

WORLD BRIEFS

FRANCE GRANTS REFUGEE STATUS TO MALIAN FAMILY

PARIS (PANA)-A Malian couple who fled their country to save their granddaughter from female circumcision have obtained a refugee status in France. The Appeal Committee of the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless (OFPRA) ruled that Moussa and Salimata Cissoko were protected under the Geneva Convention Against Persecution. The Committee overruled a previous OFPRA ruling saying female circumcision could not be considered a form of persecution. Moussa and Salimata are from Kayes in Mali. They told the French Appeal Committee, authorities in Kayes had failed to protect them from public scorn after they had refused to present their granddaughter for circumcision. "I am a believer. What was done to me in Kayes belongs to the past and I do not wish to bear any grudge to anybody. My wife, myself and my daughter, are now going to build a new life," Moussa said. Manuel Tome of the Group of Information and Support to Immigrant Workers, told PANA the Committee's decision was a landmark on the issue of female circumcision. Maimouna Doucoure of the Coalition Against Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa agreed, saying the decision would intensify the campaign against female circumcision in Sahelian countries.

TRADITIONAL HEALERS DEMAND LAWS TO PROTECT THEM

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (PANA)-Traditional healers are demanding that all countries pass laws to protect the practice of traditional medicine and the participation of healers in bio-medical research. Traditional healers, attending the five-day International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa (ICASA) in Ouagadougou, voiced their concern in an eight-point appeal to UNAIDS Executive Director Dr. Peter Piot. They organized a march to meet Piot and read the statement, saying "traditional healers believe that while modern medicine has difficulties in its research for a solution to effectively fight AIDS, traditional medicine can be seen as a hopeful alternative." Therefore, the statement says traditional healers, who wish to have guarantees that their knowledge will not be pirated by pharmaceutical firms, "call for the creation of an international office for the protection of traditional medical knowledge and the issuance of patents." In order to protect this health sector, the statement recommended the establishment of an international council of professional traditional medicine to coordinate and institutionalize their activities. To strengthen their collaboration with modern medical structures, the healers further recommended that local structures be set up to facilitate patients' access to health services. The statement also wants traditional healers to be considered as agents of information, education and communication on the AIDS pandemic.

SQUATTERS AROUND DOUALA AIRPORT TOLD TO PACK

DOUALA, Cameroon (PANA)-More than 6,500 families of squatters around Douala international airport will have to move after Cameroon authorities announced they intend to improve security at all airports. A ministerial delegation, led by Transport Minister Christopher Nsahlai, visited Douala airport and its surroundings where unlawful housing has developed. "We have toured the facilities and visited all sensitive spots. The first thing to be controlled is access to all the airport's sensitive areas," the minister says. "Overall, we must restructure the use of space within the airport. Measures to be taken should ensure efficiency. They should be implemented to correct the identified shortcomings." Regarding the squatters, Nsahlai says the squatters must "move immediately due to the risk of accident which they are facing." Observers, however, foresee a situation of unrest arising in the slums near the airport if the issue is not well managed. "We have been living here for 20 years and we have invested on this land," says El Hadj Mamadou, leader of Newtown slum. "We cannot be asked to leave without proper arrangement to be resettled elsewhere, he adds. "We are heads of households. It would be unjust for us to be chucked out."

INTERNATIONAL

Nigerian justice minister slain

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) - Nigeria's justice minister was shot and killed by one of several unidentified attackers who broke into his home in the southeastern city of Ibadan, government officials and family members said Monday.

Bola Ige died around 10 p.m. on Sunday evening after being shot once in the chest, according to Bose Ehindero, a relative of Ige who answered the phone at Ige's residence Monday morning.

An aide to President Olusegun Obasanjo, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the death without giving details. The Nige-



File photo of slain Nigerian Justice Minister Bola Ige.

rian leader canceled a planned visit to Zimbabwe as soon as he heard the news, the aide said.

Motives behind the slaying had yet to be determined,

although the Lagos daily newspaper ThisDay speculated the killing could be linked to a violent political feud between the governor and his deputy in the southeastern Osun State.

Last week, an Osun State legislator Odunayo Olagbaju, was bludgeoned to death outside his home, sparking riots in the city of Ife, where at least five people were reported killed. Olagbaju had been a supporter of Osun deputy governor Iyiola Omisore.

Ige had apparently backed Osun State Gov. Bamidele Adebisi Akande, ThisDay said.

Ige, 71, was one of the most outspoken campaigners for democracy under Nigeria's former military rulers. He is also the founder of one of the West African country's three registered political parties, the Alliance for Democracy. Just weeks ago, Ige had been chosen to serve in 2002 on the prestigious 34-member United Nations (news - web sites) international law commission.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with 120 million people, is regularly rocked by violent feuding along political, ethnic or religious lines.

Comoros poll decides on constitution draft

MORONI, Comoros (AP) - Voters in the coup-plagued Comoros went to the polls Sunday to decide on a draft constitution, which, if approved, will grant greater autonomy to the three islands that make up the Indian Ocean nation.

The draft constitution is intended to bring political stability to the Comoros, a former French colony off the coast of Mozambique where there

have been 20 coups or attempted coups over the last 26 years.

For the referendum to pass, at least half of Comoros' 224,000 registered voters must cast ballots, with a simple majority voting for the draft constitution.

Comorians appeared split Sunday. Some people on the smaller islands said they preferred a more autonomous union while others said they

would vote against the constitution because it was written without input from the public.

"I have never seen the text of the new constitution. I cannot vote for something I don't understand," said 22-year-old Bless Abdallah Massode before casting a vote against the draft constitution.

The referendum is taking place just six days after the Comoros' latest coup attempt

in which residents and government soldiers on Moheli, the smallest and poorest of the three islands, refused to back the 13 men who tried to take it over.

Six of the attackers were killed, five are under arrest and two remain at large, Interior Minister Said Abdallah Sheikh said Saturday. He identified those under arrest as French but did not provide (See Comoros, Page 14)

More black South Africans earning college degrees

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (PANA)-The number of degrees and diplomas going to Black South Africans over the past decade has increased 173 percent, up from 14,798 in 1991 to 40,333 in 1998.

The proportion of all awards from universities and technical schools earned by Africans has risen as well. In 1991 Blacks received a quarter of all awards—a proportion that doubled by 1998. In contrast, awards to Whites dropped by 17 percent.

Increase in South Africa child rapes dominate headlines

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (PANA)-A gathering momentum of child rape in South Africa has captured the attention of the media and of a horrified public.

There has been a huge increase in the number of child rapes coupled with a new report revealing that children were victims of a shocking 41 percent of all rapes and attempted rapes reported in South Africa.

According to the South African Police Service report, more than 15 percent of rapes are committed against chil-

dren under the age of 11. Further, 26 percent of all reported rapes are committed against children between the ages of 12 and 17.

Figures for 2000 revealed that an average of 58 children were victims of rape or attempted rape in South Africa each day.

Complicating the situation is the widespread belief that sex with a virgin, child or baby can cure an HIV/AIDS sufferer.

Deputy President Jacob Zuma came under fire from political parties and the me-

a way as to benefit so-called historically White rather than historically Black universities.

Enrollment patterns thus show a significant movement away from historically Black universities. Whereas students of all races flocked to largely White universities and technical schools, predominantly Black universities lost a third of their students between 1995 and 2000. Distance institutions lost a fifth.

Numbers of first-time en-

tering undergraduates plunged 42 percent at historically Black universities and by a quarter at distance institutions.

A further aspect of uneven educational transformation is shown in the breakdown of awards according to discipline. Relatively few African students complete professional courses of four years or longer such as engineering, architecture, medicine, social research, or urban planning. (See Degrees, Page 14)

dia for blaming the high incidence of child rapes on apartheid. He said in Pretoria that rapists long ago developed a lack of respect for life and human rights taught to them by apartheid.

"If this generation was young in the 1980s and 1970s, what kind of men can we expect of them today? Today this angry generation is making our lives miserable. Killing and raping, to them, is the order of the day," Zuma said.

The opposition Democratic Alliance says either Zuma can continue blaming

the past for everything that is going wrong in South Africa, or he can join forces with every South African committed to eradicating this most horrific of crimes.

Business Day newspaper said the Soweto 1976 generation has come of age, and the fallout is worrying and unsettling.

"It is not difficult to imagine the psychological effect on children in squatter camps who grow up in an environment where they have to share a bedroom with their parents, (See Child, Page 14)