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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 fall 2011 term are:

Felicia Gomez (University of San Diego), Andrew 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)
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IAPA = Inter American Press Association (www.sipiapa.org)
ICG = International Crisis Group (www.crisisweb.org)
IHT = International Herald Tribune (www.iht.com)
Independent = The Independent (www.independent.co.ug)
Informer = The Informer (www.theinformer-lr.com)
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Kuwait Times = Kuwait Times (http://www.kuwaittimes.net/)
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RSF = Reporters without Borders (www.rsf.org)
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UPDATE SUMMARY

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COLOMBIA

Carmelo Agámez, leader of MOVICE, regains his freedom

On September 26, Carmelo Agámez, human rights activist and leader of Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (MOVICE), was released from prison after almost three years of confinement without any convictions. Agámez was persecuted for his work as a human rights defender and was deprived of any right to due process for the duration of his time in prison.

Agámez is a human rights defender, specifically denouncing crimes committed by the paramilitary groups and corrupt politicians in Colombia. He also serves as the leader of MOVICE, which states it aims to consolidate a national movement to denounce criminal activities, work to help victims of state terrorism, and to contribute to the solution of armed and social conflict in Colombia.

Agámez was arrested November 13, 2008 in his hometown of Sucre on charges of crimes of conspiracy, which accused him of being part of the paramilitary groups. However, Agámez had denounced the acts of the paramilitary groups in Sucre.

Days before Agámez’ arrest, men armed with weapons illegally entered and searched his house violently without a warrant. On November 15, 2008, Agámez appeared in court with his lawyer, José Humberto Torres, who asked the judge to grant Agámez home detention, which was denied. This right was granted to men who had confessed to activity with the paramilitaries.

Some advocates have accused the prison institutions of kidnappings aimed at human rights defenders such as Agámez. These same critics also noted that “Carmelo served a sentence in advance, despite his innocence.”

Sources: Comité de Solidaridad. Sept. 26; MOVICE. Sept. 26;

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

GUATEMALA

Students paint murals to promote peace

More than 50 students and young adults painted murals on city walls within Zone 6 of Guatemala City September 24 to promote peace and reconciliation, part of a week long program sponsored by Archivo Histórico de la desaparecida Policía Nacional (PN). Director of Arte y Cultura para el Desarrollo, Julio Solórzano Foppa, whose own mother had been “disappeared” during the civil war, explained that these murals highlight the role of culture as a reconciler of society.
The murals and other events, including discussions and photo exhibitions, were aimed at promoting the recuperation of historical memory and reconciling the citizens of Guatemala with the past and the events of the 36-year long civil war.

Similar tactics of reconciliation have been employed in Northern Ireland, where public murals depicting cross-cultural cooperation and understanding have become a cornerstone in the process of building and sustaining peace following “The Troubles” lasting from approximately 1969 to 1998.

Guatemala’s historical archive project began in 2005 after an explosion at an ammunition depot outside Guatemala City led to the discovery of millions of documents that were part of the historical record of the National Police of Guatemala. The PN was disbanded after the 1996 peace accords and replaced by the National Civilian Police, and had long denied the existence of such records.

The project has since recovered and restored more than 5 million folders and documents, which register the disappearances and deaths of thousands of Guatemalans between 1960 and 1996. These documents may provide evidence to bring cases to court, be a starting point for further research on the role of the police and military in the counterinsurgency campaign, as well as give answers to the families of the dead and missing.


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

HAITI

**President opposes UN troop withdrawal**

President Michel Martelly announced Friday that he believed UN peacekeepers had committed “unacceptable errors” in his country, but should stay to help with stability and reconstruction.

In his speech to the UN General Assembly September 23, Martelly also called for better coordination in the relief efforts along with more opportunities to allow his own country to take a leading role in rebuilding.

This theme had previously been discussed September 21 on CNN’s “Piers Morgan Tonight,” when Martelly, President of Rwanda Paul Kagame, U.S. Special envoy to Haiti Dr. Paul Farmer, and fashion designer Donna Karan all appeared to discuss the situation in Haiti. President Kagame emphasized that Haiti needs to be resilient and take national ownership of the recovery process, tactics Rwanda adopted in order to overcome the devastating effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. He added, “Globally, the political will to help is there, if they can get organized and target the kind of assistance in specific areas and priorities.” Farmer said the country is now at a stage where it needs fully fledged support to reconstruct: “What the people of Haiti need is not just relief, but reconstruction…”

There have been mixed feelings about the UN peacekeeping troops for years, seen by some Haitians as a vital security force and by others as an unwelcome military occupier. Recent protests have
called for their withdrawal, citing the cholera epidemic and the rape of a young Haitian man, both of which were reportedly caused by the peacekeepers.

Martelly himself had previously called for a quick exit of the troops, but instead agreed this week with the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on a proposal to extend the deployment for another year but reduce the force from 12,000 troops to its pre-quake levels of 9,000 troops.


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

**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

**BAHRAIN**

**Elections boycotted; opposition to government rises**

Public protests began on Friday September 23 in Pearl Square in the capital of Manama. The following day, elections scheduled for September 24 were inhibited from taking place due to boycotts and elections are scheduled to be held again October 1.

While the government’s Information Affairs Authority claimed that the low turnout was due to non-democratic pressures, protesters and opposition members asserted that it was an intentional act against the government.

Sheikh Ali Salman and other Shiite religious leaders assert that the failed vote was due to an intentional boycott aimed against the Sunni monarchy led by Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa.

19 of the September 23 protesters are being tried in court for inciting violence, and all pleaded not guilty.

Eight Shiite protesters convicted in June of similar charges were sentenced to life in prison while 13 others were given a 15 year sentence on Wednesday September 28.

A special tribunal held Thursday September 29 found 13 medical professionals who treated protesters during protests of last spring to be guilty of crimes against the state and sentence them to 15 years in prison.

Several international human rights organizations expressed concern over the sentences and the treatment activists received while in detention.
Bahrain, a Sunni-controlled kingdom, has a significantly Shiite majority and the opposition cited achieving more equal representation as its main goal.


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

IRAQ

Corruption Levels on the Rise

According to a September 2011 report from the International Crisis Group (ICG), progress in Iraq has been severely undermined by rising levels of corruption and abuse.

The 38-page ICG report, “Failing Oversight: Iraq’s Unchecked Government,” stated that although the Iraqi government had successfully reduced levels of violence throughout the country, it had not been able to control widespread corruption throughout its agencies and institutions.

In the violence that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, judges and parliamentarians were targeted, public services were destroyed, and significant corruption ensued due to a lack of oversight agencies. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was criticized for failing to protect his government’s institutions from corruption and abuse. According to the ICG, al-Maliki had exacerbated the problem by “interfering in anti-corruption cases, manipulating investigations for political advantage, and intimidating critics to prevent a replication of the type of popular movements that already have brought down three regimes in the region.”

According to the report, the government of Iraq and the Council of Representatives should address corruption by developing a framework for better coordination between various state agencies, reforming the Council of Representatives to accelerate the legislative process, and passing legislation that requires political parties to display financial transparency and publish detailed annual accounts, income and expenditures.

The ICG report was released just four days after Iraqi President Jalal Talabani’s September 23 address to the United Nations, in which he said, “We are working on Iraq to become…an important factor in regional stability, security and prosperity as a living example of democracy and federalism, voluntary coexistence of different ethnic and sectarian groups…”

However, watchdog non-governmental organization Transparency International recently ranked Iraq among the world’s four most corrupt countries in their 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Sources: AFP, Sep 26 ;International Crisis Group, Sep 26 ; XinHuanNews, Sep 23

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

Mass grave found in Tripoli

Amid the ongoing fighting against remaining pro-Gadhafi supporters in the cities of Sirte (Moammar Gadhafi’s hometown) and Bani Walid, a mass grave containing the bodies of 1,270 people was discovered, National Transition Council (NTC) officials announced September 25.

The grave, located outside of Abu-Salim prison in Tripoli is filled with the bodies of prisoners that were executed in 1996 in an event known as the “Abu-Salim massacre.” Only a few death certificates were written following the event, and many who were believed to have been killed have been missing since.

The discovery of the grave has serious implications for the NTC. Not only does it reveal atrocities committed by the Gadhafi regime and serve as additional weight to the movement, the Abu-Salim massacre has been a central grievance of the revolution.

In February, Fathi Terbil, the lawyer charged with discovering the whereabouts of people missing from Abu-Salim prison was arrested, prompting the start of protests against Gadhafi.

Officials of the NTC government called upon the international community to assist in identifying the bodies.

While the NTC controls Tripoli, it is still besieging Sirte and Bani Walid with the assistance of NATO, acknowledging that pro-Gadhafi forces have received support from outside of Libya.

Al Jazeera, BBC, Huffington Post Sept. 26

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

YEMEN

Violence mounts following President’s return; opposition demands removal

Ongoing opposition against President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his government has not lost momentum since his return to Yemen September 23. Although Saleh had called for a cease-fire upon arrival, the government has neglected to follow it.

September 24 saw a violent backlash against protesters with government forces using sniper and artillery units, leaving more than 100 dead.
Retaliatory attacks have also occurred. A suicide bomb attack September 27 against Defense Minister Mohammed Nasser Ali’s convoy left several of his military attaches wounded but Ali was unscathed, according to government officials.

Tension erupted further on September 28 when tribal militants, believed to be allies of defected General Moshin Al-Amar, shot down a government fighter jet in Yemen’s mountainous region.

Despite the September 28 violence, tens of thousands of peaceful protesters had simultaneously returned to Change Square where the events of last week occurred.

It has become increasingly apparent that the longer Saleh maintains his position and uses violent tactics, the more willing members of the opposition have been to take up arms. Additionally, the international community has shown increasing concern about the degree Al-Qaeda has been able to establish itself in Yemen with the instability over the last few years will be affected by further political volatility.

Sources:
New York Times Sept. 25; Al Jazeera Sept. 26; Al Jazeera Sept. 27, Al Jazeera Sept. 28

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

SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

INDIA

Maoists invited to talks with government

On September 21, the Union Minister of Home Affairs, P. Chidambaram, urged Maoist rebels to halt the violence in favor of engaging in peaceful talks with the government. He has promised that he will not set conditions of their surrendering, giving up arms, or abandoning their ideologies.

India’s Maoist insurgency has become progressively more powerful and dangerous in recent years. Since 2008, 2,721 people have been killed by the rebels, whose tactics include sabotaging trains and planting land mines.

The Maoist movement began in 1967 and is strongest in the poorest areas of India. The rebels claim that they are fighting on behalf of neglected tribal people and landless farmers who have found themselves trapped in vicious cycles of poverty and deprivation.

Maoists target police officers, landowners and representatives of the state. In recent times, the movement has become a violent struggle in response to the use of force by the Indian police. Not surprisingly, the movement is mainly supported by impoverished villagers who have lost faith in the
Indian government. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has urged state governments to increase services for poor communities as a way of countering the rebel movement.

Chidambaram has said that in terms of the number of people who have died in India, “Left-wing extremism is a greater challenge than terrorism.” He stated that he does not expect to solve the problems overnight, but hopes that talks will encourage development, law and order.

Sources: AFP, Sep 13 ; The Telegraph, Sep 22 ; South Asian News Agency, Sep 22 ; Pakistan Observer, Sep 28

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

NEPAL

Islamic Association General-Secretary assassinated

General-Secretary of the Nepali Islamic Association, Faijel Ahmed, was shot to death September 26 by two gunmen. The shooting occurred at 1:45 P.M. bordering the Tri-Chandra College campus and within sight of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner’s Office (MPCO).

Ahmed, who had finished daily prayers at the Jane mosque at 1:30 P.M., was returning to his office when he was gunned down, sustaining multiple gunshot wounds to the head, neck and chest. He was proclaimed him dead at 2:15 P.M.

As a result of the proximity of the shooting to the MPCO, Home Minister Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar had Superintendent of Police (SP) Kedar Rijal replaced with Rajendra Shrestha in Kathmandu, presumably a “secure” area.

Nepal, though a Hindu majority country, has been known for its religious tolerance.

Both the shooters and their motives remain unknown.

Sources: The Kathmandu Post, The Rising Nepal, Nepal Mountain News Sept. 26

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PHILIPPINES

Clashes erupt in southern province

At least 18 people were killed September 25 in clashes between suspected separatists and government troops in the southern province of Sulu.

The fighting reportedly began after 50 men attacked troops guarding a school construction site and road project on Sunday, killing 13 suspected militants, two soldiers, and three civilians hit by stray bullets. Randolph Cabangbang, a military spokesperson, identified the men as members of the
Awliyah, an armed group, with links to the Abu Sayyaf, another group that the Philippines classifies as a terrorist organization. The fighters allegedly launched the attack in an attempt to take control of the predominantly Muslim territory from the military.

For decades, Muslim separatist groups have fought for independence or an autonomous substate in the southern provinces. The main separatist group, the Moro National Liberation Front, signed a peace accord with the government in 1996 after it dropped its secessionist bid and settled for limited Muslim autonomy. Many of the Moro rebels, however, believe that the Philippine government did not follow through on many of their political and economic promises, and continue to be blamed for backing or carrying out violence in the area.

Al Jazeera, Sept. 25; Philippine Star, Sept. 16, 2011.

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Typhoon floods Manila

Typhoon Nesat flooded most of Manila and much of the main island of Luzon Tuesday as it passed over the country with more than 100 mile per hour winds and dropping up to an inch of rain an hour. At least 21 people have been reported dead and 33 others missing. The capital was brought to a standstill as main power lines were downed and financial markets, government offices, transportation, and schools were shut down. Powerful storm surges flooded the entire first floor of a hospital, the U.S. embassy, and a five-star hotel.

The typhoon also dumped heavy rains on rice and corn-growing regions in central Luzon, where it is estimated 15 to 20 percent of crops may have been damaged, worth 16.5 million US dollars.

The BBC deemed Nesat the largest typhoon this year. While the storm had mostly passed, authorities kept an eye on communities at the base of the Mayon volcano, southeast of Manila. In 2006, a typhoon caused mudslides in the area that buried villages and killed or left missing 1,600 people.

The massive flooding came exactly a day after Manila held two-year commemorations for the nearly 500 people killed during a 2009 cyclone, which dumped a month’s rainfall in just 12 hours. The geography of the Philippines makes it a welcome mat for about 20 storms and typhoons from the Pacific each year. Another tropical cyclone, Nalgae, is expected to enter Philippine waters within the week and is likely to cross Northern Luzon, the same area hit by Nesat.


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SRI LANKA

Military rule and unaccountability on the table at United Nations meeting

September 24 marked the 66th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. In attendance was Sri Lanka’s President Mahinda Rajapaksa to discuss the condition of post-war Sri Lanka and human rights.

Over the meetings, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Rajapaksa to follow through on the agreement that they had both signed in 2009 following the conclusion of the war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). The document emphasized the need for the Sri Lankan government to investigate, address and reconcile human rights violations that occurred during and after the conflict.

The UN still has been persistent with this request. Ban’s September 12 decision to further scrutinize Sri Lankan government’s actions related to the detention, murder and disappearance of civilians suspected of ties to the LTTE brought a report to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The notion that Rajapaksa has simply been playing diplomatic games and avoiding following through on the agreements he had signed has made some members of the international community lose patience.

John Baird, the Foreign Minister of Canada stated, “The greatest enemies of United Nations are not those who have publicly repudiated [UN] actions, the greatest enemies of the United Nations are those who quietly undermine its principles and, even worse, those who sit idly watching a slow decline.”

Many await the release of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report this November, a document aimed at investigating past actions created by Rajapaksa’s government. This combined with talks with the Tamil National Alliance have served as a bargaining chip for those claiming to deal with gross violations of human rights that have occurred before and after the war.

The UN has also catered to the assertions of the Sri Lankan government, which has frequently cried “foul play” in terms of the credibility of their evidence related to human rights violations, and Ban has launched an investigatory committee spearheaded by Under-Secretary-General, Thoraya Obaid.

Sources:
UN News Centre Sept. 24; Colombo Page Sept. 25; Daily Mirror Sept. 26; Tamil Net Sept. 27; Tamil Guardian, Sept. 28

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Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner dies of cancer

Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize, died September 25, at age 71 from ovarian cancer.

Maathai held many roles including environmentalist, feminist, politician, professor, human rights advocate and head of the Green Belt Movement, which she founded in 1977. She also served as a Member of Parliament in Kenya from 2002-2007. Maathai was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree and has received a range of honors from being named as one of the 100 most influential people in *Time Magazine* to praises from the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon.

She was also the head of the Green Belt movement which aimed to plant trees across Kenya to fight erosion, as well as create firewood for cooking and jobs for women. The movement originally began when Maathai paid poor women a few Kenyan shillings in exchange for planting trees. Her role with the Green Belt movement contributed to her recognition as an environmentalist, and later as a Nobel Peace laureate.

The United Nations remarked how successful the Green Belt movement had been, noting that since its inception, 30 million trees have been planted in Kenya and approximately 900 thousand women have been helped. Not only has the Green Belt movement improved environmental efforts in Kenya, it has also sparked similar causes in other African countries.

Among the most notable of her accomplishments, she was the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. She won the Prize in 2004 for “her contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace,” as stated by the Nobel Committee. In receiving the Prize, Maathai expressed hope that her “own success would spur other women on to a more active role in the community.”

Prime Minister Raila Odinga stated that the death of Maathai “strikes at the core of our nation’s heart.” President Mwai Kibaki also called Maathai a “global icon.”

Maathai leaves behind three children and a granddaughter.


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