Peace & Justice Update  
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The countries for the Peace and Justice updates have been chosen as areas of focus at the Institute. The International Human Rights section is intended to focus on aspects of international law. For information on specific cases of human rights abuses, please visit www.hrw.org or www.amnesty.org. The Gender and Peace section highlights events in peace building and human rights that pertain to gender.

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 biographical 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.

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UPDATE SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

AP = Associated Press (www.ap.org)
AFP = Agence France Presse (www.afp.com)
AllAfrica = AllAfrica Global Media (www.allAfrica.com)
BBC = British Broadcasting Corporation (http://news.bbc.co.uk)
BBC Monitoring = BBC Monitoring International Reports (www.monitor.bbc.co.uk/)
CDC News = Center for Disease Control News (www.thebody.com)
CNN = Cable News Network (www.cnn.com)
CPJ = Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org)
DPA = Deutsche Presse-Agentur (www.dpa.com)
FPIF = Foreign Policy in Focus (www.fpif.org)
FT = Financial Times (www.ft.com)
HRW News = Human Rights Watch News (www.hrw.org)
IWPR = Institute for War and Peace Reporting (www.iwpr.net)
IRIN = Integrated Regional Information Network (www.irinnews.org)
(UN Dept. of Humanitarian Affairs Information Network: (www.unog.ch)
NCN = New Congo Net (www.marekinc.com/NCN.html)
PANA = Pan African News Agency (www.panapress.com)
RSF = Reporters Sans Frontieres (www.rsf.org).
TASS = ITAR-TASS News Agency (www.itar-tass.com/english/)
UPI = United Press International (www.upi.com)
VOA = Voice of America (www.voanews.com)
WP = Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com)
WPS = What the Papers Say (www.wps.ru:8101)
WWP = Women Waging Peace (www.womenwagingpeace.net)
Xinhua = Xinhua News Agency (www.xinhuanet.com/english/index.htm)
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CROATIA
Croatia seeks to join NATO and strengthen ties with the U.S.: U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld met with Croatian leaders February 8 and said he supported the country’s desire to join NATO. It was the first trip to Croatia by a U.S. Cabinet member since 2000 when former Secretary of State Madeline Albright visited the country. The two countries have enjoyed a renewed level of closeness since a new government was elected in November 2003 on a platform to further democracy, promote minority rights, and strengthen ties with the U.S. Relations between the two nations had been strained since 2002 when President Bush withdrew the U.S. from the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court and had pressured Croatia to sign an agreement which would guarantee that Americans charged with war crimes would not appear before the court. Croatia refused to sign the agreement, prompting the U.S. to suspend millions in military aid. U.S. interest in promoting a stable Croatia stemmed from the country’s involvement in the conflicts that gripped the Balkans during the 1990s, prompted in part by Croatia’s declaration of independence from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. (WP, February 9, 2004)

SERBIA
War crimes prosecutor alleges war criminal in Belgrade: Carla Del Ponte, the U.N. chief prosecutor for the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at The Hague, alleged February 11 that she had received credible information that indicted former Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic was living in the Serbian capital. Ms. Del Ponte described Belgrade as a haven for fugitives and noted that her office’s relationship with Serbia was now “frozen.” This was not the first such charge and Serbian leaders bristled at the allegation. International donors have insisted on Serbia’s cooperation with the tribunal as a condition for continuing financial aid. Karadzic was charged with war crimes stemming from the 1992-1995 Bosnian war that killed over 200,000, including the massacre of 6,000 Bosnian muslims at the U.N. “safe haven” of Srebrenica in 1995. (BBC; WP, February 11, 2004)

GENDER AND PEACE
Women’s rights making strides in Afghanistan: Equal rights for women were nominally guaranteed by the new Afghan constitution ratified January 4 by the constitutional loya jirga (grand council). Noteworthy was the active participation of women in the council; out of 502 elected delegates present during deliberations, 100 were female. Women’s rights groups heralded the final document as an “incredible victory” for Afghan women, noting that the draft constitution released in November 2003 contained no provision regarding equal rights. The new constitution also allocated 25 percent of the seats in the Afghan House of Representatives to women, and 17 percent of the seats in the Senate. Since adoption of the new document, some religious leaders and media outlets have advocated the increased presence of women in politics by encouraging women to register and vote in upcoming elections. Such supporters noted that Islam permits the
participation of women in the political, social, economic, cultural, and military arenas. From the mid-1990s until 2001, Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban, a fundamentalist Islamic group that rose to prominence during the power struggle that gripped the country after Soviet troops withdrew in 1989. Under the Taliban’s extreme interpretation of Islam, women were restricted from working outside the home and from pursuing an education; were not to leave their homes without an accompanying male relative, and were forced to wear a traditional body-covering garment called the burka. (BBC Monitoring, February 7; WWP, January 14, 2004)

Activists fear backslide for women’s rights in Iraq: Human rights groups, supported by 44 U.S. lawmakers, have called on the Bush Administration to take a strong stand on protecting women’s rights in liberated Iraq. The activists were concerned about Resolution 137, passed by Iraq’s Governing Council (IGC) in late December 2003. The resolution proposed replacing Iraq’s 1959 civil liberties legislation with religion-based laws to be adjudicated by Iraqi clerics. Lawmakers alleged in a February 2004 letter to President Bush that this change could affect women’s access to “education, employment, freedom of movement, property inheritance, divorce and child custody.” Activists feared that Iraqi women would find themselves oppressed as women in Afghanistan had been under the Taliban. The resolution would not take effect until approved by the U.S.-backed governing Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and most considered it unlikely that the CPA would endorse the new law. However, human rights advocates were concerned that unless stronger safeguards were guaranteed by the CPA or written into the new constitution, there would be little outsiders could do to guard against implementation of such laws after sovereign power was transferred back to the Iraqi people. Iraq has been governed by the CPA since the U.S.-led military occupation of the country ousted President Saddam Hussein in April 2003. The Bush Administration’s latest plans called for a transfer of power in June 2004. (FPIF, February 5, 2004)

GREAT LAKES

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Repatriation of ex-Rwandan combatants in DRC slows down: The demobilization of Hutu rebels, who fled into the DRC after the 1994 genocide, has been stalled. Observers raised concerns that the continued instability in the area would have a negative effect on the transitional government in Kinshasa. The Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) estimated that approximately 4,000 fighters out of 53,000 Rwandan Hutu rebels in the DRC had returned. The repatriation of the Hutu fighters has been difficult to speed up because the soldiers were dispersed throughout the country. Furthermore, the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu rebel movement based in the eastern DRC, prevented approximately 3,000 combatants from returning to Rwanda in order to maintain the troop strength of the rebel movement. The FDLR has continued to wage war in eastern DRC against Rwanda in an attempt to oust the government there. Despite the denial of the FDLR, ex-combatants who escaped confirmed that the FDLR had threatened to kill those who intended to repatriate to Rwanda. However, the Chairman of the RDRC was optimistic about the
demobilization process, commenting that ex-combatants would soon return once they were informed about the conditions of repatriation. (All Africa, February 6, 2004; BBC, February 2, 2004)

RWANDA
Private radio returns: The Rwandan government decided to liberalize its airwaves nearly 10 years after the 1994 genocide when approximately one million people died. The Rwandan National High Press Council announced January 28 that several privately owned radio stations were to begin operations in February. Observers said that the government considered the private radio stations a source of employment for unemployed youth. The radio stations were also to assist the government in airing educational programs designed to enhance efforts to eradicate poverty and create awareness of HIV/AIDS. The Rwandan government had been very cautious in licensing private radio stations because of the role of private media in accelerating the 1994 genocide. A pro-Hutu militia radio, Radio Milles Collins, launched a hate campaign against the Tutsi in the early 1990s that led to and fueled the genocide. (BBC, January 28; February 4, 2004)

UGANDA
Rebel movement attacks refugee camp: Approximately 300 Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels attacked a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) February 5 near the northern town of Lira. The attack resulted in approximately 52 deaths. Survivors of the attack said that the LRA deployed throughout the camp by pretending to be government soldiers and militias, and then launched a full-scale attack, shooting civilians and setting fire to their shelters. The attack stopped when the Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF) arrived. President Yoweri Museveni pledged that the government would investigate the circumstances surrounding the attack. In the meantime, local peace groups told the press that this incident was an indicator that the LRA were not being defeated militarily as claimed by the Ugandan government, and they called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The LRA has been fighting the Ugandan army in the north for the last 18 years in an attempt to replace the current government with one based upon the Biblical Ten Commandments. Since last year, insecurity had spread to parts of the east, increasing the fighting as well as the number of IDPs. (IRIN, February 4; February 9, 2004)

Peace advocate could be deported: The Gulu Resident District security officials, composed of police and army officers, recommended February 9 to President Museveni that Father Carlos Rodriguez, a prominent peace advocate and a member of the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative, be deported for spreading false information undermining national security. In a statement regarding the February 1 fire in the Pabbo IDP camp, Father Rodriguez said that the UPDF had arrested LRA collaborators to divert attention away from a fire that the UPDF soldiers had allegedly started that destroyed 2,000 huts. A defense ministry spokesman denied the accusation, stating that Rodriguez’s statement was incorrect. A Gulu-based organization said that this was an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Father Rodriguez who has been critical of the government’s military approach to the conflict in the north. Approximately 1.2 million people have been living in IDP camps in northern and eastern Uganda due to the LRA
insurgency that has de-stabilized the north of the country since 1989. (IRIN, February 9, 2004)

HORN OF AFRICA

ERITREA-ETHIOPIA

Border ban is lifted: Border area restrictions imposed by the Ethiopian Armed Forces on UN peacekeepers were expected to be lifted February 5. The ban, imposed February 2, closed partial areas of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, restricting movements of UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) forces across the southern boundary of the temporary security zone. The border restriction followed Ethiopian concern over the disappearance of an UNMEE vehicle and three personnel last month. The buffer zone, part of the estimated 620-mile border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, was established as part of the implementation of the 2000 Algiers Agreement. The Algiers Agreement was signed by both parties to end the two-year border war and stipulated the appointment of a boundary commission to demarcate the border between the two countries. (All Africa, IRIN, February 5, 2004)

SUDAN

Conflict follows adjournment of peace talks: Sudanese peace talks in Nairobi, Kenya were suspended January 27 for three weeks in deference to the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage. This session of ongoing peace talks, expected to broker a peace deal between Sudan’s warring parties by the end of January, had continued for 58 days. A conflict between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army and the Sudanese government erupted in southern Sudan days after the suspension despite agreement from both sides to discourage their forces from fighting. The peace talks, aimed at ending the 20-year Sudanese civil war, had made progress on power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and security agreements before the adjournment. (All Africa, IRIN, January 27; February 3, 2004)

Government will not attend humanitarian talks on Darfur: The Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance and two rebel groups in western Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), were to participate in talks concerning humanitarian efforts in the Darfur region. The meetings were to take place February 14 and 15 in Geneva to discuss unrestricted humanitarian aid and to ensure worker safety and admission into the area. The Sudanese government announced February 9 that it would not attend the talks, claiming that the issue was manipulated by the rebel groups for publicity and political/military gains. The previous session of talks between the SLM/A and Sudanese government on humanitarian access and disarmament of Darfur groups broke down December 2003. Approximately 95,000 Sudanese refugees have fled to neighboring Chad from government militia attacks, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Humanitarian access into southern and western Darfur had remained limited following escalation of conflict between the government and rebel groups in Sudan. (IRIN, February 4, 9; Relief Web, January 29, 2004)
Government claims Darfur victory: The Sudanese government formally declared the defeat of rebel groups in the western Darfur region. President Omar al-Bashir proclaimed the end of rebel military operations and restoration of security in the area after government forces captured one town and seven rebel camps. Despite the declaration of victory, two Darfur-based rebel groups, the SLM/A and the JEM, have rejected the claim. The rebels have accused the Sudanese government of attempting to divert international attention away from conditions of the region. According to a JEM spokesperson, Abu Bakr Hamid al-Nur, the group had called upon the international community for humanitarian aid and documentation of crimes committed by government militias. Humanitarian agencies have continued to express concern over the 600,000 civilians displaced in Darfur. Thousands of Sudanese refugees have fled from militia attacks, despite the government claim of victory. (IRIN, February 10; February 11; Sudan Tribune, January 30, 2004)

SOMALIA

TNG endorsement binds peace agreement: The breakthrough peace agreement between Somalia’s Transitional National Government (TNG) and various political factions signed January 29 was made legally binding after the endorsement of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) of Somalia. This breakthrough deal, signed by Somalia’s top militia leaders, was expected to create a functional, centralized government, adopt a new constitution, and appoint a new president to lead a unified Somalia. Abdiqassim Salad Hassan, president of the TNG, signed the peace agreement February 8 with the support of elders from the Hawiye clan. Endorsement by this major Somali clan legitimized final dealings between various militia groups involved in 14 years of armed conflict. (All Africa, IRIN, January 29; February 9, 2004)

Abducted UN employee released: Abducted January 29 by militias in southern Somalia, UN staff member Rolf Helmrich was released with help from the Juba Valley Alliance (JVA). The JVA and other nongovernmental groups of the region negotiated Helmrich’s February 7 release. Helmrich was held near the Somali town of Jilib by gunmen suspected to be criminals from the capital of Mogadishu. In a statement following his release, Helmrich stated he was not mistreated during his 10-day captivity. He was the latest aid worker abducted by Somali militias. Although money is usually demanded prior to release, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Somalia, Maxwell Gaylard, stated that UN policy was not to make ransom payments. (IRIN, February 9; February 10, 2004)

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Chinese workers’ deaths reveal abuse in Britain: On Friday, February 6, 19 Chinese immigrants drowned at Morecambe Bay on the west coast of Britain. The Chinese were digging for cockles—a delicacy in European restaurants—when they were trapped by the Bay’s infamous tidal surge. Cockle harvesting was common in the region, but local pickers have complained in recent years that “gangmasters,” who did not have a license, had used immigrant laborers without regard for their safety and welfare. Collecting cockles, which was once a cottage industry in Britain, has become a highly profitable
export business yet remains highly unregulated. Some employers have employed non-European Union workers illegally, paid them approximately $1.85 per day for their labor. This latest incident turned public attention to the exploitation of the migrant workforce. The news of the recent deaths, compelled many authorities to call for regulations and proper protection of all workers. (AP, February 9; New York Times, February 8, 2004)

NEPAL

Maoist insurgency intensifies: King Gyanendra appealed for an end to the eight-year insurgency, speaking from a civic reception in Nepalgunj, western Nepal, a town considered to be a stronghold of the Maoists. Maoist supporters vowed to shut the kingdom down with a five-day strike and the All Nepal National Independent Student Union-Revolutionary said it would mark the strike by marching, distributing leaflets, and burning effigies of the royal family. A day later, the insurgency intensified and 11 people died, including two children. The capital Kathmandu, which so far had not been the center of hostility, was under attack when a bomb went off inside a municipal office building. The Maoists also torched the country home of former junior minister, Devendra Raj Kandel, resulting in much damage but no casualties. Security was tightened in the capital to prepare for the February 13 anniversary of the launch of the Maoist uprising. More than 8,000 Nepalese have died since the civil war broke out in 1996. The situation deteriorated even more when King Gyanendra abolished an elected parliament and appointed his own administration in 2002. (AFP, February 8, 9, 2004)