

INTERNATIONAL

Puerto Rican rebel group threatens U.S. attack

By Carmelo Ruiz

Special to Sentinel-Voice

SAN JUAN (IPS) — A revolutionary group advocating independence for Puerto Rico sent a message late last month to the White House and the United States Congress that it will make life miserable for the Clinton Administration if the United States does not close its military bases in the Caribbean state.

In its message, the Macheteros served notice that it plans a reign of terror, including car bombings, in the United States.

In the 1980s, the Macheteros bombed a U.S. Air Force Base in San Juan and stole \$7 million from an armored truck in Connecticut.

"We have the help of Vietnam veterans and other

freedom fighters from Ireland, Italy and Arab countries ready to support us with all kinds of weapons in our struggle to liberate our country," read the Macheteros' statement.

It also mentioned the Puerto Rican Nationalists' armed attack against the U.S. Congress in 1954. "That was a child's game compared to what you will face," the letter said.

At present, the United States military is proceeding with what is being described as an anti-drug radar system and the installation of the U.S. Army Southern Command (USARSO) in Puerto Rico.

FBI spokesman Paul Bresson told a local newspaper that the U.S. government is taking the Macheteros' letter very

seriously and interprets it as a threat to U.S. national security. He would not say what course of action the FBI plans to pursue.

"That letter won't have any effect," said Charlie Rodriguez, Puerto Rican senate majority leader. Rodriguez, who is also a member of the NPP, referred to the Macheteros' message as "anti-Puerto Rican."

Anibal Acevedo-Vila, president of the PDP, Puerto Rico's main opposition party, told the local press that the Macheteros are a law enforcement problem, not a political problem.

"I believe that the law enforcement authorities have to give this matter the appropriate attention," the PDP leader said.

Puerto Rican Governor

Pedro Rossello has described the Macheteros as a marginal group whose methods are repudiated by the Puerto Rican people.

"It is not the opinion or voice of fringe...groups of few members who determine the direction of our society," he said.

He also declared that the government of Puerto Rico and the Clinton administration were not prepared to negotiate with terrorists.

Rossello, who recently visited Washington, told the Puerto Rican press that he refuses to be intimidated by the letter and that he will not take additional security measures.

In January, the FBI raised the reward for the capture of

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South African politician shot at, beaten

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — A politician who left South Africa's Zulu nationalist party because it wouldn't support an end to political violence was shot at and beaten by 10 men Saturday at a voter registration site.

Walter Felgate, 67, was recovering from head injuries from a beating with a steel pipe, said Bheki Ntuli, a colleague, in a telephone interview from a hospital in Richards Bay, on the Indian Ocean coast.

The attack in the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal marred an otherwise peaceful final round of voter registration that ends Sunday, setting the nation's first-ever voters roll for the June 2 national vote — the first since 1994's all-race elections ended apartheid.

Felgate, who is white and was once a close confidante to Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, defected to the ruling African National Congress in 1997 to protest Inkatha's withdrawal from peace talks with the ANC.

In the past decade, conflict between supporters of the two groups has claimed more than 10,000 lives.

Felgate and two ANC colleagues were watching the registration process at Mbonambi, near Richards Bay on the southeast coast, to ensure that ANC supporters were not intimidated. A gang attacked the group and shot at them as they fled, but did not hit anyone.

"Politically, we are not free in this area," Ntuli said. He

Mandela sets South Africa election date, June 2

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Ending months of speculation, President Nelson Mandela told Parliament last week that South Africans will go to the polls June 2 to choose his successor.

The announcement comes five years after the euphoric 1994 elections that ended apartheid, and permits political parties to launch their campaigns.

In impish fashion, Mandela grinned and paused several times to sip water during his address in Cape Town while lawmakers squirmed in anticipation.

"OK, I will not keep you guessing," he joked. "It is my

intention to proclaim the date of South Africa's second democratic elections as the 2nd of June 1999."

The vote will mark the end of an extraordinary transition from white minority rule and signal the departure from politics of one of the world's most beloved figures, Mandela.

Like many democracies, voter apathy appears to be running high. Only 15 million of 25 million eligible voters have registered despite personal appeals by Mandela and others.

The registration has also been marred by disorganization and legal challenges by mainly white

opposition parties. The parties say the election rules favor supporters of the ruling African National Congress.

In one sense, the election is unusual in that the contest will be no contest. The ANC will win by a huge majority, and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's choice, will most likely assume office.

The pressure will be on Mbeki, a longtime ANC organizer and diplomat who spent much of his adult life in exile.

Despite great strides in the past five years, overwhelming problems remain: huge unemployment, poverty, widespread

corruption, continuing lack of opportunities for blacks, large-scale deprivation of basic services and continuing racial division.

"Some of the still-burning questions that have been submerged under the glory of a Mandela presidency are now actually up front: jobs, crime, education and housing," said Wilmot James, former head of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa.

The ANC won 63 percent of the vote in 1994 on a jubilant day of national rejoicing. Polls show its standing at about 53-55 percent, with the defectors

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WORLD BRIEFS

ZAMBIAN PRESIDENT TOURS BOMB SITES

LUSAKA (IPS) — Zambian President Frederick Chiluba has begun touring the 14 sites where bomb attacks occurred or where explosive devices were found last month, while 1,000 students took to the streets to protest the blasts. Waving placards with slogans against the Zambian government's attempts to find a peaceful solution to the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the students marched to the State House. "Remove the log from your eye before you can remove the log from other people's eyes," read one placard. "We don't want to die from the sins of a few people," read another one. No one has claimed responsibility for the blasts, and the government has put its armed forces on full alert and has asked the United States to help with investigations.

STEVE BIKO'S ASSASSINS TO FACE PROSECUTION

JOHANNESBURG (AIA/GIN) — Following their failure to secure amnesty from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the murderers of Black consciousness activist Steve Biko are likely to face prosecution. The applications for amnesty by the three policemen, Daniel Siebert, Jacobus Beneke and Harold Snyman, were dismissed by the Nuremberg trials-styled body which was created to investigate human rights abuses under apartheid. The trio's applications were deemed unacceptable because they did not admit to a crime. Their applications, therefore, did not comply with the requirements of the Truth and Reconciliation Act. Biko, who led the Black Consciousness Movement, died in 1977 while in police detention in Pretoria where he had been transferred for medical attention from Port Elizabeth.

EGYPTAIR MAY REFUSE TO SERVE BOOZE

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — In a decision that could have wide repercussions on Egypt's tourism industry, an appeals court has ruled that EgyptAir stewardesses have the right to refuse to serve alcohol because it is banned by Islam, court officials said. Four hostesses had sued the national carrier in Cairo's Labor Court last year for forcing them to serve alcoholic beverages in flight. The women won the case, but EgyptAir appealed. The court on Saturday upheld the lower court's decision and sided with the hostesses, the officials said on condition of anonymity. "Egypt is an Islamic state and Egyptian law is based on Islamic Sharia (law) which bans the carrying or circulating of alcoholic beverages, even when they are being offered to non-Muslims or foreigners," the court ruled. The ruling could have a big impact on Egypt's tourist industry as it could mean that all bar, restaurant and hotel personnel can refuse to serve alcohol on religious grounds. Tourism is Egypt's second largest source of foreign currency.

POPE URGES PEACE IN HORN OF AFRICA

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope John Paul II urged Ethiopia and Eritrea to accept an African proposal to end their border war, saying Wednesday it is the only way to bring about peace. Heavy fighting has been reported between the two Horn of Africa neighbors since an eight-month stalemate ended Feb. 6. The war contesting parts of their barren, largely uninhabited border killed 1,000 people last May and June. John Paul said that after the "sad news" of the heavy fighting, both sides are reported to be ready to accept a peace proposal by the Organization of African Unity. "I applaud this wise decision, which I accompany with fervent prayers," John Paul said during his open-air general audience, attended by 25,000 people in St. Peter's Square.

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