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The countries for the Peace & Justice Updates have been chosen as areas of focus at the Institute. The International Human Rights section is intended to focus on aspects of international law. For information on specific cases of human rights abuses, please visit www.hrw.org or www.amnesty.org. The Gender and Peace section highlights events in peace-building that pertain to gender and human rights.

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UPDATE SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

ADNKI	=	ADNKI (www.adnki.com)
AfricaFocus	=	AfricaFocus (www.africafocus.org)
AFP	=	Agence France-Presse (www.afp.com)
AI	=	Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org)
AllAfrica	=	AllAfrica Global Media (www.allafrica.com)
Angola Press	=	Angola Press (www.angolapress-angop.ao)
Asian Tribune	=	Asian Tribune (www.asiantribune.com)
AP	=	Associated Press (www.ap.org)
AWID	=	Association for Women's Rights in Development (www.awid.org)
BBC	=	British Broadcasting Corporation (http://news.bbc.co.uk/)
BBC Monitoring	=	BBC Monitoring International Reports (www.monitor.bbc.co.uk)
Cambodia Daily	=	The Cambodia Daily (www.cambodiadaily.com)
CBC News	=	CBC News (www.cbc.ca)
CIA	=	CIA - The World Factbook (www.cia.gov)
Colombo Page	=	Sri Lankan Online News (www.colombopage.com)
Daily News	=	Sri Lanka Daily News (www.dailynews.lk)
DPA	=	Deutsche Presse-Agentur (www.dpa.de)
EU	=	European Union (www.europa.eu.int)
Freeinternetpress	=	Freeinternetpress (www.freeinternetpress.com)
Guardian	=	Guardian Unlimited Network (www.guardian.co.uk)
HRW	=	Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)
ICC	=	International Criminal Court (www.icc-cpi.int)
ICG	=	International Crisis Group (www.crisisweb.org)
ICTR	=	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (www.ict.rw)
IndiaTimes	=	India Times (www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com)
Independent	=	The Independent (www.independent.co.uk)
IRIN	=	Integrated Regional Information Network (www.irinnews.org)
Khaleej Times	=	Khaleej Times (www.khaleejtimes.com)
Kathmandu Post	=	The Kathmandu Post (www.nepalnews.com.np)
Khmer Intelligence	=	Khmer Intelligence (www.khmerintelligence.org)
Jurist	=	The Jurist (http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/)
LA Times	=	Los Angeles Times (www.latimes.com)
Lanka Web	=	Lanka Web (www.lankaweb.com)
MediaChannel	=	Media Channel (www.mediachannel.org)
Monitor	=	The Monitor (www.monitor.co.ug)
MONUC	=	MONUC (www.monuc.org)
MSF	=	Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (www.msf.org)
Nepal News	=	Nepal News (www.nepalnews.com)
Nepali Times	=	Nepali Times (www.nepalitimes.com)
New Times	=	The New Times (www.newtimes.co.rw)
New Vision	=	New Vision (www.newvision.co.ug)
News24	=	News24 (www.news24.com)
News Blaze	=	News Blaze (www.newsblaze.com)
NYT	=	The New York Times (www.nytimes.com)
PANA	=	Panafrican News Agency (www.panapress.com)
Oxfam Great Britain	=	Oxfam Great Britain (www.oxfam.org.uk)
Reuters	=	Reuters (www.reuters.com)
RSF	=	Reporters sans frontières (www.rsf.org)
SEAPA	=	Southeast Asian Press Alliance (www.seapabkk.org)

SMH	=	Sydney Morning Herald (www.smh.com)
Sofiaecho	=	The Sofia Echo (www.sofiaecho.com)
Sofianews	=	Sofia News Agency (www.nonivite.com)
ST	=	Sudan Tribune (www.sudantribune.com)
UN News Center	=	UN News Center Homepage (www.un.org)
UNESCO	=	UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (www.unesco.org)
UNHCHR	=	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.unhcr.ch)
UNICEF	=	UN Children's Fund (www.unicef.org)
UNIFEM	=	UN Development Fund for Women (www.unifem.org)
VOA	=	Voice of America (www.voanews.com)
Xinhua	=	Xinhua News Agency (www.xinhuanet.com/english)
WP	=	Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com)
Web India	=	Web India (www.webindia123.com)

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BALKANS

Bosnian Croat convicted of war crimes: Miroslav Bralo was convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Bralo, 38, would have received a stiffer sentence but entered a guilty plea, and according to the tribunal, and has demonstrated “sincere remorse.” The tribunal also claimed that Bralo had helped investigators locate bodies previously not discovered. Bralo was accused of going on a rampage through Muslim villages in central Bosnia in 1993. In one attack on the villages of Ahmici and Nadioci, Bralo’s unit blew up a mosque and killed two families including nine children. He later took a female prisoner and repeatedly raped her in front of his soldiers during the two months he had her captive. The judge in the proceedings upon handing down the sentences stated, “The trial chamber accepts that his remorse is indeed sincere and heartfelt, and that he has undergone a personal transformation since the commission of his crimes.” Bralo surrendered to the tribunal a year ago and originally pled not guilty to the charges. He later changed his plea as part of a bargain with UN prosecutors. ([BBC](#), December 7, 2006)

BURUNDI

Education troubles persist for returning refugees despite removal of school fees: Only months after schools opened, Burundi faces new education problems with the return of thousands of refugees. Refugee children raised in neighboring countries and taught in English or Kiswahili have reported difficulties with an education system based in French and Kirundi. The country has been forced to place many of these children at lower grade levels to accommodate their language abilities, a fact that has exasperated both teachers and students. “When they told me to start in the fourth year, I felt like giving up,” said one 15-year old girl who had just returned with her family from Tanzania. To address the problem, the Ministry of Education and the National Commission for the Rehabilitation of War Affected People (CNRS) announced during the week of November 27 plans to open more free language courses. But due to budget constraints, Commission Chairman Frederic Bamvuginyumvira said that such courses would only be reserved for primary school children. The language courses that have been offered have been limited by resources, with many classes of 60 or more forced to share one book. The international community had praised President Pierre Nkurunziza in early September after he announced the country would scrap school fees to provide free education. But after hundreds of thousands of new students enrolled, many schools were forced to close their doors due to a dearth of teachers. The European Union pledged to pay teacher salaries for a four-year period, allowing the country to hire thousands of new primary and secondary school teachers, but no move to hire more language instructors has yet been made. ([IRIN](#), December 2, 2005)

Burundian president visits neighbor Rwanda for first time since civil war began: On November 30, President Pierre Nkurunziza spoke of ethnic barriers, economic prosperity, and the need for cooperation as he stood next to Rwandan President Paul Kagame in the Rwandan capital city of Kigali. Nkurunziza applauded Kagame’s work and his statements condemning the false ethnic divisions put in place by colonists to “act as a scapegoat . . . used to cover up for their leadership failures and greed,” but said the main purpose of his visit was to discuss the security problems posed by rebel groups. “I have been a rebel leader,” continued Nkurunziza, “and the road to success whether by force of arms or dialogue is to have a genuine cause.” The crowds cheered when he hailed Kagame and Rwanda, “without whose support and encouragement the peace process in Burundi would have flopped.” The official visit was the first by a Burundian president

since President Cyprien Ntaryamira was killed outside Kigali in 1994 in the plane crash that also killed Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana. (AllAfrica, IRIN, November 30, 2005)

CAMBODIA

UN human rights envoy concerned for political prisoners: During a short visit to Cambodia, newly elected UN human rights envoy Yash Ghai expressed concern December 5 for the high-profile political prisoners in a Phnom Penh military jail. After visiting incarcerated union leader Rong Chhun, independent broadcaster Mam Sonando, and opposition party politician Cheam Channy, Ghai told reporters that the health of the prisoners was at risk. Ghai also criticized their status as prisoners, claiming “there appears to be very little concrete evidence against them.” The trip, which included meetings with nongovernmental organizations, union leaders, and politicians, encouraged the recently elected envoy to question the Cambodian judicial system where impunity and corruption run rampant. Both Rong Chhun and Mam Sonando were found guilty of defamation in October after publicly criticizing Prime Minister Hun Sen’s controversial border treaty with Vietnam. Jailed since February 2005, Cheam Channy was convicted of having plotted to create an opposition militia, despite lack of evidence to support the accusation. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, December 5, 2005)

Prime Minister absent at court case hearing in New York: Prime Minister Hun Sen neglected to attend the first court hearing held in the lawsuit accusing him of various human rights abuses. Hun Sen also failed to hire an attorney to defend him. Due to Hun Sen’s absence, the hearing, which took place December 2 in New York, lasted no more than a half an hour with judge Louis Kaplan deeming the case default. Because the prime minister has declined his right to represent himself as defendant, the plaintiffs, among them opposition leader Sam Rainsy, were to have thirty days to ask for a default judgment, which would allow a request for damages. The U.S.-based lawsuit was served to Hun Sen September 16 during his visit to the UN World Summit in New York. Along with Sam Rainsy, plaintiffs include other Cambodian nationals and one U.S. citizen, all of whom were injured in the 1997 bombing of the opposition party’s peaceful demonstration. (KI, December 4, 2005)

Opposition party leader attends Asian/European relations conference: Opposition leader Sam Rainsy attended a conference in Rome focused on Asian/European relations. The meeting, entitled “Asia/Europe- Strategic Partnership,” took place December 2-4 and included politicians and diplomats from both European Union (EU) and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Those attending signed a regionally directed declaration stating, “We underline that the European Union is such a strong and solid entity because it is based on common values such as democracy and the respect for human rights... The EU experience can be a model for Asian integration.” Specifically regarding Cambodia, the declaration reads, “We support the implementation of the Agreement between the UN and Cambodia about the trial of the Khmer Rouge,” and urges the international community to increase pressure on the Cambodian government to enhance democracy and stop corruption. Sam Rainsy himself lives in self-imposed exile for fear of political persecution; however he continues to fight for government reform and civil liberties. (KI, December 4, 2005)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Thousands evacuated from displaced persons camps as fighting continues: As efforts by the army to clear the north Katanga province of rebels and militias continued, up to 100,000 people were forced to flee their homes in late November. Many traveled to neighboring Burundi where the UNHCR was shuttling them to refugee camps, while thousands of others sought safety in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps within the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). But Doctors Without Borders (MSF) reported December 2 that these camps were under attack. At least 3,000 people were evacuated from IDP camps in Katanga late during the week of November 27 after Mai Mai militia raided the area in search of food and supplies. “Houses have been burnt, including the MSF health center, one person has been killed and several wounded,” said Coordinator of the MSF Emergency Team in Congo Laurence Saily. Despite the severity of the situation, according to MSF, military operations have blocked off access to populations desperately in need of assistance. The Congolese army has been working with United Nations peacekeepers to forcibly disarm the Mai Mai, who recently restarted military operations in response to slow disarmament pay. (IRIN, December 1; MSF, December 2, 2005)

Parliament adopts new amnesty law in spite of President’s party: The Congolese Parliament passed a resolution November 30 that would effectively grant amnesty to persons convicted or detained for political crimes that took place during the country’s civil war. The law was to apply to “acts of war, political offenses and opinions” between the time President Mobutu Sese Seko was forced from office in August 1996 until June 2003, when the transitional government was set up – a period in which nearly four million people died as a result of fighting. Members of President Joseph Kabila’s party boycotted the measure, which they believed would grant amnesty to the 30 prisoners currently condemned to death for their role in the assassination of Joseph Kabila’s father, Laurent. However, proponents of the amnesty law said that war crimes convicts would not be eligible for amnesty. Whether the assassination would be judged as a war crime or political offense remained to be decided. The resolution cannot be made into law without the approval of President Kabila, who has not publicly stated his position. (BBC, November 30; MONUC, December 1, 2005)

GENDER AND PEACE

Anti-rape legislation passed in Liberia: After the Liberian parliament passed new legislation December 1 outlawing rape, Liberia’s president-elect Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson vowed to combat the gender-based crime during her term in office. The legislation was promoted by Liberian women’s rights groups in the wake of many recent publicized rape cases, and was severely needed in a country where only gang rape was considered an offence. Sirleaf-Johnson stated on a December 5 radio interview, “Nobody will abuse our girls and women and get away with it; any law on rape especially the rape bill just passed into law will be totally implemented under our government.” Liberia’s chief prosecutor Theophilus Gould also backed the law, saying that its prior absence contributed to the growing number of rapes in recent years. During Liberia’s 14-year civil war, the crime was commonplace; however recent rape arrests include that of a Nigerian UN peacekeeper and a traditional leader near the capital city, Monrovia. (IRIN, December 5, 2005)

National Democratic Institute holds meeting for Iraqi women politicians: Iraq’s female politicians convened November 29 at a meeting established by the U.S. nongovernmental

organization, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to discuss their role in current politics. With parliamentary elections scheduled for December 15, the women politicians have been increasingly adamant about their position in Iraq's political parties and government at all levels. Over 40 women from varying political backgrounds attended the meeting and signed a petition calling for the right to nominate women for both party and parliamentary positions. One member of the al-Umma al-Iraqiah party, Rafeda al-Jeburi stated, "Men dominate the parties. We want to be able to nominate women both for internal party elections and parliamentary elections." Though politics have become arguably more accessible to women since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Iraqi women are angered that their position in politics is merely to fulfill female quotas in parties and parliament, rather than to take part in important decision making. The recent NDI meeting allowed the politicians to express the importance of female voices in the political decision making process. (IRIN, November 30, 2005)

Yemen's women's rights conference discusses gender issues and politics: Over 300 participants from around the world gathered in Yemen's capital, Sana, December 3-5 for a symposium dedicated to women's rights issues and politics in the Middle East. The conference focused on how economic, political, and cultural improvements could better the lives of women throughout the Arab world. Attendees also urged participating Arab governments to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was originally adopted by the UN Security Council in 1979. In addition to the discussion of women in politics, the encouragement of a 15 percent female quota system, and improvement in education for women, the symposium closed with statements more politically broad. It advocated the "right of return" for displaced Palestinian refugees and called for the pullout of U.S. troops in Iraq. CEDAW, often called the women's bill of rights, defines various forms of discrimination against women and has yet to be ratified by many Middle Eastern countries. (IRIN, December 6, 2005)

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights groups mark day of publicized international executions: On December 2, three highly publicized executions sparked debate over the applicability of the death penalty in judicial systems throughout the world. Kenneth Lee Boyd, a North Carolina man convicted of killing his wife and step-father in front of two of his children, became the 1,000th person put to death in the United States after the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. Hours earlier, Tuong Van Nguyen, an Australian man convicted in Singapore of drug trafficking, an act which he claimed was to help his ailing brother, was put to death. Drug trafficking is punishable by death in Singapore, just as it is in Saudi Arabia, where another high-profile execution took place the same day. The public beheading of Ahmad al-Shaater for killing a man in an argument went unnoticed by many in Saudi Arabia, but was significant to international human rights groups like Amnesty International that are concerned over the rapid rise in the number of religious justified executions in the country. In October, Saudi Arabia was criticized for its strict interpretation of the Koran in executing a 14-year old Egyptian boy who killed a young girl who had apparently been teasing him in the market. While many countries around the world have abolished the death penalty – a precondition for countries to enter the European Union – executions are on the rise in countries that still implement it. The large majority of these executions have disproportionately affected lower socioeconomic classes, even more so in Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia. (AI, December 2; HRW, November 30; Reuters, December 2, 2005)

U.S. pushing UN to include Burma on permanent agenda: A United States-backed initiative to include Burma (Myanmar) on the United Nations Security Council's permanent agenda was bolstered December 2 by a unanimous decision to call for a briefing on the Southeast Asian country. U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton said the decision to focus on "the deteriorating situation" in Burma was significant after an attempt earlier this year to have the Security Council discuss the country failed due to lack of support. The U.S. request came days after Burma's military junta extended the house arrest of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate who has been in detention for 10 of the past 16 years. Despite the decision, Bolton said the U.S. would not be satisfied until Burma became part of the Security Council's formal agenda. "That's what we sought. That's what we're going to get," said Bolton. Despite the unanimous request for a briefing, several countries – primarily in Southeast Asia – remain opposed to placing Burma on the agenda, claiming there has been little evidence to suggest that the situation there will evolve into a regional or international threat to peace and security. (UN News, VOA, December 2, 2005)

Iraqi senior human rights inspector dismissed in torture scandal: On December 1, Iraq's Interior Minister dismissed Nouri al-Nouri, the country's senior human rights and corruption inspector. Interior Minister Bayan Jabr reportedly acted on orders from Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari as reports about torture within Iraqi prisons surfaced. Allegedly, al-Nouri had worked to cover up reports of torture in a prison raided by the United States military November 13. Two days later, Prime Minister al-Jaafari ordered an investigation into the abuses at the prison. A report is expected soon, but the dismissal of al-Nouri gave some indication as to the findings. The U.S. Embassy applauded the investigation as proof that the Iraqi government was proactive and that there was no need for an independent, international inquiry, which many members of the Sunni Muslim minority have demanded. The reports of abuses within the Iraqi prison have caused many outspoken critics of the interim government to agree with former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's mid-November claims that the human rights situation in Iraq is "worse than during the Saddam Hussein regime." (CBC News, December 1, 2005)

LIBYA

Relatives visit jailed Bulgarian nurses: Family members of the five Bulgarian nurses sentenced to death were to visit them in Tripoli for Christmas. One representative from the family of each medic would receive a visa for the trip, and Bulgaria would cover all the expenses. Meanwhile, Italian senator Tana de Zulueta requested that the government in Rome initiate action in support of the nurses. De Zulueta reiterated that the Bulgarians' confessions had been extracted under torture. The medics' case was also to be among the topics that Romania's Foreign Minister Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu would discuss during his visit to Libya December 10-11. (Sofiaecho, Sofianews, December 6, 2005)

Diplomats protest after satellites jammed: British and U.S. diplomats protested to the Libyan government after two international satellites were illegally jammed, knocking off TV and radio stations. Among stations hit were digital broadcasts by Channel Five, BBC World, CNN International, and U.S. diplomatic, military, and FBI communications. The jamming reportedly started September 19, after a small British-Arabic commercial radio station called Sout Libya, later Sout Alamel began broadcasting from London to Libya on human rights and freedom of speech issues. An anonymous e-mail sent to one of the companies associated with the station

claimed that Sowt Alamel “broadcasts terrorist propaganda, intended to spread terrorist ideas among the listeners minds (sic).” The station agreed to suspend its service. ([freeinterpress](#), December 3; [Guardian](#), December 3; [MediaChannel](#), December 6, 2005)

NEPAL

Maoists extend cease-fire: On December 2, Maoist leader Prachanda announced a one-month extension of the Maoists’ unilateral cease-fire. However, Prachanda also warned that it would not be possible to go on extending the truce if the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) continued its present tactics. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Chief of United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) Nepal, Iain Martin welcomed the extension and urged the government to reciprocate the cease-fire. UN Resident Representative to Nepal Mathew Kahane said that an international commission could monitor national security forces during the peace process in the country. The European Union (EU) stated that it continued to support the transition of the Maoists into a mainstream political party, and repeatedly expressed its readiness to support a meaningful peace process. Meanwhile, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Secretary General Nicolas Howen called on both the government and the Maoists to declare indefinite cease-fires. On December 5, RNA General Pyar Jung Thapa called the truce extension “rife with crooked tricks,” and accused the Maoists of abducting over 8,000 civilians, recruiting children, and extorting money during the three-month cease-fire. Meanwhile, the Forum of the Families Victimized by the State submitted a memorandum at the Kathmandu office of OHCHR December 5, asking for help in the search for missing relatives. The victims claimed that 132 persons, abducted either by the State or the Maoists during the nine-year conflict, are still missing. ([Kantipur Online](#), December 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 2005)

King expands Cabinet of Ministers: On December 7, King Gyanendra reshuffled the Cabinet of Ministers constituted after the February 1 royal takeover. Seven ministers, including Home Minister Dan Bahadur Shahi, who was blamed for security lapses December 2, and Women and Social Welfare Minister Durga Shrestha, who allegedly was found misusing state property were dismissed and 18 new members were inducted; the new cabinet has 35 members. The General Secretary of Nepali Congress party Ram Chandra Poudel said that appointing a new cabinet would complicate the current political problems rather than solve them. The cabinet changes were announced hours after the Nepali Supreme Court issued a stay order to the government, asking it to let Radio Sagarmatha air the BBC Nepali Service broadcast. ([Kantipur Online](#), [LA Times](#), [Nepalnews](#), [NewsLine Nepal](#), [Reuters](#), December 7, 2005)

Party rallies against autocracy: Under monitoring by the United Nations of High Commissioner of Human Rights and the National Human Rights Commission, the Communist Party held a demonstration against the monarchy in Kathmandu December 2. The party’s general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal, thanked Maoist leader Prachanda for extending the cease-fire and urged the rebels to allow displaced Nepalis to return to their villages. Nepal also urged the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) to agree to decommission their arms under UN monitoring. Pro-king groups and opposition party protestors clashed after the mass meeting, when the monarchist groups lined up to welcome King Gyanendra and Queen Komal returning from a three-week tour of Bangladesh and several African countries. The protestors threw stones at the security convoy and the motorcade of Crown Prince Paras on the way to the airport. On December 3, the RNA,

armed police, and civil police personnel provided security at the communist party's central office after receiving information of possible attack by a group of "hooligans" protesting against the stone-throwing incident December 2, dispersing the group before it reached the building. The seven-party alliance of political parties that signed a 12-point memorandum of understanding with the Maoists November 22 was to stage a joint demonstration in Kathmandu December 15. ([Kantipur Online](#), November 30; [Kathmandu Post](#), November 30, December 2, 3; [Nepalnews](#), December 3, 2005)

Female workers leave for Malaysia: The Nepali government opened Malaysia as one of the labor destinations for women Nepali workers May 31, 2005, and the first group of 40 women left for Malaysia November 30 to work for a seafood processing company. Malaysia had a restricted country for Nepali female workers, due to the government's fear of violation of the workers' rights. However, Nepali employment agencies are not allowed to recruit women as domestic workers. The government's direction also compels the agencies to procure jobs for at least five Nepali women at one time and restricts recruitment of women in companies that employ 25 or fewer women. According to Finance Director of Jasim Trading and Services Private Limited Manoj Subedi, the agency has already received 120 additional demands of female Nepali workers. ([Kantipur Online](#), November 30, 2005)

PHILIPPINES

Mindanao Week of Peace brings Muslims and Catholics together: The Mindanao Week of Peace, annually celebrated since 1999, brought Muslims and Catholics together at a time when the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have been making strides in achieving peace agreements. The annual event seemed to reflect the results of recent surveys revealing that both populations were exhausted by the fighting and believed that there was a peaceful answer to the issues that had brought them war, destruction, and displacement. Entitled "The aim of the new millennium: women and youth as peace-builders," this year's week of peace, which traditionally lasts from the last Thursday of November to the first Wednesday of December, comprised a series of events such as seminars, prayer meetings, scholastic activities, and concerts, aiming at bringing Muslims and Catholics together under the goal of peace. One of the activities was a "cycle rally for peace," a game between students from the two religions. In addition to the activities, the event also focused on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate poverty and hunger, guarantee primary education for all, promote gender equality, and empower women, to name a few. "The event [has] succeeded in showing how Christians and Muslims, despite their different faiths, are united by a shared cultural patrimony and are well able to live together in peace," concurred in saying priests, sisters, bishops, and lay people of the Roman Catholic faith who participated in the week of peace. ([AsiaNews](#), December 3; [Mindanews](#), December 2; [Sunstar](#), December 1, 2005)

Rescuing of kidnapped couple reinforces hopes for a lasting peace in southern Philippines: In a joint effort December 4 government security forces and rebels of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rescued Felipe Lucanas and his wife Helen, both kidnapped by an unknown gang in the south of the country. The couple, instructors at Mindanao State University (MUS), were abandoned in a village in Piagapo town, Lanao del Sur, after the members of the gang were forced to flee the overwhelming military and rebel presence in the area. There was no hint as to why the couple was kidnapped. General Ben Dolorfino, who led the operation, and Eid Kabalu, a

spokesman for the MILF, agreed that the success of the operation was due to good coordination and the exchange of intelligence between the MILF and government forces. Most notably, according to Kabalu, what really stems out of such success is that “the guerrilla wanted to demonstrate with facts that they desired lasting peace and were ready to collaborate with the central government to attain it.” (AsiaNews, December 5; Sunstar, December 5, 2005)

Peace advocates express concern over increasing American-Philippine tensions in Sulu: In an article released November 30 by Mindanews, peace advocacy organization Mindanao PeaceWeavers wondered if the Philippines were at war with the United States once again. According to the governments of both the Philippines and the United States, American forces have been present on the island for the purpose of humanitarian work comprising medical and civic operations. However, following the bombings of Indanan town November 24, an area under the control of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rebels, and with U.S. troops in combat zones fighting alongside the Philippine military against the MNLF, inhabitants of the island were starting to question to what extent the U.S. mission in Sulu was truly humanitarian. Furthermore, the lack of action taken by Secretary of Justice Gonzales to arrest the six military men accused of raping a 22 year-old woman from Mindanao November 1, raised suspicions as to the will of the government to protect its Moro population. As the 100-year commemoration of the Bud Dajo massacre drew closer, Mindanao PeaceWeavers demanded that the presence of American troops in Sulu be investigated. “If America is indeed serious about its civic and humanitarian assistance in the province of Sulu and in the entire Mindanao, let them send doctors, engineers, development planners and economic specialists, not their spy planes and their soldiers,” the statement concluded. (Mindanews, November 30, 2005)

RWANDA

Rwandan refugees in Malawi send scout group with UNHCR to assess situation: Inspired by similar successful initiatives in neighboring countries, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) helped usher hundreds of Rwandan refugees back into Rwanda November 30 to assess the likelihood of returning all of the 2,800 Rwandans currently living in Malawi. The refugees were to have toured most of the provinces during their five-day mission before returning to Malawi to report their findings. Initial reports had been positive. “For sure I have witnessed great changes in Kigali city, and I think there must be change in the villages; honestly when I go back I will have a story to tell,” said Pascal Mbabajende, one of the visiting refugees. Among other activities, the refugee ambassadors were encouraged to attend local Gacaca courts to review their fairness. Many of the tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees living abroad fled what they suspected would be harsh justice from these courts for their roles or associations with Hutus responsible for the 1994 genocide. But UNHCR officers in Rwanda said that the refugees should know the truth about the state of the country and judicial system and decide for themselves whether they wished to return home. The UNHCR estimates that there are still between 20,000 and 50,000 Rwandan refugees living abroad. (UNHCR, Xinhua, November 30, 2005)

Burundi and Rwanda make plans to revive joint commission: Following his return to Burundi after a brief trip to Rwanda, Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza told the media December 1 that he had discussed with Rwandan President Paul Kagame the possibility of reopening a joint commission of the two countries. Such a commission had regularly been a part of political

processes between the two nations for many years, but had not met for several years due to domestic concerns over the past decade. The trip to Kigali, Rwanda by Nkurunziza was primarily focused on achieving solutions to persistent problems that Rwanda and Burundi had faced from the rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and National Liberation Front (FNL), respectively. Reviving the joint commission was suggested as a “common defense system” necessary to combat the increasing cooperation between the two rebel groups. Although there has not been an official timetable set for reinstatement of the committee, analysts in the two countries believe the governments will work quickly in response to reports that the rebels have been planning a massive joint offensive for sometime in early 2006. (Angola Press, New Times, December 1, 2005)

SRI LANKA

Rebels accused of provoking war as 14 soldiers die in landmine blasts: Seven soldiers were killed in a claymore mine attack near the northern city of Jaffna, December 4, while another seven died under similar circumstances December 6 at Irupalai, north of Jaffna, bringing the number of dead soldiers to 14 in 48 hours. Though there was no clear evidence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) involvement in the attacks, two main factors pointed to the rebel group. Claymore mines carry a small charge packed behind hundreds of steel balls which shoot forward on detonation, and are recognized to have been extensively used by rebels during the war. Furthermore, while the northern and eastern areas of the country are under LTTE control, Jaffna is a military-held town; the government therefore accused the LTTE of being “engaged in a stealth war against Sri Lankan security forces using the cover of the Cease-fire Agreement,” said the Secretary to the Ministry of Defense December 6. According to him, the LTTE is attempting to provoke a confrontation with the security forces. The LTTE however, which has been fighting for a separate homeland for over two decades, denies any involvement in the attacks. The increase of violent attacks in the northern areas of the country has reached its peak in the last few days since a cease-fire was signed in 2002. (BBC News, December 5 and 6; Bloomberg, December 5 and 6; Colombo Page, December 5 and 6; Outlook India, December 5; Reuters, December 6, 2005)

Amnesty International calls for end to human rights violations: Following a visit by Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan, the London-based human rights group warned that the situation in the country was “combustible.” During Khan’s stay in the country, the combination of increasing acts of violence and the cancellation of a meeting between rebel political leader C. Ilamparuthi and Maj.Gen. Sunil Tennakoon in the military-held town of Jaffna increased tensions between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The latter were meant to meet December 4 in Jaffna in order to discuss the “deteriorating situation,” said pro-rebel website TamilNet. However, Tennakoon never arrived at the meeting, giving no reasons for his absence to Ilamparuthi who had waited over an hour. The incident caused relations to deteriorate further, leading to a group allied with the rebels, the Trincomalee Tamil People Consortium, to declare, “The day when paramilitaries and traitors must run away from our land is very near.” Upon her return to London, Khan announced, “Both sides use human rights as a political weapon each accusing the other of abuses but doing little to stop the spate of killings, abductions, and harassment over the past year.” She urged both sides to show restraint and work toward peace. (Colombo Page, December 6; Associated Press, December 5, 2005)

SUDAN

Southern constitution signed as southern forces enter Juba: Salva Kiir Mayardit, the Sudanese first vice-president and president of southern Sudan, signed December 4 the new constitution for south Sudan, just two days after the official arrival of two full battalions of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) troops in the region's capital, Juba. Done in the presence of thousands of people, the signing marked an important milestone in the implementation of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed January 9 by the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The ceremony also represented an important step in fulfilling the southerners' aspirations for greater political autonomy and the decentralization of power, for which the SPLM/A fought a 21-year civil war that claimed two million lives. "It spells out people's rights and protections. The government and the president will be held to account using the constitution, and it contains important provisions with regard to equal rights for women and media freedom," commented one unnamed political analyst. The analyst also added that the next step in the implementation of the CPA would be to develop the constitution as well as to finalize the setting up of state governments and legislative assemblies. In related news, the thousands of SPLA soldiers which entered Juba December 2 were to form so-called joint integrated units with the northern Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), as foreseen under the peace agreement. (IRIN, December 6, 2005)

UN contemplates military operation for Darfur: A joint military team will visit Darfur December 10-20 to study whether the United Nations should take over efforts to bring order to the region, UN officials said December 4. The African Union (AU)-led mission will include experts from the United States, the European Union, and the UN, and will discuss the possibility of incorporating the AU's 6,000-strong existing Darfur peacekeeping operation into a UN Sudan mission established last March to support the January 9 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Darfur rebels would welcome the United Nations taking over the AU mission in the region, according to their leaders who were involved in peace talks with the government in Abuja, Nigeria. "We will welcome and cooperate with any international force in Darfur," said Ahmed Tugod Lissan, chief negotiator of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The main Darfur rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), said the AU was doing a good job, but needed more troops, help with equipment and logistics, and a wider mandate to protect civilians. The Sudanese government had in the past rejected any proposal for the UN to deploy in Darfur and a government spokesman at the talks, Amin Hassan Omar, said it preferred the AU because they were Africans and understood the culture of Darfur. "The government will look at the proposal on its merits when it is made," he said. "But we don't want the UN to control so much of our country," he added. More than 10,000 UN peacekeepers and police were being deployed to south Sudan to preserve the CPA, which brought an end to more than two decades of civil war in the country. (Reuters, December 4, 5, 2005)

UN mission chief heads for Nigerian where peace talks have become difficult: The senior United Nations envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, was to head to Abuja, Nigeria's capital, December 11 to help with difficult peace talks between the Sudanese government and the two main rebel groups in western Sudan's Darfur region, the United Nations Mission in the country (UNMIS) announced December 6. The aim of the trip would be to boost "the ongoing negotiations process, which does not seem to progress as expeditiously as hoped, in order to reach an agreement by the

end of this year,” UNMIS said in a statement. The security situation in Darfur over the past week had been characterized by banditry, looting and inter-tribal fighting; alleged clashes between the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and tribal groups; and harassment, threats, and sometimes the beating of staff of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), according to the mission. Meanwhile African Union (AU) mediators said December 6 that finding a consensus on land rights and disarmament was essential to advance peace talks between the government and Darfur rebels, although both sides were far apart on the issues. “Land is at the root of this whole conflict,” said AU mediator Sam Ibok, adding “there’s a very polarized approach to it.” Similarly, the government wants the Arab militias, known locally as Janjaweed, to be disarmed simultaneously with the rebel groups. “You cannot ask some tribes to disarm when the other still carries arms,” government spokesman Amin Hassan Omar said. However the rebels want the Janjaweed (proxy militias used by the government to quash the rebels), who many say even the government can no longer control, to be disarmed first and then integrated into joint army units in Darfur. (Reuters, UN News, December 6, 2005)

UGANDA

Army insists on court martial for opposition leader: The Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) dismissed December 4 accusations that Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) leader Kizza Besigye was unfairly being tried before the General Court Martial (GCM). Besigye, a retired colonel, qualifies to be tried under the GCM under the law, said the Chief of Legal Services in the UPDF, Col. Ramadhan Kyamulesire. “[A]nybody not otherwise subject to military law who otherwise abets someone subject to military law in commission of a service offence qualifies to be tried under the General Court Martial,” said Kaymulesire. The army’s response came on the heels of a High Court ruling December 2 that stopped Besigye’s trial by the military court until questions surrounding its fairness, powers, and competence were resolved. In granting the interim order halting the army court proceedings, Justice Remy Kasule said, “The applicant raises serious issues regarding whether or not the GCM has jurisdiction to try him and whether or not he is getting a fair trial before the same court.” According to Kaymulesire, Besigye qualifies to be tried under the GMC because there was evidence that he was in illegal possession of firearms, a preserve of the active military. “Besigye was in possession of firearms,” he said. “Possession can either be actual or constructive. We have evidence that Besigye procured and passed on firearms to a third party; that is constructive possession of firearms.” Additionally, Kyamulesir downplayed the claims that being tried by two separate courts amounted to subjecting Besigye to “double jeopardy.” Besigye’s lawyers meanwhile have filed a petition before the Constitutional Court challenging the double trial, claiming that according to a previous ruling of the latter, the army court is subordinate to the High Court. (Monitor, 5 December, 2005)

Besigye allowed to sign nomination papers in jail: The government has allowed detained leader of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) Kizza Besigye to sign his presidential nomination forms inside Luzira Prison, and to be photographed. On December 2 authorities at the prison had rejected FDC’s request to have Besigye sign the nomination forms and take the required passport photos in jail, claiming they needed to consult the Internal Affairs Ministry. “A position has been taken,” Internal Affairs Minister Ruhakana Rugunda stated December 5. “The photographs can be taken from within the prison. Even the nomination papers can be filled. We have consulted the Constitution and we have been advised accordingly.” He added that the Commissioner of

Prisons had been already advised to allow the required photographs of Besigye to be taken and the required nomination forms signed. “There is no legal bar to prevent Dr. Kizza Besigye from being nominated as a presidential candidate,” said deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Adolfe Mwesige. “As long as a person satisfies the requirements/qualifications set out in the Presidential Elections Act, that person can stand for election as President or member of Parliament even if he/she has been charged provided that he/she has not been convicted and sentenced for a period exceeding nine months without an option of a fine.” According to the Presidential Elections Act, a presidential candidate is supposed to sign a form consenting to his or her nomination among others, which by law should be accompanied by postcard-sized copies of his or her recent photos. (Monitor, December 6, 2005)

Thousands homeless after fires – ICRC: Dry-season fires destroyed the homes and property of nearly 4,000 people at internally displaced persons camps in war-torn northern Uganda, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said December 7. Devastating blazes are common during the parched months between November and March, when sparks pass easily between the tightly packed thatched huts in the camps – home to more than 1.6 million people displaced as a result of 19 years of conflict in the region. “Nearly 4,000 internally displaced persons in Gulu and Pader districts were left homeless, without any belongings, due to fire outbreaks in the end of November,” said ICRC, adding that it had given tarpaulins and other relief items to almost 2,000 of the victims. Aid agencies have said the north suffers from one of the world’s most neglected humanitarian emergencies, adding that their staff had recently become the target of ambushes carried out by rebels from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). (Reuters, December 7, 2005)

ZIMBABWE

Infighting continues within opposition party: In the latest twist to its internal crisis, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe’s principal opposition party, became further divided when its second highest body, the national council, revoked party leader Morgan Tsvangirai’s suspension and disassociated itself from the pro-senate faction of the party. The MDC national council released a statement which said that the disciplinary committee, which met last week and had suspended Tsvangirai, was “not valid and had not followed proper procedures.” Along with reinstating Tsvangirai the national council also adopted a vote-of-no-confidence in the leaders of the pro-senate faction including party vice president Gibson Sibanda and secretary general Welshman Ncube. In a telling resolution, the national council gave control of the party’s finances over to Tsvangirai and his allies. In the past the finances were overseen by a separate office within the party, not the President. (BBC, December 1, Reuters, December 1, 2005)

Zimbabwe accepts food aid, rejects tents: The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) was to begin feeding at least a million more Zimbabweans after signing an agreement with President Robert Mugabe. Mugabe’s government had previously accused aid agencies of harboring a political agenda and had therefore refused the aid. Mugabe also was quoted last year as saying that Zimbabwe would not require food aid during this year. Mugabe has continued to deny that his country faces chronic food shortages, contrary to many aid agencies’ reports. WFP regional spokesman Michael Huggins in Johannesburg said the deal covered rural areas, which meant it did not cover the thousands affected by the government’s recent crackdown on “illegal shack

dwellers” in the urban areas. In a related story, while allowing the food aid to enter the country, Mugabe rejected the UN’s offer of tents. A meeting with top UN envoy Jan Egeland in the capital city of Harare failed to end the dispute and concluded with Zimbabwe refusing the tents. The tents were to have been given to the hundreds of thousands of people whose houses were demolished earlier this year under Operation Murambatsvina (Drive Out Trash). Egeland emerged from the meeting visibly frustrated and said, “We do not disagree on the need to help people help themselves. There is disagreement around the eviction campaign. There is disagreement on how to help those that have been evicted.” Egeland spent December 5 meeting people living in camps and said that a majority of them were living in inadequate conditions. (BBC, December 6, 2005)