

## Respiratory illness kills eleven in central Sudan

More than 16,000 hospitalized with illness linked to locusts

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) - At least 11 people in central Sudan have died and more than 16,000 have been hospitalized with a respiratory illness doctors link to an annual locust invasion, the country's official news agency said Saturday.

The peak was reported a week ago when some 500 cases were admitted to a hospital in Medani, Sudan's second-largest city, 112 miles south of Khartoum.

"The cases of lung eczema increased as of the 22nd of October in an average that exceeded the normal rate, a matter we considered as an epidemic situation for the patient suffering from eczema of the respiratory system," the local government said in a statement carried by the news agency.

The statement was prepared by a committee including federal experts in eczema and respiratory diseases, and local physicians.

This is the first such outbreak of respira-

tory illness in the area.

A spokesman for the World Health Organization, Dick Thompson, told The Associated Press that infectious disease experts at the Geneva-based U.N. health agency were unaware of the outbreak, but said the occurrence of such a "toxic event" could not be ruled out.

Abdel Moneim Hassan Khalifa, an agricultural official in the Medani area, was quoted in Saturday's al-Rai al-Amm newspaper as saying the illness is linked to a hormone released by the dark-red locusts during mating season - which "has a strong effect on people with asthma."

The committee has provided medication, oxygen and equipment for patients.

The area has been sprayed with insecticide since last week and the numbers of deaths and infections have dropped, the statement said.



### HIDDEN AGENDA

A Palestinian boy watches an Israeli soldier from behind a gap in a concrete wall separating the West Bank town of Abu Dis from East Jerusalem in order to pass without being seen on Tuesday. Israel says the wall is a barrier intended to prevent potential suicide bombers from crossing into its cities.

## Orphaned Haitian teens face deportation, rally draws notice

By K. Chandler

Special to Sentinel-Voice

"This is a boy who was clearly traumatized in Haiti, and now our government is traumatizing him." - Ms. Cheryl Little

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) - Two orphaned children fleeing Haiti a year ago have become the focus of a growing furor over the U.S.'s 'separate and unequal' immigration policies.

At the crux of the matter are INS policies that allow

Cubans, who reach American soil, to live with relatives while their political asylum claims are processed, but incarcerates Haitians almost without exception before summarily repatriating the majority of them back to Haiti. Once returned to Haiti many face possible imprisonment and/or death.

Rose Thermitus and Ernest Joseph, both 16, arrived on Biscayne Bay on October 29, 2002 along with 200 other Haitian refugees

fleeing Haiti's repressive government. So far, 189 of the 200 have been deported with just 11 remaining in U.S. custody, including the two teens.

Thermitus and Joseph's stories underscore the double standard inherent in America's immigration/naturalization policies, which were stringently tightened this past April by U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Fearing a massive wave of Haitian immigrants, the

U.S. Justice Department has decided that Haitians are to remain at Krome Detention Center in west Miami-Dade until a ruling is made on their cases.

Many of Haiti's youngest immigrants are orphaned children, like Thermitus and Joseph, who face possible imprisonment and death upon returning to Port-au-Prince.

Rose Thermitus, who has been locked up by the U.S. government for almost a year, arrived in this country with her older brother, Franquelyn. She alleges that supporters of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide torched their family's home.

A few days before the attack, the girl's parents told her "they were going out." That was the last time she ever saw them and fear that they may be dead.

Making matters worse, Thermitus only recently learned that her brother, Franquelyn was deported to Haiti in August. No one has seen or heard from him since.

"It is alarming that the brother has not been located," said Candace Jean, a Catholic Charities lawyer involved in the case. "There is this fearful concern these people are disappearing into prisons of Haiti, one more reason why a minor should not be returned to Haiti."

Like Thermitus, Ernesto Joseph, an orphaned teen also fled to freedom, or what he thought would be freedom, in October of 2002. Since landing on U.S. soil, he has

been detained for seven months at Krome with the threat of deportation constantly hanging over his head. A younger sibling, Ophelio, never made it to land, and was deported. No one has seen or heard from him since.

After Joseph's attorneys were able to convince authorities that he was suffering grave psychological damage from being incarcerated, Joseph was turned over to the custody of his Uncle Adelphin in north Miami-Dade, after earlier winning asylum in court.

Scarcely four months later, however, the youth was picked up again and taken into custody by the INS. This time he was incarcerated in a locked hotel room in west Miami after the Board of Immigration Appeals overturned the judge's earlier ruling. Justice Department officials still maintain that the youth's orphan status does not make him a candidate for political asylum.

Adding to the confusion was the issue of Joseph's age. The INS argued that he was really 18 and not a minor after all. Since then, a copy of his birth certificate, obtained from Haiti, along with a notarized statement certifying the authenticity of the birth certificate, were submitted to authorities who have given Joseph a 30-day reprieve while they review the matter.

Presently attorneys and political representatives including U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek are working diligently

to get approval from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to pursue the case in juvenile court. They hope to obtain U.S. residency for Joseph under a unique congressional proviso for abandoned, undocumented or abused/neglected children residing in this country.

Meek has been instrumental in pushing the Department of Homeland Security to extend the 30-day window so the necessary documents can be effectively turned over to authorities.

"We are talking about the life of this young man," said Meek, who has been working behind the scenes to get Joseph released into the custody of his uncle. "We need to be fair, and we need to have a level of sensitivity about what we are doing. We are talking about humanitarian efforts in Iraq because we are a compassionate country. But we have a very shaky democracy right in our hemisphere that is poorer than the Iraqi people."

In an ironic twist, the Haitian government is refusing to issue travel visas to either teen since they would be unaccompanied minors, with no parents.

Cheryl Little, Executive Director of the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, said, "This is a boy who was clearly traumatized in Haiti, and now our government is traumatizing him."

K. Chandler writes for the Westside Gazette.

## Burundi peace agreement signed

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) - Burundi's president and main rebel leader signed a peace agreement Sunday, but efforts to end the decade-long civil war were threatened by renewed fighting between Tutsi-dominated government troops and other Hutu rebels.

Peter Nkurunziza, leader of the rebel Forces for the Defense of Democracy, said Sunday the deal with President Domitien Ndayizeye could lead to a cease-fire with all rebel groups in Burundi. At least one other group has resisted any agreement with the government and skirmishes continue. "We look forward very much to work with our brothers who were our enemies yesterday," Nkurunziza was quoted as saying by the South African Press Association.

"I hope the agreement signed today will be implemented in the very, very near future so we shall indeed be one."

His FDD is the largest Hutu rebel group fighting the army.

South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma, who helped broker the deal, said the agreement signaled an end to the conflict in this central African nation.

"I believe with this agreement Burundi's problems are over," Zuma said. "This is an

agreement you can defend, own and implement."

The agreement allows Nkurunziza's rebels to be included in the military and form a political party. Both government and rebel fighters will be granted temporary immunity from prosecution.

Fighting flared up last week as the Hutu-dominated National Liberation Force clashed with the Tutsi-dominated army. Thousands fled their homes outside the capital, Bujumbura.

The National Liberation Force is the only group that has refused to negotiate with Burundi's transitional government. Two smaller rebel factions signed cease-fires in October 2002.

More than 200,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since fighting started in October 1993. Tutsi paratroopers assassinated the country's first democratically elected leader, a Hutu.

Ndayizeye, a Hutu, heads a transitional government that took office in November 2001. His predecessor was a Tutsi.

Tutsis are in the minority in Burundi, but have effectively controlled the country for all but a few months since it achieved independence in 1962.