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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 2011 term are:

Felicia Gomez (University of San Diego), Andy Paul (University of Colorado - Boulder), Meghan Auker Becker (Swarthmore College) and graduate intern Shabnaz Yousefia (University of San Diego)
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HRW = Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)
iAfrica = iAfrica (http://iafrica.com)
IANS = Indo-Asian News Service (www.ians.in)
ICG = International Crisis Group (www.crisisweb.org)
IPS News Agency = Inter Press Service News Agency (www.ipsnews.net)
IRIN = Integrated Regional Information Network (www.irinnews.org)
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TIME = Time (www.time.com)
Times Live = Times Live (www.timeslive.co.za)
Times of India = Times of India (www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com)
Times Online = Times Online (www.timesonline.co.uk)
UN News = UN News Center (www.un.org/news)
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)
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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

COLOMBIA
Women’s sex strike comes to an end only after a new road is built

The strike called Crossed Legs began 22 June, when more than 300 women refused to have sex with their husbands until the government agreed to pave the first half of a road that connects their secluded town of Barbacoas to the city of Pastro.

Maribel Silva, one of the strike’s leaders and a local judge, said that the strike was “born out of desperation.” She went on to describe the terrible conditions of the road, noting that sick people have died trying to make it to the hospital, food prices have gone up due to the transportation costs, and that the drive can take up to twenty hours.

Silva and Diego Enriquez, a local judge, encouraged the women of Barbacoas to join the strike because of the men’s passivity towards the paving of the road. Silva remarks that the men of the community first responded “with laughter because they found the way that we were protesting very curious.” When the reality set in, the men soon became a driving force in the cause.

The women have ended the strike as a result of Transport Minister, German Cardona’s pledge to invest 21 million US dollars to pave the first half of the road. Cardona stated that research on the costs to pave the second half of the road is currently being conducted.

The initial construction on the road began the week of October 10, although many are wary of the actual implementation of the promises made. Money has been allocated toward the paving of the road five times before, but has disappeared and never been seen by the people. The people of Barbacoas are hopeful that this will be a major transition for them. Silva noted, “We have to come out of these 18th century conditions.”

Sources:

Please send comments to Felicia Gomez at feliciagomez-12@sandiego.edu.

Paramilitary groups train members of the Los Zetas drug cartel in Mexico

Four ex-members of Colombia’s Army Special Forces (Fuerzas Especiales del Ejército) have been accused of training and advising members of the Los Zetas organized crime group in Mexico. They are now under investigation by Colombian, Mexican and U.S. authorities for their alleged actions.

The Zetas drug cartel has been labeled one of the most dangerous and violent cartels within Mexico and is made up of members who have parted ways with the Mexican army. According to the
Mexican DEA, the cartel is “the most technologically advanced, sophisticated and violent of the paramilitary enforcement groups.”

Currently Colombian, American and Mexican authorities are investigating two former army majors and two non-commissioned officers from Colombia accused of having ties to the Zetas since 2006. It was noted that they have traveled extensively between Colombia, Mexico and the United States. The two majors were released from prison in 2005 after being detained on charges of human rights abuses. After their release they allegedly formed a criminal training agency.

The skills possessed by ex-Colombian militants have proved to be worthy assets to the international war market. Not only are Colombian ex-militants advising Mexican drug cartels, they have also had a presence in taking mercenary jobs in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan.

Sources: Al Jazeera, Oct. 17; Colombia Reports, Oct. 16; El Tiempo, Oct. 15, 2011.

Please send comments to Felicia Gomez at feliciagomez-12@sandiego.edu.

GUATEMALA
Single-sex bus service begins in Guatemala City

Guatemala introduced women-only buses to the capital last week, aimed at reducing instances of harassment and violence against women on public transportation.

The project resulted from a petition started by Congresswoman Zury Rios Montt to draw attention to the fact that hundreds of women were sexually harassed on buses every year.

The Association of Transport Users in Guatemala receives approximately 1,500 complaints of passenger abuse every year, and more than a third of them involve the sexual harassment of women and girls.

"Women have the right to travel in safety, as demanded by law," said Luis Gómez, vice-president of the city's bus service, Transurbano. "It's a shame we had to introduce this system, but people weren't respecting women on mixed buses."

The project currently only operates during rush hour, but passengers said they hope the hours will be extended and the rules expanded to allow children over the age of seven to accompany their mothers on the bus. The system uses pre-paid travel tickets, so drivers do not carry money, which makes the buses less of a target for thieves, and each bus is equipped with panic buttons, CCTV cameras, armed guards and some even have female drivers.

Similar programs have been introduced in Mexico, India, and (to a lesser extent) in Japan, Brazil, and Egypt. These are voluntary programs, meaning women are permitted to take advantage of the single-sex trains, buses, and taxis if they wish or continue to use mixed-sex transportation.
Report profiles the drug trafficking world

Guatemala: Drug Trafficking and Violence, a report published October 11 by the International Crisis Group, examined the eruption of Mexican-led cartels in the country and how they relate to the cycles of violence and the institutional failure of the government. The report urged the winner of November’s presidential election to find internal resources and the political will to improve law enforcement and justice to confront violence and corruption, as well as to address the widespread social and economic inequalities that are among the most extreme in Central America.

Guatemala’s location between Colombia and the United States has made it one of the world’s busiest intersections for illegal drugs. Cocaine and other drugs come in by air, land, and sea and move into Mexico en route to the U.S. The report looked at the growing number of gangs, common criminals, and drug traffickers, as well as at demoralized police forces, the intimidated or corrupted judicial system, and at a population widely distrustful of law enforcement. It also focused on the arrival of the Zetas criminal cartel from Mexico and its violent attempts to integrate itself in the country and at the long-established criminal families, such as the Mendozas, who seem to avoid prosecutions through ties in high-ranking political and government circles.

With regards to the broader social-economic situation in Guatemala, the report cited studies that have found that in the highland communities, a majority of children suffer from malnutrition, that in the country as a whole one in four adults cannot read or write, and that 42 in 1,000 children die before the age of five. According to the report, an average of 6,000 people have been killed in Guatemala annually, a figure that approaches the number of homicides each year in the entire European Union, with nearly 36 times the population. To put these numbers in a regional context, the murder rate in 2010 (42 per 100,000) was 16 per cent higher than Colombia’s (38 per 100,000) and nearly triple neighboring Mexico’s (16 per 100,000).

The report, however, did highlight some signs of hope. Guatemala is not a failing state, but rather holds regular elections, has functioning schools and hospitals, and runs an active economy. The report also pointed to the work of activist attorney general, Claudia Paz y Paz, who is working to revive long-stalled investigations into past human rights abuse; a veteran human rights activist, Helen Mack, who was chosen by the outgoing government to reform the police; and the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a joint initiative by the UN and the Guatemalan government, which is pursuing high-profile judicial cases.

Ending the impunity that has allowed drug trafficking and other illegal activities to flourish is one of the key components to ending the violence and inequality in the country, the report stated. It will require not only domestic efforts but also international support to ensure these challenges do not overwhelm a democracy still recovering from decades of political violence and military rule.
“Under-resourced and widely mistrusted institutions are being overwhelmed by crime, especially at the local level”, said Javier Ciurlizza, director of Crisis Group’s Latin America & Caribbean program. “Confronting these networks will require considerable political will on the part of Guatemalan leaders and substantial financial and moral support from abroad”.


Please send comments to Meghan Auker Becker at megtab@sandiego.edu.

HAITI
UN votes to reduce numbers of troops

The UN Security Council agreed October 12 to withdraw nearly 3,000 troops and police, bringing the force’s size to just under 10,600, closer to where it was before the devastating earthquake in January 2010.

The 15-nation council unanimously approved the resolution in response to improved security situation in the country and a more stable political situation after a new government was formed with the recent approval of Prime Minister Garry Conille. However, the council also voted to extend the mission’s mandate for another year, noting that any future adjustments to the size of the mission will be based on the overall security situation.

Despite improvements in security, the council's resolution voiced "concern that trends since the earthquake reveal an increase in all major categories of crime, including murder, rape and kidnapping in Port-au-Prince and the West Department." It condemned violations against children affected by violence as well as sexual abuse of women and girls, and requested that the Secretary-General enforce a zero-tolerance policy with troops on the ground with regards to sexual exploitation or abuse of any form.

UN troops have allegedly been involved in many cases of misconduct during their deployment, including the recent rape of an 18-year old Haitian by Uruguayan troops, prompting Haitians to protest what they see as a foreign occupation of their country.

Sources: BBC; CNN; Reuters, UN News Centre, Oct. 14, 2011.

Please send comments to Meghan Auker Becker at megtab@sandiego.edu.
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

IRAQ
US troops prepare to withdraw from Iraq

The United States continues plans for a full U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq despite ongoing concerns about the insecurity and potential instability of the Iraqi military. The two countries have been unable to reach an agreement on the protection of U.S. troops from prosecution in Iraqi courts should they remain to conduct trainings for Iraqi forces.

All U.S. troops are currently scheduled to leave Iraq by December 31, which would end more than eight years of war. The Pentagon plans to keep two hundred troops in Iraq in order to provide security for the U.S. embassies and other facilities.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki has announced that Iraqi security forces need further training before they can take over from the U.S. military. The U.S. government has agreed to leave more troops behind on the condition that they are granted full immunity from prosecution in Iraqi courts, a condition that the Iraqi government has not agreed to.

Al-Maliki told U.S. officials that Iraq’s parliament will not provide the votes needed to provide immunity to American trainers. Meanwhile, Shiite militiamen have threatened further attacks on any American forces that remain in the country past the end-of-the-year withdrawal date.

According to the Pentagon, talks with the Iraqi government are ongoing.

Sources: CNN, Oct. 18; USA Today, Oct. 18; The Huffington Post, Oct. 15, 2011

Please send comments to Shabnaz Yousefia at syousefia@sandiego.edu.

LIBYA
Gaddafi killed in hometown of Sirte

After controlling Libya for 42 years, Colonel Moammar Gaddafi was captured October 20 in rebels’ final push on his coastal hometown of Sirte. Several videos have been released including a clip of him still alive and one of his dead body.

He was moved to Misrata, the town where the rebel unit responsible for Sirte’s siege was based. It is unclear whether he died in Sirte or in transit to the hospital in Misrata.

Ali Tarhouni, a deputy chairman of the National Transition Council (NTC) arrived with reporters and medical officials for official confirmation.
While Gaddafi has been confirmed dead, further uncertainty remains whether he died from wounds he received in the gun battle against his stronghold or was killed in the street. What is certain is that the former dictator met a violent and gruesome end.

Muttasim, one of Gaddafi’s sons and former National Security Advisor was also killed in the attack, though he had been rumored to have already been NTC custody earlier in the week. It is rumored that one of Gaddafi’s last sons to be at large, Saif, fled Sirte in a convoy.

Mahmoud Jibril, Prime Minister of the NTC stated on behalf of his government, “we were serious about giving him a fair trial. It seems God has some other wish.” Criticism has come from the West due to the treatment of Gaddafi following his capture and the release of violent pictures and video clips. Some have seen this as the tone setter for the new supposedly democratic government. Despite such skepticism, Libyans are relieved and many consider a dark chapter of their history to be over.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon remarked in the wake of Gaddafi’s death, "Now is the time for all Libyans to come together. Libyans can only realize the promise of the future for national unity and reconciliation."

The interim government has yet to determine what to do with Gaddafi’s body, though it has stated it does not want to bury him in Sirte for fear of his grave site becoming a shrine for his supporters and followers. Rather, they prefer to bury him in a secret location.


Please send comments to Andy Paul at ajpaul@sandiego.edu.

PALESTINE
Hundreds of prisoners returned in exchange for Israeli soldier

More than 400 Palestinians were returned to their homes in exchange for an Israeli soldier October 18. The prisoner swap, facilitated by the Egyptian government, has marked a significant milestone in the relationship between the three countries.

The Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who had been in Hamas custody since 2006, was removed from Egypt by Israeli officials and was taken to the Tel Nof air force base. He was later returned to his hometown of Mitzpe Hila.

In an interview in Egypt, Shalit stated, “I will be very happy if all Palestinian prisoners are freed so they can go back to their families […] I hope this deal could help reach peace between Israelis and the Palestinians and strengthen cooperation,” revealing his optimism despite years in captivity.
However, Shalit also admitted that frequent raids on Gaza by Israeli troops would quickly fill prisons with new prisoners, replacing those returned to Palestine.

While 550 more prisoners are to be freed in a second phase of the deal, there are still roughly 5,000 Palestinians in Israeli custody for various charges.

Should Israel not comply with the exchange of prisoners, some Palestinians advocated the capture of more Israeli soldiers, given the favorable ratio they received in this deal.

Sources: Al Jazeera; Associated Press, Oct. 18, 2011.

Please send comments to Andy Paul at ajpaul@sandiego.edu.

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

INDIA
India gives aid to strengthen relationship with Nepal

India is preparing to announce a substantial assistance package to boost Nepal’s economic development process. Details will be revealed when Nepal’s Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai visits India October 20.

According to news reports, India plans to provide Nepal with $1 billion in order to create infrastructure projects that would build and improve hospitals, bridges, canals and colleges. The development partnership between the two countries would strengthen economic ties between the two countries through providing aid for Nepal’s socio-economic development.

Pending a formal agreement, India would also expand existing Indian development assistance programs in Nepal, which focus on increasing the capacity of education, health and community-based development projects.

However, critics suspect that ulterior motives are at play. Hari Roka, a Maoist member of parliament, said, “Instead of designing the smaller projects…per the development priorities of Nepal, India’s aim seems to be to expand political patronage. They use the projects to reward loyalists, and win friends without keeping in mind the real needs on the ground.”

Nepal’s unstable government and widespread political corruption have resulted in mistrust among Nepali citizens who assert that international aid money often does not reach them. Many are critical of economic projects that involve Indian lawmakers due to allegations that the money remains in the hands of influential politicians. Indian officials have rebutted the allegations, saying that all projects come through civil society.
NEPAL
Defense Minister removed from office for separatist remark

Meetings held October 17 regarding the Defense Minister Sarat Singh Bhandari of the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum-Democratic Party (MJF-D) were held in response to his alleged advocacy of a separatist movement.

Bhandari had voiced the formation of an independent Terai state in southern Nepal in an “anti-national” statement he made in Kathmandu. He implied that 22 counties of southern Nepal’s Terai could form their own autonomous region if the government fails to meet realistic demands.

Members of the dominant parties of the Nepali Congress (NC) and the UCPN-Maoists had expressed their concern at such remarks.

In his defense, Bhandari argued, “I have just raised the issue of inclusiveness.” Reluctant to step down from office, Bhandari faced tribunals both from his own party, the MJF-D, and Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai’s Cabinet.

Bhattarai announced that Bhandari was officially sacked October 19, as well as the Land Reforms and Management Prabu Sah. While Bhandari was reluctant to leave office, Sah, who had reportedly been involved in a murder plot against Hindu Yuva sangh leader Kashi Tiwari, had already submitted his resignation.

The Madhesi of the Terai region have been calling for more presence in the Nepali army and political system, and are trying to maintain—or insert—a foot in the door while the country’s constitution is still in the draft phase following the conclusion of the revolution in 2008.

Speaking to foreign reporters last week, Aquino said that a state funeral would be the “height of injustice” toward the victims of Marcos’ rule, stating that the victims of the regime have yet to be accorded any formal apology or compensation. Aquino had earlier rejected the proposal for Marcos to be given state honors, citing similar reasons.

Marcos Jr. responded by saying he was offended by the surprise announcement, which appeared to ignore the recommendation of a presidential commission. He also pointed out what he called the hypocrisy of such a decision, allegedly that both Aquino’s mother, Corazón (who succeeded Marcos after the 1986 uprising), and the current administration have as much to answer for regarding human rights.

However, the Marcos family reportedly refused to appeal the decision, stating that they would just take their chances with the next administration.

For now, Marcos’ body will remain in its refrigerated crypt in the northern Philippines, as it has for most of the two decades since he died in exile in Hawaii.


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SRI LANKA
Tamil unrest continues; student leader attacked, political protest staged

24 year-old Jaffna University Students Union (JUSU) leader Subramaniyam Thavapalasingham was assaulted October 16 by men on motorbikes brandishing sharpened iron rods. He had been assembling students in democratic protest against threats from paramilitary wings of Sri Lanka’s government.

Jaffna, a city in northwestern Sri Lanka has seen violence before and during the war between the Sinhalese government and Tamils.

Thavapalasingham’s student group previously staged demonstrations in Jaffna in May 2010, which resulted in retaliation from the Sri Lankan military. Despite this and a tumultuous relationship with the vice chancellor Vasanthy Arasaradnam, “there had been no formal engagement between the JUSU and the University administration.”

“The attack on Thavapalasingham,” stated a student who visited him in the hospital, “is an attack on the entire student society in Jaffna.” Wounded participants were visited by members of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other Tamil politicians.

October 16 also saw protests in Colombo by members of several Tamil political parties, including the TNA. Although conducted simultaneously, they occurred independently of Thavapalasingham’s assault.
Of their major grievances, the settlement of Sinhalese in Tamil majority was at the fore, as well as the government’s inability to address internally displaced persons (IDPs) before allowing settlement projects.

Despite ongoing Tamil unrest, popular Sri Lankan news sources in Colombo have addressed both stories, though they have not received popular attention and have been hardly covered.

Sources: Daily Mirror; TamilNet, Oct. 16; Daily Mirror; The Island, Oct. 17, 2011.

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EAST AFRICA

KENYA

Shabab militants threaten attack if Kenyan military doesn’t leave

On October 16 the Kenyan military sent hundreds of soldiers into Somalia with the aims of reaching Afmadow, the district headquarters under al-Shabab control. The government said it had received orders to attack all al-Shabab bases in southern Somalia. The military was backed by helicopters and tanks and has been threatened by possible action from al-Shabab if it doesn’t leave Somalia.

Reasons for the invasion have ranged from helping the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia; reassuring safety; and confronting the recent kidnappings of tourists.

Major Emmanuel Chirchir, a Kenyan military official, stated that the Kenyan military wants “to create an environment that’s good for the TFG,” and added that the military was ready to invade Somalia in order to carry out this goal.

Other sources say that the Kenyan government wanted to demonstrate their preparedness for a possible suicide bombing in Nairobi and prove that it would protect its own citizens from the violence that has erupted from Somalia’s conflict.

Kenyan officials also blamed al-Shabab for its alleged role in the recent kidnappings of tourists. However according to some analysts, al-Shabab may not be to blame for the kidnappings, but instead it may have been organized by experienced pirate gangs. Al-Shabab has denied any ties to the kidnappings as well. The attacks against tourists have hindered the booming tourist industry in Kenya as well as the security of aid workers.

Throughout history, Kenya has remained a relatively neutral country, with little interference but peacemaking efforts in its neighboring country’s affairs. Suddenly the Kenya government is acting quickly and it is reported that many Kenyans are worried “that their country may be playing with fire.”
Due to the swift invasion by the Kenyan military, al-Shabab is enraged and wants the Kenyan military to leave Somalia. Sheik Ali Mohamud Rage, an al-Shabab spokesperson, stated, “If your government ignores our calls to stop its aggression on Somali soil, we will strike at the heart of your interests.” He went on to say that “Shabab would attack unless Kenyan troops immediately withdrew and that Kenyan planes had already bombed Shabab, killing many civilians.” Hassan Turki, a senior al-Shabab leader, stated that his men would force the Kenya military to “test the pain of bullets.”

While there is some local hesitancy towards the actions of the Kenyan military, many other Kenyans seemed willing to take on the fight. The Sunday Nation, a local Kenyan newspaper, stated, “there is no greater external threat to Kenya’s stability than the al-Shabab.”


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