

WORLD BRIEFS

WOMAN HEADS CAPE VERDE'S LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

PRAIA, Cape-Verde (PANA) - Cape Verdian Lawyers' Association has elected Ligia Fonseca, 37, its first woman president. The election has however sparked off controversy, with some lawyers filing a petition against the single list process. They are accusing the association's electoral commission of committing serious "irregularities" during the ballot. Most importantly, the disgruntled lawyers are accusing the commission, set up in December 2000, of rejecting without good reason, another list which was vying for the leadership of the association. The dissenting group argues that Fonseca did not fulfil the requirements as stipulated by the regulations, since she has been a member of the association for less than ten years. Ligia is married to lawyer Jorge Fonseca, a candidate in Cape Verde's February presidential election. OAC is expected to replace the Institute of Legal Patronage and Assistance, a public institution with which new law graduates are supposed to register before joining the Bar.

MASIRE TO KICK-START INTER-CONGOLESE DIALOGUE IN LUSAKA

LUSAKA, Zambia (PANA) - The first round of talks between leaders of government and armed opposition groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who are party to the Lusaka peace accord, is due to start Thursday in the Zambian capital. According to a statement issued by the office of the facilitator of the inter-Congolese dialogue, former Botswana president Ketumile Masire, signatories of the accord will be required to sign a declaration of fundamental principles on the dialogue. The declaration is intended to guide the DRC government and armed opposition in their preparations for the inter-Congolese dialogue that is expected to lead to a new political dispensation in the DRC. "This will certainly be an important step in initiating the dialogue," Masire said on arrival in Lusaka. Masire said he would use the opportunity to consult the signatories on the preparatory meeting for the dialogue later, which would also involve political parties and the civil society.

TRADE UNION NOT PLEASED WITH PRIVATIZATION

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (PANA) - Ethiopia's leading trade union has expressed misgivings about the ongoing privatization of state-owned enterprises. Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions president Amare Alemayehu told a May Day rally in Addis Ababa that the confederation "strongly objects to irresponsible privatization" of state-run firms when such action leads to mass lay-offs. He said Ethiopia's 1993 labor law was being amended with the objective of improving worker-management relations and the living conditions of workers. According to Amare, protection of workers' rights in Ethiopia was difficult either because of the outdated labor laws or due to disregard of provisions that explicitly concern the rights of workers. Under the free market system, the CETU leader said the private sector would play a major role in the development of the country. "But since workers are equally involved in development activities, it is most important that their rights are protected," he added.

BUILDING ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA SHOWS STEADY GROWTH

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (PANA) - Lower interest rates in South Africa have positively boosted building activity in the residential sector that continues to show steady growth, says a recent survey. The business confidence of respondents to the latest Bureau for Economic Research (BER) survey has improved over the past quarter and expectations are that workloads would increase further during the second quarter of 2001. In the case of the non-residential sector, fixed investment increased notably during the last quarter of the year, mainly driven by higher activity levels in the casino and office building sectors. However, it appears from the BER survey that the availability of new work has not improved significantly and respondents expect business conditions to remain tight in the second quarter. From a medium-term perspective the picture looks more positive, as government expenditure on schools, health facilities, police stations and courts is bound to increase markedly over the next three years.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. jewelers won't buy conflict diamonds

Cape Town, South Africa (PANA) - Retail jewelers from the United States have said that the international certification agreement reached in Europe by governments and the diamond industry to curb the sale of uncut 'blood diamonds' was timely.

The international diamond certification system would be effective by the end of the year.

It is intended to curtail the sale of conflict diamonds, which are used to finance wars in Africa.

The jewelers made the statement at the end of their visit to South Africa.

Festdiam Diamond Cutting director Lester Meents, who hosted the visitors, Wednesday told reporters that even though the American

jewelers had expressed concern about 'conflict diamonds', they were convinced that South Africa's mining and diamond cutting industry was conflict free.

The jewelers' visit was organized by the American Gem Society.

About six billion US dollars worth of diamonds is sold through the U.S. jeweler market annually.

Since the market is the final link in selling South African polished gems to U.S. customers, retail jewelers and organizations such as the AGS, have a huge say in the purchase of diamonds.

Jeffrey Abell, an AGS executive, told reporters that they would do everything in their power to avoid supporting atrocities that are con-

nected with conflict diamonds.

"What we have seen on our visit has been encouraging not only in respect of the standard of workmanship and gem quality, but also in the benefaction and job creation process which we shall be only too willing to support," Abell said.

"Customers in our stores are beginning to raise the issue and this definitely provides us with the opportunity to assure our clients that just as we as jewelers refuse to deal in conflict diamonds, they, too, can rest assured that when they buy the diamond they have always dreamed of, they will not be supporting the seamier side of the diamond trade," he added.

He said the AGS was the only organization in the jewel industry that took responsibility for ethical conduct of members who were audited annually.

Although many of the visiting jewelers had been selling diamond jewels for many years, Meents said, for the first time, the visit brought them face-to-face with diamond mining and manufacturing.

"They had no idea of the extent of investment, the technological capability, and the quality of workmanship available in South Africa, but the factory visit was invaluable support for our efforts in establishing a market for South African superior cut and polished diamonds," Meents said.

Clinical trials of malaria vaccine slated for Gambia

LONDON (IPS) — The first of a series of three clinical trials of a vaccine against malaria, made possible by a partnership between a U.S.-based non-profit organization and a leading drug company, begins early next month in Gambia.

If successful, it would help save the lives of millions of children. Malaria is a parasitic infection transmitted through the bite of the Anopheles mosquito.

Currently, no vaccine has been approved against malaria. Anti-malarial drugs are available, but the parasite has

consistently developed resistance to them, leaving millions vulnerable to the disease.

Malaria currently infects an estimated 300 to 500 million people worldwide. Another 2.3 billion are at risk of the disease, making development of a malaria vaccine a global health priority.

Those most vulnerable to malaria are children under five years of age and pregnant women.

The partners in the pediatric clinical trial are the Malaria Vaccine Initiative at PATH — Program for Ap-

propriate Technology in Health — and Glaxo Smith Kline, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer.

The company last year distributed over 1.1 billion doses of vaccines to 177 countries, an average of 35 per second.

The Gambian unit of Britain's Medical Research Council will conduct the trial in Basse Santa Su, a region in Gambia's northwest where malaria is endemic.

The MRC has worked in Gambia for 50 years and, according to Keith McAdam, Director of MRC/Gambia,

has developed a strong relationship with the community and the government.

As a result, more than 90 percent of Gambia's children are immunized against the major childhood diseases, a slightly higher rate of immunization than in the United States.

The announcement of clinical trials of the vaccine was made in London this week.

"These trials are an important step forward in creating a malaria vaccine for children in Africa," said Regina (See Gambia, Page 15)



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