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Summary of Report

Political Developments

South Africa reports seizing banned North Korea weapons

South Africa has confirmed it seized banned military equipment on a ship sailing from North Korea to the Republic of Congo.

Canada and Mandela: the story behind the myth

While Brian Mulroney did more than many (government leaders) in the West, his government and the Canadian business (community) also became dupes to South Africa's insidious propaganda campaign.

Namibia: First Divisions Start

THE Namibia Premier League (NPL) yesterday announced that the two first-division leagues will officially start this weekend countrywide.

Namibia: Parliament Approves NDF Troops to Chad

MEMBERS of the National Assembly yesterday approved a request by Defence Minister Charles Namoloh to send 800 soldiers to Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) for a UN peacekeeping mission.

Presidency denies Duarte has quit

The Presidency has said that its chief of staff Jessie Duarte had not resigned, but the Sunday Times said it stood by its report that she had sent an e-mail to ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe announcing her intention to do so.

Al Qaeda releases French hostage - Mali government

Al Qaeda's North African wing has released French hostage Pierre Camatte, Mali's government said on Tuesday.

China throws birthday bash for Zimbabwe's Mugabe

China said on Monday its embassy in Zimbabwe had thrown a birthday party for President Robert Mugabe, a rare sign of foreign support for a leader reviled by many Zimbabweans and criticised by the United States and Europe.

French ex-hostage transferred to Mali capital

French aid worker Pierre Camatte was brought by Mali security forces to Bamako on Wednesday after being released by al Qaeda militants, and was due to meet French President Nicolas Sarkozy before returning home.

Sarkozy meets French ex-hostage in Mali

French aid worker Pierre Camatte, who was released from captivity by North African al Qaeda militants this week, met President of France Nicolas Sarkozy in Malian capital Bamako on Thursday.

South Africa says intercepted N.Korea arms shipment

South Africa has told to U.N. Security Council committee that it intercepted a North Korean weapon shipment bound for Central Africa, which diplomats said was a violation of a U.N. ban on arms sales by Pyongyang.

South Africa: No Burden in 11 Official Languages – Xingwana

Government considers South Africa having 11 official languages as an asset rather than a burden, says Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana.

Swaziland Democracy Campaign Launched in South Africa

Pro-democracy groups from several southern African nations Sunday gathered in South Africa to launch a campaign for democracy in Swaziland, which is considered one the few remaining absolute monarchies in the world.

Economic Developments

Inflation increases in Zambia from 9.6% to 9.8%

Zambia's Central Statistical Office has announced a marginal increase in inflation from 9.6% last month to 9.8% this month.

South Africa power price surge leads to strike threats

South African trade unions are threatening strikes after the country's government allowed state-owned power firm Eskom to raise prices by 24.8%.

Big Sports - Big Cost

World sporting events such as the Olympics and World Cup require billions of dollars of investment and years of planning. But do the investments pay off, helping the local or national economy?

MALAWI: Extra Money Allocated for Drought Relief

Unofficial figures estimate that due to the drought, over 30,000 hectares of crop fields have been affected and that up to 120,000 families (an average of 720,000 people) could need food assistance in the region. Government is now stepping in and has allocated 76 million dollars in the annual budget for food relief. According to the ministry of finance; the money is to be spent purchasing food for distribution to affected households.

Informal Cross-Border Traders Reduce Poverty, But Face Major Risks in Southern Africa

Informal cross-border trade contributes significantly to the economies of southern African nations - about \$17.6 billion a year - and helps reduce poverty. But a group of researchers who met recently in South Africa say informal traders face many threats.

IN BRIEF: IMF restores Zimbabwe's voting rights

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) restored voting rights to Zimbabwe on 22 February 2010, but any new loans for the cash-strapped country will only be considered once its arrears of about US\$140 million to the Poverty Reduction & Growth Trust (PRGT) were paid, an IMF spokesman told IRIN.

MADAGASCAR: Textile industry unravels

Tensions between street traders and the city authorities in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, are mounting as hundreds of recently unemployed textile industry workers compete with established informal traders; textile factories have been closing since the country was suspended from a preferential trade agreement with the US.

Social Developments

Another challenge from the Church

Here is support from beyond the Council of Churches in Zambia for a recent CCZ Pastoral Letter that emphasised the need for Government economic policies to be more concerned about the welfare of all citizens. "Positive economic growth is meaningless if the lives of the majority of the citizenry are not positively affected.

MALAWI: Catapults Against Cholera

"There has been a reduction in open defecation. The people of Mkanda have fully adopted the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach where they are discouraging the common practice of defecating in the open," said Thomas Mchipha, Water, Sanitation Health and Environment Coordinator for Mchinji district.

SWAZILAND: Long-distance Learning Certificate for Caregivers

Swaziland has the highest (26%) HIV/AIDS rate in the world. So to take care of HIV positive population a programme named as "PWCFC" is launched. This, distance learning, programme trains caregivers to understand the emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual and educational needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS and poverty.

Challenges faced by Botswana's indigenous require Government action – UN expert

Botswana's Government must step up efforts to tackle the challenges faced by many indigenous communities, such as land rights, according to a new report by a United Nations independent expert.

Africa: Finding the food crops of the future

Temperatures seem set to soar to perilously high levels because of climate change. In another 40 years, would maize still be the staple food in Kenya, already hit by five failed rainy seasons? If not, what could people grow and eat? And if you could grow maize, how much water and fertilizer would it need?

Angola: Release Cabinda Rights Defenders

The Angolan government should promptly release three human rights defenders who were arrested on apparently political grounds following the January 8, 2010 attack on Togolese footballers in Cabinda, Human Rights Watch said today. Human Rights Watch also expressed concern about the continued detention without charge of five other people.

SOUTH AFRICA: Court releases illegally detained asylum seeker

South Africa's Supreme Court of Appeal ordered the Department of Home Affairs on 24 February 2010 to immediately release an Ethiopian asylum seeker from "unlawful" detention after he had languished in repatriation centres for over nine months.

SOUTH AFRICA: New research fuels "test and treat" debate

New research could bolster arguments for a controversial approach that could eradicate HIV transmission in South Africa within five years, said Dr Brian Williams of the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA).

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Children that slip across borders

Zimbabwe's still-limping economy can provide few essential services, so children living along the border cross into South Africa to attend school during the day or even to see a doctor, often at great risk to their personal safety.

SWAZILAND: Some women can now own property

On 23 February 2010 the High Court of Swaziland ruled that some married women will be allowed to register property in their own name.

ZIMBABWE: Measles in nearly half of country's districts

A measles outbreak has hit 28 of Zimbabwe's 62 districts and is still spreading, but efforts to vaccinate people in some quarters are being hampered by religious convictions.

South Africa: 2010 War On Malaria, TB And HIV

The 2010 FIFA World Cup will present a unique platform to mount the fight against malaria, tuberculosis (TB) and HIV in the African continent.

South African Court Lends Support to White Zimbabwean Farmers

Thursday, a South African High Court confirmed a ruling made by a Southern African Development Community Tribunal that the farm seizures were illegal. The decision came after a South African civil rights group, AFRIFORUM, took up the case of the white farmers several months ago.

Detailed Report

Political Developments

South Africa reports seizing banned North Korea weapons

(BBC News)

26 February 2010

South Africa has confirmed it seized banned military equipment on a ship sailing from North Korea to the Republic of Congo.

The foreign ministry said it had reported the seizure to the UN Security Council, saying the shipment broke a UN weapons sanction against North Korea.

The report said spare parts for T-55 tanks were hidden among sacks of rice in two shipping containers. The Republic of Congo has experienced a wave of violence recently.

Arms ban

South Africa's report to the UN said the two containers were seized in November last year and were being stored in Durban while an investigation into the shipment, labelled as bulldozer parts, continued.

It is not the first seizure of its kind. In December, Thailand confiscated more than 35 tons of arms from a cargo plane that made an emergency landing in Bangkok that officials said had come from North Korea.

North Korea was banned from selling arms and related equipment under UN sanctions passed in June last year after Pyongyang carried out nuclear and missile tests.

The sanctions allow searches of transport travelling to or from North Korea suspected of carrying banned goods.

Canada and Mandela: the story behind the myth

(Africa Files)

26 February 2010

This month marks the 20th anniversary of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, which has naturally triggered reminiscences around the world, some more accurate than others. Mine went back to the last years of apartheid, from the late 1980s until Mr. Mandela's election as president in the historic 1994 election.

On Jan. 7, 1987, a South African diplomat in Ottawa wrote to a Canadian newspaper fiercely complaining of "the scurrilous allegations" against his government that had appeared in its pages. "My government," he declared, "has been the victim of a great deal of misinformation spread by certain elements of the Canadian press, but none as reprehensible" as the piece in question. I have always considered that attack on me by one of the most egregious regimes the world has known to be a badge of honour. But the letter was not an isolated shot by the apartheid government. A totalitarian system premised on the innate inferiority of Africans, built on extreme repression, and enforced by brutal violence was, in the late 1980s, in its death throes. Not even the bitter-end support by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan could save apartheid. Its back against the wall, the white government lashed out on all fronts.

Its grand strategy was twofold:

First, launch attacks with all its vast might against three targets: its opponents within the country; the neighbouring African states, most of which it invaded in those years; and ANC activists in exile, from Maputo to Paris, whom they searched out and murdered.

Second, launch a massive dis-information and propaganda campaign around the world with three messages: to insist that life for black South Africans was improving, to tie Nelson Mandela's African National Congress to so-called left-wing terrorist groups around the world, and to discredit critics of apartheid everywhere.

The letter attacking me was one tiny part of that sophisticated, hugely expensive propaganda campaign.

Last week in this paper, the head of the Public Policy Forum looked back nostalgically on the good old days when Canada was "helping achieve the end of apartheid in South Africa." It's an appealing notion, a perfect Canadian conceit, but it's not nearly as accurate as some Canadians like to romanticize. In fact, to a significant extent, the Canadian government and Canadian business became dupes of South Africa's PR campaign.

It was one thing for Canadian journalists like Peter Worthington to make themselves propagandists for the South African apartheid government at its most vile moment. But it was quite another when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, sometimes the western world's boldest leader against apartheid, actually bought into the South African propaganda campaign. When African National Congress president and trusted Mandela confidante Oliver Tambo, visited Canada in 1987, Mr. Mulroney directly confronted him with, of all things, a South African government advertisement in *The Globe and Mail* labelling the ANC a terrorist Communist organization. Mr. Mulroney's contradictory positions reflected the decades-long ambivalence towards South Africa by a succession of Canadian governments - even after Mr. Mandela was freed.

Fred Lum/*The Globe and Mail*

Winnie Mandela and Foreign Affairs Minister Joe Clark lead an anti-apartheid parade up University Avenue in Toronto on June 19, 1990.

We owe much of our real understanding of Canada's lacklustre engagement with apartheid to two of Canada's most dedicated scholars of Africa, Linda Freeman of Carleton and John Saul of York University. Rejecting the prevalent mythology about Canada's impressive role, Professors Freeman and Saul documented the meagre response that had long characterized Canadian government's actual policies towards South Africa for almost half a century. Diefenbaker, Pearson, Trudeau - all talked a much better game than they played. Through all these decades while the ANC and anti-apartheid activists around the world called for sanctions against South Africa, trade between our two countries steadily grew.

Mr. Mulroney's record was by far the best of a disappointing lot. He and his UN ambassador, Stephen Lewis, took on all comers in their attacks on the evils of apartheid. Mr. Mulroney stood up to Reagan and Thatcher in a way that few others with power did. But the prime minister's enthusiasm for the cause soon ran out of steam, and his much-lauded public commitment to tighten sanctions fell by the wayside. Joe Clark, Mr. Mulroney's Foreign Affairs minister, was soon running the apartheid file. Mr. Clark, far more than the prime minister, was obsessed with the ANC's strategic commitment to armed struggle, which he found far more intolerable than the evils of apartheid.

Mr. Clark knew perfectly well the reality of the South African system, telling parliament, "We do understand that violence is at the heart of the apartheid system." But that apparently couldn't justify an armed response, even though the ANC explicitly banned attacks on civilians and targeted only the military and police who enforced the system.

In 1990, soon after Mr. Mandela was released from jail, he and Mr. Clark met in Lusaka, Zambia. Mr. Mandela knew that, while Mr. Mulroney had stood up to Thatcher and Reagan, he had also humiliated Mr. Tambo. But in true Mandela style, he now chose to accentuate the positive. He physically embraced Mr. Clark and lavished praise on Canada for its contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle. Then he made three public requests of the Canadian government:

1. Intensify sanctions.
2. Aid the ANC directly. And
3. Understand that Mr. Mandela needed to use the possibility of armed struggle as a negotiating tool with the South African government.

Only hours later, Mr. Clark publicly rejected all three requests. Not only did his government not tighten sanctions, trade between South Africa and Canada continued to increase during the Mulroney years. Yet as Prof. Freeman noted at the time, "As Canada's South African policy falls into disarray, the government's claims for its success grows ever louder."

It's true that Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Mandela remained on good terms, and the prime minister contributed to special funds that Mr. Mandela needed. Mr. Mulroney will always be able to claim that he played a greater role than most other Western leaders in the ending of apartheid. But it was far from the contribution he might have made. Besides the insult to Mr. Tambo and Joe Clark's double standard about the use of violence, Nelson Mandela's people never forgot that, when their arch-enemy Mangothusu Buthelezi came

to Ottawa in 1992, Mr. Mulroney was only too happy to agree to a smiling photo-op with him. This at a time when Mr. Buthelezi was colluding with the apartheid government in a ferocious and deadly battle against Mr. Mandela and the ANC.

Equally troubling is the number of Canadian business-people who suddenly discovered, after Mr. Mandela's release, their anti-apartheid bona fides and craved nothing more than a photo with the great man. In fact, the vast proportion of our business community had been either complicit or indifferent to apartheid. Some blithely invested in South Africa; many condemned the ANC as violent Marxists; many were simply oblivious to the issue, while some actually embraced black South African stooges who were conspiring with the dying white government against the ANC.

It was Canadian civil society that played a heroic role in the struggle against apartheid. The Canadian anti-apartheid coalition -solidarity groups, NGOs, trade unions, churches, South African exiles - was one of the great international movements in our country's history. Tens of thousands of Canadians were involved, and it is they who can take most satisfaction at the joyous memory, exactly twenty years ago, of watching Nelson Mandela walk free from his prison.

Namibia: First Divisions Start

(The Namibian)

18 February 2010

THE Namibia Premier League (NPL) yesterday announced that the two first-division leagues will officially start this weekend countrywide.

NPL Chairman Johnny DoÅ«seb said the two leagues, which are known as the Northern and Southern Stream First Divisions, will start this weekend, after a sponsorship of over N\$800 000 was secured for their activities.

DoÅ«seb said the Southern Stream, which will have 12 teams in total, has been allocated a budget of N\$403 000, while the Northern Stream teams of which are 13, will get a total of N\$423 000.

The money was sourced from MTC, which is also the lead sponsor of the domestic premiership.

DoÅ«seb said the money will serve as grants as well as prize money for the two streams which only have until the end of June to conclude their football activities.

"We expected to have the relegation and promotion playoffs of the two leagues by the end of June" he said.

The NPL decided to take over the two streams after the Namibia Football Association (NFA) has periodically failed to secure funding for its activities.

All teams in both streams will receive N\$20 000 as an annual grant. The league winners in each of the streams stand to get N\$35 000, the runner-up N\$15 000, while the third and fourth places will receive N\$8 000 and N\$5 000 respectively.

Stadium bookings amount to N\$20 000, referees to N\$40 000, while administrations costs are also put at N\$40 000 for both streams.

Namibia: Parliament Approves NDF Troops to Chad

(The Namibian)

17 February 2010

MEMBERS of the National Assembly yesterday approved a request by Defence Minister Charles Namoloh to send 800 soldiers to Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) for a UN peacekeeping mission.

This was one of the few times a Defence Minister has sought approval from Parliament to deploy troops outside Namibia since former President Sam Nujoma unilaterally ordered Namibian Defence Force (NDF) troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1998.

In his motivation yesterday, Namoloh said the UN Security Council had requested last year that a Namibian military contingent be sent to these two African countries.

"The equipment the NDF will use on that peace mission was sent by ship on February 3 from Walvis Bay to the port of Douala in Cameroon and from there it will be sent by road to Chad.

"An advance party of 300 NDF soldiers will be deployed in southern Chad in the general area of Koukou Angarana, which is currently under the European Union Force (Eufor) command.

"It will be replaced by the UN Mission in the CAR and Chad (Minurcat) under which our NDF contingent will fall," the Defence Minister said.

"The remaining 500 NDF troops will only be deployed to Chad once the Irish contingent has left that area. The [NDF] peacekeepers will then rotate every six months," he added.

Presidency denies Duarte has quit

(Cape Argus)

March 01, 2010

The Presidency has said that its chief of staff Jessie Duarte had not resigned, but the Sunday Times said it stood by its report that she had sent an e-mail to ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe announcing her intention to do so.

The newspaper reported on Sunday that Duarte in an e-mail sent on Thursday, cited being "bullied" and suffering "vilification", apparently at the hands of colleagues.

The row has blown up on the eve of President Jacob Zuma's state visit to the UK. The Presidency's head of communications, Vusi Mona, said Duarte had not resigned.

She would be acting as director-general this week in the place of Vusi Mavimbela, who is among the staff accompanying Zuma to London, Mona said.

But Sunday Times editor Mondli Makhanya said: "The newspaper did not say she had already resigned."

The e-mail was not in dispute. Duarte had tried to stop the newspaper from publishing its report when she was approached for comment, arguing that it was private correspondence.

"Obviously (Duarte and the Presidency) are denying it because the in-fighting doesn't reflect well on the Presidency," Makhanya said.

"She (Duarte) must explain what she meant in the letter, rather than playing on semantics."

As an employee of the government, although a deployee of the ANC, any letter of resignation by Duarte would need to be addressed to Zuma himself.

Mona also dismissed suggestions that Duarte and the head of Zuma's private office, Lakela Kaunda, did not see eye to eye.

Both Duarte and Kaunda "vehemently reject the reports of conflict or tension between the two of them", Mona said.

"They work well together and support each other positively and constructively."

Asked if it were true she had denied resigning, Duarte would only respond with an SMS saying: "No comment."

Mona also dismissed as "false and misleading" the suggestion that Zuma's advisers were being blocked from seeing him.

ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema also weighed in on the matter, denying Duarte's resignation and saying the reports were "fabricated".

"The problem with the media is that you write too much gossip. She hasn't resigned, (I know this) because I am working with her. She is still working with the Presidency and fully supports President Jacob Zuma," he said.

Al Qaeda releases French hostage - Mali government

(Alert Net)

23 Feb 2010

BAMAKO, Feb 23 (Reuters) - Al Qaeda's North African wing has released French hostage Pierre Camatte, Mali's government said on Tuesday.

"We confirm the liberation of Pierre Camatte," Seydou Cissouma, spokesman for Mali's presidency, said on state radio. He said Camatte, kidnapped in Mali in November, was in the hands of the Malian authorities. His release follows the freeing of four Islamist prisoners by Mali last week after al Qaeda threatened to kill Camatte unless they were released.

China throws birthday bash for Zimbabwe's Mugabe

(Alert Net)

22 Feb 2010

BEIJING, Feb 22 (Reuters) - China said on Monday its embassy in Zimbabwe had thrown a birthday party for President Robert Mugabe, a rare sign of foreign support for a leader reviled by many Zimbabweans and criticised by the United States and Europe.

Mugabe celebrated his 86th birthday on Sunday and made time to attend a party held in his honour at the Chinese embassy in Harare, China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Hailed as a saviour by fanatical supporters and praised throughout Africa for standing up to what many see as bullying by the West, Mugabe is hated in equal measure by opponents who accuse him of being a dictator.

Mugabe "thanked the Chinese embassy for its painstaking preparations for the birthday celebration and ... hoped to further expand friendly cooperative relations in every field between the two nations", the foreign ministry said.

The ministry's website (www.mfa.gov.cn) showed pictures of Mugabe cutting a birthday cake in front of a large sign wishing him "Happy 86th birthday" and addressing almost 100 guests.

It quoted Zimbabwean Foreign Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi as saying it was the first time Mugabe had visited a foreign embassy in the country since independence in 1980.

"This proves the special friendly relations between the two countries," the statement paraphrased the minister as saying.

Mumbengegwi is scheduled to visit China from Feb. 24 to March 2, but Beijing has given no other details of his trip.

Mugabe denies charges of human rights abuses and insists the West has withheld aid mainly in protest over his controversial seizure of white-owned commercial farms for resettlement among blacks.

Mugabe has tried to boost economic ties with Asian countries such as China and Malaysia.

Beijing and Chinese companies have pledged tens of billions of dollars to Africa in loans and investments, mostly to secure raw materials for the world's fastest-growing major economy.

Rights groups have repeatedly criticised China for propping up dictatorial and corrupt African nations. China counters it offers no-strings aid and that its pledge not to interfere in any country's internal affairs is welcomed by African nations.

French ex-hostage transferred to Mali capital

(Alert Net)

24 Feb 2010

BAMAKO, Feb 24 (Reuters) - French aid worker Pierre Camatte was brought by Mali security forces to Bamako on Wednesday after being released by al Qaeda militants, and was due to meet French President Nicolas Sarkozy before returning home.

Sarkozy told reporters during an official visit to Gabon that he would meet Camatte in a ceremony on Wednesday night, following his release on Tuesday.

"I don't want to forget that there are still other hostages in the area, Spaniards and Italians, who are being held by these terrorist groups that are rampant in the Sahel," Sarkozy told members of the French community in Gabon.

"All states that are able to do so have to work towards obtaining their release," he added, thanking Mali's President Amadou Toumani Toure for his help in the hostage case.

Camatte was taken hostage by al Qaeda's north African wing in Mali in November. His release came after Mali freed four Islamist prisoners that al Qaeda had demanded released by Feb. 22 to ensure Camatte was not executed.

The prisoner swap has angered Algeria and Mauritania, two countries where al Qaeda cells also operate. (Reporting Tiemoko Diallo; additional reporting by Yann Le Guernigou in Libreville; Editing by Elizabeth Fullerton).

Sarkozy meets French ex-hostage in Mali

(Alert Net)

25 Feb 2010

BAMAKO, Feb 25 (Reuters) - French aid worker Pierre Camatte, who was released from captivity by North African al Qaeda militants this week, met President of France Nicolas Sarkozy in Malian capital Bamako on Thursday.

"I thank my friend the president of Mali (Amadou Toumani Toure) for all he has done for the liberation of Pierre Camatte," Sarkozy told journalists in Mali's presidential palace.

Camatte, released on Tuesday, was brought to Bamako by Mali's security forces a day later. He was due to fly to Paris after the news conference, while Sarkozy left for Rwanda.

"I say to the people of Mali, that in your fight against al Qaeda, against terrorists, against assassins, that France ... is determinedly by your side," Sarkozy said.

Sarkozy, who was accompanied by French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, said France was committed to fighting al Qaeda in the Sahel region, which straddles black and Arab Africa. "I'm thinking particularly of Mauritania and Algeria," he said.

During a visit to Gabon on Wednesday, Sarkozy drew attention to what analysts say is a growing problem in a vast, inhospitable desert region in North and West Africa which is extremely difficult to police.

"I don't want to forget that there are still other hostages in the area, Spaniards and Italians, who are being held by these terrorist groups that are rampant in the Sahel," he said there.

"All states that are able to do so have to work towards obtaining their release," he added.

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The prisoner swap has angered Algeria and Mauritania, two countries where al Qaeda cells also operate. (Reporting Tiemoko Diallo; additional reporting by Yann Le Guernigou in Libreville; Editing by Daniel Magnowski and Alison Williams)

South Africa says intercepted N.Korea arms shipment

(Reuters)

23 Feb 2010

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 22 (Reuters) - South Africa has told a U.N. Security Council committee it intercepted a North Korean weapons shipment bound for Central Africa, which diplomats said was a violation of a U.N. ban on arms sales by Pyongyang.

The seizure took place in November, when South African authorities received information that a ship headed for Congo Republic was carrying containers with suspicious cargo, according to a letter sent by South Africa to the Security Council's North Korea sanctions committee.

Several Western diplomats described the incident as a "clear-cut violation" of Security Council resolution 1874, which bans all North Korean arms exports and most weapons-related imports in response to its nuclear program.

The letter, parts of which were seen by Reuters on Monday, said a North Korean company was the shipping agent and the cargo was first loaded onto a ship in China, then transferred to a vessel owned by French shipping firm CMA CGM in Malaysia.

Diplomats said the French company alerted authorities to the fact it had suspicious cargo on board and was not believed to have done anything wrong. The South Africans intercepted the vessel and seized the containers, which held tank parts.

The letter, which the committee received last week, said the South Africans discovered "that the contents fell within the definition of conventional arms in that the contents consisted of components of a military tank T-54/T-55."

The letter said the documentation for the containers described the cargo as "spare parts of bulldozer." T-54 and T-55 tanks were designed and produced in the Soviet Union in the 1940s and 1950s but were later upgraded and made in other countries.

Neither the French company nor the countries involved had any immediate comment.

Congo Republic, which borders Democratic Republic of Congo, has suffered a wave of violence in the Pool region between the capital Brazzaville and the oil port town of Pointe Noire that has broken a period of calm after a decade of instability.

COMMITTEE TO DECIDE

The diplomats said the committee was planning to send letters to countries involved in the case -- such as North Korea, Republic of Congo, Malaysia and France -- seeking more information so it can decide whether the North Koreans or any other nations were in breach of U.N. sanctions.

Resolution 1874, approved in June 2009, was passed in response to Pyongyang's second nuclear test in May 2009 and expanded the punitive measures the Security Council had imposed on North Korea after its first atomic test in October 2006.

Last year's resolution also authorized countries to inspect suspicious North Korean air, land and sea cargo and to seize any banned goods.

"The latest incident shows that the sanctions are working," one Western diplomat told Reuters. "But it also shows that we have to be vigilant. The DPRK (North Korea) is still trying to violate the sanctions."

This is not the only seizure of its kind. Thai authorities confiscated over 35 tons of arms from a cargo plane they said had come from North Korea after the aircraft made an emergency landing at a Bangkok airport in December 2009.

Last's year's expanded sanctions against North Korea were aimed at cutting off its arms sales, a vital export estimated to earn the destitute state more than \$1 billion a year.

North Korea's biggest weapons sales come from ballistic missiles, with Iran and other Middle Eastern states as customers, according to U.S. government officials.

The U.N. sanctions and the cut-off of handouts from South Korea have dealt a heavy blow to the North, which has an estimated gross domestic product of \$17 billion, and may force it back to nuclear disarmament talks in the hopes of winning aid, analysts say.

South Africa: No Burden in 11 Official Languages – Xingwana

(Bua News)

21 February 2010

Pretoria — Government considers South Africa having 11 official languages as an asset rather than a burden, says Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana.

Xingwana unveiled government's multilingualism campaign at Freedom Park, Pretoria on Saturday.

"Government considers its many languages as asset, but not a burden. While committed to political and economic integration, government actively promotes the freedom of its citizens to speak and write in their own languages," she said.

She said the country must be quick to understand that its languages are assets in cultural, social and also economic terms, adding that similar campaigns are necessary to raise public interest in language matters.

Xingwana also pledged to support measures in place in place to promote multilingualism.

"When I say multilingualism, I mean two things essentially: respect for linguistic diversity and language learning," she said.

Government's commitment to multilingualism is also longstanding. In 2003, Cabinet endorsed a National Language Policy Framework (NLPF). This was done with a view to establishing the principle of linguistic diversity.

The motto on the Coat of Arms, "Diverse People Unite" is a reflection of the multilingualism which lies at the heart of the national policy on language.

Xingwana outlined three strands of the multilingual policy to focus on during the campaigns. These include encouraging language learning and promoting linguistic diversity in communities; promoting a healthy multilingual economy; as well as promoting social integration through improved knowledge and acceptance of different languages.

Through a bursary scheme, Xingwana's department offers language-learning opportunities and training in language practice.

The scheme seeks to build linguistic capacity, improving skills for language practitioners and raising awareness of the importance of languages.

The youth who attended the launch commended government for launching the multilingualism campaign.

17-year old Khabonina Masuka of Mamelodi said: "As young people we view this as an important move because we need to be proud of our own indigenous languages."

Mxoxolo Salmani, 18 of Westonaria said government's plan to promote its languages will make more people realise that in South Africa there is no language which is inferior.

Pascalis Moletsane, 17, also from Westonaria said he was prepared to learn other languages such as Tshivenda and Xitsonga. UNESCO declared February as international Mother Tongue Day.

Swaziland Democracy Campaign Launched in South Africa

(Voice of America News)

22 February 2010

Pro-democracy groups from several southern African nations Sunday gathered in South Africa to launch a campaign for democracy in Swaziland, which is considered one of the few remaining absolute monarchies in the world.

Activists from trade and student unions, civic groups and Swazi opposition parties Sunday launched the Swaziland Democracy Campaign.

The deputy-president of the People's United Democratic Movement, or PUDEMO, Sikhumbuzo Phakathi, said the campaign was launched in South Africa because in Swaziland all political activity is banned.

"That makes it a criminal offense to belong to a political party," said Phakathi. "It makes it recently a terrorist act to belong to my organization, PUDEMO, which the government decided was a terrorist organization."

Organizers said the campaign is seeking the removal of restrictions on political parties, the news media and political gatherings. It is also calling for free, multi-party elections.

Swaziland has been ruled as an absolute monarchy since 1973, when then-King Sobhuza scrapped the constitution, banned political parties and decreed a state of emergency.

His son, Mswati III, has continued the practices since assuming the throne 24 years ago upon his father's death.

Under a new constitution introduced four years ago, legislative, judiciary and executive branches of government exist but their powers are limited and the king rules by decree.

Supporters of the king say opposition parties are allowed to exist but many dissidents have been detained under the emergency laws and others have fled into exile.

Supporters say the monarchy provides stability and is part of Swaziland's traditional culture.

Opposition leader Phakathi agrees that Swazi's value their culture and traditional leaders.

"But what is happening in Swaziland is that the monarchy, or rather the king, has used that [tradition] to oppress the people," he said. "The culture now is used as an instrument of oppression."

He adds that the expense of maintaining a royal lifestyle for the king and his extensive family is hurting economic development and the fight against HIV/AIDS, which reportedly afflicts more than one-third of the adult population.

Trade unions and civic groups from several southern African nations are supporting the Swaziland Democracy Campaign.

The international relations secretary for the Confederation of South African Trade Unions, Bongani Masuku, said these groups are calling for targeted sanctions against Swazi leaders.

"The world, particularly the western world, continues to embrace [King] Mswati as a leader, yet he is not making any advances in the democratic direction," he said.

Masuku says international organizations, such as the African Union, U.N. agencies and the Southern African Development Community, should apply more pressure on the Swazi government to lift political restrictions and allow more democratic freedom.

Economic Developments

Inflation increases in Zambia from 9.6% to 9.8%

(Africa News)

26 February 2010

According to CSO acting director Peter Mukuka, the slight increase in the year-on-year inflation is as a result of an increase in petroleum products and food stuffs.

In a monthly bulletin issued in Lusaka, Mukuka said, "The increase of 0.2 of a percentage point in the annual inflation rate in February 2010 was attributed to the increase in the prices of fuel and some food products."

The recent 15% increase in the price of fuel was beginning to filter through into inflation and the trade account showed a surplus of 316.3 billion kwacha in January compared with a 179 billion kwacha surplus in December.

Late last year, Zambia experienced acute shortages of petroleum products which might have spurred the latest upward swing in inflation.

The southern African state depends on crude imports from Middle East for its petroleum supplies and on a number of occasions, the procurement and ferrying of crude oil has been marred by allegations of corruption.

South Africa power price surge leads to strike threats

(BBC News)

24 February 2010

South African trade unions are threatening strikes after the country's government allowed state-owned power firm Eskom to raise prices by 24.8%. Both consumers and businesses will struggle with significantly higher electricity bills, unions argue.

The Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry said firms were already struggling to cope with the fallout of recession and slow economic recovery. The extra expense and risk of strikes were a "double whammy", it added.

"In this climate, with the economy where it is, obviously it has a huge impact, it is not good for recovery," the group's president, Mark Nowitz, told the BBC.

Job loss fears

Patrick Craven from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) said he was worried that extra costs from higher electricity prices would deter firms from taking on more staff.

"Many businesses, which are struggling to survive, will not be able to afford such a massive increase. Jobs could be lost, fewer new jobs will be created and many firms may even be forced to close down," he said.

Figures released earlier this week showed that South Africa's economy grew at an annualised rate of 3.2 % in the fourth quarter, helped by a strong rise of 10% for the manufacturing sector.

But there are fears that the prospect of a big jump in power prices could dent that growth. Dawie Roodt, chief economist with Efficient Group, an asset management firm in Pretoria, told the BBC the country's economy remained quite fragile.

"I'm afraid this increase of around 25% in electricity prices is going to have quite a significant impact on the South African economy," he said.

"Some sectors, for example manufacturing and most definitely the mining industry, will be quite hard hit by this huge increase in electricity prices."

Rise expected

A big increase in power prices has been on the cards for some time as the state-owned generator has failed to meet the growing demand for electricity.

Eskom, which provides more than 90% of the country's electricity, needs fresh funds to build more power stations.

In recent years power rationing has caused shortages or blackouts which have been especially troubling for South Africa's mining industry - the big driver of the country's economy.

Eskom wanted permission to increase power prices by 35%. The government settling below that level will ease some of the Reserve Bank of South Africa's short-term concerns about inflation.

However Eskom has also been permitted to increase electricity prices by a further 25% next year and again in 2012.

Big Sports - Big Cost

(Voice of America News)

23 February 2010

The 2010 Winter Olympics call Vancouver, British Columbia, home. The 2010 World Cup takes place across South Africa in July. These events attract hoards of spectators, bringing construction projects, jobs, money for businesses and tax revenues for local governments. Countries compete fiercely to host such events. But are these premiere sporting events usually a net benefit to the host country?

"If you look at the economics of the large projects they fall into two categories," says Fariborz Ghadar of Pennsylvania State University. "For example in the Olympics, you have the costs of actually running the operation, and then you have the costs of building the infrastructure to house it. Generally, both of them are underestimated."

Ghadar cites this year's winter Olympic games in Vancouver as an example. Originally, city officials estimated the costs of preparing for the games at around \$2 billion. However costs have already topped \$4.6 billion, and may ultimately top \$5 billion or \$6 billion, according to Ghadar.

"And on the benefit side, they (host cities) always seem to exaggerate the benefit. In Vancouver they think they're going to make \$9 billion, but in reality they will be very lucky if they even make \$1 billion."

George Mason University's Tony Samara says it is not often clear how host cities calculate revenues from major sporting events, because bookkeeping can vary from one city to the next.

"A lot of money is generated by private companies that have contracts either through the governing body or through the city," says Samara. "For example, beverage concessions for tourism packages - those companies often are not domestic, so a lot of that money may actually leave the country."

Increasingly, the cost of security is a major issue that can offset, in a big way, financial gains an event might bring. Notes Fariborz Ghadar. "I mean for example, in Canada, the original estimate for security was \$200 million. But it's going to cost about \$1 billion."

Huge sporting events are great for the local hotels, restaurants, retailers and construction firms. And there is little doubt that world sporting events create jobs and a demand for skills, but construction employment related to building sports event infrastructure often ends once the games are over.

Recently South Africa was rocked by a nationwide strike, as some 70-thousand workers stopped constructing stadiums and buildings for the World Cup. Tony Samara points out that workers there were unhappy with the labor conditions. "(They were) asked to work in timelines, asked to speed up construction, which some felt made working conditions unsafe."

Samara and Ghadar agree that in most cases, host nations are not likely to recoup the costs of events such as the Olympics. Still, the Olympics and World Cup are widely prestigious events, and analysts say cities will continue to compete strongly to win the right to host them.

MALAWI: Extra Money Allocated for Drought Relief

(Inter Press Service News Agency)

Feb 25, 2010

BLANTYRE, Feb 25 (IPS) - Maize farmer Anita Yunus has lived near the Mulanje Mountain in southern Malawi for over 30 years. And she does not remember there ever being a drought in the area.

While there have been four severe droughts in Malawi in the past 25 years, the Mulanje region was not affected by these. So this year's drought is the first Yunus has experienced and she is deeply worried.

"I don't know what punishment this is," the 53-year-old tells IPS. "We have always enjoyed very good rains, maybe because of the mountain, but now I don't know how to explain what we have this time."

According to government records, last year the southern region produced a third of Malawi's total annual maize harvest of 3.5 million tonnes.

Mulanje is one of the major maize-producing districts in Malawi. Here 81 percent of the 530,000 people survive on subsistence farming. During harvest, residents from Blantyre rush to Mulanje to buy cheap maize.

Apart from Mulanje, the dry spell has hit six other districts in the southern and central region. In Malawi, the rainy season often starts in early December and runs up to March. But in these districts rainfall has either not fallen or has been irregular since December.

Unofficial figures estimate that over 30,000 hectares of crop fields have been affected and that up to 120,000 families (an average of 720,000 people) could need food assistance in the region.

Government officials rank Mulanje as among the "badly hit" regions that will need food aid.

Quoting officials from the agriculture development divisions, local newspapers said last week that national food production could drop by 30 percent and that the south alone could register a drop of 60 percent compared to last year.

Government is now stepping in and has allocated 76 million dollars in the annual budget for food relief. According to the ministry of finance, the money is to be spent purchasing food for distribution to affected households.

President Bingu wa Mutharika, also the country's minister of agriculture and the African Union chair, made a surprise tour of the major maize-producing areas in the south on Feb. 21.

He said Malawi would face a decline in food production this year but insisted that the country would still harvest enough to feed itself. There will not be surplus for export, he said.

Yunus, a widow, is not sure if she and her three children will survive if she does not harvest any maize this year.

"That (there will be enough food for the country) is for politicians to say. They talk about everyone. I am talking about myself and a few other families that I know of," says Yunus.

Government says Malawi requires 2.4 million tonnes of maize to feed its 13 million people and that last season the country produced a surplus of 1.3 million metric tonnes.

According to economic policy analyst, Mavuto Bamusi, Malawi may have a national surplus but food security at household level is still an issue. He says this is partially because maize is not easily available and also because some households are too poor to buy the commodity.

"We have the maize in the national silos. Many households in Malawi do not have food throughout the year. This (brings) to the fore how government should spend this extra budget," he says.

National coordinator for Civil Society Agriculture Network (Cisanet), Victor Mhoni, says the drought has placed a spotlight on Malawi's reliance on maize as a staple food crop.

"As long as we continue to fill our food basket with maize only and rely on rain-fed agriculture, we are still a vulnerable country," says Mhoni.

Apart from maize, Malawi also grows food crops such as cassava, rice and potatoes. But there is a tradition among Malawians to say that they have not eaten anything when they have had cassava or potatoes for lunch. Nsima (pap), which is made from maize flour, is the favourite meal.

Mhoni also accuses government of perpetuating this reliance on maize for food by encouraging farmers, especially those in districts that do well in other crops, to grow maize. Ministry of agriculture officials told IPS that there are no statistics yet about the number of farmers that have moved to maize farming from other crops.

But a good example is Likoma Island on Lake Malawi. Before the farm input subsidy programme started in 2005, people here used to rely on cassava for food. Now the island largely grows maize, which is slowly replacing cassava as the staple food crop for the 10,000 inhabitants.

"Our farm input subsidy programme has been about maize and fertilisers all across the country even in places that rely on rice and sorghum. The programme, in spite of its good intentions, has promoted that heavy dependence on maize and when it falls short, we are all suffering," says Mhoni,

Mhoni, however, says the surplus of the past four years means that government will not be importing maize to feed people. Instead, local reserves will be purchased and distributed thereby ensuring that aid will reach those in need faster.

Government says it has stockpiled 140,000 tonnes of maize in the national grain silos found in the three regions of the country. It will also purchase an additional 30,000 tonnes of the grain from estate farmers and traders. The Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation, a state-run farm produce marketer, says it has stockpiled 45,000 tonnes of maize.

Apart from mid-financial year grants from donors (donor support contributes to 40 percent of Malawi's annual national budget), the relief fund is also reliant on the Malawi Revenue Authority.

"The (76 million dollars) provision is only an estimate. The full extent of the need is yet to be determined," says minister of finance, Ken Kandodo.

But Bamusi says if people like Yunus are to be reached, food needs to be widely distributed.

"This money should bring the food to locations where those people that need it get it easily. It must also deal with the issues of pricing because to have food brought into an area is one thing and to have people being able to buy it is another," he says.

During harvest time when there is a large supply of maize on the market, it sometimes sells at 20 cents per kilogramme. Currently, maize sells at around 40 cents per kilogramme. Yunus, however, would have preferred a harvest to aid.

"I have been harvesting enough in the past years and was able to sell some to buy a few things for my family. Now I can see how much suffering we will go through if I harvest nothing, if Mulanje harvests nothing. Maize is everything for me," Yunus says.

Informal Cross-Border Traders Reduce Poverty, But Face Major Risks in Southern Africa

(Voice of America News)

24 February 2010

Informal cross-border trade contributes significantly to the economies of southern African nations - about \$17.6 billion a year - and helps reduce poverty. But a group of researchers who met recently in South Africa say informal traders face many threats.

Charity Mandishona was once a teacher in Zimbabwe. But she left the profession years ago when hyperinflation destroyed her salary's buying power. She says she and her husband, a former miner, ran a bar for a while, but it was destroyed by police five years ago in a major clean-up operation.

Mandishona now supports her family by selling Zimbabwean handcrafts in neighboring countries.

"At the moment with the economic situation, cross-border trading is much better because at least I can sustain the family and I can have a decent life," she said.

Mandishona was speaking at a recent workshop in Pretoria sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, known as UNIFEM.

UNIFEM Director for Southern Africa Nomcebo Manzini notes a recent survey of more than 700 informal cross-border traders in the region shows that trade contributes significantly to the number-one Millennium Goal, reducing poverty.

"Sub-Saharan Africa is probably going to be one of those regions of the world where poverty, instead of going down, is actually going to escalate. So this work is particularly relevant in terms of ensuring that poverty is reduced in our sub-region," said Manzini.

She noted the trade is dominated by women, and as a result it could also help achieve another Millennium Goal, reducing gender inequality.

A Zimbabwean contributor to the survey, Joyce Malaba, told the gathering that informal cross-border trade is attractive to many, but carries many risks especially as they travel.

"Transport problems included taking too long, high cost of transport, accidents, loss of goods and cash through theft, general harassment and sexual harassment," she said.

Malaba says some women surveyed said they were obliged to trade sexual favors for safe accommodation. And informal traders of both sexes faced harassment and theft of their goods by local police, border guards and other officials during their trips.

They also face stiff competition from more established merchants who undercut their prices by importing cheap goods in bulk from Asia.

Another survey contributor, University of Swaziland Professor Winnie Madonsela, said there are very few civic groups supporting informal traders.

"There are couple of things that they [civic groups] could do, for example trying to help them [traders] with finding markets, and also to try and help them improve the quality of their wares," said Madonsela.

UNIFEM says informal cross-border trade accounts for one-third of all trade between members of the Southern African Development Community, but it is hardly recognized by SADC and other regional integration organizations.

Trader Mandishona said the groups and their member-governments need to recognize the trade contributes significantly to their gross domestic products.

"We want them to recognize that the informal traders contribute to the GDP and also to put legal frameworks which protect the cross-border traders," she said.

She says governments should punish officials who harass traders and should provide safe-houses where they can rest in security. She also wants the governments to create micro-finance institutions to provide long-term loans for informal traders.

Finally UNIFEM officials advocate the creation of associations to press governments in the region to recognize informal cross-border traders and protect their rights.

IN BRIEF: IMF restores Zimbabwe's voting rights

(IRIN News)

23 Feb 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 23 February 2010 (IRIN) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) restored voting rights to Zimbabwe on 22 February 2010, but any new loans for the cash-strapped country will only be considered once its arrears of about US\$140 million to the Poverty Reduction & Growth Trust (PRGT) were paid, an IMF spokesman told IRIN.

"With the full settlement of GRA (general resource account) arrears in 2006, and the elimination of multiple currency practices and various exchange restrictions in 2009, Zimbabwe does not have breaches of obligations under the Articles of Agreement ...

Therefore, the restoration of Zimbabwe's voting and related rights is fully consistent with the IMF's rules and procedures," IMF spokesman Alistair Thomson told IRIN.

Zimbabwe's voting rights were suspended in 2003 after the IMF board adopted a declaration of non-cooperation regarding the country's overdue financial obligations, which meant it was no longer eligible to borrow from the PRGT.

"In practice it [restoration of IMF voting rights] means that Zimbabwe can only receive access to GRA resources once it has cleared arrears to the PRGT [of about US\$140 million] and satisfied other requirements under the IMF policies on the use of IMF lending resources, including the resolution of arrears to official creditors. The latter would require donor support," Thomson said.

MADAGASCAR: Textile industry unravels

(IRIN News)

24 Feb 2010

ANTANANARIVO, 24 February 2010 (IRIN) - Tensions between street traders and the city authorities in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, are mounting as hundreds of recently unemployed textile industry workers compete with established informal traders; textile factories have been closing since the country was suspended from a preferential trade agreement with the US.

"Before, there were just a few stalls here - now there is someone selling something, every step you take," Naina Ravaoaririnina, a cosmetics vendor, told IRIN, hiding her goods from sight as a municipal patrol passed by. "But there is not enough room now for everyone in the official street market."

Factories operating under the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) - an agreement permitting some African states to export duty free goods to the US - employed about 50,000 people and provided work to a further 100,000 indirectly, according to the government. Madagascar was suspended from AGOA on 31 December 2009.

Preferential access to US markets is determined by democratic practices and good governance, among other things. Madagascar was deemed ineligible after Andry Rajoelina assumed power in March 2009 with the backing of the army, a move widely condemned as a coup.

"The March 2009 undemocratic transfer of power and the inability to establish a return to democracy have violated one of the vital criteria for Madagascar's continued eligibility for these trade preferences," said a statement released by the US State Department in December 2009.

The collapse of a multi-million dollar industry

Madagascar's textile industry accounts for about US\$600 million annually; more than half its income is derived from exports to the US, according to industry observers. Contracts placed in 2009 have kept the factories running in one of the world's poorest countries.

"As lead times [expire] on orders placed before the agreement [came to an end], factories are laying off workers and we are facing an explosion in the numbers of unemployed," Jessie Andriamampianina, a director of the Antananarivo-based Association of Free Trade Businesses, told IRIN. "The impact of the loss of the AGOA agreement is very negative for Madagascar."

Robert Strauss, head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Madagascar, told IRIN that a quarter of the jobs in the formal economy were dependent on AGOA, and the reintroduction of US import duties of up to 34 percent had made keeping factories open unprofitable.

The rapid decline of the textile industry was also having a knock-on effect in other countries in the region, including Mauritius, Swaziland, Lesotho and South Africa, where many of the materials used in Madagascar's textile factories, such as zips, were produced, Strauss said.

Unemployed compete with informal traders

The flood of unemployed textile workers now operating as informal traders has forced the city's authorities to turn one of Antananarivo busiest thoroughfares into a pedestrian walkway and designate new areas for markets, but the demand for informal markets is outpacing supply.

"I used to be able to earn 20,000 ariary (\$9.30) a day," said Soloniaina Rasoarimanana, who has been selling clothes from a pavement stall for 10 years. "Now, with the political crisis and more competition, I earn around 5,000 ariary (\$2.30) a day."

Fabien Rakotonirina, a textile factory machinist who lost his job in December 2010, told IRIN: "Here on the street there is not enough profit. In the factory I earned 10,000 ariary (\$4.65) a day, now I earn 6,000 (\$2.80)."

The Minister of Economy and Industry, Richard Fienena, told IRIN: "There are projects for those who will be made redundant. There is a project for agribusiness, a project to create high-intensity labour forces for demolition work, a project for public works - all these options are waiting for when people are made redundant."

Andriamampianina dismissed this as "unrealistic". Few states recognize Rajoelina's government, including the Southern African Development Community, the regional body of which Madagascar and 13 other states are members.

Factory owners and workers have called on Rajoelina to reach an agreement with his political opponents so as to bring about a return to legitimate governance in Madagascar

that would allow the AGOA suspension to be lifted, but many fear the textile industry may never recover from the effects of the coup-style change of government.

Social Developments

Another challenge from the Church

(Africa Files)

23 February 2010

Last week, another Church voice was heard speaking about the very serious issues currently facing Zambian society. This time it was not a pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops or a critical call from a Catholic priest. Rather it was a Pastoral Letter from the country's major Mother Body of Protestant Churches, the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ). Because the Letter, entitled *On the State of the Nation*, is very important and because media coverage of it has been thin and at times quite biased, I thought it would be good this week to devote my column to its clear and strong message. It is a message that cannot easily be dismissed by those who disagree with it, as it is "signed for and on behalf of CCZ Church leaders," and released by the CCZ General Secretary, Rev. Suzanne Matale.

What I immediately appreciated about the Letter is that it grounds its message – its content and its right and duty to speak out – on very solid theological grounds. In the opening paragraph, it expressed the importance of noting that "the Council's mandate is to be a prophetic voice with a transformative impact on church and society for the propagation of Christian values and human dignity. This mandate is motivated and inspired by the Word of God in seeking justice for all (Proverbs 31: 81-9)."

Such a theological foundation is explicitly repeated in the Letter's treatment of issues such as poverty – where it states that poverty "deprives the people of the God given ability of free will" – and extractive industries – where it reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's and all its fullness (Psalm 24:1)" and that the wealth under the Zambian soil "is given by God through His grand design to benefit all the Zambian people."

Why do I consider this statement of theological grounds important? Simply because it calls upon those who disagree with the Letter's analysis and recommendations to state their own theological grounds. I'm sorry to repeat this obvious point again, but some critics of the mainline churches' outspoken social messages posit extremely untenable theological and clearly invalid scriptural arguments that elected governments are somehow ordained (even anointed?) by God and should therefore never be criticised. Please, a bit more theological intelligence is needed in our public discourse!

The CCZ Pastoral Letter sadly notes a "departure from democratic principles to a non-tolerant culture." The objectives and aspirations that brought about dramatic change in the 1990s "have died down" and "only a few elite are the beneficiaries" of the current governance situation. But you might ask, isn't that a bit exaggerated? Well, I would say

that, if that is your question, just take a walk through some peri-urban compounds and remote rural areas around our beloved Zambia. I've done that recently, and as a result I don't think the CCZ judgment is at all exaggerated.

As might be expected, the Letter looks at the constitution-making process found in the current National Constitutional Conference (NCC). It expresses extreme dissatisfaction that the NCC has "continued to disregard the people's wishes as submitted to the Mung'omba CRC and has opted to approve provisions that seek to guarantee the continued grip of Government on power." Again, anyone who might doubt the truth of this CCZ statement simply needs to read the NCC debates and evaluate the recommendations. As might be expected, the Letter also does not let pass without rightful condemnation the proposal made to the Cabinet by the Vice-President to pay ministers and Lusaka-based MPs the added bonus of 5 billion Kwacha, lest they be "de-motivated" in their public service!

Calling corruption "the greatest enemy to the country's development," the CCZ leaders state that although there is much talk of "zero tolerance to corruption" this evil "remains rampant especially in Government institutions where colossal sums of money continue to be pocketed by a few individuals." Anyone who might doubt that assertion should simply read the most recent report of the Auditor General – read and weep! And then question: why so few dismissals and arrests?

Certainly the fast approaching 2011 tripartite elections occupies a central place in the Pastoral Letter. Besides the usual call for a "free, fair and transparent manner" for the elections, the Letter adds a strong call for church members to "turn up in large numbers to register voters in the voter registration exercise which starts in June 2010." I was sorry that there was not also a call for more effective action for securing the basic citizen's Registration Card that is necessary for becoming engaged with the voter registration process.

In speaking of the judicial system, the Letter repeats the adage, "Justice delayed is justice denied" and notes that our current system is in need of comprehensive review if the accused are not to continue to be subjected to the injustice of "unrealistically long periods of detention awaiting trial." And this long detention occurs in a prison system where "the rich and the powerful appear to be above the law and go scot-free while the poor languish...." Simply read recent reports from the Government's own Human Rights Commission to verify that critique!

While not adding anything new to the ongoing debates about poverty in Zambia and the gross inequality in access to resources such as land and opportunities to invest, the Pastoral Letter rightly emphasises the need for Government economic policies to be more concerned about the welfare of all our citizens. "Positive economic growth is meaningless if the lives of the majority of the citizenry are not positively affected."

Furthermore, "poor corporate social responsibility of the mines" has meant such unacceptable consequences as lack of serious investment in social support (e.g., roads, health), deplorable working conditions for indigenous employees, hazardous

environmental degradation and indiscriminate displacement of people. Is that too sweeping a judgment? I was on the Copperbelt last week and heard similar complaints.

I can only pray that members of the several large delegations going to China this week to promote business exchange will read this Pastoral Letter!

The CCZ Church Leaders conclude their truly prophetic letter with an expression of “the Zambia we want” guided by a Constitution “which speaks of the aspirations of the Zambian People and not only a few individuals.” This would be a Zambia of freedom and peace, integrity and dignity, free of corruption and promoting justice. It would be “a Zambia we all stand proud and free to call our home.”

I believe we can all thank the CCZ Church Leaders for their recent significant contribution to that “Zambia We Want.” And I pray that among Government officials, church members and ordinary citizens, the Letter stirs the reflection, debate and action it certainly deserves!

MALAWI: Catapults Against Cholera

(Inter Press Service News Agency)

Feb 23,2010

LILONGWE, Feb 23 (IPS) - By this time last year, Mkanda had recorded 14 cholera cases as rainy season descended on central Malawi. This year, there has not been a single report of cholera.

"There has been a reduction in open defecation. The people of Mkanda have fully adopted the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach where they are discouraging the common practice of defecating in the open," said Thomas Mchipha, Water, Sanitation Health and Environment Coordinator for Mchinji district.

CLTS is an initiative where locals come together and build pit latrines using locally-available materials like grass and clay. The communities also set by-laws that are used to ensure that people are adhering to using latrines.

Preventing water-borne disease

Mchipha explains that the communities have come to realise that open defecation results in the spread of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery.

Diarrhoea is one of the three top killers of children under the age of five in Malawi, alongside malaria and respiratory infections. According to national health ministry statistics, twenty percent of children under five years old in Malawi suffer an episode of diarrhoea every two weeks.

Mchipha says CLTS was brought to the Mkanda community in 2008 by government-trained health extension workers after it was introduced to the country by a development consultant from India, Dr. Kamal Kar.

"CLTS was pioneered in Bangladesh where it is reported to have been very successful. The government of Malawi became interested and invited Dr. Kar to train extension workers. I am one of those who got trained," he says.

Mchipha explains that communities are encouraged to use locally-available materials in constructing pit latrines to reduce costs.

"This will in the long run ensure sustainability, as the communities do not have to rely on financial assistance from government or donor agencies. They can easily build latrines with locally found materials which they do not have to spend money on."

Changing mindsets

Defecating in the open, especially in the bush, has long been standard practice in the rural areas of Malawi. Many people see the construction of a toilet as a luxury they can do without in this poor country where up to 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of \$1 a day.

"Even now you see that it is usual for many men around the country to go by the roadside or under a tree to urinate. Some even come out of cars just to urinate by the roadside. But for the people of Mkanda, this sort of practice is frowned upon," says Mchipha.

A neighbourhood watch, comprising both children and adults, patrols the Mkanda area ensuring that no one defecates in the open. Natural leaders - who have shown special enthusiasm for the concept during orientation sessions run by extension workers - are charged with coordinating efforts.

"While patrolling, we are armed with catapults which we use to stone anyone found defecating in the open," Mkanda resident Ganizo Kalaya told IPS.

Kalaya explains that children are engaged in the neighbourhood watch because they are usually honest and have no hesitation sharing information about who is still defecating in the open. He says an emergency meeting is called if the patrol discovers any faeces in the village grounds or bushes and that the entire neighbourhood is taken to task to reveal the culprit.

"It gets embarrassing for the villagers to be put through such an ordeal, as such the practice of defecating in the open is becoming a very rare occurrence," Kalaya says.

Mkanda area has since been declared "open defecation free by the Mchinji district commission and is being used as a model for the CLTS approach in the country.

The concept, being advanced by local assemblies, has also been adopted in nine of the Malawi's 28 districts. Plan International, WaterAid and UNICEF are providing financial

support in expanding CLTS around the country. The concept is reported to be in use in more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

National strategy for sanitation

The government's 2008 Malawi Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report indicates that the percentage of households with improved access to sanitation in Malawi have increased from 72 percent in 1990 to 88 percent in 2006.

"This is an indication that the country is making good progress towards achieving improved access to good sanitation," states the MDGs report.

The report also says that Malawi, compared to many other sub-Saharan countries, has a high level of access to improved sanitation facilities. The government projects that 98 percent of Malawians will have adequate sanitation by 2015, well above the MDG target of 86 percent, according to the MDGs report.

Satisfied with this performance, Finance Minister Ken Kandodo moved to reduce the 2009-2010 allocation to the ministry in charge of sanitation by 25 percent.

"The Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development is one of the (ministries) which completed implementation of its large projects," Kandodo stated in the budget summary.

But the move may be premature as these positive figures for water and sanitation coverage have been challenged.

A study by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) found only less than 10 percent of the populations of the major cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe live in homes connected to the sewage system. Residents of the informal settlements where nearly two thirds of urban Malawians live told IPS they had seen little sign of the progress claimed by government.

Kandodo did pledge money from the current budget to constructing 798 sanitation and hygiene units.

With the global recession affecting donor support and drought threatening national revenues, CLTS may become an important part of sustaining progress towards improved sanitation for poor urban and rural communities.

SWAZILAND: Long-distance Learning Certificate for Caregivers

(Inter Press Service News Agency

Feb 24, 2010

MBABANE , Feb 24 (IPS) - Every Tuesday you will find 70-year-old Precious Dlamini under a tree, weighing children and babies from her local community as she monitors their health and nutrition.

Though she may not have any official qualifications to do so, Dlamini is a retired teacher, she devotes much of her time to caring for the orphaned children in her community and educating people about a healthy lifestyle.

She is just one of thousands of caregivers who have no formal training but care for the country's increasing HIV-positive population (Swaziland has the world's highest infection rate - almost 26 percent of the population between the ages of 15 to 49 are HIV-positive).

But this is starting to change. Dlamini is among 122 students in Swaziland studying for a certificate in the Programme Working with Children, Families and Communities (PWCFC) in association with South Africa's University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

The programme is run in partnership with the UKZN's African Centre for Childhood (ACC); the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative, an organisation that provides leadership, quality technical assistance and knowledge in psychosocial care for children and youth in communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

The distance learning programme trains caregivers to understand the emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual and educational needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS and poverty.

Dlamini is looking forward to receiving her second academic certificate. "I can't wait for my graduation in April," said Dlamini. "This certificate (PWCFC) will add to my Diploma in Education."

Dlamini is a rural health motivator – someone who educates people about a healthy lifestyle within a community.

She is one of the 12,000 caregivers in Swaziland of which 5,000 are employed by government and the remainder with non-governmental organisations. While most concentrate on their efforts on aiding the large portion of HIV-positive adults, an increasing number of caregivers are now working with children.

While 26 percent of the Swazi adult population is infected with HIV, the National Emergency Response Council on HIV/AIDS estimates that 15,000 children are living with the virus.

Most of these caregivers have no formal training save for a few short courses in caring for the sick.

According to Makhosazana Mabuza, the psycho-social support specialist at government's National Children's Coordination Unit, this programme is holistic in its approach.

"Previously, caregivers were concentrating on the physical needs of children such as food and shelter and overlooked all the other needs of a child such as their emotional and physical development," said Mabuza.

She said currently caregivers lacked this holistic approach when helping children deal with the impact of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

Mabuza said the programme aimed to empower caregivers to understand that each child has their own needs and must be addressed as an individual.

There are six modules to the programme including: human rights and child protection; child and youth development; and a service learning project.

For the last module students have to be attached to a humanitarian organisation to practise what they learnt in the five modules.

"The module on child and youth development really helped me understand the emotional needs of adolescents and it's even more relevant for orphans and vulnerable children," said Dlamini.

When she makes house calls, Dlamini is now more open minded. She said she does not only ask whether the orphaned children have food or if they go to school, she also gets the intimate details about their development.

Dlamini said she is now a better listener because the human rights module taught her that 'it's a child's right to be heard'.

Mduduzi Shongwe, UNICEF Swaziland's Child Protection programme officer said the PWCFC is very relevant for the country because, although there are social workers at national level, not much is being done at community level to help people, especially children, deal with psychological issues.

"It's difficult for children to reach out to the national and regional social workers whenever they have problems because they are far from communities," said Shongwe.

Mabuza said the programme also trained those who deal with children in their line of work such as police and teachers.

"We currently don't have a social welfare qualification at tertiary level which is why the PWCFC will go a long in empowering caregivers," said Mabuza. "The University of Swaziland (UNISWA), however, is considering introducing a social welfare course at degree level."

Dlamini is among the first group of 500 participants in eight countries including Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda where the programme was introduced last February.

"This is a sponsored programme," said Fiona Bulman, ACC director. "It's not open to anyone to just apply." Candidates were nominated by NGOs and government and showed a commitment to working with children.

Dlamini was selected to participate in the distance learning course because of her active participation in maternal and infant health.

According to Shongwe, PWCFC has been a resounding success in its first year in Swaziland.

"Only five candidates dropped out because they got better offers of employment in different fields," said Shongwe. "But we've done very well in terms of commitment of students and their showing some improvement in working with children."

The students study on their own but they meet once a month with their mentors who are lecturers from the local tertiary institutions and NGOs. UNICEF meets all the costs of tuition and mentors while the students only cater for their transport.

Plans are underway to upgrade the course to a degree programme. Bulman said it would take between two and three years to write the materials and organise for institutions to deliver it.

As the programme moves to its second year, there are discussions around introducing it to the University of Swaziland (UNISWA).

Meanwhile, Dlamini will graduate and receive her second certificate at the UNISWA in April.

Challenges faced by Botswana's indigenous require Government action – UN expert

(UN News Service)

25 February 2010

25 February 2010 – Botswana's Government must step up efforts to tackle the challenges faced by many indigenous communities, such as land rights, according to a new report by a United Nations independent expert.

"The current problems faced by indigenous peoples in the country are associated with three underlying, interrelated issues: respect for cultural diversity/identity, political participation and consultation, and redress for historical wrongs," S. James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, said.

Mr. Anaya, who visited the country last March, noted that the Government has undertaken many initiatives to address the conditions of disadvantaged and marginalized

peoples, as well as preserving and celebrating the diverse cultures of Botswana's indigenous tribes.

However, he stressed in his advance report that there are shortcomings in these schemes in tackling the key issues affecting many indigenous communities.

The expert pinned the blame on colonization and policies established post-independence that continue to prioritize the interests of the dominant Tswana tribes for the disadvantaged and often marginalized position that many indigenous groups are in.

He called on the Government to “strengthen and adopt new affirmative measures, consistent with universal human rights standards, to protect the rights of non-dominant indigenous groups to retain and develop the various attributes of their distinctive cultural identities, particularly those related to land rights approaches to development, and political and decision-making structures.”

The dispossession of traditional lands, a kind of historical injustice, has led to marginalization and a range of social ills, Mr. Anaya stressed. “Certain indigenous groups continue to suffer from a lack of secure land tenure, including access to and use of their ancestral lands and resources, in part due to the non-recognition of these groups’ customary land use practices.”

A mechanism, in consultation with affected indigenous groups, to examine and provide redress for cases of land dispossession, is necessary, he emphasized.

Mr. Anaya, an unpaid expert who reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, will present a final version of his report in September.

Africa: Finding the food crops of the future

(Alert Net)

24 Feb 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 24 February 2010 (IRIN) - Temperatures seem set to soar to perilously high levels because of climate change. In another 40 years, would maize still be the staple food in Kenya, already hit by five failed rainy seasons? If not, what could people grow and eat? And if you could grow maize, how much water and fertilizer would it need?

If you live in the remote semi-arid Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda - beset by 14 droughts in 25 years - you might also want to know what your options are for continued food security.

For the first time, a customized regional climate model linked to crop growing and water models, run on a supercomputer at Michigan State University (MSU), will help provide

crop breeders in three East African countries - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania - with detailed answers on crop yields.

Many research institutions have been working on models to predict the impact of climate change on food production in Africa, but in a few months the MSU model will help scientists and breeders to zoom in at a regional level on the possible impact of climate change on a wide variety of crops in these countries.

The research could help produce climate-resilient varieties of food crops, said Jennifer Olson, lead researcher and associate professor at MSU's College of Communication Arts and Sciences.

"East Africa is already experiencing the impact of climate change - food crops are experiencing extreme water stress," she commented. People living in Kenya's highlands, who have traditionally grown tea and coffee, have begun experimenting with maize and beans as the climate has grown warmer.

Work on the model began 10 years ago with the recording of relevant data, such as the impact of nutrients on a certain food crop, or the impact of water stress on another, which were subsequently fed into the model. "The model is still being perfected," said Olson. The model can experiment with the impact of climate change, such as high temperature and water stress on a certain crop variety, saving the time that would have been spent on field trials, "which will help speed up the agricultural research cycle", she noted.

The researchers intend to launch the model at a workshop in June. Concern about increasing food insecurity in East Africa has prompted two institutions to set up a research grants to encourage innovative solutions.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), based in South Africa, and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), in Nairobi, Kenya, announced a US\$10.67 million grant from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) to support the establishment of a multidisciplinary competitive funding mechanism for biosciences in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

ILRI's Bruce Scott said they would be looking for innovative solutions using bioscience to improve crop resilience to climate change, or perhaps to improve the shelf-life of a food product.

Angola: Release Cabinda Rights Defenders

(Human Rights Watch)

February 23, 2010

(New York) - The Angolan government should promptly release three human rights defenders who were arrested on apparently political grounds following the January 8, 2010 attack on Togolese footballers in Cabinda, Human Rights Watch said today. Human

Rights Watch also expressed concern about the continued detention without charge of five other people.

Togo's national football team was attacked in Angola's oil-rich enclave of Cabinda. Two people were killed and at least nine others wounded as the team traveled by bus from the Republic of the Congo to Cabinda to compete in the 2010 Africa Cup of Nations. Separatist rebels from a faction of the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), which has been fighting for Cabinda's independence since 1975, claimed responsibility for the attack.

"The Angolan government has an obligation to investigate and prosecute those who attacked the Togolese team," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "But arresting outspoken human rights defenders in Cabinda suggests the government is using the attack to target its peaceful critics."

The Angolan authorities have arrested at least eight men since the attack on suspicion of "state security crimes." According to credible sources interviewed by Human Rights Watch, police arrested the first one at 5:30 a.m. on January 8, before the Togolese footballers were attacked at 3 p.m. local time. Three of those arrested, Belchior Lanso Tati, Francisco Luemba, and Raul Tati, are all prominent Cabindan intellectuals and human rights defenders who are outspoken critics of the government. Since the attack, the authorities have also harassed and intimidated others critical of the government.

The Angolan government announced after the rebels' claim of responsibility that it would prosecute the attack's "material and moral authors," and the police have routinely called the detainees "terrorists." There is no evidence that the police have conducted a forensic criminal investigation into the attack.

Angolan law provides for a maximum initial detention period of 45 days for security crimes before charges must be brought against any suspects. The attorney general must justify an extension of the time limit. The 45 days expired on February 22 for arrests on January 8. To date, no charges have been brought against any of the eight.

The Angolan authorities have claimed that only two of the eight suspects - João Ant3nio Puati and Daniel Simba - were directly involved in the attack. They are residents of a village close to where the attack occurred, near the border with the Republic of the Congo. Human Rights Watch has received credible reports that the military have mistreated Puati and Simba to force them to confess to the crime. Abuse against detainees by the military is common in Cabinda, particularly in rural areas, as Human Rights Watch previously documented.

The six other detainees were arrested by the police in the city of Cabinda under suspicion of having committed "crimes against the security of the state." They are:

Andre Zeferino Puati, member of a Catholic Church group, arrested on the morning of January 8; Pedro Benjamim Fuca, an oil worker, arrested on January 13; Belchior Lanso Tati, an economist and university professor, arrested on January 14; Raul Tati, a Catholic priest and university professor, arrested on January 16;

Francisco Luemba, a lawyer and writer, arrested on January 17; Barnabé Paca Peso, engineer and former human rights activist, arrested on February 14. Belchior Lanso Tati, Francisco Luemba, and Raul Tati, the three most prominent detainees, were held largely incommunicado for 10 days before the authorities lifted these restrictions. Lawyers had only restricted access, and family members had no access to them.

The three had been prominent members of Cabinda's civic association Mpalabanda. Before the Angolan government banned Mpalabanda in 2006, claiming that it was inciting violence, the organization had issued several human rights reports on Cabinda and facilitated peace negotiations between the separatist FLEC guerrillas and the government. Together with others, these three men continued preparing peace talks until 2009 between the Angolan government and the guerrilla factions that had not laid down their arms. The peace initiative had been encouraged by senior government officials. An impartial facilitator to these meetings, Rev. Ntoni Nzinga - a senior Angolan peace activist - told Human Rights Watch those meetings aimed at finding a solution to the Cabinda conflict and establishing lasting peace.

Angolan law on "crimes against the security of the state" dates from 1978, when Angola was under one party rule and in the midst of a nationwide civil war, and defines security crimes very broadly. It includes not only those participating in violent acts that undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Angola, but also in "collective action aimed at instigating public opinion ..., that is in accordance with foreign pretensions" (article 1). Human Rights Watch believes that basing detentions on such a broad definition of security crimes undermines fundamental rights of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, as guaranteed in Angola's new constitution.

"The Angolan government should initiate without delay an impartial and transparent investigation into the January 8 attack and its circumstances," Gagnon said. "Using broad-brush state security crime laws is likely to result in abuse instead of credible criminal charges against the ones who are responsible."

Following the January 8 attack, members of civil society in Cabinda have told Human Rights Watch about increasing government intimidation and harassment. A journalist told Human Rights Watch that on January 20, Angolan security officials had warned him his life was at risk because the authorities considered him to be a "dangerous person" who has "damaged Angola's image" by reporting on politically sensitive issues.

Raul Danda, former spokesperson for Mpalabanda and a member of Parliament for the opposition party UNITA, said he received repeated warnings that his parliamentary immunity might be lifted on claims he was linked to FLEC. In 2006, Danda spent more than two months in prison on suspicion of state security crimes without ever being formally charged with a crime.

Fernando Lelo - a former Voice of America correspondent in Cabinda - told Human Rights Watch that individuals claiming to be Angolan intelligence officials warned him he may soon be charged for alleged arms sales to FLEC. Lelo spent almost two years in

prison for "security crimes" until the Military Supreme Court quashed his conviction in 2009. Lelo had been sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment following a trial in 2008 that did not meet international fair trial standards.

"The Angolan government's continuing intimidation and harassment of civil society in Cabinda is disturbing," Gagnon said. "Security concerns should not be used to unduly restrict the peaceful exercise of basic rights."

Background

A 2006 peace agreement between the government of Angola and the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue (FCD), representing a faction of the FLEC separatists, sought to bring a formal end to the armed conflict in Cabinda, which has endured since Angola's independence in 1975. The Angolan government has since claimed that the war in Cabinda is over. However, sporadic attacks on government forces and expatriate workers have continued. FLEC-FAC, the most militant faction of the separatists, which did not sign the 2006 accord, threatened to increase armed attacks ahead of the January 2010 Africa Cup of Nations.

The Angolan government has long used security concerns to restrict civic rights in Cabinda. In a report published in June 2009, "€ They Put me in the Hole': Military Detention, Torture and Lack of Due Process in Cabinda," Human Rights Watch documented a pattern of state abuses aimed at 38 rebel "suspects" between September 2007 and March 2009. Many of those arrested alleged that they were tortured by the Angolan military. In a positive move, the Angolan courts have since acquitted a number of these people for lack of evidence. But the authorities have still not investigated torture allegations nor prosecuted any member of the military involved in these abuses. None of the acquitted received any kind of compensation or redress.

In December 2009, Human Rights Watch documented increased intimidation of journalists in Cabinda, which was designed to deter them from reporting about the fragile security situation in the enclave on the eve of the Africa Cup of Nations. On January 8, Human Rights Watch called upon the Angolan authorities not to use the attack on the Togolese footballers to justify increased repression in Cabinda.

SOUTH AFRICA: Court releases illegally detained asylum seeker

(IRIN News)

26 Feb 2010

JOHANNESBURG , 26 February 2010 (IRIN) - South Africa's Supreme Court of Appeal ordered the Department of Home Affairs on 24 February 2010 to immediately release an Ethiopian asylum seeker from "unlawful" detention after he had languished in repatriation centres for over nine months.

Costs were also awarded against the Minister of Home Affairs and the Director-General of the Department in an order that Gina Snyman, of the Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) Refugee and Migrant Rights Project, termed a "scathing rebuke".

LHR requested that the identity of the man not be disclosed for fear of retribution should he be deported to Ethiopia. He is a political activist of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a separatist organization "established in 1973 by Oromo nationalists to lead the national liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule," according to its website.

The man was first arrested in Port Elizabeth, on the south coast of the country, for being an "illegal foreigner" and then "detained at the Lindela Repatriation Centre for more than 275 days", the LHR said in a statement.

The Lindela centre is in Gauteng Province in the north of the country, about 40km from Johannesburg, and is the main departure point for deporting and repatriating undocumented foreign nationals from South Africa.

"The court found that home affairs had no basis to detain the asylum seeker. Highlighting the clear illegality of the detention, the court suggested that the department either did not understand the law, or had chosen to ignore it," LHR said.

LHR have brought three cases against home affairs for illegal detention of asylum seekers since January 2010. "There are many individuals at Lindela who have been held beyond the 120-day period permitted by law, and many who are held without the department properly obtaining the legally required warrants. The effect is that these detentions are occurring outside of the law," Snyman said.

Bosasa, a private company contracted by home affairs to administer Lindela Repatriation Centre, was named as the third respondent in the court of appeal. The company has been awarded numerous government and provincial contracts, including for transport and at prisons, but persistent allegations of graft have frequently put the company in the headlines.

Gavin Watson, Bosasa's chief executive, is closely linked to the ruling African National Congress as a result of the Watson family's anti-apartheid credentials.

Snyman said the Lindela facilities were "very good in comparison to correctional services [prisons], but psychologically there is a greater impact [on detainees at Lindela], as they do not see themselves as criminals."

They were often unaware of their rights, and Lindela made no provision for communicating in languages other than English or South African vernacular languages, she said. There were no books or recreational facilities, apart from a television that only showed programmes by the state broadcaster.

Home affairs minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma visited Lindela in November 2009 and highlighted delays encountered in the deportation process, but "failed to acknowledge

that many deportations are occurring outside of the law", LHR noted at the time of the minister's visit.

"Moreover, asylum seekers detained under the Refugees Act must appear before a judge of the High Court after 30 days. LHR has not come across a single asylum seeker who was brought before a judge after 30 days," LHR said.

Home affairs continued to oppose court applications, "despite the courts consistently finding that any deprivation of liberty in these cases must be in strict compliance with the law," said Snyman.

"The order [releasing the Ethiopian asylum seeker] sends a strong message that the courts will not condone or facilitate the ongoing illegalities in the detention process."

SOUTH AFRICA: New research fuels "test and treat" debate

(IRIN News)

22 Feb 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 22 February 2010 (IRIN) - New research could bolster arguments for a controversial approach that could eradicate HIV transmission in South Africa within five years, said Dr Brian Williams of the South African Centre for Epidemiological Modelling and Analysis (SACEMA).

The "test and treat" approach is based on mathematical modelling and pairs aggressive HIV testing campaigns with almost immediately putting people found to be HIV positive on treatment. In theory, this model would use early treatment to lower viral load (the amount of virus in the blood), and lower the likelihood of transmission, eventually cutting HIV prevalence rates.

A report published in the current issue of AIDS, the Journal of the International AIDS Society, is based on a study that followed about 14,000 new mothers in Zimbabwe for about two years from 1997 to 2000 after the birth of their children.

The research showed that HIV-positive new mothers were at much greater risk of dying than their HIV-negative peers, even when the positive women had a CD4 count (which measures immune system strength) of 600 to 1,000 and was equal to or higher than that of HIV-negative women.

Although the research was conducted before antiretrovirals were available in the public sector, the data may have answered a crucial question in the test and treat debate.

"One of the questions around doing [the test and treat model] has been that even if you accept that there is public health benefit of testing and treating everyone, what does that do for the individual?" Williams told IRIN/PlusNews.

"The study's authors showed that even at CD4 counts of up to 1,000, mortality among the HIV-positive women was about 50 times higher, [and] it's in the patient's interest too, to start treatment early," said Williams, who spoke in favour of test and treat at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI), and the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, both in the United States.

John Hargrove, co-author of the report, said the study was one of a very few that had compared the mortality rate of untreated HIV-positive adults to their HIV-negative peers and had tied this to CD4 counts - the research could never be ethically replicated in today's expanded treatment environment.

However, there are concerns that the approach is unrealistic, given low testing uptake globally, and that putting more people on treatment earlier may lead to poor adherence and contribute to drug resistance.

The approach is being implemented on a trial basis in high HIV prevalence areas of the United States, including the District of Columbia and New York City. The US infection rate is about 0.6 percent, according to UNAIDS.

Testing and treating, funding and debating

Williams said doing away with specific requirements like the need to verify CD4 counts would reduce costs, but estimated that it would still cost a country like South Africa at least US\$2 billion a year to implement the test and treat strategy nationally.

"Costings show that the cost of providing ARVs will be roughly balanced by the costs saved in [relation to] opportunistic infections and hospitalisations," he said. "We need a big investment initially, but in the long term we are going to be saving money. It's the only real prospect for actually stopping the epidemic."

However, in a debate about test and treat in late 2009, Dr Francesca Conradie, deputy director of the University of Witwatersrand Clinical HIV Research Unit, argued that money was not the only issue, and that test and treat models ignored current realities, including low testing uptake.

According to the 2008 South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey, only about half the people 15 years and older have been tested for HIV.

Conradie also argued that the US had low HIV prevalence, whereas South Africa's HIV population was simply too big to meet the treatment targets cited by current test and treat models to make the approach effective - the country would have to reach more than eight times the number currently on treatment to meet the targets.

With an HIV prevalence rate of about 18 percent and more than half a million people on treatment, South Africa runs the world's largest ARV treatment programme.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Children that slip across borders

(IRIN News)

26 Feb 2010

PRETORIA, 26 February 2010 (IRIN) - Zimbabwe's still-limping economy can provide few essential services, so children living along the border cross into South Africa to attend school during the day or even to see a doctor, often at great risk to their personal safety.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) regional child protection advisor for East and Southern Africa, Cornelius Williams, said the movement of unaccompanied child migrants from Zimbabwe was one of the biggest problems confronting humanitarian agencies in the region. Between 3,000 and 15,000 Zimbabwean children are known to move into and out of their country every month.

"Unfortunately, governments continue to devote most of their resources to child trafficking, where much smaller numbers of children are involved," Williams told IRIN at a meeting of officials from 15 countries in Pretoria from 23 to 25 February to discuss ways of strengthening cross-border co-operation to protect children at risk.

William Duncan, deputy secretary-general of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the Netherlands-based world organization for cross-border cooperation in civil and commercial matters, said an even bigger issue was that "There is no central authority in Zimbabwe to contact to help repatriate the child."

The Chief Family Advocate in South Africa's Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Petunia Seabi, said a solution to the problem was being worked out. "We are in talks with the Zimbabwean authorities to set up protocols to protect these children."

She said neither of the governments would prevent children from accessing services across the border, but would rather try addressing the risks the children took while crossing the border unaccompanied.

Duncan pointed out that the numbers of Zimbabwean children moving around the region only underlined the need for close cooperation between child protection agencies and "between judges in different countries, and the Hague Children's conventions make this possible."

Many African countries have yet to ratify the Hague Conventions pertaining to children, which seek to standardize international legislation and provide a comprehensive legal framework to for the cross-border movement of children; more governments have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Duncan acknowledged that most countries did not have the resources or the capacity to ratify the Hague Conventions, which include treaties on child abduction, inter-country

adoption, protection of children and the international recovery of child support. He said the Hague Conference was trying to build capacity.

Delegates at the meeting said the discussion on the need for better cooperation between governments couldn't have come at a better time than on the eve of the FIFA World Cup, which kicks off in South Africa in June.

"We will probably see a flood of child migrants to South Africa, not only attracted by economic benefits but a chance to spot their football hero," said Williams.

The South African government was gearing up for the challenge, he said. They were planning safe areas for unaccompanied child migrants around the various stadia, and an advertising campaign aimed at visitors, which, they hoped, would deter child prostitution.

SWAZILAND: Some women can now own property

(IRIN News)

(25 Feb 2010)

MBABANE, 25 February 2010 (IRIN) - On 23 February 2010 the High Court of Swaziland ruled that some married women will be allowed to register property in their own name. It has been five years since the new Constitution granted women equal status, after centuries of being classified and treated as minors. Gender activists greeted the ruling as a small victory; despite the 2005 enactment of the Constitution, the second-class status of women in the country ruled by sub-Saharan's last absolute monarch, King Mswati III, has largely remained intact, denying women their inheritance rights and hobbling their progress as entrepreneurs and traders. "I went to apply for a bank loan, and I was shocked to find that nothing has changed for women in this country.

The loan was approved for my business, the bank was in support of my project, but the bank manager asked me, 'Where is your husband? He must sign the loan forms,'" Thabsile Masuku told IRIN. "The bank did not recognize me as an adult who can enter into a contract. Legally, I am just a minor who is dependant on my husband. He is a good man but the situation is galling - I am not dependant on my husband, I am an independent person, but in Swaziland I don't exist," she said. A woman who declined to be identified told IRIN that a house she had built from the proceeds of her chicken-breeding business was sold by her husband without her knowledge. In Swaziland the husband remains the legal administrator of the marriage estate, to use as he likes - with or without his wife's knowledge or consent.

Although the Constitution has granted women equal rights with men, in practice old laws still on the statute books continue to define gender relations. Observers blame a lack of political will for the slow progress in replacing laws that conflict with the Constitution. Lomcebo Dlamini, director of the Swaziland branch of Women in Law in Southern Africa - one of the legal bodies advising the Mswati-appointed Constitutional Review

Commission during the 10 years it took to create the Constitution - told IRIN that gender equality could be partly achieved with a new law that defined modern marriages.

"The Marriage Act No. 47 of 1964 dates from the colonial era before Swaziland's independence [in 1968] and was really written with European residents in mind. Under the law, Swazis are assumed to be wed according to the traditional practice, which falls under the rules of Swazi Law and Custom that Swazis have always lived by," said Lomcebo Dlamini. When the Constitution took effect, it stated that all laws counter to the Constitution were null and void, yet a recent ruling by the High Court of Swaziland said government must be given time to revise or repeal all non-compliant laws, but failed to provide a timeframe. Activism has contributed to eroding gender-prejudiced legislation, and this week the High Court amended the 1968 Deeds Registry Act by making it possible for a Swazi woman to register immovable property, like a home or business, in her own name. Justice Qinisile Dlamini, the High Court's sole female judge, ruled that "Section 151 (2) of the Constitution states that the High Court has jurisdiction to enforce fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by (the Constitution). This includes the right to equality, which is guaranteed by section 20 and 28 of the Constitution."

However, the ruling only applies to women married in a civil ceremony, and with a community of property agreement. About 80 percent of Swaziland's one million people live on communal Swazi Nation Land under customary law administered by chiefs. "The marriage law must be changed because it assumes that all Swazi women are married the traditional way, which is really arranged marriages that unite two families. A woman is a minor under her parent's homestead until she goes to her husband's homestead, where she is also a minor. The law considers the husband the administrator of the marital property," said Lomcebo Dlamini.

Social historian Anita Magongo told IRIN: "Traditional marriages are polygamous, which is one reason why a man is given administrative control. How do you divide administration of family property amongst any number of wives? ... A traditional homestead is a communal affair, without any real property." The question of land ownership was also problematic. "The land belongs to the King, and Swazis reside on a piece of land at the pleasure of their chief.

There was no wage-earning or commerce, no material objects beyond blankets and pots, and no need for loans or savings - but that was then." With increasing numbers of women widowed by HIV/AIDS and in need of family property on which to live and raise their children, AIDS activists object to Swazi Law and Custom that results in the family of the deceased husband inheriting all marital property. Widows are often left destitute, but custom dictates that a widow must mourn for at least six months, during which she is forbidden to leave the home, preventing her from working to support her children and compounding the vulnerability of the family. "A new Marriage Act is essential," said Lomcebo Dlamini. "Fewer women are entering into traditional marriages, and it is wrong for the law to assume that 21st century Swazi women live as the Colonial-era lawmakers assumed they did long ago.

ZIMBABWE: Measles in nearly half of country's districts

(IRIN News)

22 Feb 2010

HARARE, 22 February 2010 (IRIN) - A measles outbreak has hit 28 of Zimbabwe's 62 districts and is still spreading, but efforts to vaccinate people in some quarters is being hampered by religious convictions.

According to the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) Epidemiological Bulletin, "Nearly 1,200 suspected cases were reported since the start of the outbreak in October 2009 ... 221 cases have been confirmed ... 50 community deaths have been reported."

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as well as other organizations in the health sector have embarked on an intensive vaccination programme. "The campaign is targeting all children between the ages of six months and 14 years," UNICEF's Zimbabwe spokesperson, Micaela Marques de Sousa, told IRIN. In eastern Zimbabwe, in the Buhera district of Manicaland Province alone, more than 25,000 children had been vaccinated against measles.

"We are also embarking on door to door campaigns to emphasize the importance of vaccinating children," she said, although the strategy is likely to meet with stiff resistance among those who refuse vaccinations based on their religious beliefs.

"While we as UNICEF respect the faith of the apostolic churches, we have also been engaging them to understand the value of vaccination. We have been engaging communities on the importance of protecting the rights of the children and to ensure that they access health services. Even children who have been vaccinated in the past are being revaccinated because of the exposure to the measles outbreak."

A large-scale measles outbreak has occurred among family members of the Johanne Marange Apostolic Church in the Nzvimbe area, about 70km from the city of Mutare, near the Mozambique border, according to local media reports. The church's elders do not allow vaccinations or permit followers to seek medical treatment, and prefer such measures as sprinkling holy water on the sick.

The reports said 30 people belonging to the religious group, mainly children, had died from measles, although the number could be higher because of Vapostori – the practice of "fast-tracking" burials.

A senior official in Zimbabwe's ministry of health and child welfare, who declined to be identified, told IRIN: "We are working overtime to come up with strategies to ensure that the measles outbreak is contained. In an environment where some parents do not avail health programmes to their children, it then becomes difficult to contain the outbreak.

"That is why we are also working on regulations which will make it an offence for parents or guardians to deny children vaccination against killer diseases," the official said.

WHO describes measles as a highly contagious viral disease affecting mostly children, which can be effectively prevented by immunization. In Zimbabwe, children receive a first vaccination against measles at the age of nine months and second inoculation at 18 months.

Symptoms usually appear about 8 to 12 days after infection and include high fever, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. A rash also develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading over the body. Measles cause the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children in developing countries annually.

South Africa: 2010 War On Malaria, TB And HIV

(Bua News)

21 February 2010

Pretoria — The 2010 FIFA World Cup will present a unique platform to mount the fight against malaria, tuberculosis (TB) and HIV in the African continent.

The pledge was made by Michael D'Hooghe, chairman of the FIFA Medical Committee at the third International Football Medicine Conference in Rustenburg.

"We must use this Soccer World Cup to fight the big three in Africa. We must fight against malaria, TB and HIV.

Those issues need to be fought hard as to help improving the standard of the game in Africa. We are here to learn about this continent; we will have to listen to African health practitioners and see how best we can exchange ideas for the better of the game," he said.

Delegates from the African continent and the world including representatives of the 32 teams participating in the Soccer World Cup attended the conference.

D'Hooghe also emphasized that African football should be the biggest beneficiary during and after the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

FIFA executive members said the conference was organised to try and bring expert knowledge to the game, communicate and discuss the implementation of ideas.

FIFA medical officer, Dr Jiri Dvorak, emphasized the importance of using the knowledge acquired to improve the lives of footballers as well as the standard of the game itself.

"Our biggest goal is to minimise injuries in football. People have to realise that soccer is a safe sport," he said.

"The Soccer World Cup is the best opportunity to present football to the world. We have to show that we care for the health of players and improve the standard of care," Dvorak said.

South Africa's Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Molefi Sefularo, told delegates that the country has been putting all necessary measures to prepare for the tournament to ensure that visitors enjoy quality health care.

"From the side of government, we have invested in all sectors. We are further pleased by the fact that our assessment of our state of readiness gives us comfort to be able to say we are ready for the 2010 FIFA World Cup," he said.

South African Court Lends Support to White Zimbabwean Farmers

(Voice of America News)

26 February 2010

"It becomes possible to exercise or execute this judgment against Zimbabwean-owned assets that are situated in South Africa."

White Zimbabweans, who lost their farms under President Mugabe's land reform program, are a step closer to suing for compensation.

Thursday, a South African High Court confirmed a ruling made by a Southern African Development Community Tribunal that the farm seizures were illegal. The decision came after a South African civil rights group, AFRIFORUM, took up the case of the white farmers several months ago.

Attorney Willie Spies, who's handling the case, based his arguments on the SADC tribunal ruling.

"The ruling was made," he says, "in November 2008, firstly, that the land reform policies of Robert Mugabe were unlawful, that they were in contravention of the SADC treaty and that they were racist in the fact that land had been taken from white people and just given to black people without compensation."

President Mugabe disregarded the ruling, Spies says, "which left the farmers with quite a frustrating situation." While a court had ruled in their favor, there was no way to enforce its ruling.

A step forward

AFRIFORUM took up the case to try to have it “registered “in a South African court, meaning that a court would recognize the SADC tribunal ruling. That happened Thursday at Pretoria’s High Court.

“The moment it becomes registered and enforceable in South Africa,” he says, “it becomes possible to exercise or execute this judgment against Zimbabwean-owned assets that are situated in South Africa. And that is exactly what we did.”

The High Court decision, however, does not mean the farmers can immediately sue Zimbabwe for compensation for the loss of their land. Only one part of Thursday’s ruling may have a monetary effect.

“It’s the part that deals with legal costs incurred by the farmers to bring the SADC proceedings. And that is not a huge amount...about \$30,000. And that amount can now be claimed from the Zimbabwean government through South African legal procedures. And if the Zimbabwean government does not pay those costs it would enable us to attach Zimbabwean assets in South Africa,” he says.

Such a move could serve as a model for claiming compensation in the future. First, though, the farmers must go back to the SADC tribunal to try to win a ruling that they are indeed owed compensation.

“If we are successful with this little amount of \$30,000, which represents the legal costs, then we could use a similar process to also enforce more substantial amounts that apply to the actual damages that the farmers have suffered. And that is what we’ve got in mind,” he says.

The original SADC tribunal ruling affected about 80 people, Spies says. But the case could have much wider implications. Overall, approximately 3,000 white farmers were affected by the land reform. He also says there are about 400 South African citizens who had owned land in Zimbabwe that was seized.