

WORLD BRIEFS

RWANDA FARMERS DRY UP-MARKET COFFEE BEANS TO COMBAT LOW PRICES

KIGALI, Rwanda (GIN)—New skills and more money: That's what Rwandan farmers are getting from growing specialty coffee beans to be exported under fair trade deals. "For the small holder, when he produces a kilo of ordinary coffee he receives 28 cents a kilo. But once he produces specialty coffees, he receives almost 80 cents," says Rwandan Commerce Minister Alexandre Lyambabaje. The flagship product is Maraba Arabica Bourbon coffee, which, according to a statement by the Rwandan government, was "graded the second best in the world...at a recent coffee quality test in the U.S." This, along with other specialty coffees, has become popular in countries such as the United States and United Kingdom in the last 10 years; American company Community Coffee was Rwanda's biggest coffee buyer last year. Coffee once provided Rwanda with 60 percent of its revenue; it was a crucial source of income after Rwanda's economy was devastated by the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which 800,000 people were killed in just 100 days.

APARTHEID-ERA GENERAL LINKED TO BIOLOGICAL WARFARE

JOHANNESBURG (GIN)—Apartheid-era Gen. Tai Minnaar, now deceased, is to be investigated by South Africa's Non-Proliferation Council (NPC) over claims that he attempted to sell biological organisms developed during South Africa's apartheid-era biological weapons research program. The NPC is the statutory body responsible for ensuring that South Africa complies with its legal responsibilities to prevent the spread of chemical and biological warfare technology. It is also responsible for nuclear non-proliferation. NPC chairperson Abdul Minty, who is also the acting director general of foreign affairs, told a local newspaper the NPC would have to "look into" claims that Minnaar had tried to procure deadly anthrax bacteria for sale and that samples of less harmful organisms had been handed over to a shadowy American linked to the CIA. He said the investigation would also cover the question of whether stocks of prohibited biological material produced for the apartheid war machine had been destroyed or if some people still have it.

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA WORKERS WIN WAGE DEMANDS

WINDHOEK, Namibia (GIN)—Workers at the University of Namibia (Unam) called off a strike last week after receiving word that the government would raise their pay. A 16.5 percent pay raise will begin in April, according to Namibia's Finance Secretary. Staff say they had not had any pay rises for the last three years, and in a statement added: "This situation now means that Unam staff members' salary packages lag severely behind their peers at other institutions of higher learning in Namibia and the SADC [South African Development Community] region..." Now the funding has been assured by government of Namibia, which Foreign Affairs Minister Hidipo Hamutenya has said had a reasonably good economy with annual growth of about 3.8 percent. Last week Unam management met with workers' representatives to finalize the details of the deal.

AFRICA: RICH NATIONS MUST DROP 'DOUBLE STANDARDS'

ARUSHA, Tanzania (GIN)—A meeting of world and regional leaders meeting in Arusha, northern Tanzania, was the setting for a call to rich nations to abandon their "double standards" and trade fairly with Africa. "We continue to receive lectures from our friends about removing subsidies, while they continue subsidies themselves," Salim Ahmed Salim, the immediate former secretary-general of the Organization of African Unity, said in delivering the recommendations of the recent two-day meeting of the World Commission on the Social Dimension. The delegates urged African leaders to adopt the following priorities: greater regional economic integration, a greater focus on education, the improvement of their negotiating capacity at international trade forums, and a reduction in youth unemployment—a phenomenon they described as "a potential time bomb." However, delegates said that in order for Africa to compete fairly, the international community would have to abandon its double standards.

INTERNATIONAL

Africa's Pygmies face logging dilemma

POKOLA, Republic of Congo (AP) - For Pygmies logging the rain forests of central Africa, the chainsaw's whine signals the promise of work - and threatens a way of life.

As Republic of Congo's timber industry revs up after years of ruinous civil war, international logging firms are cutting swathes deep into the heart of central Africa's huge Congo basin.

The boom puts the Pygmies in a wrenching dilemma: Tree by tree, the jobs it gives them are destroying the forest home where they have dwelled for millennia.

"It's out of a need to sur-

vive that I work with the timber companies," said Bekou, a Pygmy logger. "Our life is impossible outside the forests."

International loggers say they offer jobs and schooling, and want to save Pygmy culture. But the Pygmies say each tree felled means less leafy cover for the striped antelopes they hunt and brings them closer to losing their heritage.

"Our only hope is that our forests not be totally destroyed," said Daniel Kaya, one of about 160 Pygmies working for the Swiss-German forestry firm Congolese Industrial Wood Co., known

by its French acronym CIB.

The Congo basin holds about one-fourth of the world's tropical forests and is the largest stretch of unbroken forest in the world aside from the Amazon. Each year, logging eats up 3,125 square miles of lush woods, an area twice the size of Rhode Island.

It's already changing the way of life for the Pygmies, believed to be the earliest inhabitants of central Africa. While many survive by hunting and gathering deep in the jungle, others have already left the forests in search of jobs.

"Today, we need to travel

great distances, or simply emigrate, to find something to eat," said Florent Bekou, another CIB Pygmy employee.

Between 5 percent and 10 percent of Republic of Congo's 2.9 million citizens are Pygmies, many of whom stand less than 5 feet tall. Over the centuries, the legendary hunters retreated deep into the jungle to keep away from more powerful Bantu tribes.

During the 1990s, three civil wars devastated Republic of Congo and silenced the chain saws in the jungles. An insurgency still rages in the

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Ivory Coast rebels strict on peace plan

By Gabriel Packard

BOUAKE, Ivory Coast (GIN)—Rebels controlling the northern half of the Ivory Coast have told the government to keep to the peace accord agreed to last month; if the government doesn't do this, rebels say they will secede and permanently split the country in two.

The rebels are boycotting a peace summit being held in the Ivorian capital, Yamoussoukro, which is aimed at resolving this five-month-old conflict. They say they have nothing more to discuss with President Laurent Gbagbo, who they said defied a French-brokered peace deal, agreed to by the government and the main rebel groups.

Although there were high hopes for peace after the deal, brokered in Paris on Jan. 24, it has been problematic in many ways. When the deal was announced, government supporters took to the streets for days of anti-French protests.

Also, the army said that it won't serve if a rebel holds the ministry of defense. And, after keeping silent for two weeks, President Gbagbo has announced that he hadn't made up his mind on how the new power-sharing government would work. He said that he accepted the "spirit" of the deal, but rejected several key details, such as disarmament of police and government forces.

Even so, Soro still says, "We are moving toward peace."

This view is supported by some recent developments. A key youth leader who spent weeks leading protests against the peace deal has now started lending his support. Charles Ble Goude still says, however, that he opposes giving government positions to rebels.

Although gains have been made, this conflict, which has divided the Ivory Coast since September, seems far from over.

African miners still not paid for lung damage

JOHANNESBURG (GIN)—Silicosis fibrosis of the lung, an occupational hazard among asbestos miners, has afflicted close to 500,000 miners here, who have yet to receive a court-ordered settlement for their health problems. Now, mining giant Gencor is organizing to pay out more than 460-million rand (\$55.4 million) to compensate sufferers of asbestos-related diseases. This money will go into a trust fund to pay for treatment and to compensate families who lose breadwinners.

In villages in large parts of the Northern Cape and Limpopo, people still live in buildings made of asbestos and drive on asbestos roads, while children play on dumps of asbestos fiber. Clean up of this contamination has not yet been arranged.

"Asbestos poisoning is not a purely legal matter. It's about as close as you get to large-scale murder and massive corporate malfeasance. The evidence that exposure to asbestos was extremely harmful has been available since the 1960s, but absolutely nothing was done to

protect workers," said occupational health attorney Richard Spoor.

After divvying up the settlement for asbestos victims, the lawyers group plans on suing the country's even larger gold mining industry, also for health damage.

Spoor said that about 500,000 gold miners had been abandoned penniless after contracting silicosis. Silicosis fibrosis of the lung, reputed to be the oldest known occupational disease, is caused when miners inhale crystalline quartz silica dust.

"The asbestos settlement is a message for the rest of the mining industry: You will be held accountable for killing or injuring literally hundreds of thousands of miners, and for devastating the environment of entire towns," said Spoor.



GLOBAL COMMERCE

Urban Chamber of Commerce Executive Director E. Louis Overstreet, left, and Chamber member Alvarez Alejandro, right, welcome Moubamba-Moubamba Dieudonne, personal counselor to the president of the Republic of Gabon. During his official visit last week, Dieudonne met with Chamber officials to discuss possible business opportunities between the Chamber and his country.

Sentinel-Voice photo by Kathi Overstreet