Featured Stories

Africa
_Sudan – Bashir threatens to close southern oil pipelines_

Middle East/North Africa
_Yemen – Tribal chief believes Saleh return could spark civil war_

Asia
_Nepal – Maoists to protest army deployment at hydropower project_

Latin America and the Caribbean
_Colombia – FARC activity on the rise_
The countries for the **Peace & Justice Update** have been chosen as areas of focus at the institute.

**Source information:** Information presented in this update is condensed from wire and newspaper reports from Lexis/Nexis and from electronic sites on the World Wide Web. Complete bibliographical information is unavailable from these services, but every attempt has been made to properly cite information and give credit to source materials. This update is intended for use by IPJ staff and associates for informational purposes only. As the material in this update is condensed, and does not directly quote the primary source, information from the update should not be quoted. Any opinions expressed herein solely reflect the views of the individual Update author(s) and in no way reflect the official views and/or positions of the IPJ, its staff, or the University of San Diego.

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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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LA Times = Los Angeles Times (www.latimes.com)
Latin America Press = Latin America Press (www.latinamericapress.org)
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Miami Herald = The Miami Herald (www.miamiherald.com)
Mandanews = Mandanews (http://www.mandanews.com/)
MSF = Médecins Sans Frontière (www.msf.org)
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Nepal News = Nepal News (www.nepalnews.com)
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Oxfam = Oxfam International (www.oxfam.org)
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Press TV = Press TV (www.presstv.ir)
Relief Web = Relief Web (www.reliefweb.int)
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| **Sudan Tribune** | = Sudan Tribune (www.sudantribune.com) |
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| **UNESCO** | = UN Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization (www.unesco.org) |
| **UNHCR** | = UN High Commissioner for Refugees (www.unhcr.org) |
| **UNICEF** | = UN Children’s Fund (www.unicef.org) |
| **UNIFEM** | = UN Development Fund for Women (www.unifem.org) |
| **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) |
UPDATE SUMMARY

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

COLOMBIA
FARC activity on the rise

CUBA
U.S. Senate blocks aid to Cuba

GUATEMALA
Elections need divorce from violence and loose campaign finance restrictions; former armed forces chief arrested for genocide

HAITI
Martelly assesses his first 30 days

CENTRAL ASIA, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AFGHANISTAN
Obama: Surge troops will withdraw by next summer

IRAN
US hits Iranian shipping line & its affiliates with sanctions

LIBYA
Libyan officials accuse NATO of targeting Non-combatants

SYRIA
Assad Makes Third Address to Nation Following Protests

YEMEN
Tribal chief believes Saleh return could spark Civil War

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

NEPAL
Maoists to Protest Army Deployment at Hydro Project

SRI LANKA
Government does not respond to UN report; UN will not accept Sri Lankan aircraft
CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
South African President Visits the DRC; Disease and Rape are of Concern in the Country

KENYA
Members of Parliament to Pay Higher Taxes

SUDAN
President Omar al-Bashir Threatens to Close Southern Oil Pipelines
COLOMBIA

FARC activity on the rise

Activity by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has increased since 2010, despite successes by the Colombian military in 2008 and 2009 against the armed rebel group. The FARC has amplified the use of hit-and-run tactics as well as increased the use of land mines.

The FARC attacked a contingent of government soldiers who were patrolling a bridge in Caquetá province June 14. The rebels ambushed the soldiers and a public transportation vehicle was caught in the crossfire; two civilians were killed and ten wounded. The attack has been attributed to the elite forces of the FARC, called the Teófilo Forero, which operate in the rural areas of the country.

In response to the FARC’s new and increased activities, the government and military have had to adapt as well. As a result, Colombian Defense Minister Rodrigo Rivera unveiled a new security policy, which plans to dismantle the FARC and ELN by the end of President Juan Manuel Santos’ term in 2014.

However, the new plan has been criticized as reminiscent of former president Alvaro Uribe’s strategies against the FARC, suggesting that old strategies could fail against new rebel tactics. According to Ariel Avila, a conflict analyst with the Colombian think tank Nuevo Arco Iris, “the policies may have worked, but the situation has changed, the FARC have adapted, they have recovered some operational capacity,” says Avila. The “new” policies unveiled are “more of the same,” he adds.

In addition to the increased FARC activity, the rebel group has recently been accused of recruiting indigenous children into their ranks. Children between the ages of 12 and 15 have been recruited from the southwestern Cauca department. A statement made by the army indicated that, “additionally, they said that the youngest ones, before they are incorporated into the illegal armed group’s ranks, are used to transport explosives [and] rations and to place anti-personnel mines, for which they would receive 15,000 pesos [US$8.4].”

Indigenous and youth recruitment has been an ongoing issue in the decades-long violent conflict. The UN last year denounced the recruitment of children and increased danger faced by indigenous communities as a result of the conflict. Indigenous groups have begun demanding a faster response from the government to prevent youth recruitment and to stop the continued danger the population faces.

Sources: CS Monitor, June 16; LA Press, June 9.
CUBA

U.S. Senate blocks aid to Cuba

The Obama administration’s effort to spend another $20 million on Cuban democracy programs has been blocked in the Senate. Senator John Kerry, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, put a hold on the money in April on the grounds that the programs were wasteful and provocative.

Although Kerry’s committee staffers notified the State Department, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID), June 3 that the hold was to be lifted, Kerry maintained the hold the following Monday, June 6.

The senator blocked the additional $20 million because, he said, “There’s no evidence the programs help the Cuban people, nor have they achieved much more than to provoke the Cuban government to arrest a U.S. government contractor.”

Kerry cited the arrest of contractor Alan Gross, a development specialist who was arrested in Havana in 2009 after delivering U.S. telephones to Jewish groups in Cuba and received a sentence of 15 years in prison. In a 13-question note to the State Department, Kerry alleged that the programs provoked Havana and led to the arrest of Gross.

When asked in the note about new contributions to programming, the State Department answered that the new proposals for the $20 million include programs to help the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community and Cubans with disabilities as well as more money for providing information about market economies.

The State Department notified Congress that the money included 17 program areas totaling $15.7 million for civil society and media programs, $2.7 million for human rights initiatives, and $1.6 million for administration. Kerry’s note claimed that U.S. money was used to “mobilize protests” in Cuba and condemned the use of encrypted communications, secret codes, and aliases in some of the programs.

Havana denounced the USAID programs June 10 in article in the Cuban Communist Party’s newspaper Granma stating that the “aim to ‘promote democracy in Cuba’ is a cover for intelligence and destabilization.” The U.S. has spent $150 million on programs in Cuba since their creation in the 1990s to assist nongovernmental groups on the island.

Sources: Miami Herald, June 8, June 9; Granma.cu, June 10.
GUATEMALA

Elections need divorce from violence and loose campaign finance restrictions; former armed forces chief arrested for genocide

National and local elections are scheduled for September 2011. Although the vote will most likely be free, violence and unregulated campaign finance have presented a challenge to the country’s political institutions. The controversy over whether Sandra Torres, recently divorced wife of current President Alvaro Colom, can legally run has not been resolved. Torres’ suspension from registering as a candidate has been maintained by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

Pre-election violence has claimed the lives of candidates, their families, party activist, and electoral staff. A report from the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that deteriorating security, drug traffickers’ brutality, and polarized politics have left candidates especially vulnerable to attacks.

For example, the mayoral race in the municipality of San José Pinula has been suspended due to increased violence and new death threats. Two candidates, Augusto Enrique Barrera Ovalle of the Partido Unionista or Unionist Party and Carlos Enrique Girón Dardón of Compromiso, Renovación y Orden (Creo), have been killed by unknown gunmen and another candidate, Luis Fernando Marroquin, survived an attack. TSE considered it appropriate to suspend the mayoral campaign until the TSE can determine the risk of holding the elections.

Unregulated campaign finance and inadequate funding from the government have allowed candidates to disregard limits on campaign spending with impunity.

ICG argued that recent election campaigns have been among the most costly, per capita, on the continent, and spending in 2011 will probably outstrip even previous records. Organized crime has infiltrated the system and has funded campaigns. In order to prevent politicians being beholden to criminal interests, the TSA needs to better regulate campaign finance.

In other news, Héctor Mario López Fuentes, former armed forces chief, was arrested in Guatemala City June 17. Lopez Fuentes was accused of participating in genocide and crimes against humanity during the civil war. The office of public prosecutions charged Fuentes with being the intellectual author behind the killings of more than 300 indigenous Mayan civilians from the Ixil region in 1982 and 1983.

According to Edgar Pérez, an attorney for victims and families of victims in several cases of massacres, the prosecution of López Fuentes is the first time in history that a national court handled a case of genocide; perpetrators of the genocides in Yugoslavia and Rwanda defendants have been and are being tried by international courts.

Source:

BBC, June 18; ICG, June 16; Prensa Libre, June 18, June 19, June 20.
HAITI

Martelly assesses his first 30 days

President Michel Martelly released a statement June 16 stating that he is satisfied with his first 30 days in office. The assessment boasted the creation of the National Fund for Education (FNE), which was announced May 26 and is funded by a $0.05 deduction on incoming international phone calls as well as a $1.50 tax on international money transfers.

FNE is aimed at providing a free education to those children who currently are now in school. Martelly estimated that 1.5 million children will be in school by the end of his term.

Martelly also claimed the extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) by the United States as an accomplishment of his first month in office. On May 17, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the extension, which will be effective July 23, 2011 through January 22, 2013. TPS granted Haitian nationals residency in the U.S. since January 12, 2010. DHS estimated that approximately 48,000 Haitian nationals with TPS currently reside in the U.S.

Martelly’s relations with the Haitian diaspora however have become more strained. Martelly and his nominee for prime minister both proposed to do away with the cabinet-level Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad, and the issue of dual nationality has not been resolved. Although dual nationality had been approved shortly before Martelly took office, he annulled the change as a part of a parliamentary maneuver in constitutional reform, which infuriated Haitians overseas.

Martelly’s nominee for prime minister, Daniel Gérard Rouzier was rejected by a 42 to 19 vote in the Chamber of Deputies June 21. Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive, who was appointed by former president René Préval, resigned the week of May 15 in order to allow the incoming Martelly to name his own prime minister. Friction over Martelly’s choice of nominee arose early in the process with Préval’s Inite (Unity), coalition in the parliament opposing the choice.

The opposition against Rouzier centered on allegations of tax evasion as well as the question of his doubts as to his nationality. The rejection of Rouzier has been a political blow to Martelly who needs a prime minister in order to have a government that can work with international agencies involved in the task of rebuilding. The process of finding a new nominee has been set to take several weeks not including the ratification process.

Martelly’s administration has faced several other challenges like a looming fuel and food crisis, a hurricane season which has already claimed 28 lives, the beginning of the school year, and a surging cholera epidemic in the countryside.

Sources: AP, May 13; Miami Herald, June 16; BBC, June 22; DHS.gov, May 17.
CENTRAL ASIA, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AFGHANISTAN

Obama: surge troops will withdraw by next summer

In an address to the nation from the East Room of the White House, U.S. President Barack Obama laid out his plan to withdraw the 33,000 troops proposed December 2009. Obama asserted that the American strategy in Afghanistan has made significant progress “in reducing the threat posed by extremist elements in the war-torn country.”

Obama announced that he would withdraw 10,000 of the surge troops by December, with the remaining 20,000 to leave by summer 2012. The troop reductions are said to be faster than what many of the top commanders and generals had suggested. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen stated that the drawdown was faster than top military officials were expecting, but that he was fully able to “support the president’s decisions.”

Obama contended Wednesday that al Qaeda “is under more pressure than at any time since 9/11.” He also asserted the importance of charging focus from fighting wars abroad to handling the economic difficulties that the U.S. faces.

Administration officials have also promised a full military withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2014.

Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai welcomed the drawdown, expressing his belief that the Afghan government was ready to take control of the security issues within the nation. He said, “The number of troops that he has announced to be withdrawn is a sign that Afghanistan is taking over its own security and is trying to its own territory by its own means… So we are happy about the announcement.”

Karzai continued, “It is the responsibility of the Afghan people to protect their country and to provide security for the citizens of the country.”

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 after learning that the Taliban had provided a sanctuary for al Qaeda. The current war in Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history, lasting for approximately 9.5 years.

IRAN

US hits Iranian shipping line and its affiliates with sanctions

The United States Department of Treasury imposed sanctions on Islamic Republic of Iran’s Shipping Lines (IRISL) and companies associated with it June 19. The Treasury released a statement legitimizing the designation, stating that it was “responding to Iran’s continued efforts to evade sanctions and its ongoing creation and use of new front companies, subsidiaries and affiliates to protect IRISL and to advance its proliferation activities.”

The Treasury Department has charged the IRISL, along with at least 10 firms with attempting to move more than $60 million through at least seven U.S. banks in violation of previously imposed sanctions, according to Bloomberg. The charges also include falsifying business records in the first degree and conspiracy, according to the grand jury indictment. The measures targeted IRISL’s operations in Britain, China, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates. The banks have not been charged with any malfeasance.

Director of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control Adam Szubin also weighed in on the issue, stating, “As the private sector around the world increasingly turns its back on Iran’s national shipping line, IRISL’s efforts to evade international sanctions and increased scrutiny have gone more and more desperate.”

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. disclosed the 317-count indictment June 19, alleging that the defendants had falsified bank accounts to access the U.S. financial system, according to AFP. “IRISL and its sanctioned affiliates used a web of aliases or corporate alter egos across the globe to exploit the services of financial institutions located in Manhattan,” he said. “New York remains the number one target of terrorist organizations around the world, and today’s joint action will make it more difficult for Iran, a state sponsor of terrorism.”

Many Western countries along with Israel have long suspected Iran of possessing a nuclear program designed to develop nuclear weapons. Iran has consistently denied the claim, alleging that the program is designed only for peaceful purposes such as creating nuclear energy and medical isotopes.

Sources: AFP: June 20, 2011, Bloomberg.com: June 20, 2011, MarketWatch.com: June 20, 2011

LIBYA

Libyan officials accuse NATO of targeting non-combatants

An errant North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) airstrike killed several civilians June 19 in a densely populated neighborhood in Tripoli. On June 20, Libyan officials accused NATO of killing
15 noncombatants, including three children, in the airstrike. The early morning airstrike destroyed one apartment building and damaged half a dozen homes in what is normally a relatively quiet neighborhood.

The bombing marked the second time in as many days that the Libyan government has presented credible evidence that civilians were killed in bombings that the NATO coalition says it is carrying out to save innocent lives. The airstrike gave the Libyan government a powerful new basis to continue trying to demonize the West’s role in Libya’s civil war.

NATO responded to the airstrike by stating that a military missile site was the intended target of the air raid and “there may have been a weapons system failure which may have caused a number of civilian causalities.”

Canadian air force Lt. Gen. Charles Bouchard, commander of the Libya campaign, additionally stated, “NATO regrets the loss of innocent civilian lives and takes great care in conducting strikes against a regime determined to use violence against its own citizens.”

NATO’s apologies after the recent airstrike, marked the first time the organization acknowledged responsibility for civilian deaths arising over the 11-week bombing campaign over Gaddafi regime-controlled territory. NATO is bombing Libya under the United Nations Security Council mandate to protect civilians from Muammar Gaddafi’s regime. Late on June 19, Gaddafi sent a message to all members of the UN Security Council holding them responsible “for this methodical extermination process.”

The Libyan government bused several international reporters and journalists to the bomb site early June 19, as victims of the airstrike were still being pulled from the rubble. The journalists were later taken to a hospital, to see five of the dead, including two children- one a nine month old girl.

Later, the journalists were taken back to the bomb site, in an attempt by the Libyan government to sway international opinion against NATO and their constant airstrikes. Libyan officials claim that the recent airstrike demonstrates how the new aggressive NATO air campaign is recklessly targeting civilians.

According to the chief Libyan government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim, the Gaddafi regime “has noticed that NATO’s aggression is taking a completely different turn” and alleged that cases of civilian causalities had gone from “collateral damage” to “direct hits.”

However, NATO denies targeting civilians and stated shortly after the failed airstrike that “every mission is planned and executed with tremendous care to avoid civilian casualties.”

SYRIA

Assad makes third address to nation following protests

Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad addressed his nation in a speech June 19 at Damascus University, marking the third time he has made such an address following the uprisings that began in March. His speech consisted of an amalgam of threats and promises of reform, stating that he was “working on getting the military back to their barracks as soon as possible.” He also warned that the government would “work on tracking down everyone who shed blood or plotted in shedding the blood of the Syrian people, and we will hold them accountable.”

In the speech, Assad’s promises of reform were small in scope, only alluding to the possibility of amending the Constitution and engaging in a “national dialogue.” However, he clarified that such dialogue would not involve one-on-one talks with those in the opposition movement. He also blamed the protests on armed gangs and foreign conspiracies, saying that such entities have defiled Syria’s image and destabilized the country and referring to such entities as “germs” that cannot be “exterminated.”

“There are some who are distorting the image of the Syrian nation abroad, and they wanted to open the gates and even called for foreign intervention. They tried to weaken the national political position,” he said.

While Assad’s audience was largely enthusiastic, the speech was met with demonstrations, resulting in several additional arrests by Syrian security forces. Furthermore, responses abroad have been largely dismissive of President Assad’s speech.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé was indifferent, stating, “I believe he has reached the point of no return… And in any case it is not the speech that was made today that is going to change the context.” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland contended that Assad “spends a lot of time blaming foreign instigators rather than appreciating that his own people are simply disgusted by a regime that supports itself through repression, corruption, and fear.”

According to human rights activists, Syrian security forces have killed as many as 1,100 people and have jailed several thousands more. Thousands of Syrians have also opted to flee across the northwestern border into Turkey fearing retribution. In his speech, Assad also called for the refugees to return home.

Sources: Al Jazeera English: June 20, 2011, The BBC: June 20, 2011, CNN.com: June 20, 2011
YEMEN

Tribal chief believes Saleh return could spark civil war

The head of Yemen’s most powerful tribal confederation, Sadeq al-Ahmar, warned Tuesday June 21 in a letter to the Saudi king that Yemen could plunge into civil war if President Ali Abdullah is allowed to return home.

Currently, Saleh is in Saudi Arabia, where he is receiving treatment for serious injuries that he suffered from a blast earlier this month at his palace in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa. In his message to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, al-Ahmar appealed to the Saudi monarch to prevent Saleh from returning to Yemen. According to al-Ahmar, “his return will lead to sedition and turmoil.”

Inspired by the protests taking place in the Arab world, hundreds of thousands of protestors have taken to the streets daily since mid-January, demanding the ouster of Saleh, who has ruled Yemen for nearly 33 years.

The revolution has been relatively peaceful, but fighting erupted in Sanaa between Saleh loyalists and fighters from al-Ahmar’s powerful tribal confederation, the Hashid, after troops moved to attack al-Ahmar’s residence. The fighting has tapered off since Saleh left for Saudi Arabia and Vice President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has stepped in as acting President in Saleh’s absence.

Yemen’s opposition parties have sought to persuade Hadi and Saleh’s ruling party to join them in a transitional leadership that would effectively shut out Saleh. The president’s son Ahmed, who commands the country’s elite military force, the Republican Guard which is the only fighting force maintaining his father’s grip on power, opposes such discussions.

The opposition has accused Saleh’s inner circle and family of hindering their dialogue with Hadi, stating “Saleh’s sons are not helpful in solving the problem, and they don’t help the acting President exercise his constitutional powers.”

Saleh’s close aide and advisor, Abdul-Karim al-Iryani, arrived Tuesday June 21 in Riyadh for talks with Saleh. It is believed that Saleh himself requested the meeting and according to a leading member of the ruling party, Saleh and al-Iryani were discussing a transfer of power and expected “very important decisions” to come out from the meeting.

Sources: AP June 21, 2011
SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

NEPAL

Maoists to protest army deployment at hydropower project

Nepal’s Maoists threatened to launch a “three pronged agitation” against the government’s decision to continue work in the Upper Karnali Hydropower Project (UKHP) by deploying the Army June 19. Speaking at a press conference in the capital, Maoist Politburo member and member of the party’s Water Resource Department, Dharmendra Bastola said that his party would launch an agitation from the streets, parliament and the government to halt the construction work of the 900-megawatts (MW) UKHP.

The Maoists leader’s threat follows a government decision to deploy the Army to ensure for smooth operation of the work at the hydro sites. A group of locals, allegedly backed by the Maoists, set ablaze three office buildings of the UKHP in Paltada in Daliekh district May 22, saying that the construction of the project was against the welfare of the local people. The Cabinet had decided June 16 to deploy Army personnel for security at the project following frequent Maoist attacks.

Bastola has claimed that the decision to award the hydro project contract to an Indian company was against the national interest and in breach of the people’s sovereign rights. According to Bastola, “the decision to award the contract to Indian company GMR Group is against the Interim Constitution.”

In addition, he accused the government of giving the contract to GMR without parliamentary approval and demanded that the government ensure the people’s sovereign rights. Though the Maoists are demanding parliamentary approval for the project, the government has said that since it has a 27 percent share in the project there was no need for the parliament to ratify the decision.

One of the biggest hydro projects in Nepal, UKHP is considered the lowest-budget hydroelectricity project in the world. The project is expected to give Nepal 108 MW of free energy and $360 million in royalties for the next 15 years and $1 billion annually thereafter.

Regardless of the economic benefits the project would bring to Nepal, Bastola has stated that “if the government fails to correct its decision, we will start collecting funds from people to construct the project and the Maoists will take a leadership role.”

Sources: The Kathmandu Post, MSN News, June 20, 2011
Supreme Court upholds state of emergency in Mindanao

The Supreme Court ruled June 7 to maintain the state of emergency in three provinces—Maguindanao, Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat—on the island of Mindanao. The decision was written by Justice Roberto A. Abad and stating that the petition to remove the state of emergency failed to demonstrate that the proclamation had no factual basis.

The state of emergency was put in place November 9, 2009 by then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, following a massacre that killed 57 people. Proclamation 1946 placed the three provinces under the supervision of the Department of Interior and Local Governments (DILG).

The Armed Forces were placed in these areas to suppress lawlessness and violence. The Security Council stressed that “the imminence of violence and anarchy at the time the President issued Proclamation 1946 was too grave to ignore and she had to act to prevent further bloodshed and hostilities in the places mentioned.”

The petition for the removal of the state of emergency was placed by Governor Datu Zaldy Ampatuan of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). He argued that because only three regions in Mindanao were placed under a state of emergency and not the entire region, there was no basis for the intervention by the Department of Interior and Local Governments.

President Benigno Aquino III has not removed the state of emergency, which was one reason the Supreme Court ruled to uphold it. “Apparently, the presence of troops in those places is still necessary to ease fear and tension among the citizenry and prevent and suppress any violence that may still erupt, despite the passage of more than a year from the time of the Maguindanao massacre,” the Court stated.

Former Governor Zaldy Ampatuan is the son of Andal Ampatuan and the brother of Andal Ampatuan Jr., who are both implicated in the 2009 massacre. The violence that has occurred in Mindanao is a part of the conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has campaigned for an independent state, and the government of the Philippines.

Sources: Manila Bulletin, June 20; Inquirer News, June 20.
SRI LANKA

Government does not respond to UN report; UN will not accept Sri Lankan aircraft

The government of Sri Lanka has not responded to a UN report alleging war crimes were committed during the ethnic conflict between the majority Buddhist Sinhalese and the Hindu-Tamil minority.

The government of Sri Lanka did not recognize the UN panel, considering it a Western plot to be used for leverage used against the country. Instead, the government is preparing its own reports which will be made available to the international community.

“We have one report on food and medical supplies to the North, facilitated by the Presidential Task Force under the auspices of Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa. There is another report by the Ministry of Defense and Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa which is a 120 page commentary on the situation in the North,” External Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris said. The government has sought the support of countries such as Russia and China to enforce what it views as its national sovereignty.

Despite Sri Lanka’s non-recognition of the UN panel, the government was in negotiations with the UN to provide aircraft to the UN for peacekeeping missions. The aircraft were used in the fight against the Tamil Tigers in 2009. However, because of the allegations against Sri Lanka’s human rights record, accepting the aircraft would create a controversy.

The government’s offer of the aircraft appeared to be a way to improve the relationship between Sri Lanka and the UN. Sri Lankan troops already participate in UN peacekeeping missions in Haiti and Chad. The Sri Lankan aircraft could be used to replace Indian helicopters that were used in Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The strained relationship between the UN and the government of Sri Lanka was caused by the ethnic conflict and war crimes perpetrated by the Tamil Tigers and government troops.

The final months of the civil war were the most violent of the twenty-year conflict. The government troops pushed the Tamil Tigers and tens of thousands of civilians into a narrow strip of land in the north and ultimately defeated the rebel group in 2009. Between January and May 2009, 7,000 civilians were killed and 16,700 wounded.

Sources: AFP, June 17; Colombo Page, June 17; Daily Mirror, June 21; IBN Live, June 21.
CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

South African President Visits the DRC; Disease and Rape are of Concern in the Country

On 21 June, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa visited the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for his first ever state visit to that country. The visit dealt with stabilization, rebuilding, energy, and the future of regional security. Zuma and DRC President Joseph Kabila co-chaired the 7th DRC-South Africa Bi-national Commission.

The meeting was promoted by the 2004 General Cooperation Agreement signed between the two countries promoting economic and social development and cooperation. Both presidents also shared concern over the situation in Libya.

While Kabila and Zuma discussed development, one of the world’s worst contagious diseases spread near the DRC’s capital, Kinshasa. A recent cholera outbreak has killed 32 people and is said to now be a threat to the densely populated city, where many people live in unsanitary conditions.

As reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), the disease, which comes from unclean water, is said to have come to the capital via traders who travel down the Congo River. The organization is working with the government of the DRC to prevent the continued spread of the disease from Bandundu province. Health inequality in the DRC is sizeable due to the fractured infrastructure left after the Congolese War of 1998 to 2003.

Amnesty International and Médecins Sans Frontièræs (MSF) have also released reports of a two-night attack on the villages of Nyakiele and Fizi in eastern DRC June 11 and 12. MSF stated that it has treated over 100 women for injuries from rape in the raids.

Over the course of the two nights the attackers not only raped a reported 170 women, they also stole medical supplies, farm animals, and motor vehicles. A member of the provincial parliament stated, “people are in total despair.”

The United Nations Mission in Congo has begun investigation of the incident in the area of Fizi, with information that the group of attackers was previously part of the Congolese army. The continuation of rape in eastern DRC, which was named the “rape capital of the world” by UN special representative Margot Wallstrom, is of great concern for standards of law and order in the country.

Amnesty International has called for immediate action to protect victims of these crimes. Rape has been used as a widespread tool of violence against women of all ages in the DRC during times of conflict.

Sources: AI 23 June 2011; CNN 24 June 2011; Pretoria News 23 June 2011; Congo 21 June 2011
KENYA

Members of Parliament to Pay Higher Taxes

On 21 June the Members of Parliament were asked to pay taxes on their full salary dating back to last year’s new constitution. The Kenyan tax office has demanded that if they do not pay tax on their full earnings, it would be a breach of the new national laws. Even with the new constitution, an agreement between the President and MPs has allowed MPs to pay taxes on only a small percentage of their income.

The monthly salary of a Kenyan Member of Parliament is about $10,000 compared that of the average Kenyan, who earns $760 a year. In July 2010 the MPs voted to raise their salaries after the 2012 elections to $126,000. Under the change the Prime Minister would earn $40,000 USD a month, and the MP would also add $370 a day to their earnings for being present in Parliament. The annual salary of the U.S. president is $400,000 and that of the UK’s prime minister is £142,000 ($228,650 USD).

MPs in Kenya are some of the highest paid officials in Africa. Reportedly however the new larger tax bill would take an additional $10,000 from each MP for the last year and even more after the newly voted salary takes effect next year.

On 23 June the MPs defended their tax-free income while the Kenyan Revenue Authority (KRA) threatened to auction their assets in order to pay the amount truly due from taxes dating back to September 2010. Justice Minister Mutula Kilonzo stated that taxing the MPs should not be done in a way that would create mistrust in the public leaders. Additionally, the Central Organization for Trade Unions said that although the KRA has the right to tax, taxation should not be handled through intimidation.

One MP said that it is the KRA’s job to collect taxes and therefore he would not refuse to pay. There is a proposal to waive the tax fees to current members sitting in Parliament.

Sources: BBC 24 June 2011; BCC 5 July 2011; KBC 23 June 2011

SUDAN

President Omar al-Bashir Threatens to Close Southern Oil Pipelines

On June 21 President Omar al-Bashir made an important speech in Port Sudan stating his intention to shut down pipelines carrying Southern Sudan’s oil to northern refineries and ports if a deal was not reached before the south becomes independent in less than a month.
The south of Sudan holds more than three quarters of the country’s oil reserves and contributes 98 percent of its revenue from oil exports. The pipelines that have been threatened by President Bashir make southern oil available to the ports in the Red Sea. Any blockage or shutdown would be detrimental to the south’s economy. A desired deal between the north and south would include payment to the north for the oil availability lost with the south’s independence.

President Bashir did however state that after the South is independent it would be possible for the two countries to continue to cooperate on matters concerning oil. The terms of a post-independence deal will greatly depend on the events of the next couple of weeks.

In the years since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005, the north and south have equally shared the revenues from oil exports. The north is asking the south to pay half of its oil revenue in exchange for using the north’s oil infrastructure. President Bashir made his threat very clear, stating, “The north is to continue getting its share, or the north gets fees for every barrel that the south sends to Port Sudan. If they don’t accept either of these, we’re going to block the pipeline.”

The demands of the northern government come in conjunction with a June 20 deal between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. The proposed deal would bring 3,200 Ethiopian peacekeepers to the Abyei region once both northern and southern troops have withdrawn.

This breakthrough ceasefire can be contrasted with the violence continuing in the Northern state of South Kordofan between Khartoum’s armed forces and northern rebels. Some of this violence, which has been ethnically targeted, is a threat to hopes for a peaceful July 9 secession. U.S. President Barack Obama has called for a complete cease-fire in the country and urges expedited moves toward the peace process.

Sources: BBC 22 June 2011; CNN 22 June 2011.