

WORLD BRIEFS

TENSIONS HEIGHTEN IN BURUNDI, REBELS ATTACKED PROVINCE OF MUYINGA

BUJUMBURA, Burundi (PANA)—Rebels reportedly attacked the province of Muyinga in northeastern Burundi, sources in Bujumbura said. Following on Bujumbura, Bururi, Kayanza and Ruyigi, the latest attack confirms a heightening of insecurity across the country, notwithstanding the inauguration of a transitional government. Witnesses fleeing the fighting in Muyinga spoke of large-scale destruction. Confirming the turbulence, Gov. Lazarre Karekezi of Muyinga conceded that local authorities were having difficulty communicating with government units sent to check rebel incursions into the region. Renewed hostilities in the area comes only days after Muyinga authorities called on some 50,000 Burundi refugees in neighboring Tanzania to return home, saying the war was over. Meanwhile, the recrudescence of widespread violence in Burundi, has been roundly condemned within and outside the country, with Pope Jean-Paul II addressing a message of comfort to people of Burundi.

CONGOLESE REFUGEES TO BE REPATRIATED FROM GABON

BRAZZAVILLE, Congo (PANA)—A committee comprising officials from Gabon, Congo, Brazzaville and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), has agreed to repatriate home some 15,000 Congolese who have been living in Gabon since 1998. Officials said in Brazzaville the refugees would be returned in two groups. The committee took the decision on the voluntary repatriation at a meeting chaired by Congolese Health Minister Léon Alfred Opimbat. In 1999, some 353 Congolese who had fled the December 1998 war in their country, were declared missing at a Brazzaville port. A military source later claimed the people were suspected of belonging to ex-Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas' Ninja militia group.

CHILDREN IN REUNION OBSERVE DAY OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

SAINT DENIS, Reunion (PANA)—More than 400 pupils in Reunion participated in a pedagogic rally in observance the 12th anniversary of the international convention on the Day of Children's Rights. Several familial associations actively took part in festivities to mark the occasion. Meanwhile, many development partners including UNICEF mobilized several thousand children to gather at la Redoute stadium in the capital in order to improve their citizen behaviors and develop their sense of solidarity with disabled children. The agencies plan to use the opportunity to teach the children tolerance and respect for others. Children of the island will for the first time read exclusively in Creole and Mahorais the text of the international convention, which was unanimously adopted on Nov. 20, 1989, by the UN. Debates by the children on "disabled children at the center of animation," "children's rights and parents' authority" and "cultural diversity and education" will also be broadcast live as part of the celebration.

S. AFRICAN MINISTER DECRIES VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (PANA)—South Africa's Social Development Minister Zola Skweyiya has called on citizens to stand up against the increasing cases of abuse, including rape and all forms of violence against women and children. "The increasing number of rapes of children, including a nine-month-old baby, is indeed despicable and demands that men, in particular, should come together and take resolute action to reverse this tide. Rape, especially of young children can tear our social fabric apart unless it is stopped now," he said. Skweyiya was speaking in the context of the "16 Days of Activism Against Violence on Women and Children," which heralds the Nov. 25 International Day Against Violence on Women and Children. During the campaign, the international community will be marking several historic Days, including the World AIDS Day, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the International Day of Volunteers and the International Human Rights Day. Various activities are planned at local level, such as "Men's March Against Violence on Women and Children" in Cape Town Nov. 25. Meanwhile, Skweyiya is expected to visit the European Union, to seek assistance for programs on vulnerable children.

INTERNATIONAL

AIDS activists sue South African government

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP)—Busisiwe Maqungo's daughter died the same year she was born, infected with the HIV virus at birth. Maqungo said the drug nevirapine, given to HIV-positive pregnant women during labor to prevent the transmission of the virus to their babies, could have saved her daughter Nomazizi, who spent her nine months of life in and out of hospitals before succumbing to AIDS.

The Pretoria High Court will review Maqungo's testi-

mony Monday when AIDS activists and pediatricians sue the government in an attempt to force it to distribute nevirapine to all HIV-positive pregnant women.

In a country with one of the worst rates of infection in the world, nearly 200 South African babies are born with HIV every day, and studies show nevirapine can reduce that number by nearly 50 percent.

The government has refused to distribute nevirapine nationwide despite an offer

by the German-based pharmaceutical company Boehringer Ingelheim to distribute the drug for free.

"I'm very angry," said Maqungo, 29, who is now an AIDS activist. "It's very hard to look at an HIV positive child getting sick and dying ... these babies could have been saved by our own government."

AIDS activists and doctors experts have accused the government of not being aggressive enough in handling the epidemic. More than 4.7

million South Africans, 11 percent of the population, are HIV positive, and a recent study found that it was the leading cause of death for adults in the country last year.

Ayanda Ntsaluba, the director-general of South Africa's Health Department, said the government stands by its policy of first distributing nevirapine on a small scale through pilot programs to test its effects.

Ntsaluba said the government's approach is (See AIDS, Page 14)

Pressure builds for land reform in Zimbabwe

By Lewis Machipisa

HARARE, Zimbabwe (IPS)—Representatives of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are here in Harare to persuade the Zimbabwe government to implement a "credible and transparent" land reform program.

The seven-member UNDP team will try to find a solution to what is proving to be Zimbabwe's most vexing dilemma since the southern African country gained independence from Britain in 1980.

"We are here to continue

the dialogue between the UNDP (U.N. Development Program) and Zimbabwe," says Abdoulie Janneh, head of the delegation. In the end, he says, the UNDP hopes to assist Zimbabwe find a "credible and transparent program."

Zimbabwe's foreign affairs minister, Stan Mudenge, acknowledged that land is at the core of Zimbabwe's problems and would only be "solved in the context of its (own) laws and not of any other country."

The team is touring the country for the next three

weeks, holding discussions with the stakeholders.

"We are hoping that at the end of the assessment of the current program and the context (of implementation) we will be able to put a framework that will be acceptable to Zimbabwe," Janneh said. "Zimbabwe will also be able to get assistance from the international community."

Zimbabwe has fallen out with the international community because of its controversial land reform program that has left more than 70,000 farm laborers and their families displaced and scores in-

jured in violent attacks by pro-government war veterans and ruling party supporters since last year. Nine White farmers and three Black settlers were killed resisting illegal occupations of commercial farms.

Donors, expressing concerns about the violence, have cut funding to Zimbabwe until it restores the rule of law.

The government, however, denies there is a breakdown of the rule of law and blames the White commercial farmers and the opposition (See Land Reform, Page 14)

New report clears government of arms-deal charges

By Anthony Stoppard

JOHANNESBURG (IPS)—A report by three independent agencies has cleared the South African government of charges of widespread corruption in the awarding of contracts in a multi-billion-dollar arms deal.

However, investigations into the activities of senior officials who may be guilty of criminal conduct are continuing.

"It is evident from the investigation that the perception of widespread corruption within the government is without justification. While there may be certain individuals and officials who used their position to derive some form of benefit from the acquisition process which might

render them criminally liable, the integrity of government is unquestionable," says Bulelani Ngcuka, the head of South Africa's National Directorate of Public Prosecutions (NDPP).

He also indicated that the directorate was continuing to investigate shareholders in companies that have benefited from the arms deal, and the receipt of gifts and conflicts of interest of officials involved in the procurement process.

A number of senior politicians and government officials have already been named in the media as allegedly personally benefiting from the deal, which has a contract price of more than \$3.2 billion.

The NDPP, along with

South Africa's Auditor-General and Public Prosecutor, has been tasked with investigating allegations of corruption in the awarding of contracts to supply South Africa with an estimated \$4.6 billion worth of arms. Their report was recently released.

Ngcuka has already charged Tony Yengeni, the former chief parliamentary

whip of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), with fraud and corruption after he allegedly promised the arms manufacturer, the European Aeronautics Defense System (EADS), that he would influence the procurement process in their favor.

The case is due to come up (See Arms, Page 13)

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