

Conflict Update
Countries of Focus for the Institute's Dedicatory Conference
August 3, 2001
(Volume 1, Number 8)

Choice of countries for updates: The countries for the conflict updates are the countries that have been chosen as areas of focus at the Institute's dedicatory conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century," December 5-7, 2001.

Source information: Information presented in this update is condensed from wire and newspaper reports from Lexis/Nexis and from electronic sites on the World Wide Web. Complete biographical information is unavailable from these services, but every attempt has been made to properly cite information and give credit to source materials. This update is intended for use by IPJ staff and associates for informational purposes only. As the material in this update is condensed, and does not directly quote the primary source, information from the update should not be quoted.

The conflict updates are written by the summer 2001 interns at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego. The interns are Jennifer Fullerton (University of San Diego), Scott Huntley (University of North Carolina), Sarah Laubach (University of San Diego), and Tiffany Santos (University of California at Berkeley)

UPDATE SUMMARY

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

DRC opposition parties demand release of political detainees; Commission accuses Uganda of violating UN charter

GUATEMALA

Prosecutor in Bishop's murder case flees the country; Protest turns violent

MACEDONIA

Leaders decide on Albanian as an official language

NEPAL

Government releases jailed Maoist rebels; Prime Minister presents bonded labor bill

UPDATE SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

AP	=	Associated Press
AFP	=	Agence France Presse
BBC	=	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	=	Cable News Network
EFE	=	Agencia EFE (Spanish New Agency)
IRIN	=	Integrated Regional Information Network (UN Dept. of Humanitarian Affairs Information Network: www.unog.ch)
JED	=	Journaliste En Danger
NCN	=	New Congo Net
PANA	=	Pan African News Agency

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

DRC opposition parties demand release of political detainees: Congolese opposition parties have called on the DRC government to release 32 people detained when security forces dispersed a demonstration July 30. The peaceful demonstration was in response to what journalists characterized as a “violent dispersal” of a July 25 press conference held by a coalition of political parties calling for an inter-Congolese dialogue. Security personnel and heavily armed policemen were stationed at the central railway station where the demonstration was planned to begin and along Kinshasa’s main road. When the first group of protestors unfurled a banner, several truckloads of policemen arrived on the scene, and arrested participants. Joseph Olenghankoy, leader of the opposition party Innovative Forces for Union and Solidarity, said the proper notification was given to the government in accordance with new rules governing opposition political activity. In mid-May the government established a new law requiring opposition parties to inform the government in writing that they intend to resume activity. Opposition party activity was severely restricted during the presidency of Laurent-Desire Kabila, current President Joseph Kabila’s late father. The demonstration, in support of the Lusaka peace process and the August 12 inter-Congolese Dialogue, would have been the first march by the political opposition in Kinshasa for three years. (BBC, August 1; IRIN, July 26, 31, August 1; The Monitor, August 1; NCN, July 31, 2001)

Commission accuses Uganda of violating UN charter: Ugandan Justice David Porter, the chair of the Ugandan judicial commission of inquiry into the exploitation of the DRC’s resources, said July 27 that Uganda’s invasion and occupation of the DRC violated Article 51 of the UN Charter, which prohibits crossing national borders without certain conditions being observed. He stated that the agreement signed in April 1998 by Uganda and the DRC regarding joint border security did not provide for the Ugandan People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) to cross into the DRC. Uganda’s permanent secretary in the ministry of foreign affairs, Ralph Ochan, defended the invasion saying that the UPDF crossed over to monitor security in the area due to the lack of effective administration in eastern Congo. The Porter Commission has continued to investigate allegations of Ugandan companies with government ties plundering the natural resources of the DRC. (IRIN, July 30; NCN, July 31; New Vision, July 31, August 1, 2001)

GUATEMALA

Prosecutor in Bishop’s murder case flees the country: The lead prosecutor, Leopoldo Zeissig, who handled the inquiry into the killing of a leading human rights activist, Bishop Juan Gerardi, left the country July 29 after receiving death threats. He took over the case after the previous prosecutor, Celvin Galindo, fled the country due to death threats. Two of the three judges have also moved out of the country for fear of being killed. Zeissig’s investigation led to the conviction of three military officers in a case, which was seen as a test for Guatemala’s fragile justice system. Since the end of the nation’s 36-year civil war in 1996, human rights activists in the country have been subjected to an escalating wave of abuses. (AP, BBC, EFE, July 30, 2001)

Protest turns violent: The Guatemalan Red Cross reported that 83 demonstrators were arrested and more than 50 people were injured during a protest to oppose the newly approved sales tax increase August 1. The protest was organized by a nationwide coalition of business, labor, student, and human rights groups. A group of protesters in Totonicapan, 120 miles west of the capital of Guatemala City, burned down the mayor's house, a bank, and a government office. Police used tear gas and firearms to disperse large crowds of demonstrators. President Alfonso Portillo approved a measure July 31, immediately raising the tax from 10 percent to 12 percent. The 1996 peace accords called for the tax increase of gross domestic products to pay for social spending to improve the lot of the country's Mayan Indian majority, who suffered most in the civil war. (AP, EFE, New York Times, August 2, 2001)

MACEDONIA

Leaders decide on Albanian as an official language: After six weeks of talks between Macedonian Slavs and minority Albanians the two groups agreed that Albanian, which is spoken by a third of the population, would become an official language, alongside Macedonian. However, the agreement would not go into effect until other debated issues, such as amnesty for Albanian rebels, and ethnic Albanian demands for greater control over their local police force, were settled. The ethnic Albanian insurgency began in February 2001. The rebels claim to be fighting for greater rights for the ethnic Albanian minority, but the Macedonian government insists that the rebels are seeking to create a greater Albanian state. (BBC; CNN; The New York Times, August 1, 2001)

NEPAL

Government releases jailed Maoist rebels: Since Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba came into office July 21 he has released 25 jailed Maoist rebels as a goodwill gesture in anticipation of negotiations with the insurgents. In a meeting August 3 the Central Working Committee of the Nepali Congress gave Deuba a full mandate to proceed with peace talks to bring the six-year insurgency to an end. The Maoists issued statements welcoming the new government's approach and July 29 held their first public meeting in the capital, Kathmandu. However, Former Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel told the House of Representatives July 31 that the Maoist rebels have not halted their terror tactics. Poudel said rebels are attacking other party workers and elected representatives, extorting money, closing private schools, and beating teachers. Both the Maoists and the government have claimed to be holding hundreds of prisoners. More than 1,800 people have been killed since the rebels began their campaign in 1996 to convert the Himalayan country's constitutional monarchy into a republic through what they call the "People's War." (Kathmandu Post, July 31; Nepalnews.com, July 29, August 2; The Telegraph, August 1, 2001)

Prime Minister presents bonded labor bill: Prime Minister Deuba presented a bill July 31 to the House of Representatives outlawing the practice of bonded labor. A parliamentary committee representing most political parties has been designated to debate the bill and make necessary amendments. The final draft agreed on by the committee would then be

passed back to the house for final endorsement. The bill would make bonded labor punishable by a three to ten year prison sentence and a \$300 fine. Human rights groups have estimated that as many as 40,000 people in western Nepal have been working as bonded laborers trying to pay off debts drawn by their fathers or grandfathers. (Kathmandu Post, July 31, 2001)