Leadership and Education Sciences), Jorge Benavides (University of San Diego), Libby Jelinek (University of San Diego) and Erinn King (Georgia State, B.A.)
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UNMIL = United Nations Mission in Liberia (http://unmil.org)
VOA = Voice of America News (www.voanews.com)
Web Newswire = Web Newswire (www.webnewswire.com)
WPFD = World Press Freedom Day 2010 (www.wpfd2010.org)
WSJ = The Wall Street Journal (www.wsj.com)
WP = The Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com)
Xinhua = Xinhua News Agency (www.xinhuanet.com/english)
COLOMBIA

Optimistic Attitudes and Unilateral Cease-Fire Highlight Peace Talks in Havana

A senior commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group, Jesus Santrich, spoke optimistically stating days of peace negotiations with the Colombian government had been going well. Negotiators from the FARC and the government have agreed to support a forum in Bogotá in December in order to discuss agrarian development, a core issue in the decades-long conflict.

“Up until now we have had good results. There has been agreement, we are on the same wavelength,” stated Santrich. The forum is important because it means both sides have accepted a basic framework for the negotiations. The forum, which is being organized by the United Nations and the National University of Colombia, hopes to give Colombian civil society a greater stake in the negotiations’ success.

The rebels have called on the governments of Colombia and Ecuador to work with the Red Cross to repatriate rebels killed in a cross-border raid in 2008, including top leader Raúl Reyes, and have also sent a letter to U.S. President Barack Obama asking for a presidential pardon for FARC leader Simón Trinidad so that he may participate in the talks.

As part of the peace talks, the FARC has also enacted a unilateral ceasefire that will run until January 20, as stated by negotiator Ivan Márquez. The official launch of the negotiations, which occurred in Norway in October, saw Márquez renewing calls for a bilateral ceasefire that was rejected by the Colombia government.

The government said it would not make the mistakes of the past in reference to a previous failed peace effort, which went on from 1999 to 2002. The Colombian government expects the FARC to give up its armed struggle and join the political process as a legal party by the end of the negotiations.

Sources: AP, November 27; BBC, November 19, 2012.

By Andres Bernal. Please send all comments to abernal@sandiego.edu.

CUBA

Religious Groups Denounce U.S. Embargo

Protestant church groups denounced the United States embargo on Cuba after the U.S. Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) froze the assets of the Latin American Church Council (Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias “CLAI”) in the Miami branch of the Ecuadorian bank Pichincha.
The group was informed by their bank that their assets, which total $101,000, were frozen because their intended destination was the island nation of Cuba. Indeed, CLAI had raised the funds to pay for its sixth general assembly which is to be hosted in Cuba February 19-24, 2013. The funds were not simply blocked but rather frozen when the group tried to transfer the money to a Spanish bank so they could later be transferred to Cuba.

CLAI President Julio Murray lamented the U.S. action because the general assembly is meant to be an evangelical event with great impact. The CLAI is headquartered in Quito, Ecuador and was established in Lima, Peru, November 1982 in an effort by Latin American Protestant churches to promote greater unity among Christians throughout the American continent.

It is currently constituted by 188 churches in 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Their general assembly occurs every six years and invites 400 delegates from throughout Latin America to attend.

In Cuba, the Cuban Church Council (Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba “CIC”) also denounced the move as an impediment against the freedom of religion. The group’s President Joel Ortega asserted that Cuban churches would try to raise additional funds so the event could take place nonetheless if the funds were not released. The CIC is composed of 26 Protestant denominations which represent 100,000 of Cuba’s faithful.

Sources: Diario de Cuba, Juventud Rebelde, November 26; Granma, November 27; El Diario, November 28; Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias 2012.

By Jorge Benavides. Please send all comments to jbenavides@sandiego.edu.

GUATEMALA

Violence and Death Lead to Increasing Cemetery Exhumations

Gunmen shot dead seven men at a Guatemalan health clinic November 22 in an attempt to kill an alleged drug trafficker. According to Interior Minister Mauricio Lopez, the gang members entered an upper-class neighborhood dressed as police officers looking for he alleged trafficker Jairo Orellana. Once turned away by security, the men opened fire with AK-47 assault rifles killing seven including a clinic guard before speeding away. This type of incident is not new to the nation.

According to the U.S. State Department, last year Guatemala averaged 40 reported homicides per week. As a result, the capital’s largest public cemeteries require a rent paid for by relatives of the deceased. Falling behind on rent results in eviction and the transporting of bodies to mass graves on the outskirts of the city amidst a neighboring garbage dump and the presence of vultures in the air.

Edgar Leonel Bosch Castro, administrator of public cemeteries in Guatemala City, estimates 15 to 20 victims of unnatural deaths a day, ranging from traffic accidents to crime. According to Bosch
Castro the exhumation practice is not new but because more people are being buried in the public cemeteries, the number of unpaid bills has gone up, leading to more exhumations.

The government recently sent out 3,600 telegrams warning relatives of impending exhumations including approximately 1,500 for the graves of children. Close to $25 pays the first six years of grave rent. Another four years costs $23 and a new bill is due every four years after that. In a country that suffers from poverty, gang violence and drug traffickers, and is still recovering from a civil war, this exacts a heavy toll.

Sources: Reuters, November 22; Christian Science Monitor, November 28, 2012.

By Andres Bernal. Please send all comments to abernal@sandiego.edu.

HAITI

Student Murder Results in Renewed Protests

University students took to the streets in Port-au-Prince the week of November 12 to protest the murder of Damaël D’Haïti, a twenty-four-year old graduate student studying at the School of Law and Economic Sciences.

Police officer Pierre Paul Maceus shot the student dead November 10 during an evening event that was hosted to welcome students to the university. Maceus formed part of the Administration Pénitentiaire Nationale (APENA), the Haitian national police, which the United Nations has investigated in the past for human rights violations.

The protests began November 13 when students joined a demonstration that the university faculty had planned ahead of time to express their grievances regarding their low remuneration as well as a recently imposed tax on their salaries.

Students from the departments of social sciences, ethnology and agronomy joined their law colleagues in demanding justice for the murder of D’Haïti. After the students blocked off vehicular access to the school they became violent, with some committing acts of vandalism on cars, resulting in the arrests of three students.

Chief of Police Godson Orélus accused the students of causing unjustified disorder that did nothing but trouble the general public. Tensions between the police and the protestors were further aggravated November 16 when security forces shot another individual dead. Further violence erupted and escalated; protestors set fire to a barricade of tires and a van.

Although some students claimed the United Nations observing force, locally known by its French acronym MINUSTAH, was responsible for the death U.N. spokeswoman Yasmina Bouziane denied the claim.
The police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd after days of protest as a “proportional response” to the violence.


By Jorge Benavides. Please send all comments to jbenavides@sandiego.edu

**SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**NEPAL**

**President Sets One Week Deadline for New Consensus Government**

President Ram Baram Yadav set a seven-day deadline to arrive at a new consensus government by 4 pm November 29. Yadav set the deadline per Article 38 of the interim constitution which stipulates that the prime minister shall be selected through political consensus but also states that the prime minister shall be elected by a majority of members present in the parliament if the political parties fail to reach a consensus.

While the move is legal under the constitution, government experts Bipin Adhikari and Bhimarjun Acharya note that article 38 of the constitution does not necessarily apply in the current situation because it cannot be invoked in the absence of parliament.

In effect, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai disbanded the Nepalese Parliament May 27 on the basis that its mandate had expired and new elections were necessary to choose a more representative government.

The deadline set forth by the President was met with mixed reactions from both opposition parties and the current government. Notably, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), UCPN-M, decried the move as unconstitutional stating that the President had overstepped his constitutional limits by giving a deadline.

In addition, Prime Minister Bhattarai and the government cabinet publicly termed the move unconstitutional as well. Nevertheless, most opposition parties welcomed the President’s move, asserting that there is no alternative to consensus government.

Leaders of the main opposition parties, the Nepali Congress (NP) and the Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), among others, were confident they would be able to reach consensus within a week. Furthermore, a group of 16 opposition parties, including the main
opposition, went on to denounce as undemocratic the government’s decision to term the deadline unconstitutional. At a meeting at the CPN-UML’s headquarters in Balkhu, the ensemble of opposition parties concluded that the government’s move was a ploy to stay in power by misinterpreting and opposing the call for consensus.

The deadline of November 29 was not met; opposition parties requested a one-week extension which President Yadav honored.


By Jorge Benavides. Please send all comments to jbenavides@sandiego.edu.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka Launches First Satellite with China’s Help

Sri Lanka launched its first communications satellite November 27 with the assistance of a Chinese state-owned space technology firm. The privately owned company, SupremeSAT, said the satellite will be capable of providing communications services, including broadband Internet, telecommunications, and broadcasting.

While the government has emphasized the launch was a private effort, Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s youngest son, Rohitha, has been credited by Sri Lankan media as one of the main actors in the project.

Neighboring India observed the Chinese – Sri Lankan joint launch with unease, concerned about the growing relationship between the two countries. China and India have had a tense relationship since they fought a brief border war in 1962. Though the defense relationship has improved, to date they are economic and strategic rivals.

“It reinforces the impression that Sri Lanka is getting slowly but surely closer to China,” said Brahma Chellaney, an analyst at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi. “From a larger geopolitical perspective, it sends a message to India that a country in its own backyard is cozying up with China.”

China is Sri Lanka’s main investor as well as lender, undertaking several key infrastructure projects, including seaports, airports, and highways.

Sources: Chicago Tribune, ColomboPage, FirstPost, Reuters, November 27; Khaleej Times, November 28, 2012.

By Erinn King. Send comments to erinnking@gmail.com.
MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA

EGYPT

Morsi’s Decree Sparks Protests

President Mohamed Morsi issued a decree November 22 that his decisions are not subject to judicial review by the nation’s constitutional court, granting him absolute powers. His decree also canceled legal challenges to the committee drawing up Egypt’s new constitution and to the upper house of parliament, both of which are dominated by his Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

Although Morsi formally quit the Brotherhood on taking office, his decree has heightened concerns of secularists and Christians that the Brotherhood plans to impose its Islamist vision on Egypt. This unilateral decree, issued just one day after Morsi won international praise for brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas around the Gaza Strip conflict, met heavy criticism for giving the President more powers than Hosni Mubarak, Egypt’s previous dictatorial president overthrown in the spring 2011 revolution, and earned Morsi the nickname “the new pharaoh.”

A protest in Cairo’s Tahrir Square started immediately after the decree was announced, calling for its immediate reversal. Tens of thousands of Egyptians have joined the protests, stepping up the pressure with each day and consequently resulting in more clashes with police. Two protestors have died so far. Smaller protests also occurred in Alexandria, Suez, Minya and other Nile Delta cities.

Opposition to Morsi also arose in the form of the “National Salvation Front,” a group formed by former head of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed ElBaradei; the former head of the Arab League, Amr Moussa; and a moderate Islamist who challenged Morsi for the presidency, Abdelmoneim Aboul Fotouh.

The president’s administration defended the decree as an effort to speed up reforms and complete a democratic transformation, claiming the judiciary still had deep ties to the Mubarak era that threatened the gains made by the revolution. Morsi also issued a statement November 25 saying, “The presidency reiterates the temporary nature of those measures, which are not intended to concentrate power. The presidency stresses its firm commitment to engage all political forces in the inclusive democratic dialogue to reach a common ground.”

Morsi insists the decree is temporary, as it will only apply until a new parliament is elected, which can happen once the constitution is written and passed in a popular referendum. Morsi agreed to meet with Egypt’s top judges, and he assured Egypt’s highest judicial authority that the scope of the decree includes only matters of “sovereign” importance.

Despite these assurances, protests continue and tension is high. The Muslim Brotherhood canceled a counter-rally to avert violence and public tension, but they maintain their ability to mobilize millions in support of the president if necessary.
SYRIA

Islamist Factions Renounce Internationally Recognized Coalition

Leaders of 14 Islamist rebel factions met November 18 in Aleppo to renounce the Western backed Syrian Coalition on the grounds that it fails to represent the objectives of religious fundamentalists.

The group posted a video of the meeting on a website that hosts pro al-Qaeda material. In the video faction leaders denounce the Coalition as a foreign creation and declare an Islamic state in the city of Aleppo, where most of them are based.

Notably, two prominent rebel groups, al-Tawheed Brigade and Jabhat al-Nursa, took part in the pact to reject any foreign group claiming to represent the Syrian people. The latter group, Jabhat al-Nursa, is of particular importance because it is widely known for its jihadist tendencies, including suicide bombings. In all, the 14 groups are estimated to number 10,000 combatants.

In response to the video Mouaz al-Khatib, the leader of the Syrian Coalition downplayed its importance stating that the Coalition’s aim is inclusion and tolerance. Moreover, he added that the Coalition will be open to engage in dialogue with the extremists whenever they are ready to talk.

Foreign powers have been hesitant to aid the Coalition beyond extending recognition, despite the fact that it is regarded as a moderate organization that endorses pluralism and tolerance, because they fear arms provided would fall in the hands of extremists. Thus far the European Union has recognized the group as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people but has stopped short of recognizing it as the sole representative because that can only be done by individual member states of the EU.

To date, France and the UK are the only Western powers to have extended full recognition to the group; in addition, Turkey and the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council have also recognized the Coalition’s legitimacy. France announced November 26 that it will be providing the Coalition with $1.5 million in aid.


By Jorge Benavides. Please send all comments to jbenavides@sandiego.edu.
EASTERN EUROPE

MOLDOVA

Moldova Rejects Russian Plan to Place Consulate in Transnistria

Moldova will not entertain Russia’s request to place a consulate in the breakaway region, Transnistria, until Russia first removes its troops from the area. This would require Moscow to pull out 2,500 servicemen and to negotiate a settlement to a 20-year-old dispute over the territory.

“Moldova will not give its agreement to Russia to open its consulate until the Russian army has been withdrawn from Transnistria,” Moldovan President Nicolae Timofti told the press November 17. “When the Moldovan authorities are not in control of the territory, where a separatist regime is operating, we cannot guarantee the security of the work of a consulate from any country.”

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin insisted, “These problems are being discussed and they can well be solved. The OSCE mission has its office in Transnistria, and foreign diplomats regularly come there. I do not see any special problems.”

Moldova is heavily indebted to Moscow for cheap gas imports and in November renewed a contract to continuing receiving gas for an additional year.

Tension has been on the rise between the former Soviet countries as Moldova has made public its intention to become a member of the European Union. By joining Europe’s energy pact and adopting European energy liberalization measures, Moldova will eventually become less reliant on Russia for gas. As long as the international status of the territory Transnistria remains undecided, it will undermine Moldova’s push for European integration.


By Erinn King. Send comments to erinnking@gmail.com.

EAST AFRICA

KENYA

Kenyan Security Officers Criticized for Garissa Violence

The military reaction to the killing of three soldiers in Garissa by unidentified gunmen November 19 resulted in one dead, at least eight shot, and more than fifty wounded civilians. Garissa is a city in
the north eastern province of Kenya, near the border with Somalia and mainly populated by ethnic Somalis. There have been several recent attacks on Kenyan security personnel in Garissa, which have been blamed on the Somali militant group al-Shabab. Somali-based al-Shabab militants have vowed revenge for Kenya’s military involvement in southern Somalia.

Security officers set fire to the main market and local businesses in the course of searching for the attackers, prompting locals to riot in protest and leading to the subsequent army crackdown.

According to residents, “immediately after the killings of the three officers, the Kenyan army surrounded the town, preventing anyone from leaving or entering, and started attacking residents and traders.” Security officers reportedly beat and detained residents, raped women, and allegedly went into a school and shot at students. Kenyan Defense Minister Mohammed Yusuf Haji said he did not authorize the army action in Garissa.

Violence also broke out November 19 after a grenade blast hit Nairobi and after a bus attack in Nairobi’s Eastleigh district November 20, which killed at least seven and injured twenty nine. Al-Shabab has not claimed direct responsibility for any of the attacks.

Leslie Lefkow, the deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said, “The level of abuse by Kenyan security agencies… is appalling and a complete contradiction of the government’s obligation to protect its citizens and guarantee their rights and freedoms. This has become a pattern that should not be allowed to continue.”


By Libby Jelinek. Send comments to ejelinek@sandiego.edu.

SOUTH SUDAN

Government Programs Striving for Human Rights

South Sudan, which won independence from Sudan in July 2011 after decades of brutal civil war, continues to struggle with violent border disputes, refugee crises, and conflicts between security officers and civilians. In the last month, South Sudan’s government has taken a few steps to reconcile with the past and move past these struggles towards a better future.

First, South Sudan’s parliament held a debate and art show on child rights November 20. South Sudan has yet to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is the first legally binding international instrument to spell out the basic human rights that children everywhere have.
These rights include the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. After three girls in Lakes State and two in Jongelei State were killed for refusing to accept arranged marriages, South Sudan passed the Child Act in 2008, which put the age for marriage at eighteen years and said marriage should be with the consent of both parties.

“The South Sudan Child Act of 2008 is a good example of how South Sudan has made efforts to domesticate the CRC even though there are still some challenges in the implementation of their national legislation. To cement these efforts and to ensure greater investment, the Republic of South Sudan needs to demonstrate to the rest of the world its commitment to its children by ratifying the CRC,” said Elizabeth Quaye, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) officer-in-charge.

Child marriage is still prevalent in South Sudan, and as the world’s newest nation at fifteen-months old and one of the world’s youngest with 50 percent of the population under the age of eighteen, South Sudan increasingly sees child rights as a priority.

In addition, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare on Friday launched the Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign Against Gender Based Violence (CAGBV) November 23. This is the campaign’s seventh anniversary, but only the second since South Sudan became an independent nation. The National theme for the campaign is “Promote Peace at Home, Stop Gender Based Violence and Ending Child Marriage.” CAGBV will involve panel discussions on television and several media houses at the state level.

South Sudan is also planning a comprehensive peace and national reconciliation conference to try to unite communities by reconciling with the past and focusing on the future. The first preparatory meeting was held November 24.

The conference, planned to convene in April 2013, will draw together hundreds of participants from the top leaderships in the national capital, Juba, as well as from the ten states in the country. The conference will also be addressed by a number of high profile international personalities including Nobel Laureate and Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu.

Sources: Sudan Tribune, November 21; All Africa, Sudan Tribune, November 25, 2012.

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SUDAN

New Demands and Air Strikes Postpone Resumption of Oil Production

South Sudan was scheduled to resume oil production November 15, but after Sudan made new demands related to rebel fighting in Sudanese territory, production has once again been suspended. South Sudan, which seceded from Sudan in July 2011, shut down its oil output in January in a dispute over how much it should pay to export oil through Sudan’s pipelines to the Red Sea,
resulting in a serious blow to both countries’ economies. In the African Union (AU) helped the countries come to a deal in September on export fees and border security to restart oil production, including a six-mile border zone from which both armies would withdraw.

However, a recent increase in fighting between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N) and Sudanese government forces in the Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile border regions has complicated the implementation of the buffer zone. Both sides failed to agree on how to move their forces back from the unmarked border and now Sudan is demanding that South Sudan denounce support for and disarm the rebels.

The SPLM-N fought alongside the southern insurgents during Sudan’s decades-long civil war but was left in Sudan once South Sudan won independence. South Sudan denies continued support of the rebel army.

Tensions escalated November 20, when Sudanese warplanes bombed Northern Bahr al Ghazal, a region in northern South Sudan, killing one civilian and wounding four others. More than twenty seven bombs were dropped in the aerial strikes, which continued through November 23, killing seven people and wounding others.

South Sudan accused Sudan of violating their security agreement and attempting to frustrate oil production. Garan Kuot Kuot, secretary General of the Northern Bahr el Ghazal State government, is concerned that the bombing campaign is “a tactic to instigate the forceful displacement” of the civilian population in order to pave the way for Sudan to occupy the area. The air strikes have displaced more than nine hundred people.

Sudanese military spokesman, Colonel Sawarmy Khalid Saad, said that government forces did not hit areas in South Sudan, but were battling rebels in the nearby Rigaibat region in the East Darfur state. Saad claimed that South Sudan’s accusations amount to “an open admission by the government of South Sudan that it supports militarily and logistically rebels inside Sudan.”

South Sudan President Salva Kiir has given no new date for restarting oil output. The delay has already brought the Sudanese pound to an historic low against the dollar, and without oil production South Sudan’s economy will take a serious hit.

**Sources:** Reuters, November 20; Reuters, November 21; ABC, November 23; Sudan Tribune, November 26, 2012.

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