

## INTERNATIONAL

## Security beefed up at Africa Games

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — All vehicles carrying athletes and officials from the All Africa Games received police escorts Saturday after a car with two officials was hijacked.

Neither of the two information technology officials was injured in the carjacking of the Mercedes Benz, which occurred Friday night in Soweto township south of Johannesburg, games chief executive officer Danie Malan said.

About 5,000 police and soldiers have been deployed to protect the estimated 5,200 athletes amid South Africa's notorious crime wave.

On an icy day that had swimmers wearing gloves and coats before plunging into the water and spectators wrapped in blankets, South Africa claimed seven gold medals Saturday.

"It's really cold. I couldn't feel my hands," said Charlene Wittstock of South Africa, who won the gold in the 100-meter freestyle, the South

African Press Association reported. "It's actually nice and warm in the pool. I didn't want to get out after my race."

Problems continued to plague the games, which began last week and end Sept. 19.

Weightlifting went ahead in an empty auditorium while officials turned away locals who said they couldn't afford the \$2 entrance fee.

But in baseball, officials let spectators in free because they had run out of tickets. Lesotho beat Ghana 18-14,

recovering from its 43-0 loss to South Africa on Thursday.

Authorities, meanwhile, were investigating what caused about 600 children who were to participate in Friday's opening ceremony to contract food poisoning.

Games committee chairman Mtobi Tyamzashe said the services of the caterer would not be suspended.

"They have not been found guilty," he said.

The 20 children who were hospitalized overnight were released Saturday.

## Black Louisianans ask U.N. to fight pollution

Danielle Knight

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (IPS) — David Prince probably never imagined he would someday leave his home in Louisiana for the U.N.'s European headquarters to press for the phasing out of toxic chemicals worldwide.

Government officials discovered that the blood levels of Prince and other residents of the mainly African-American area of Mossville, La. were contaminated at rates two to three times higher than the national average with a pollutant called dioxin.

He and others now want the worldwide elimination of these chemicals, which have the ability to travel thousands of miles.

"We want chemical plants to stop producing these toxins and we want them to stop it immediately," Prince said.

Prince told reporters in Washington, D.C. that his wife has cancer and his daughter has endometriosis, a reproductive disease some researchers believe may be linked to exposure to dioxins.

Prince has joined the environmental group Greenpeace at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland where about 100 nations will resume formal negotiations on a treaty to control a group of toxic chemicals known as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), which include dioxins.

Along with other POP chemicals like DDT and PCBs, dioxins break down slowly in the environment and are linked to reproductive abnormalities, neurological defects and cancer.

Unlike the pesticide DDT, dioxins are not produced intentionally. They are

generated as wastes and by-products when hazardous waste is burned or in the manufacture of chemicals containing chlorine, such as pesticides, PVCs (vinyl) plastics and paper products.

Scientists warn that communities need not be in close proximity to the origins of the toxins to be affected. Like other POPs, dioxins are labeled "persistent" because they travel across the globe and accumulate in the fatty tissue of animals and humans.

Dioxin-contaminated food made headlines recently

dioxin reduction programs in developing nations.

"There is great pressure by chemical manufacturers to push these materials and technologies like PVC plastics in developing countries," said Weinberg, who founded the International POPs Eliminations Network (IPEN), a coalition of NGOs.

As promoted by the United States, the proposed Geneva treaty will not provide the framework and tools for developing countries to avoid dioxin contamination by

"Because dioxins build up in the food chain, only working toward the aim of total elimination of these chemicals will have an impact," said Jackie Warledo of the Indigenous Environmental Network.

Warledo said that, while dioxins and other POP chemicals can migrate anywhere in the world, they have a disproportionate impact on indigenous communities — especially tribes that still maintain subsistence cultures.

"High levels of dioxin poisoning have been found in fish populations in the traditional territories of the Yakama located in the Northwest, in Penobscots in the state of Maine and also among many tribes within the Great Lakes water basin region and villages in Alaska," said Warledo, who is in Geneva.

Low-income Black communities like Mossville and other populations along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans — dubbed "cancer alley" by environmental activists — have also borne the brunt of dioxin pollution.

More than 50 paper and PVC plants and other factories are located around Mossville, said Peter Orris, a U.S. physician who directs a project on POPs at the

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in Europe, but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) say the U.S. position on the POPs treaty in relation to dioxin has been substantially weakened by pressure from the chemical industry.

Environmentalists are worried that the U.S. State Department, which has not formally released its official stance on dioxins at the Geneva negotiations, will not support any tough action to eliminate the substances.

"The key to solving the problem of dioxin contamination should be reduction with the aim to eliminate the substances from use and production," said Jack Weinberg, a Greenpeace specialist on POPs.

He said that without calling for outright elimination, the chemical companies will be able to still produce dioxins through "loopholes" and the lack of capacity for enforcement of

enforcing the reduction of the chemicals, he said. "Many developing countries do not have the infrastructure to do this," Weinberg added.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), subtle health effects already may be occurring in the general population in industrialized nations from the current background levels of dioxin in the environment.

Many indigenous communities in North America that have been heavily contaminated by dioxins are closely watching the talks in Geneva.

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## WORLD BRIEFS

## ONE-FOURTH OF ETHIOPIAN LANGUAGES DYING OUT

ADDIS ABABA (IPS) — Of the 80 languages spoken in Ethiopia, 22 are on the verge of extinction, according to researchers. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, which specializes in the study of non-written languages, has identified 17 languages threatened with extinction in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's University of Addis Ababa has even added five more languages to the list. Most of the endangered languages are found in the southern region of Ethiopia. Two of them — Gafat and Boshha — have already died, said Abebe Gebre Tsadiq, the chairman of the Linguistics Department of the University of Addis Ababa. Ungota and Birale, spoken in the south of the country, for example, have only six fluent speakers, according to Tsadiq, predicting the language will die within 10 years. Another language, Shabo, has only 150 speakers. While Argoba, with 1,000 speakers, also risks dying out, according to the Map of the Endangered Languages of Africa.

## MALAWIAN ARMY TO RECRUIT FIRST WOMEN SOLDIERS

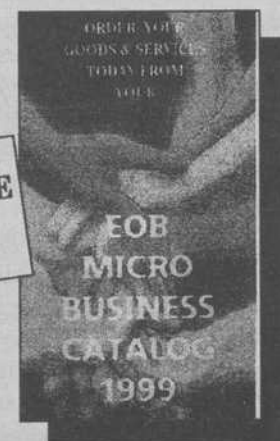
LILONGWE (IPS) — According to Malawian army commander Lt. Gen. Joseph Chimbayo, most of the logistical, policy and financial issues surrounding the enlisting of women into the "army ranks" have been finalized. The army plans to initially enlist 35 women out of the 500 recruits it wants to draft by December. According to Chimbayo, the young women will have the opportunity to work in every department except the combat division, as is the case in many countries. To prepare for the program, the Danish government is supporting gender sensitization workshops for the men and officers in the Malawian army. "The idea is to make sure everyone is prepared to work with the women soldiers," said the army's public relations officer, Lt. Col. McIlroy Chidzalo. Malawi is one of the few countries in the region whose army has remained exclusively male, 35 years after gaining independence from Britain. Several of neighboring countries, including Zambia and Mozambique, have female soldiers. Currently, the only women on the country's military payroll are nurses serving in the clinics of most army barracks.

## DIALOGUE UNDERWAY AS CONGO REBELS SIGN PEACE ACCORD

KINSHASA (IPS) — With the signing of the Lusaka peace accord by 50 founding members of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (DRC), the war-weary Congolese people are beginning to believe that a meaningful dialogue between the warring factions can now take place. Late last month, leaders of the RCD, the larger of the two rebel groups which has itself undergone a split, signed a cease-fire in the Zambian capital of Lusaka, more than 50 days after the six countries involved in the DRC war already approved it. The agreement was ratified July 10 by President Laurent-Desire Kabila and the leaders of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

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