Peace & Justice Update

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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 summer 2011 term are:

Carmyn Chapman (University of San Diego), Kelli Killion (University of San Diego), Cameron Kodhabakhsh (University of San Diego), Amol Nadkarni (George Mason University) and graduate intern Sara Nettleton (University of San Diego)
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COLOMBIA

Men and women strike to get road conditions improved

More than 250 women in Barbacoas, a remote town in southwest Colombia, staged a strike against the government starting June 23 by refusing to have sex with their partners until the road out of town gets repaved. Funds were supposed to be set aside two years ago, but little has come of former President Alvaro Uribe’s promise to do so.

The “Crossed Legs Strike” brought attention to the disrepair of the road, which usually requires four to six hours to navigate; due to torrential rains and landslides, the 35 mile road now takes up to ten hours to traverse. “This is the only road connecting Barbacoas to the rest of the state and the country, and it’s in despicable condition,” said Lucelly Del Carmen Viveros, the human rights coordinator in the town of Barbacoas.

In response to the women’s strike, the men of Barbacoas started a strike of their own. The men began a hunger strike in their central park June 25. “(Men) have come together with women with a hunger strike. This is not improvised, this is a process that began a year ago to reclaim respect for human rights and gender advocacy,” a local Circuit court judge said. More than 1,000 men and women are participating in the hunger strike.

Several people have died while traveling the road from Barbacoa to Nariño, the nearest town, because they were not able to receive medical attention in time due to travel delays. Food prices have increased because of shipping costs. Approximately 40,000 people live in Barbacoa or its surrounding neighborhoods.

The National Roads Institute had until July 1 to start construction. They cited problems with research and paperwork as the cause for the delay in construction. Similar protests against government corruption and violence have been staged in Colombia before. In 1997, women held a crossed legs strike to prompt the rebel groups, paramilitary groups, and drug traffickers to negotiate a peace deal. A similar strike occurred in 2006 in an effort to stop a gang conflict in the coffee-growing region.

Sources: Wall Street Journal, June 24 Colombia Reports, June 27.

Please send comments to snettleton@sandiego.edu
CUBA

Controversy arises over Chávez’s Cuban hospital stay; government ponders oil drilling

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s unexpectedly long absence has created some. Venezuelan officials reported that Chávez underwent emergency surgery in Cuba June 10 for a pelvic abscess. Although the Venezuelan government claims that Chávez is recovering on schedule, the lack of details about his condition and the continued absence of Chávez have created widespread speculation that his condition is more serious than government officials have stated.

In an attempt to counter this uncertainty, Venezuelan and Cuban state television aired videos and photos of a healing Chávez talking and reading the newspaper with Fidel Castro. Another image emerged of Chávez dressed in a tracksuit reading the Cuban newspaper Granma.

As the Miami Herald concluded, Chávez has sent Cuba 100,000 barrels of oil daily in exchange for services such as doctors and sports trainers. Cuba has not been so dependent on another nation’s subsidies since the Soviet Union’s collapse, which makes Cuba at risk of an economic crisis if Venezuela’s support should end.

Spanish oil giant Repsol’s scheduled offshore exploration in Cuba’s North Basin signaled Cuba’s big push to find and produce oil. Repsol has planned to begin in about five months about 60 to 70 miles from Key West, but even closer to the ecologically sensitive waters of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Cuba has partnered with seven international consortiums involving ten countries to discuss drilling in the basin.

The Florida Keys worried about the prospect of a potential oil spill in such close proximity to coral reefs, fisheries, and coastal communities. A Miami Herald article argued that because the U.S. has embargoed Cuba for nearly 50 years, the U.S. would not be allowed to respond to a spill with U.S. equipment, technology, chemical dispersants and personnel expertise.

In a report issued in January, the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling suggested that it is in the U.S. national interest to negotiate common, rigorous safety standards and regulatory oversight with Cuba’s oil industry.

These discussions have not occurred thanks to a pro-embargo voting bloc in the U.S. Congress. The Miami Herald article asserted that all American efforts to stop drilling in Cuban waters have been unsuccessful and the best the U.S. has been able to do is push for safety. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar met last month with Repsol officials in Madrid to obtain assurances that the company would follow American safety standards in Cuba.

Source: BBC, June 30; Miami Herald, June 28.

Please send comments to: kkillion@sandiego.edu.
GUATEMALA

Conference sponsors regional cooperation

Central American presidents as well as the presidents of Mexico and Colombia along with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gathered in Guatemala City for the first International Conference in Support of Central American Security Strategy (SICA), the week of June 20. SICA hosted regional forums throughout the week culminating in the conference on June 22 and June 23.

The conference outlined three mechanisms for financing security measures in Central America. The first proposal, termed the basket fund, would be coordinated by SICA for financial cooperation projects; the second proposal featured a multi-donor fund that defined the projects and whether their implementation would be made through banks or regional organizations; and the third proposal involved creating a governance group executive committee to coordinate and monitor the process. The conference decided that only the SICA would be in charge of regional projects and a country could run internal actions.

Donors pledged nearly $1 billion for security in 2011. Clinton stated that the U.S. would increase its funds by ten percent to around $300 million. The World Bank announced it would provide $1 billion for four years, and the Inter-American Development Bank decided to contribute $500 million over two years. An article in The Economist asserted that these new pledges are a big increase from the $160 million that the UN Development Program (UNDP) reported as being actually spent in 2010.

Although about one fifth of public spending in Guatemala goes to security, Guatemala has struggled to fund its fight against organized crime because taxes remain low. Clinton urged, “Businesses and the rich in every country must pay their fair share of taxes and become full partners in a whole of society effort. True security cannot be funded on the backs of the poor.” President Colom admitted that he is unlikely to secure fiscal reform by the end of his term in January.

Clinton not only reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to the region’s efforts against organized crime, but also conceded that the demand for drugs rests largely in the U.S. Analysts judged the increase in U.S. funds as still small, given that more than two-thirds of cocaine sent from South America to the U.S. passes through Central America.

Central America has served as a bridge between the Americas through which nearly 100 tons of cocaine a year are seized. The Economist estimated that another 200 tons make it through Central America undetected.

Sources: Prensa Libre, BBC, The Economist, June 23.

Please send comments to: kkillion@sandiego.edu.
HAITI

Cholera epidemic surges as new chief of UN Mission appointed

According to an epidemiological report published by the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), since the beginning of the cholera outbreak 21 October 2010, the Ministry of Health (MSPP) has registered as of 20 June, 363,117 cumulative cholera cases, 182,947 hospitalizations, and 5,506 deaths. PAHO stated that the situation in Port-au-Prince has deteriorated.

Most cholera treatment centers (CTCs) have declared that they are at full capacity and continue to receive new patients. PAHO estimated that 1,300 patients are currently admitted in CTCs and cholera treatment units (CTUs), which also are operating at full capacity. PAHO asserted that the main constraints are finding and keeping trained personnel at CTCs and CTUs. The MSPP and several nongovernmental organizations have pointed to a lack of funds to pay salaries of additional staff to care for increasing cholera patients. Although Haiti has 728 Oral Rehydration Points (ORPs), the gap of access to safe water has continued.

According to WebMD, cholera can be described as a severe infection in the small intestine caused by bacteria and is contracted by ingesting contaminated water or food. Cholera’s most dangerous symptom has been rapid dehydration which can lead to death. Treatment for cholera has featured oral rehydration therapy to replace fluids and electrolytes.

This treatable disease’s surge has been attributed to poor sanitation and a lack of clean water after recent rains. Port-au-Prince and the Centre and Sud Est departments have experienced an increase in new hospitalizations. Five other departments including Arbonite, Grand Anse, Nippes, Nord, and Ouest also have seen an increase in new cases. The UN Stabilizing Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) peacekeepers have distributed water and supplies throughout the epidemic.

In other news, Mariano Fernandez Amunategui was named the new civilian head of MINUSTAH June 27. As a Chilean diplomat with almost 40 years of experience in high-level diplomacy, Fernandez previously served as Ambassador to the U.S., the U.K., Spain, and Italy. He also worked as representative of Chile to the E.U. and had two terms as foreign minister of Chile. Fernandez replaced Edmond Mulet, a Guatemalan diplomat, who resigned in late May.

Sources: PAHO, Epidemiological Alert, June 3, June 22; Washington Post, June 27; Le Matin, June 27.

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CENTRAL ASIA, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban opens fire on Kabul hotel, 19 killed

The Taliban opened fire on the luxurious Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul June 29, resulting in the death of approximately 19 people. All six Taliban gunmen and suicide bombers were killed by NATO and Afghan security forces.

The Intercontinental Hotel, widely known as the “Inter-Con,” has been the site of several attacks since its opening in the late 1960s. Between 1992 and 1996, the hotel was hit with 22 rockets when a civil war broke out between several factions under the government led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. An attack from a rocket nearby the hotel also resulted in several shattered windows November 23, 2003.

While attacks in Kabul were more infrequent than those in the remote regions, violence in the capital has escalated following the death of Osama bin Laden. Meanwhile, U.S. President Barack Obama expressed his belief that more attacks will occur in Kabul in the weeks and months ahead, stating that Kabul was “much safer than it [had been]” prior to the death of bin Laden.

President Hamid Karzai lambasted the attack on the hotel as “a ruthless act of terror.” He also asserted that the attack would not inhibit the process of transferring security control from foreign to Afghan forces beginning in August.

Since the attack, NATO also has stated that it had killed top Haqqani network leader Ismail Jan who had been suspected of aiding the Taliban militants that had raided the hotel. Jan was the deputy senior commander of the Haqqani network in Afghanistan. Afghan security forces are now investigating how the militants managed to get through the tight hotel security.

The attack occurred a week after Obama announced his drawdown plan in Afghanistan, consisting of withdrawing all 33,000 surge troops by summer 2012 and the complete removal of combat forces by approximately 2014.

Sources: Washington Post, June 28; The Australian, June 29; CBS News, June 30; Voice of America, June 30.

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Iranian government hosts anti-terrorism conference

Iran held an international anti-terrorism conference June 26, attended by high-level officials from 60 different countries. Formally titled the International Conference of the Global Campaign against Terrorism, the government expressed hope that the summit would be an open platform to discuss a wide range of problems stemming from terrorism.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad opened the conference by accusing many Western countries of sponsoring terrorism.

“It's unfortunate for me to announce that the individuals and groups responsible for these terrorist incidents are under the protection of some European governments and U.S. politicians,” he said. Iran also accused Israel of committing terrorist acts against Palestinians both within and outside of the Palestinian Territory.

Among the more prominent leaders at the conference were Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. Karzai condemned the terrorist acts that have been committed under Islamic extremism. He said, “Since most victims of terrorism are Muslims ranging from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Iraq to many other places, the extremists are trying to misuse the holy name of our religion to justify the massacre and murder of innocent people.”

President Zardari mentioned that Pakistan is currently fighting acts of terrorism “in the trenches,” discussing how the amount of money and time devoted towards fighting terrorism is needed in order to fight “the battle as the central challenge of our times.” “We are fighting a war that will determine not only the future of my country, but the future of your country,” he stated.

Also among those in attendance were Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon.

Despite pressure to censure the conference, the United Nations has stood by it. A UN counter-terrorism official defended Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s support, stating, “the UN believes that it is important for all nations to work together in the fight against terrorism.”

Nongovernmental organization watchdog UN Watch expressed “deep disappointment” with the UN’s response. Meanwhile, the United States has viewed the conference as “ironic.”

Iran has been accused of committing acts of terrorism in Iraq as well as sponsoring Hamas and Hizbollah, two entities widely considered to be terrorist organizations. The U.S. has also declared the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a large branch of Iran’s military, a terrorist organization.
LIBYA

International Criminal Court issues Gaddafi arrest warrant

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi June 27. In addition, the court issued arrest warrants for Gaddafi’s son Salif al-Islam and his military intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi. The ICC called for the three men to stand trial for crimes against humanity in connection with the violent crackdown on anti-government protestors this year.

The three-judge pretrial chamber ruled that ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo had established “reasonable grounds” to charge Gaddafi, his son and the chief of military intelligence, with the murder and persecution of hundreds of Libyan civilians since the government began suppressing protests February 15. Judge Sanji Mmasenono Monageng stressed after the ruling that the indictment and the arrest warrants for the three men were not proof of guilt, which must be proved at trial.

Libya dismissed the ICC move, rejecting the authority of the tribunal. Libya Justice Minister Mohammed al-Qamoodi stated, “Libya… does not accept the decisions of the ICC, which is a tool of the Western world to prosecute leaders in the Third World.”

The June 27 ruling marked only the second time that the ICC sought the arrest of a sitting head of state. In 2009, the ICC issued an arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who stands accused of orchestrating a genocidal campaign against civilians in Darfur; however the court has been unable to arrest him.

The head of Libya’s opposition Transnational Council applauded the ICC arrest warrant against Gaddafi, and vowed to bring the leader to justice. Residents of Benghazi greeted the news from the ICC by shooting into the air and blasting car horns, with many in the streets believing that “justice had been done.”

However some people thought it was too early to celebrate the ruling from The Hague, and a citizen loyal to the opposition stated, “For [the rebels] this is an important day when justice is finally served, but now even the National Transitional Council in Benghazi made it clear that the door has been
shut to any peaceful political settlement of this conflict. They are worried that Gaddafi, who now is a prisoner in his own country, will fight until the end, until death.”

Sources: The Washington Post, AlJazeera English, June 27.

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SYRIA

Opposition convenes in Damascus

Critics of the government met in Damascus June 28, calling for a peaceful transition from President Bashar al-Assad’s authoritarian regime to a democracy. Failure to do so, they said, would exacerbate the current state of chaos in the region and ultimately “destroy the country.”

Rami Abdul-Rahman, director of the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, discussed the overall purpose of the meeting, stating, “Today’s meeting in Damascus is a consultative one. It is not a meeting with the Syrian regime… The aim is to find a way to transition democracy, to stop the slide toward civil war.” According to an organizer of the meeting, approximately 200 opposition figures and intellectuals were in attendance.

The public meeting took place at a Damascus hotel and was the first since the March uprisings against Assad’s regime. It also received the support of the government, though many remain skeptical of the government’s attempt to promote open discourse while simultaneously continuing its suppression of dissent. Despite the large number in attendance, many oppositionists boycotted the conference for that reason.

Nevertheless, such a meeting is unprecedented given the opposition’s widespread fear of retribution by the government. Furthermore, such government support implies that the regime has succumbed to making concessions. According to Syria’s state-run news agency, Assad also scheduled a national political dialogue for July 10, which would include “all factions, intellectual personalities, [and] politicians.”

In Washington, the White House described the Damascus meeting as “worthwhile,” but also mentioned that such meetings will not bring about the change they seek unless the government ceases its violent crackdowns on opposition protestors.

The United States and the European Union have responded to the suppression with strong economic sanctions specifically targeting Assad and his regime.
The opposition movement alleges that 1,400 people have been killed since the March uprisings, with the majority of those people being unarmed.

Sources: New York Times, June 27; Associated Press, June 27; Financial Times, June 27.

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Yemen

Saleh to speak on TV as UN launches Yemen mission

President Ali Abdullah Saleh was scheduled to speak on television to reassure the Yemeni people regarding his health, three weeks after being hospitalized in Riyadh with bomb blast wounds. Saleh, 69, has faced nationwide protests since January against his 33-year autocratic rule and this television address will be his first public message since the attack, which killed 11 people and wounded 124.

The ruling General People’s Congress party’s website stated that Saleh would address “the coming phase in Yemen and the steps expected for political reform” in his televised statement.

In Saleh’s absence, Vice President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has come under pressure from the opposition and the West to assume power, while protestors continue to demand that he set up an interim ruling council. However, Deputy Information Minister Abdo al-Janadi ruled out any transfer of power in Yemen so long as Saleh remains hospitalized in Saudi Arabia.

A mission from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights arrived in Sanaa June 28, after the Security Council expressed “grave concern” about the violence in Yemen. The UN mission was to meet Saleh’s son Ahmed, who commands the elite Republican Guard, his nephew Yehya who heads the central security services and another nephew named Tariq, who controls the Presidential Guard.

The delegations also were to hold talks with Hadi as well as with the powerful tribal chief Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar. In addition, the UN mission has lined up talks with rights activists, opposition members and victims of violence, with further plans to visit medical and detention centers.

Janadi urged the UN mission to conduct a thorough investigation but hoped the delegation would “not be biased towards certain parties… We hope the committee would seriously investigate what was going on in the sit-in squares across Yemen.”


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Inter-party negotiations on constitution struggle to find balance

According to leaders and interlocutors involved in inter-party negotiations on the constitution, the first draft of that document is within reach before the August 31 deadline, provided there is substantial progress in the peace process and power sharing. The parties have come closer to a first draft in the task force of the sub-committee under the constitutional committee, though none of the understandings have been formalized.

The parties – the Maoist party, Nepali Congress (NC), the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-UML) and Madhesi Morcha – have found common ground on issues in three crucial areas: forms of governance, electoral system and state restructuring.

On the issue of forms of governance, both the political leadership and legal experts of the four major parties have agreed on the “French model” of governance, with a clear constitutional division of the executive powers between the President and the Prime Minister. The Nepali Congress and the Madhesi Morcha had demanded that the “Westminster system (a democratic parliamentary monarchy) be retained, while the Maoists believed that such a system produces constant instability, citing the last 20 years in Nepal’s history as an example.

According to both Maoist and non-Maoist party leaders, the French model addresses competing visions offered by the parties on the executive branch of the government and was considered by the parties as the best option of governance for a “new” Nepal.

The parties have developed a common basis for restructuring, despite minor differences on the number and names of the provinces. The Nepali Congress (NC) accepted “identity coupled with capability (restructuring based on empowering the ethnic groups)” as the basis for state restructuring and recommended seven provinces. The Maoists responded favorably and urged the NC leaders to consider adding two or three more provinces for “practical reasons” – something NC leaders did not totally oppose.

The parties have agreed on a system that would ensure inclusive legislative bodies in the provinces and the centre. In addition, the parties agreed that such a system would address the demands of more identity groups for better representation in the decision-making process.

Although there seems willingness between the parties to conclude the peace and constitution processes by the August 31 deadline, the reality is that the party leadership of the three main political parties (Maoist, Communist and Nepali Congress) is struggling to find a balance between their intra-party and inter-party obligations.
According to Agni Kharel, the CPN-UML member of the task force, “dispute in the new constitution isn’t a problem in itself. If a new constitution isn’t written, it will be because of the outstanding disputes in the peace process.”

Sources: The Kathmandu Post, June 26; NepalNews, June 27; República, June 30.

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PHILIPPINES

Peace talks begin, then get delayed

Peace talks convened between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government of the Philippines June 27 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The peace negotiations were the fourth meeting with the government of Benigno Aquino. After a meeting in January, the groups have held three formal meetings every two months since February.

In conjunction with the peace negotiations, monitoring billboards were set up by civil society groups in order to keep people apprised regarding the peace process. Billboards were built in Iligan, Cotabato and Davao cities, and display the words “365 Days Countdown to Peace.” The slogan referenced the one year time table to establish a political agreement that both the MILF and the government think can be met.

The MILF recently claimed that the government is seeking to undermine the peace talks. The government denies these allegations and the chief negotiator, Marvic Leonen said “the government is sincere in its objective to achieve a just and lasting peace in [the southern Philippines region of] Mindanao. We will continue to reach out to the MILF to find practical and reasonable solutions to long-standing problems.”

The peace talks were further complicated by two bombings that took place in Mindanao June 27. An improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated in Cotabato near the office of the Commission on Audit and another IED was detonated in Kidapawan City. Another two bombs were recovered from a van at a police security checkpoint in Sultan Kudarat. Military reports suggested that the bombings were related to the peace talks.

Late in the day June 27, the MILF and the government opted to cut short the negotiations, scheduled to conclude June 28. The two parties agreed to reschedule the negotiations for the first week of August. Leonen did not give a specific reason for the delay, but did reiterate the government’s commitment to the peace talks.
The peace talks have been a part of the on-going conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which has campaigned for an independent state, and the government of the Philippines. The two parties have been in negotiations in an effort to find an equitable solution to the conflict.

Sources: Inquirer, June 26; PhilStar, June 28; GMA News, June 28.

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SRI LANKA

India needs to use influence to push for sustainable peace, says Crisis Group

Although Sri Lankan government forces defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) over two years ago, little progress has been made in meeting post-war challenges. According to International Crisis Group, government actions and military influence may lead to a return to violence.

India’s objectives have not resulted in significant improvement for the minority Tamils, who have experienced increasing political marginalization and insecurity. International Crisis Group suggested that India should push the Sri Lankan government to end emergency rule; return civilian rule to the north and east; and work toward demilitarization of the north.

Furthermore, stated Crisis Group, India should acknowledge the credibility of the UN panel of experts, which condemned government troops and the Tamil Tigers for war crimes committed during the final months of the civil war. The Sri Lankan government has so far not recognized the UN panel.

India has had conflicting results in its policy toward Sri Lanka. Indian support of the Tamil Tigers in the 1980s significantly escalated the conflict. Indian peacekeepers were ineffective in preventing violence in 1987 and were even seen as an occupying force in Sri Lanka. This has resulted in distrust of India on behalf of the Sinhalese, who view India as favoring the minority Hindu Tamils, as well as distrust by the Tamils, who see India as having broken promises of support.

Despite the conclusion of violence, many Tamils still living in the war zone do not know the whereabouts of their family members. Police said June 13 they would release information about individuals detained in the war and three centers have been set up by the Terrorist Investigation Division. Due to the large numbers of people searching for missing family, only 200 people per day have been able to make inquiries.
The Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were engaged in an ethnic conflict from the 1980s until the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in 2009. A UN panel of experts has condemned both sides for war crimes in the final months of the civil war.

Sources: [BBC](http://www.bbc.com), June 23; [Crisis Group](http://www.crisisgroup.org), June 23.

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**CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA**

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

United Nations Extends Stabilizing Mission for One Year

The United Nations Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Stabilizing Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) until June 30, 2012. The peacekeeping operation, originally authorized for 22,016 uniformed personnel, has extended for one year the deployment of 20,000 uniformed troops with 17,000 donning the blue UN helmets.

The mission's extension came after the Special Representative to the Secretary General, Roger Meece, told the Security Council that the DRC has made significant improvements toward stability and hopes to be fully able to restore southern and eastern areas of the country that were greatest affected by the conflict. New goals for the mission include ensuring that the November elections are free and fair, reducing the threat from armed groups in North and South Kivu, and preventing mass rapes and attacks on villages.

A gunfight occurred June 29 in one of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s largest mining cities, Lubumbashi. The gun battle occurred near an army weapons depot when police open fired on a group of robbers who were targeting the military depot and mineral stores of a private company next door. Two of the gunmen and three civilians were killed in the fight. President Joseph Kabila arrived in Lubumbashi the next day to meet foreign diplomats and preside over Independence Day ceremonies.

June 30 also marks 51 years of the DRC’s independence from Belgium. Independence Day celebrations, once widely attended across the country, have declined greatly due to massive of disease and internal displacement over the past decade.

United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton issued a press statement June 29 conveying best wishes to the DRC on its day of independence and stating: “We are looking forward to
successful presidential and legislative elections in November to demonstrate Congolese commitment
to the principles of a free and transparent democratic system.”

Sources: BBC, June 29, 2011; State Dept., June 29, 2011; UN News, June 28.

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KENYA

Drought Crisis in the Horn of Africa Will Greatly Affect Kenya

The worst drought in more than 60 years in the horn of Africa is now causing major food and water availability problems in areas of Kenya and Somalia. The drought is a result of two consecutive poor rainy seasons, and has forced Kenyans and Somalis to leave their homes in search of sustainable resources. The United Nations has now classified parts of Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia as areas of crisis and emergency.

The drought is creating an impossible situation in refugee camps, such as Dabaab in eastern Kenya. Dabaab, the largest refugee camp in Africa, has over 1,300 refugees arriving daily with around 800 of the persons children often without parental accompaniment.

The nongovernmental organization Save the Children has expressed concern over the overwhelming number of refugees and children in serious condition arriving at Dabaab. New arrivals have walked for months and are in need of medical attention and nourishment. The malnutrition rate for children has exceeded double the emergency level, causing mortality rates to rise.

The numbers of refugees arriving in Kenya from Somalia is creating a displacement crisis in the country. According to the United Nations, ten million people are affected by the drought, which is also pushing Kenyans into pre-famine conditions. United Nations aid is underfunded in the area; only 50 percent funding is met in Somalia and Kenya.

In other news, Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga publicly announced June 29 that German Chancellor Angela Merkel will visit Kenya in two weeks’ time. Merkel’s visit will include a press conference with Odinga July 12. Chancellor Merkel has previously visited Ethiopia, South Africa and Liberia to speak on matters such as disease, poverty, and human rights. Chancellor Merkel’s scheduled visit to Kenya will be her first, and her stated intentions are to build stronger relationships between the two countries and work together in areas of development.

Sources: BBC, June 28, 2011; Daily Nation, June 28, 2011; All Africa, June 28, 2011;

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SUDAN

Bashir Visits China; Peacekeeping Forces are Approved to Enter Abyei Region

President Omar al-Bashir traveled to China June 28 upon the invitation of Chinese President Hu Jintao to discuss trade and security. China is concerned with the growing tensions between the oil rich south and the northern regions where oil is processed and exported, and is encouraging an end to the conflict in Sudan. China and Sudan are economic partners, each placing great emphasis on oil exports from Sudanese port cities.

Bashir made the trip to China despite the warrant for his arrest issued by the International Criminal Court in 2008. He is wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity for the genocide and atrocities in Darfur, all charges he denies. Bashir has also traveled to Egypt, Libya, Eritrea and Qatar, all countries that are not signatories to the ICC, and cannot arrest him. Amnesty International has stated that if China, which is not a signatory to the ICC, does not arrest the wanted President the country could be labeled a “safe haven for alleged perpetrators of genocide.”

Bashir's visit to China comes before Ethiopian peacekeepers will be deployed to Sudan. The United Nations approved the resolution drafted by the United States June 27 to deploy 4,200 Ethiopian peacekeepers to the Abyei region of Sudan for six months.

The resolution reflects attempts made to demilitarize the area after fighting between the northern Sudan Alliance Force (SAF) and southern Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). The peacekeepers, not yet deployed to the country, are already facing internal Sudanese anger at the attempts to honor a deal to end violence in Abyei. The June 13 agreement between the two sides, finalized June 20, stipulates that those who fought for the SPLA in the civil war will integrate into the national army or must disband.

Meanwhile, in South Kordofan northern troops accused of ethnic cleansing have agreed to a deal to end the violence. Tensions continued to rise in the region and more than 70,000 people have fled conflict in South Kordofan while 100,000 have fled concentrated violence in nearby Abyei. A train transporting South Sudanese from the north back to their homes was attacked June 27 by a northern Arab group.

Fighting in the Abyei and South Kordofan regions broke out after southern groups were forced to disarm, and Northern forces began bombing areas of South Kordofan. Amnesty International criticized the decision to move people back home to the south when fighting and bombing are after occurring near their homes.

Sources: BBC, June 29, June 29, June 27.

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