

INTERNATIONAL

Expelled Moroccan activist returns

RABAT, Morocco (AP) — An aging opposition figure expelled from Morocco eight years ago has returned to his homeland with the permission of King Mohamed VI.

Abraham Serfaty, 73, had lived in France since 1991. He was expelled after serving 17 years in jail in Morocco for breaching state security, namely for making statements in favor of self-determination for the disputed territory of the Western Sahara, which Morocco claims as its own.

He returned Thursday evening after the kingdom's new monarch consented to his request to return, said a statement from the royal palace, "so that he can take up his place in the current process to build a modern and democratic Morocco."

"I didn't come back to Morocco to start up political activities, particularly because of my age. ... I returned to help Moroccan civil society."

— Abraham Serfaty

Mohamed took the throne in July, following the death of his father, Hassan II.

"I didn't come back to Morocco to start up political activities," Serfaty said upon his arrival, "particularly because of my age. ... I returned to help Moroccan civil society."

Serfaty's expulsion was based on false official claims that he was of Brazilian, not Moroccan, nationality.

Serfaty, born in the port city of Tangiers and once head of a clandestine Marxist

organization, was sentenced to life in prison in 1977. He was freed in 1991 under international pressure, and expelled.

His case has been held up by human rights activists as a stain on the North African kingdom.

Top-ranking officials, including Justice Minister Omar Aziman, greeted Serfaty at the Rabat airport. He was taken from the plane in a wheelchair.

About 20 of his supporters also were present, holding

signs reading, "Serfaty our love. Morocco is your country."

In the final years of the reign of the late King Hassan II, there was movement to open Moroccan society to reforms. Many political prisoners were freed from jail, and an opposition government took office in 1998. However, Hassan refused to allow Serfaty to return.

The decision to allow his return appeared to signal that the 35-year-old King Mohamed is seeking to move ahead swiftly with efforts to open Morocco further to democratization and modernization.

In July 1998, a year before Hassan's death, the Moroccan Supreme Court ruled against allowing Serfaty to return.

Court stiffens penalties for smuggling immigrants

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HAVANA (IPS) — Sending a message to smugglers that such activity will not be tolerated, a Cuban court has handed down harsh sentences against two people found guilty of illegal trafficking of emigrants, in a case that cost one person his life and endangered the lives of several children.

The Provincial Court of Havana sentenced Joel Dorta to life in prison and David Garcia to 30 years, according to reports by the state-run press. Dorta and Garcia are Cuban residents of the United States. Their accomplice, Pedro Cordova Gonzalez from Mariel (35 km northeast of Havana), received a 15-year sentence.

The court declared it had proven the defendants tried to transport 14 people from Cuba to the United States on July 3 — among them five

The legal reforms call for life sentences in smuggling cases with aggravating circumstances, such as arms possession, the use of violence or intimidation, endangering the lives of others, or causing the injury or death of others.

children — charging \$8,000 per person. The speedboat in which they used to make the trip had a capacity of just six to eight people. It capsized in the open seas, resulting in the death of 45-year-old Sergio Maurilio Martinez.

This was the first trial against immigrants smugglers since strict new laws were passed in February. The legal reforms call for life sentences in smuggling cases with aggravating circumstances, such as arms possession, the use of violence or intimidation, endangering the lives of others, or causing the injury or death of others.

The punishment is also

more severe if the perpetrators are caught smuggling people under age 14 or if it is a repeat offense. Such was the case for Dorta, the boat's pilot, who was accused of illegally entering the country several times. Dorta and Garcia's legal defense can appeal.

According to reports, another 26 Cuban residents from the United States are imprisoned in Cuba for similar crimes, though committed prior to the law. And seven other people, also from the United States, are awaiting trial for smuggling

illegal immigrants after the law was passed.

An official from Fidel Castro's administration said that illegally smuggling immigrants from Cuba "responds to the interests of the anti-Cuban mafia which, from overseas, encourages illegal emigration and disorder."

"Such conduct constitutes an 'absolute challenge to the existing migration agreements between Cuba and the United States, which defend a safe, legal and orderly exit (from the country).'" Authorities have warned those who violate the laws and the territorial waters, and who participate in any way in the trafficking of immigrants "will receive the corresponding sanctions for such serious acts, as this case has demonstrated."

WORLD BRIEFS

WORLD BANK APPOINTS FIRST AFRICAN MANAGING DIRECTOR

WASHINGTON (IPS) — World Bank President James Wolfensohn has appointed the first African to serve as a managing director, one of its most powerful positions. Wolfensohn announced, amid preparations for the joint annual meeting of the Bank and the International Monetary Fund, that Mamphela Ramphele, currently vice-chancellor of the University of Capetown in South Africa, will become Managing Director for Human Development early next year. A controversial figure at home in South Africa, Ramphele will also be the second woman in the Bank's history to serve on its senior management team. "This is a historic appointment for the Bank," Wolfensohn said. Ramphele qualified as a medical doctor at the University of Natal in 1972 and holds a doctorate in Social Anthropology from the University of Capetown.

NEW NIGER PRESIDENT FACES MANY CHALLENGES

NIAMEY (IPS) — As the people of Niger prepare for the presidential polls on Oct. 17, political observers agree the future leader's job will not be an easy one. The new president, who will be chosen from a field of 10 candidates, will face serious economic and social challenges. After the April 1999 coup d'etat, which led to the assassination of President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara and which brought Col. Malame Wanke to power, most foreign countries providing development aid to Niger pulled out. Among the 10 candidates officially in the race are: Moumouni Adamou Djermakoye of the Nigerien Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP-Zamanlahiya), Tandja Mamadou of the National Movement for the Development of Society (MNSD-Nassara), Mahamadou Issoufou of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya).

AIDS DEATHS COULD DEVASTATE KENYA'S ECONOMY

NAIROBI (NEWSLINK/GIN) — At least 10,000 Kenyans will die of AIDS annually by the year 2005, and this massive loss of economically active adults will have serious effects on the country's economy, according to statistics by the media and NGOs. There are at least 1.5 million people known to be HIV-positive since the virus' presence was first reported in 1980. The rate of infection just keeps going up, with predictions fixed at 1.6 million by the year 2000, and 2.1 million by the year 2005. That number translates to 12,500 people per the country's eight provinces, assuming an even distribution. It is also estimated at least one million children will be orphaned as a result of diseases impact.

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