

WORLD BRIEFS

UN LAUNCHES SLAVERY REMEMBRANCE YEAR IN GHANA

(IPS/GIN) – The United Nations launched its slavery remembrance year earlier this month with a ceremony in the former slave-port of Cape Coast, Ghana. African dancers enacted slave-trading scenes at the ceremony, and the head the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) gave a speech while wearing traditional Ghanaian kente cloth. “By institutionalizing memory... and by assigning it its proper place in the human conscience, we respond to our duty to remember,” said Koichiro Matsuura. As well as remembering the past, he said, “We also have a duty to educate for a better future.” He added that he hoped the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery (IYCSS) would help people commit to “the ongoing struggle against all forms of racism, discriminations, xenophobia, intolerance and injustice.” The IYCSS will include concerts, studies and exhibitions to increase awareness of slavery. About 10 million Africans were taken as slaves to the New World during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Although slavery is now outlawed by international treaty, it is reported to continue in places such as Western Sahara and Sudan.

KENYA'S PRESIDENT KIBAKI 'DISSOLVES' RULING PARTIES

(IPS/GIN) – Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki says that the parties that once made up his ruling Rainbow coalition (Narc) have been “dissolved.” He reportedly told all 16 parties to dissolve themselves. Analysts think he did this to quell infighting between them. However, one of the Narc parties, The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) responded by saying it wouldn't dissolve and pledged to keep strengthening itself. The LDP said that it would launch a recruitment drive, set up a branch network, and that it will run its candidate, against Kibaki, for president in the 2007 elections. Narc was formed after Kenyans asked for an opposition coalition to run against a successor selected by authoritarian Daniel arap Moi, who ruled Kenya for 24 years. In December 2002, Narc won the general election. But during their first year in power, some parties have been unhappy with the alliance and have asked for it to be disbanded.

SOUTH AFRICAN NOBELIST ORDAINS DAUGHTER

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) – Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work against the racial apartheid in his native South Africa, ordained his daughter Saturday as an Anglican priest. Mpho Tutu, along with three other new priests, was ordained at Christ Church, an Alexandria Episcopal church where she will minister for the next two years. “It was awesome, it was an awesome moment,” said Mpho Tutu, 40. “It would have been an awesome moment regardless of who was the celebrant, but it was something particularly special, particularly wonderful to have my father there presiding at my ordinance.” Speaking with reporters after the ceremony, Tutu said political activism is vital. The 72-year-old cleric was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his apartheid campaign and, after the white government fell, led South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aired the misdeeds of the apartheid era. He was an active opponent U.S.-led invasion of Iraq last March.

COMMANDERS WANT LEADER REPLACED BY WIFE

(IRIN) – Forty commanders of Liberia's main rebel group have signed a statement calling for the replacement of their chairman Sekou Damate Conneh by his influential wife. Diplomats say Aisha Keita Conneh has a lot of influence with Guinean President Lansana Conte, who for the past four years has been the main backer of the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). She is also reputed to be Conte's personal fortune teller. LURD officials say she is estranged from her husband. The dissident commanders said that Sekou Conneh, a former tax official and used-car dealer, had filled LURD's allocated slots in Liberia's broad-based transitional government with nominees who had bribed him to secure seats.



DIVINE STEPS

Cuban President Fidel Castro, center, walks next to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomew, right, at the official welcoming ceremony at the Palace of the Revolution on Wednesday in Havana, Cuba.

Report critical of U.S. presence in Iraq

MINNEAPOLIS (NNPA) – A study released recently by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said, “Officials misrepresented threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles programs over and above intelligence findings.”

The report challenged two of the Bush Administration's claims that led up to the war with Iraq. The administration said that Iraq had links to terrorist networks and possessed weapons that could pose an imminent threat to the United States.

But the Carnegie report brings into question the administration's failure to establish a link between Iraq and terrorist networks. There was “no solid evidence” that Saddam Hussein was connected to Osama bin-Laden or al Qaeda, the report said. It also stated that Iraq's nuclear program had been suspended for many years.

Secretary of State Colin Powell disagreed with the findings of the Carnegie report. “This game is still unfolding,” Powell said, and he reaffirmed his earlier position that Saddam Hussein did possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and had used chemical weapons against Iraq's Kurdish population in the 1980s. However, Powell did acknowledge the lack of evidence linking Hussein to al Qaeda.

In conflict with Powell's statements is the Carnegie report's statement that, “Iraq's large-scale chemical weapon production capabilities were previously destroyed during Operation Desert Storm and Desert

Fox.” These two U.S.-led military operations occurred in 1991 and 1999 respectively, leaving a five to 10-year gap in time between Powell's references to Iraq's weapons program.

The findings of the Carnegie report support what many opposed to the war have believed since President Bush declared his intent to wage war in Iraq: that the war was based on circumstantial and falsified evidence.

Allegations made by a former Bush cabinet member, along with a study published by the Army War College, have further supported the Carnegie report. The evening of January 11, former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill accused the Bush Administration of planning to overthrow Saddam Hussein prior to the September 11, 2001, bombings of the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon.

“In the 23 months I was there, I never saw anything that I would characterize as evidence of weapons of mass destruction,” O'Neill said in an interview on 60 Minutes. He added that the overthrow of Hussein was on the Bush agenda immediately when he took office three years ago.

A report published by the Army War College, released to the public on January 12, said, “The war against Iraq was not integral to the global war on terror, but rather a detour from it.”

Jeffery Record, a visiting research professor at the Strategic Studies Institute of the Army War College, also criticized the Bush Administration for not distinguishing al Qaeda from Saddam Hussein.

“The result has been an unnecessary preventive war of choice against a deterred Iraq that has created a new front in the Middle East for Islamic terrorism and diverted attention and resources away from securing the American homeland against further assault by an undeterrable al Qaeda,” Record's report said.

Military families and veterans have also voiced criticism of the Bush administration and the ongoing war in Iraq, as the numbers of U.S. casualties have continued to increase despite President Bush's announcement of the end to major conflict in May. According to the Department of Defense, there have been more than 2,800 wounded U.S. soldiers and more than 500 fatalities.

The percentage of casualties among minorities, in particular, has steadily increased in recent wars.

A study conducted by Scripps Howard News Service showed an increase in African-American deaths from 8 to 19 percent and a 2 to 14 percent increase in Latino deaths since the Korean War.

African-American soldiers represent 20 percent of U.S. fatalities in Iraq, accord-

ing to a study reported by Scripps Howard News Service.

“Nearly a fifth of the fatalities among U.S. troops in the current war in Iraq are Black, which will be the highest cost African-Americans have paid in any of America's wars if the trend continues,” the report said. “African-Americans represent 13 percent of the U.S. population and 20 percent of all military personnel.”

The Scripps Howard study also said that deaths among Latino soldiers might be over-represented relative to the U.S. Latino population. The report lacked statistics on Latino deaths because it said military experts find it “a difficult statistic to prove unofficially since ethnicity is self-defined.”

But as the hostilities continue, the U.S. government is recruiting more Latinos, including non-citizen immigrants, Andrew Gumbel reported in the London-based newspaper The Independent.

The military views Latinos “as by far the most promising ethnic group for recruitment, because their numbers are growing rapidly in the U.S. and they include a plentiful supply of low-in-

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