

THE
CARTER CENTER



Peace Programs Weekly Update: July 22, 2016

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The updates monitor countries where The Carter Center has had, presently has, or may have some degree of involvement. Particular attention will be paid to countries in which current projects require close monitoring including those in which the Democracy Program plans to observe elections in the near future. Occasionally crosscutting themes affecting a group of countries may be selected as update topics. Some countries may not be covered due to summer/fall intern transitions.

Source Information

Information presented in the updates is condensed from wire and newspaper reports, Lexis/Nexis, sites on the World Wide Web, the clari.news groups on-line services and local newspapers, when available. Complete bibliographical information is unavailable from the majority of these services, but every attempt has been made to properly cite information and give credit to source materials.

Disclaimer

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IRAQ

[Iraq to Receive Billions in Aid and Development Loans in the Coming Months](#)

Several states have pledged to provide humanitarian aid to Iraq in light of the current 38% deficit in United Nations (U.N.) Humanitarian Response Plan, which was crafted earlier this year to budget for lifesaving supplies, administrative expenses, medical supplies, and other costs associated with the current conflict. John Ging, the Director of Operations for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reiterated the need for a collective response from the international community, stating, “As the conflict expands and grows more complex, millions of people in Iraq are in increasingly dire need for international assistance.” 3.3 million Iraqis remain internally displaced due to the presence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants. Oil prices have also plummeted in recent months, creating a double pronged need for an increase in government funding. On July 15, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three year, \$5.24 billion loan to Iraq. The loan is meant to improve Iraq’s fiscal and economic policies, which represent a sustainable response to the economic crisis crippling the country. The United States (U.S.) has also recommitted itself to the cause, pledging more than \$2 billion to help Iraqi communities recover from ISIS operations and sieges. The U.S. and twenty three other countries including Canada, Kuwait, the Netherlands, and Japan are part of a pledging conference to help meet the shortfalls of the humanitarian response in Iraq. For its part, Canada announced that it would allocate \$200 million in foreign aid assistance to Baghdad. Australia similarly announced a \$15 million pledge.

([International Monetary Fund](#), July 15; [Reuters](#), July 18; [Rudaw](#) / [Huffington Post Canada](#), July 19; [The Australian](#) / [ProBono Australia](#) / [Politico](#), July 20)

[Iraqi Cleric Moqtada al-Sadr Leads Protest in Baghdad](#)

Moqtada al-Sadr, a Shiite cleric active in Iraq, led a protest in the country’s capital on July 15, calling for an end to government corruption and sectarianism. He was joined by thousands of supporters in the central Tahrir Square despite a warning by security officials that the assembly was “unauthorized” and that protesters would be treated as “terrorists” in the event of violence. Government officials worried that the large gathering would attract an attack by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) similar to the one the group perpetrated in a Baghdad marketplace on the last day of Ramadan, killing nearly 300 civilians. Hundreds of policemen and riot police were deployed throughout the city. They were joined by al-Sadr’s Peace Brigades, a Shiite militia, during the protest. Several demonstrators were injured attempting to get closer to the cleric while he addressed the crowd. The cleric called for the dismissal of corrupt politicians and state officials, a warning that extends from local council members to the president and prime minister. He urged supporters to target United States troops who are currently stationed in Iraq to lead the international coalition against ISIS. Al-Sadr was forced to cut his speech short as crowds surged forward, threatening to create a stampede.

([Al Jazeera](#) / [New York Times](#) / [Reuters](#), July 15; [Reuters](#) / [Rudaw](#), July 18; [AL Monitor](#), July 20)

ISIS/DAESH

ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attacks in Nice and Wurzburg, 84 Killed 104 Injured

On July 15, 84 people were killed and 100 were injured in Nice, France when a truck drove through a packed crowd. The crowd was watching fireworks to celebrate France's National Day, Bastille Day. The truck did not stop until the driver, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhel, was shot by police. The truck contained weapons and grenades. President Hollande immediately condemned the massacre as a terrorist attack. Hollande also extended the state of emergency in France until October 26. On July 16, the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) took credit for the attack, saying the man was a soldier of ISIS and responded to their call to attack states involved in the coalition against ISIS. French authorities say there is no apparent trail of evidence linking the driver, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhel to ISIS. Five people were arrested for connections to Bouhel. On July 18, an unnamed seventeen-year-old Afghan migrant attacked passengers with an ax on a train in Germany before being killed by the police. Four tourists from Hong Kong were injured in the attack. Authorities searched the attacker's home in Ochsenfurt, and located a hand-painted ISIS flag along with notes indicating that he may have self-radicalized. On July 19, ISIS news channel, Amaq, claimed that the attack was committed by an "Islamic State soldier." The language of this press release mirrored that of ISIS' response to the Nice attack. Alexander Gross, the superintendent detective in the Bavarian region noted that their office could not yet confirm the teen's connection with ISIS. United States (US) Secretary of State John Kerry stated that ISIS's recent global attacks reflect ISIS's desperation and weakness as they face many offensives in Iraq in Syria. US intelligence officials made opposing claims the week prior, saying that ISIS's recent terror attack reflect a change in ISIS strategy, not weakness.

([Al Jazeera](#), July 15; [Al Jazeera](#) / [Reuters](#), July 16; [CNN](#) / [Reuters](#), July 17; [Reuters](#), July 18; [New York Times](#) / [Newsweek](#) / [ABC News](#), July 19)

10 People Arrested after Brazilian Group Becomes First in South America to Pledge Allegiance to ISIS

On 21 July, Brazilian federal police arrested 10 people suspected of plotting attacks of terrorism on the upcoming Olympics. It is believed that they are not members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but that they have attempted to make contact with ISIS. The arrests were made in the southern state of Parana, about 500 miles away from Rio de Janeiro where the Olympics will begin on 5 August. On 17 July, Brazilian extremist group Ansar al-Khilafah pledged allegiance to ISIS through Telegram, an encrypted messaging app that allows for private channels. According to SITE Intelligence group, a message of support for ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdad was posted on the Ansar al-Khilafah #Brazil Telegram channel. This is the first time a South American group has pledged allegiance to ISIS. ISIS media and propaganda has created focused messages to promote attacks at the Olympics; earlier in July, ISIS created a Telegram channel in Portuguese specifically for instructing people how to attack the Olympics. ISIS's "Nashir" Telegram channel has also begun to be produced in both Portuguese and Spanish for the first time. Brazil is working to increase its security for the games. With the help of the United States (US) and France, Brazil has compiled a database of about 500,000 people who have possible ties to terrorism; however, because of the recession in Brazil, there are already existing issues with security, such as trouble paying law enforcement on time. Last week, head of the French military intelligence, General Christophe Gomar, made public the information that France was informed of a planned terror attack on its team at the Olympic Games.

([BBC](#), July 14; [Independent](#), July 18; [Washington Post](#), July 19; [International Business Times](#), July 20; [Reuters](#) / [BBC](#), July 21)

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

[Knesset Passes Legislation Allowing for Expulsion of Members of Parliament](#)

On 19 July, the Knesset passed, with a 62-47 vote by members of the Knesset (MKs), a law that allows elected members to be expelled with a two-thirds majority vote for "inciting racism or supporting an armed struggle against the state of Israel." At least 10 votes from the two-thirds must be from members of the opposition. The bill was presented by MK Nissan Slomiansky of the Bayit Yehudi party, while Arab MKs feel targeted by this legislation, making it highly divisive within the Knesset. This legislation comes in the wake of several other laws recently coming into effect, including one that criminalizes anyone who encourages a volunteer soldier to desert. Human rights groups feel that these laws are specifically encroaching on the freedoms of Palestinians.

([Ynet News](#) / [Al Jazeera](#), July 20)

LIBYA

[Hollande Confirms French Soldiers Killed in Libya, Libyan Government Denounces French Activity](#)

On July 20, French President Francois Hollande made a statement admitting that three French soldiers were killed in Libya in a helicopter crash. It was confirmed earlier this year that Western special forces were operating on the ground in Libya, but this was the first confirmation that the French were active in the country. The three French soldiers were on an intelligence gathering mission when their helicopter was shot down by the Benghazi Defense Brigade (BDB), an Islamist militia. The French officials did not confirm the location of the helicopter crash, but it was reportedly near Benghazi. This is the first confirmed Western military casualty in Libya this year. On July 21, The Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya denounced the presence of French troops in eastern Libya, calling it a violation of the nation's sovereignty. In response, France reiterated its support for the United Nations-brokered government. However, the French operation's location in eastern Libya suggests that French forces are fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria alongside General Khalifa Hifter, a staunch opponent of the GNA.

([Reuters](#) / [BBC](#), July 20; [Washington Post](#) / [ABC News](#), July 21)

RUSSIA

[Kerry Concludes Meeting in Russia, Agrees on Steps to Move Forward Together](#)

United States Secretary of State John Kerry has agreed to "concrete steps" for reviving the ceasefire in Syria, but has not shared any details. In statements Kerry appeared to take a closer position to the Russians on the

need to fight the group Jabhat Al-Nusra, which has generally fought alongside America's allies against the Assad government. In statements Kerry claimed a link could exist between Jabhat Al-Nusra and Nice "because that's what they do". No evidence at this time links Jabhat Al-Nusra to attacks in France. In the past US officials have accused Russia of attacking American affiliated opposition groups claiming it was attacking Jabhat Al-Nusra, which is not part of the ceasefire. Kerry concluded the talks by saying continued government bombings and Jabhat Al-Nusra provocations are responsible for the failure of the ceasefire. However, other observers have noted that both ceasefire affiliated opposition groups and pro-government forces have launched ground attacks in the past two months. The talks come as the ceasefire appears to be breaking down, and may be part of renewed US and Russian efforts to facilitate talks. Syrian opposition groups have criticized Kerry's move, saying that the US has failed to stand up to Russia's human rights abuses in Syria.

([The New York Times](#), July 15; [ABC News](#), July 16; [Reuters](#), July 17)

SYRIA

Syrian Arab Coalition Troops Move Toward Center of Manbij

On July 15th, The Syrian Arab Coalition moved towards the center of Manbij, preventing the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) from accessing critical supply routes. A main ISIS resupply route was severed, and coalition strikes prevented ISIS from reinforcing positions in the north of the city. The Syrian Arab Coalition has conducted more than 400 strikes total against ISIS in Manbij. Serious progress has been made in the last week, and the Syrian Arab Coalition and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have given the ISIS 48 hours to leave Manbij. The announcement comes two days after US-led coalition airstrikes killed at least 56 civilians in Manbij. The Manbij Military Council, a part of the SDF, says this is the "last remaining chance for besieged members of Daesh to leave the town." The Council said ISIS fighters would be allowed to take light weapons with them and urged civilians to leave the town to avoid clashes. The SDF have besieged the town and are currently advancing towards the city center.

([US Department of Defense / Sputnik](#), July 15; [Al Jazeera](#) / [Al Arabiya](#), July 20)

US Airstrike Kills 56 Civilians

Reports from Syria indicate that some 56 civilians have been killed by American bombs in a single strike in Syria. Pictures of children killed in the airstrike have gone viral on social media. It appears that civilians were attempting to escape from a village north of Manbij, which is held by Daesh but besieged by Kurdish aligned forces. Reports suggest that the civilians were mistaken for Daesh fighters attempting to escape. Reports indicate at least 10 of those killed were children. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a human rights group whose network supplies original from Syria from a network of civilian reports, condemned the attack saying "SOHR also condemns targeting civilians by the U.S led coalition warplanes which killed hundreds of civilians during military operations in Syria, and this stands against the dreams of Syrian citizens to reach a country of Democracy, justice, equality, and freedom." The US military confirmed it was conducting strikes in the area at the reported time and is investigating the credibility of the claims. United States (US) Secretary of Defense Ash Carter said on 20 July that the US will investigate reports of civilian casualties in an airstrike near Manbij on 19 July. The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) President Anas al-Abdah said the strikes should be halted while the investigation occurs. Abdah expressed concern that the

killing of civilians could "prove to be a recruitment tool for terrorist organizations." He also stated that the investigation should result in revised rules for strikes and create accountability for violations.

([France 24](#), July 21; [Reuters](#) / [Russia Today](#), July 20; [AlJazeera](#) / [BBC](#), July 19; [SOHR](#), July 18)

US-backed Rebel Group Accused of Beheading Child in Video

The Nour al-Din al-Zinki Movement is accused of beheading a 12 year-old child in a recently surfaced video. There was speculation that the boy, Muhammed Issa, was a member of the pro-government Palestinian militia Liwa al-Quds, but the group released a statement saying that the boy was not a fighter but a refugee living in Aleppo. Nour al-Din Al-Zinki reportedly captured the child in Handarat and killed him in Mashhad. The United States (US) supported the group in the past, and plans an investigation into the killing. State Department spokesman Mark Toner told press that "if we can prove that this was indeed what happened and this group was involved... it would give us pause about any assistance or, frankly, any further involvement with this group." The Nour al-Din al-Zinki Movement released a statement condemning the killing. The group also detained the suspected fighters for trials with a judiciary committee. Amnesty International reported that Nour al-Din al-Zinki has carried out human rights abuses in Aleppo in the past.

([BBC](#) / [Gulf News](#) / [Al-Jazeera](#), July 20)

TURKEY

Turkish Failed Coup Results in Arrests, State of Emergency

On July 15, Turkish soldiers shut down Istanbul's Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridges, took over media organization, such as CNN Turk, took several military leaders hostage amid an attempted coup. The Turkish military announced on state television that it had taken control of the country due to the increasing autocratic rule of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). President Erdoğan was on vacation in Marmaris, in southern Turkey, urged his supporters via FaceTime to go into the streets and protest the coup attempt. Thousands of people protested and blocked the path of tanks and stopped the coup early into July 16, when Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim announced that the situation was under control. Yildirim said that 161 people had been killed and over 2,000 army members had been detained as of the morning of July 16. The current death toll is at least 290. Several anti-government Turkish military members have fled to Greece to seek asylum. President Erdoğan accused United States (US) based cleric Fethullah Gülen, of ordering the coup. Gulen's movement has denied involvement and no group has taken responsibility for leading the coup attempt. Following the coup, the Turkish government detained and suspended over 50,000 people working in the government, academia, the military, and the police, in order to "clean all state institutions of the virus." The virus that President Erdoğan was referring to is the followers Fethullah Gülen. Erdoğan announced that he may reinstate the death penalty, which was abolished in 2004 as part of reforms to join the European Union (EU). The EU has expressed concern over the possible reinstatement of the death penalty and thousands and EU officials have called on the Turkish government to respect the rule of law. French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said that punishment for coup plotters should not include "measures that could lead to an authoritarian state." During the coup attempt, air space over Incirlik Air Base, the base used by US-led coalition planes to strike the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was shut down and the power was also cut. On July 17, the US said that all US and NATO military members were safe and that operations would resume. On July 20, Turkey announced a travel ban for those

working in academia and urged those who are abroad to return to Turkey quickly. According to a Turkish official, the ban will be temporary and is in place because universities have been crucial for military juntas. The ban occurred a day after the council demanded that 1,577 deans at universities across Turkey resign. Turkey has also revoked licenses of over 20,000 teachers who work in private institutions and the suspension of 15,200 state education employees. Turkey also declared a three month long state of emergency on July 20. The state of emergency was announced by Erdoğan, but will have to be approved by parliament before it can be implemented. The state of emergency is in line with Article 120 of the Turkish constitution which allows the government to limit basic rights and freedoms so that, according to Erdoğan, Turkey can "take the most efficient steps" to eliminate threats to "democracy, to the rule of law and the freedoms of the citizens in our country." This includes limits on speech and publications and limitation of where certain individuals and groups can go, meaning that meetings and marches can be banned by authorities. In conjunction with the state of emergency, Turkey suspended the European Convention on Human Rights, which is line with Article 15 of the convention which allows countries to do so in times of war or emergency. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş compared the situation to France, which has also suspended the convention and declared a state of emergency. As of July 21, no party has claimed responsibility for the coup.

([Washington Post](#), [Reuters](#), [US Department of Defense](#), July 16; [New York Times](#), July 17; [The Guardian](#), [Hurriyet Daily News](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Arabiya](#), July 18; [Reuters](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Times](#), [Washington Post](#), July 19; [Al Jazeera](#), [Jerusalem Post](#), [BBC](#), [Washington Post](#), [CNN](#), [New York](#), [Hurriyet Daily News](#), [The Washington Post](#), July 20; [The Guardian](#), [Hurriyet Daily News](#), July 21)

AMERICAS

ARGENTINA

[Anti-government Protests in Buenos Aires against Tariff Increases in Electricity and Gas](#)

On 19 July, hundreds of people marched to Argentina's national congress in the capital, Buenos Aires, to protest against the economic and social policies of the government led by President Mauricio Macri. The protest organised by local civil-society groups is the second show of public discontent with the Macri administration following the 'pots and pans' protest. Protestors demanded a stop to the tariff increases in electricity and gas, and protested against the hunger and the lack of jobs in the country. After assuming office in December 2015, Macri moved to tackle Argentina's various macroeconomic imbalances by reversing the economic measures adopted by the previous administration led by Cristina Fernández (2007-2015), including foreign currency controls, import/export restrictions, and generous government subsidies for gas and electricity consumers. Although Macri foresees that thanks to these measures Argentina's economic situation will soon begin to improve, they have had a negative immediate impact as they have ensured that inflation remains high and that there has been a significant loss in Argentines' purchasing power. In response to the protests, 20,000 volunteers organized by Macri's party Cambiemos took to the streets to talk with neighbors in order to listen to their concerns.

([La Nación](#), July 14; [Clarín](#), July 16; [Diario Las Américas](#), July 19)

BRAZIL

Public Prosecutors in Brazil Absolve Rousseff over ‘Pedaladas’

On 14 July Brazil’s federal public prosecutor’s ministry issued a report concluding that the accounting measures known as *‘pedaladas fiscais’* and which form the basis for the impeachment process against the suspended president, Dilma Rousseff, are not a crime. Pedaladas are manipulative accounting measures by which the treasury delayed payment to state-backed banks of money destined for social programs. Delays in these payments meant the banks had to pay out funds from their current accounts; and for the congressional oversight body, the Tribunal de Contas da União (TCU), the maneuvers were illegal because they did not have legislative approval and hid the true extent of the fiscal deficit. The prosecutor acknowledged the motivation doing so as a means of “manipulating official statistics”. However, he concluded that they did not fall within the legal definition of a credit operation or loan, and as such they did not require congressional authorization. Nevertheless, the weight of this ruling is relative, since the outcome of Rousseff’s impeachment trial will ultimately be a political decision, more than a legal one.

(O Globo, July 14; EBC, July 17)

Four Terrorism Suspects Applied for Olympic Credentials

In view of the closeness of the date of the Olympic games, the federal police is accelerating their efforts to arrest those suspected in ‘Operation Car Wash’ and other corruption activities. On July 5, the police launched ‘Operation Black List’ to examine the misuse of R\$100m from the acquisition of medicines in the public health system. On July 6, federal police began ‘Operation Pripyat’ to investigate fraud of public funds in the construction of a nuclear power plant project. On 7 July, police began ‘Operation Ghost Busters’ to examine possible secret operations of the FPB bank, which is suspect of acting without the authority of Brazil’s central bank and of money-laundering linked to the Panama Papers. In the wake of the terrorist attack in Nice, France, the head of the cabinet of institutional security (GSI), Sérgio Etchegoyen, said that Rio’s population “will have to swap a little comfort for security” and promised to revise security protocols. More security barriers are being installed: Brazilian security forces conducted a simulated counter-terrorism operation at a Rio de Janeiro train station on July, 16. The overall operations coordinator for Olympic security said that “in the absence of a concrete threat against Brazil, we are on yellow alert, which calls for heightened attention and response levels from the ordinary green level.”

(Washington Post, July 16; O Globo, July 17; Correio da Manhã, July 18)

COLOMBIA

2016 has been a Year with Historically Low Victims Rate in Colombia

The country’s human rights council recently stated, “16,000 cases of new victims affected by different illegal groups (different from the FARC-EP) have been reported. This is a lower count than in previous years and is paralleled by “the lowest homicide rates in history.” These lower rates are due in part to “the FARC-EP’s commitment to the de-escalation of conflict and their unilateral ceasefire.” Although the guerilla have not been the lead perpetrators in the 2016 cases, Colombia’s civilian population is still being threatened by actors including the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación) and criminal gangs. According to statements by the national human rights council, “for this reason, it is crucial to reach agreements with other armed groups that are different from the FARC-EP.” In this regard, Colombia’s

human rights ombudsman and the UN have called on the “ELN to end their violence against civilians and begin negotiations with the government.” ELN commander *Nicolás Rodríguez* in return, took the opportunity to speak on the subject during the commemoration of the group’s 52 years by stating, “their group questions the true disposition of the government,” given that they have been candid about wanting to be included in the bilateral ceasefire with the FARC-EP.

([Caracol Radio](#), 15 July; [El Universal](#), 15 July; [El Espectador](#), 17 July)

Congress Begins Debate on Post-conflict Initiatives

As part of the current legislative session, congressmen and senators will begin discussing constitutional reforms as well as post conflict initiatives (approximately 50) that would guarantee the implementation of a comprehensive peace deal. The legislative act for peace (which gives judicial guarantee to all the agreements reached in Havana) in particular, is to be presented to the legislature through a “fast track mechanism” which consists of holding three debates in a process that is to last no more than 15 days. Likewise, the government will work on several fronts including “constitutional reforms, bills, decrees and resolutions to implement every detail within the scope of peace.” This includes; agricultural development projects, political participation, illicit drug trafficking and victims rights.

([EFE](#), 19 July; [El Espectador](#), 19 July; [El Mundo](#), 19 July)

CUBA

Dissidents Begin Hunger Strike to Protest Frequency of Arbitrary Detentions

Leaders of the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU), a dissident group that has been growing recently on the island, joined a hunger strike begun by one of its younger leaders, Carlos Amel Oliva, in protest of police confiscation of laptops and other technological equipment used by the group. After UNPACU leadership joined the hunger strike, some twenty of its members have been detained, 16 of whom were attempting to visit Oliva were violently detained by the government, according to UNPACU’s president José Daniel Ferrer. Guillermo Fariñas, another opposition leader, began a hunger strike in protest of the harsh treatment he received from police agents when he attempted to meet with another opposition leader. Arbitrary detentions of members of the political opposition have increased significantly since the thawing of U.S.-Cuba relations in December 2014.

([El Nuevo Herald](#), July 18; [Cubanet](#), July 19; [El Nuevo Herald](#), July 20)

Dozens of Cuban Migrants Attempt to Cross Florida Straits, Some Successful

This week there were a number of reports of Cuban migrants who attempted—both successfully and not—to cross the Florida Straits to reach the United States. In less than 48 hours on Sunday and Monday, 26 migrants from three different trips made via “rustic motored boats” landed in the Florida Keys, whereupon they were met by Border Patrol. The U.S. Coast Guard rescued six Cuban migrants on a makeshift vessel off the coast of Boca Raton, Florida on July 20 as they continued their search for two others that had disappeared the night of July 19. From October 2015 to mid-June 2016, over 44,000 Cuban migrants to the United States,

primarily by crossing the Mexican border into the U.S. Southwest. The statistic represents a five-fold increase in Cuban migration to the United States in the last five years.

([El Nuevo Herald](#), July 18; [Cubamet](#), July 19; [Cubamet](#), July 20)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

[Congress Begins Discussions on new Political Party Reform Law](#)

The major political parties in the Dominican Republic—namely the *Partido de Liberación Dominicana* (PLD), the *Partido Revolucionario Moderno* (PRM), the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD), and the *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (PRSC)—met this week under the mediation of Monsignor Agripino Núñez Collado to discuss the proposed bill that would reform the political party and electoral systems in the country. Minority parties and civil society members were not included; a meeting set to take place the week of July 25 will incorporate minority parties and representatives of civil society, such as the Chamber of Commerce (CONEP). Several of the obstacles that these meetings will tackle are issues of election and electoral campaign funding and public works contracts awarded before elections, among others. Congress is considering the party reform bill, which was drafted several years ago, after various allegations of irregularities and political contention following the May 15 general elections.

([Diario Libre](#) / [Diario Libre](#), July 18; [Hoy](#), July 19)

GUATEMALA

[Byron Lima Among at least 13 Killed in Pavon Prison Attack , MP to Investigate](#)

The National Civil Police has reported a death toll of at least 13 people after an attack on the maximum security prison in Pavon. Among the dead is Byron Lima who was serving a 30 year prison sentence for the death of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi in 1998. Lima possessed vast control inside and outside of prisons, often carrying out illicit activities from within and enjoying extensive privileges. In 2014, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), dismantled a criminal network that was operating from within the prisons that laundered money and controlled the transfer of inmates to prisons that were best suited for conducting illicit activities. The police report confirmed that nine were killed by gunfire and three others were decapitated and charred by an explosion that was detonated inside the prison. The victims' bodies will be transferred to the National Institute of Forensic Sciences (INACIF) where official causes of death will be determined. Luis Lima, brother of Byron Lima, stated that there was a plan in place to have his brother executed so that the government would have reason to move prison reform forward and justify expenditures. He claims that he informed the authorities when he learned of the assassination plot planned by executive members of government but that nothing was done. In a press conference following the attack, President Jimmy Morales dismissed Luis Lima's statements as irresponsible. Morales stated that the attack will be thoroughly investigated and that no piece of evidence will be excluded from the process. Another theory that has emerged regarding the attack identifies Marvin Montiel Marin also known as "El Taquero", another inmate that led a rival group in the prison that clashed with Lima in criminal activities, as responsible for Lima's death. Attorney General and head of the Public Ministry (MP), Thelma Aldana, stated that the MP and International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) plan to conduct an investigation into Byron Lima's death, who is said to have died in the attack of gunshot wounds.

([La Hora](#), July 20; [La Hora](#), July 19; [La Hora](#), July 19; [La Hora](#), July 18)

PDH Enables Access to Information

The Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDH) held a workshop with the staff from the Public Ministry (MP) to strengthen interagency work in compliance with the Law of Access to Public Information. Jenifer Vargas, head of the Civil and Political Rights Unit of the PDH, commented that the workshop is responding to a need to improve coordination efforts between agencies so that they may comply with the law better and reduce complaints. In 2015, 83 complaints were filed regarding denial of information by officials and in 2016 there have been 176.

([Prensa Libre](#), July 14)

Court Prepares Resolution for State Corruption Case

Judge Miguel Angel Galvez will begin revealing verdicts for the 57 accused in the state corruption case, which includes former President Otto Perez Molina and his Vice President Roxana Baldetti, among others. From June 13 to June 18, the court held hearings to indict a range of public officials, politicians, and prominent businessmen implicated in the ransacking of millions of public funds revealed by investigations carried out by the Public Ministry (MP) and International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Both Molina and Baldetti gave testimonies during the hearings to counter accusations of money laundering, bribery, and conspiracy and to deny knowledge of the criminal network that operated through state institutions during their administration.

([Prensa Libre](#), July 21)

Ministry of Education to Penalize Protesting Teachers

Departmental directors are being ordered by the Ministry of Education's Oscar Hugo Lopez to report all teachers that participated in the protest organized by the Union of Education Workers and led by Joviel Acevedo. Protestors demanded that the Ministry of Health and Education comply with collective agreements that would increase budgets and provide supplies. Minister Lopez stated that teachers will be reprimanded and face other potential sanctions.

([La Hora](#), July 19)

HONDURAS

Government Assigns Funds for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

The Government of Honduras announced the allocation of ten million lempiras (about \$ 434,593) for the operations of the Committee for Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Communicators Social Justice and operators. This provision of funds is a reaction to the numerous murders of environmental and indigenous activists, and the threat of the U.S. to withdraw its funding from the country if the 'Berta Cáceres

Human Rights in Honduras Act' gets passed. The Act aims to suspend U.S. funding to Honduras for their police and military operations, including funds for equipment and training, until the Honduran government investigates credible reports indicating that police and military are violating citizens' human rights.

([La Tribuna](#), July 20; [Presidencia de Honduras](#), July 20; [Tiempo](#), July 20)

MEXICO

Government Aims to Prevent Racial Practices in Mexico

The congressional standing committee in Mexico (which includes bi-partisan deputies and senators) has called on authorities of all branches of government to “strengthen measures that prevent and punish discriminatory behavior based on ethnicity, race, nationality and skin color.” Members of congress agreed that in Mexico, discrimination based on such characteristics is “common practice both socially and institutionally,” and therefore noted that it is the obligation of the “state, civil society and authorities” to counter them. The committee issued recommendations in which it called on the “state to provide information on afro-descendant communities” and to “implement the constitutional guarantees on indigenous rights,” which include access to government participation. Furthermore, the committee asked for an increase in translation services within tribunals and public ministries operating in indigenous communities. National human rights entities working in coordination with the UN have proposed that congress in return “reopens the debate on constitutional reform regarding indigenous matters” in order to clearly “establish their fundamental rights.”

([Noticias MVS](#), 17 July; [Diario de México](#), 18 July; [El Universal](#), 18 July)

NICARAGUA

Nicaragua Celebrates the 37th Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution

On July 19, thousands of Nicaraguan public employees and supporters of the ruling Sandinista party (FSLN), marched through the streets of Managua in support of President Daniel Ortega, who is seeking a sixth term in office in November's general elections. Celebrations were held in the main square of the capital in order to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the Sandinista revolution, in which dictator Somoza was removed from power.

([La Prensa](#), July 19; [La Prensa](#), July 19)

Opposition Meets with OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro

On July 19, OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro met with Luis Callejas, presidential candidate of the opposition coalition *Coalición Nacional por la Democracia*. *Coalición Nacional por la Democracia* was banned from participating in November elections in a controversial ruling of the Supreme Court (CSJ). Callejas met with Secretary Almagro in order to discuss the democratic crisis that Nicaragua is facing, the lack of transparency of the electoral process, and the persecution of the parties in the opposition. Other members of *Coalición Nacional por la Democracia*, such as candidate for the Vice-presidency Violeta Granera and Wilber López, leader of the coalition's parliamentary group, also attended the meeting. They are undertaking a tour in the

United States (New York, Washington, and Miami), visiting different human rights organizations and meeting with numerous members of Congress in order to publicize the Nicaraguan crisis.

([La Prensa](#), July 19; [Diario Las Américas](#), July 19)

PERU

[President Humala Seeks the Eradication of Poverty in Peru](#)

The current president visited infrastructure projects, including a new health center in *Puerto Inca* this week, as part of his government's plan to create labor opportunities for the country's most vulnerable regions. Through policies that target "education, health, social assistance, and infrastructure," Humala hopes to break "generational and cyclical poverty." In order to implement such programs, the president called for the "mobilization of governmental authorities to the regions with the greatest need," like the *Huánuco* province. Infrastructure plans include the *Pachitea* Bridge, which will give Amazonian province access to other markets. This infrastructure project alone has created "500 jobs in the region," and has created the area into a communications and development center.

([El Peruano](#), 17 July; [AmericaTV](#), 18 July; [La Republica](#), 18 July)

VENEZUELA

[Maduro Extends State of Emergency and Exception with Supreme Court Approval](#)

On July 12, President Nicolás Maduro extended the State of Emergency and Exception through presidential decree N. 2.371, which will prolong his extraordinary powers for another 60 days. According to the Official Gazette, where the decree was published, the decree is meant to provide "protection to Venezuelans against the economic war." Opposition leaders quickly condemned the extension, alleging its reasons were poorly defined and its language was too vague. Carlos Vecchio, acting leader of the *Voluntad Popular* party, declared that the extension of the state of emergency was tantamount to an extension of "inflation and scarcity...of crisis and disaster." On July 14, the National Assembly opposition majority condemned the extension, deeming it unconstitutional on the grounds that the constitution only allows for a single extension, despite this being the third extension. On July 19, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court declared the extension to be constitutional. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, called on the Maduro administration to comply with the obligation to inform other UN nations about his reasons for taking such a measure. Maduro first decreed the State of Emergency and Exception on January 14, 2016.

([El Nacional](#), July 13; [El Universal](#), July 18; [El Nacional](#) / [El Universal](#), July 19)

[UN Calls on Venezuela to Accept International Humanitarian Aid](#)

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, called on the Venezuelan government on July 19 to accept the humanitarian aid in foodstuff that the UN has offered the country amid its economic, political,

and humanitarian crisis, as well as ensure the just distribution of medicines and foodstuffs. In her statement, Gilmore also expressed concern about reports of excessive use of force in government responses to protests and demonstrations by citizens regarding scarcity of food and medicine, as well as detentions that took place at those protests. As yet, the Venezuelan executive branch has yet to declare a humanitarian crisis in the country and has consequently turned down international offers of humanitarian aid. Over last weekend, an estimated 130,000 Venezuelans crossed the country's western border into Colombia to purchase basic goods that are unaffordable or unavailable in Venezuela.

([El Universal](#) / [El Carabobeño](#), July 19; [La Nación](#), July 20)

AFRICA

BURUNDI

[The African Union talks Burundi and Bujumbura Decided to Boycott the Summit](#)

During the 27th Summit of the African Union opened this Sunday, 19 July in Kigali, Bujumbura decided to repatriate its delegation on Friday when the Heads of State had not yet arrived in the Rwandan capital. According to the president of the Forces for National Liberation (FNL), the Burundian authorities have decided to boycott the summit to avoid “unfavorable judge” to the country and people of Burundi. Léonce Ngendakumana, the new Vice President of the FRODEBU party, said that “this solitary behavior of Burundian authorities will reinforce the distrust of the international community towards the Burundi.” So far, the government has not made any statement on the reasons for the withdrawal from the AU Summit.

Russia and Egypt have said they will support a UN police force only if the Bujumbura government agrees to its deployment. The UN police force would be tasked with monitoring security and human rights in coordination with African Union rights observers and military experts. Burundi has agreed to allow 100 AU rights observers and 100 AU military experts into the country to monitor the crisis, but fewer than 50 have in fact begun work on the ground. The draft resolution urges the government to speed up the deployment of the AU monitors and to enter into dialogue with all opposition groups including "those outside the country" to end the crisis. Political talks scheduled to open this week in Tanzania collapsed when the government refused to sit down with some opponents in exile. The Security Council is under pressure to take action in Burundi, where the descent into violence has raised fears of mass atrocities, similar to those that convulsed neighboring Rwanda in 1994. Burundi has been in turmoil since President Pierre Nkurunziza announced plans in April last year to run for a third term, which he went on to win.

([RPA](#), July 18)

[UN Security Council may Send Police to Burundi](#)

The United Nations Security Council is considering sending up to 228 U.N. police to Burundi to monitor the security and human rights situation in the country. France circulated a draft resolution to the 15-member

council on Friday that would deploy police for one year and ask U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to report on grave security incidents or human rights abuses. Burundi's U.N. ambassador, Albert Shingiro, said on Friday his country would only accept up to 50 unarmed U.N. police, adding that "the sovereignty of Burundi must be fully respected."

([Africanewshttps://www.today.ng/news/africa/153024/amnesty-intl-calls-speedy-probe-burundi-ministers-murder](https://www.today.ng/news/africa/153024/amnesty-intl-calls-speedy-probe-burundi-ministers-murder), [Eyewitness News](#), [The Standard Digital News](#), [TVC News](#), [Daily Excelsior](#), [The Indian Express](#), [Daily Nation](#), July 16)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

[Presidential Party Announces Political Rallies on July 29 and August 7](#)

The presidential majority party announced that they will be holding political rallies on July 29 in Tata-Raphael stadium in Kinshasa and on August 7 at the esplanade of the People palace. The objective of the political rallies is to incite a national dialogue and invite citizens to register for upcoming elections. Citizens are also encouraged to participate in political demonstrations following the political rallies. The general secretary of the majority party, Aubin Minaku, made the announcement early on Wednesday. This announcement is a direct response to the political meeting organized by the political opposition on July 31, for which Etienne Tshisekedi, president of the opposition party UDPS, and Moise Katumbi, a presidential candidate for the upcoming election, have scheduled to return to the DRC from Brussels and London respectively.

([7sur7](#), July 20; [RFI Afrique](#), July 21)

GHANA

[The Electoral Commission of Ghana Exhibits Voter Register](#)

The Electoral Commission's (EC) exhibition of the voter register has begun on Monday, July 18 and is running till Sunday, August 7. The exhibition gives voters the opportunity to verify their personal details ahead of the 2016 general elections. Persons whose names were deleted from the register after using the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) cards as a proof of their citizenship to register before the 2012 elections, following a recent ruling of the Supreme Court, will also be allowed to re-register onto the electoral roll during the first 10 days of this exercise.

The EC said it has printed and distributed the provisional voter register to all its District Offices across the country for deployment. It has also ensured that 29,000 Biometric Verification Devices (BVD) with backups will be deployed to all polling and exhibition centers. The EC has already indicated that prospective voters will be required to be verified biometrically to help reduce most of the challenges associated with the BVD on the Election Day.

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) has deployed 275 persons to observe the entire process of voter register exhibition exercise conducted by the Electoral Commission. The observers will be stationed at selected exhibition centers in all the 275 constituencies and will submit regular reports which will be analyzed and the findings shared with key stakeholders and the public. The observers will be monitoring

the setting up of the exhibition centers, opening of the centers, availability of materials, the functioning of equipment of the Biometric Verification Device (BVD), compliance with exhibition procedures and the conduct of authorized officials and party agents.

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) has raised concerns about the non-availability of copies of the provisional voters' register for political parties in the ongoing exhibition exercise. The party's Deputy Communications Director, Anthony Karbo, explained that having access to the register is a critical part of ensuring the credibility of persons coming to verify their details in the register. The NPP is also dissatisfied with the EC decision to run the exhibition exercise concurrently with the re-registration of persons who registered using the NHIS cards.

([Citi FM Online](#) / [Citi FM Online](#) / [Class FM Online](#) / [Modern Ghana](#), July 18; [Citi FM Online](#), July 19)

KENYA

[EACC Exonerates Hassan in Chickengate Scandal](#)

The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) absolved Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) Chairman Isaack Hassan of any responsibility in the “Chickengate” scandal. The “Chickengate” scandal was a large-scale bribery case in 2009 and 2010. The British firm Smith & Ouzman Ltd. allegedly paid millions in bribes to the IEBC's predecessor, the Interim Independent Electoral Commission (IIEC), to secure a deal in ballot box procurement. Although Hassan was exonerated, several current IEBC members are facing charges as a result of the EACC's probe into the Chickengate case. The EACC recommends prosecution against IEBC CEO James Oswago and three others. The case is significant in a time when the IEBC is already under suspicion and faces public demands for reform prior to the August 2017 election.

([Daily Nation](#), 19 July; [The Star, Kenya](#), 19 July)

[Human Rights Watch: Disappearances, Deaths in Northeast](#)

Human Rights Watch (HRW) published an 87-page report on July 20 entitled “Deaths and Disappearances: Abuses in Counterterrorism Operations in Nairobi and Northeastern Kenya”. The report documents 34 instances of forcible disappearance by security forces; all cases in which the military was involved in raiding homes suspected of housing Al Shabaab sympathizers. The eight-month investigation into security abuses in Nairobi and the northeast revealed a high number of arbitrary detainments, deaths while in custody and abuse, and too few cases of suspects going through a legal trial. Families who have gone to the police about the disappearance of loved ones have found denial and silence. HRW called for the government of Kenya to address human rights abuses in its counterterrorism operations and ensure basic due process rights. The report further called for a formal and thorough investigation into these cases by the police.

([Human Rights Watch](#), 20 July)

LIBERIA

[‘Critical Moment in Liberia’s Recovery’: Carter Center Assessment of Pre-Election Environment](#)

The Carter Center has released an election observation pre-election statement, following a visit to Liberia by a handful of Carter Center staff to assess the pre-election environment. The statement—which assesses the potential for election violence and gives recommendations for how best to avoid it in addition to recommendations regarding the functionality and fairness of the elections—stresses the importance of the 2017 Presidential election as the first post-war transition from one president to another. “These will be [...] a key test for Liberians to consolidate democratic governance through peaceful competition for political power at both the presidential and legislative levels. There is a strong desire among all Liberians for the elections to proceed smoothly and peacefully,” the statement reads. Recommendations included strengthening campaign-finance rules, fully funding the National Election Commission, and working to ensure women’s political participation.

([Front Page Africa](#) July 19)

[Local Governance Policy Debate Heats Up: Lawmakers, Chiefs Concerned](#)

Chiefs and lawmakers from across the country attended a two-day consultation in Montserrado County on the draft Local Government Act, the bill that will further decentralize the country by creating a system of local, democratic administrations and elections. Both chiefs and lawmakers raised concerns that the restructuring of towns and districts that would necessarily accompany the institution of new administrative systems would effectively destroy their jobs, jurisdictions, powers, and responsibilities. Moreover, critics of the Act believe it would reduce support to already under-served areas and leaders; one participating Sinoe County representative from the National Legislature described the draft bill as a “Montserrado County based resolution.” Advocates, on the other hand, insisted that the Act would enhance local ownership of laws and governmental processes.

([Front Page Africa](#) July 17)

[Andrew Grove, Sable Mining Wants Indictment Dismissed](#)

Andrew Grove—the Sable Mining CEO who was indicted by a Liberian grand jury last month for his company’s alleged role in bribing Liberian officials to rewrite land concession laws—has filed a motion alongside his company for the dismissal of the indictment against them. The motion claims that the court has no jurisdiction over them and that statute bars it from exercising extraterritorial powers in this case. Citing part I of the Liberian Penal Code, Grove’s motion argues that because the accused reside outside Liberia and there has been no treaty to resolve that geographical dissonance, the Justice Department has no reach. The motion also argues that the indictment is inaccurate; for instance, Grove claims he is not a resident of London as the indictment states. Grove and Sable are insisting that this faultiness demonstrates the speculative nature of the indictment.

([Daily Observer](#) July 20)

Speaker Tyler's Reported Removal Plot—LPDP Financing Threat Fiscal Instrument

The Executive branch has raised concerns over the possibility of House of Representatives Speaker, Alex Tyler, using his position as an overseer of the national budget to raise elections funds for his Liberia People Democratic Party (LPDP). After founding the LPDP early this year, Speaker Tyler appointed party Chairman, Moses Kollie, as head of the House Ways, Means, and Finance Committee, the body in charge of reviewing the national budget and making recommendations to the plenary. Given this appointment and the strong push for the presidency the LPDP is making, President Sirleaf's cabinet has released a statement threatening punitive action against budget manipulation.

([Front Page Africa](#) July 21)

MOROCCO

Morocco to Return to African Union

In a message sent to the African Union (AU) summit in Kigali, Rwanda on Sunday, July 17, King Mohammed VI said Morocco plans to “take up its natural place within its institutional family” of the AU after a thirty-two year hiatus. He addressed the speech to African leaders meeting for the annual two-day summit in Rwanda. Morocco left the AU originally because of its stance on recognizing the Sahawari state in Western Sahara as a member nation. Addressing this division in his message, King Mohammed urged the AU to reconsider its stance on the “phantom state” while he works on a political solution with the UN. Through the return Morocco wants to, “work within the AU to transcend divisions”. Support for Morocco's return appears to be strong as twenty-eight members states have signed a petition calling for the reintegration of Morocco at the cost of suspending the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (French acronym RASD). On Thursday, July 21, the Algerian Minister of African Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, responded to the condition set by King Mohamed VI that RASD must be suspended. Massahel said the Moroccan decision to join the AU should be regarded as “admission” rather than a “return”, and that Morocco cannot “stipulate constitutional changes to a continent-wide organization”.

([Aljazeera](#), 18 July; [Jeune Afrique](#), 21 July)

Morocco Asks to Rejoin African Union

Moroccan King Mohammed VI asked for Morocco to be accepted to the Africa Union (AU) in a speech at the AU summit in Rwanda. Morocco left the AU in 1984 after the AU decided to make Western Sahara an independent member. Morocco considers Western Sahara part of their southern provinces. King Mohammed urged the AU to reconsider Western Sahara's membership, however it is expected that Morocco will move forward with the AU without further protest. A vote within the AU will be needed to approve Morocco's acceptance.

([Al Jazeera](#) / [BBC](#), July 18)

Handful of UN Staff Return to Western Sahara after Dispute

On 13 July, Morocco and the United Nations (UN) reached an agreement to restore the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) after 84 civilian UN personnel had been expelled. The staff was expelled after the UN Secretary General said the Moroccan presence in Western Sahara was an "occupation." The UN said MINURSO would not be able to fulfill its mandate without the 84 personnel and expressed concern for the ceasefire that has been in place since 1991. In April, the UN Security Council voted to restore the mission and extended its mandate until 2017; the Council plans to revisit the issue on 26 July. Morocco has agreed to allow 25 personnel back into the region in order to restore functionality of MINURSO.

([Reuters](#), [Morocco World News](#), July 14)

ZAMBIA

Police Nab 28 UPND Cadres, Confiscate Petrol Bombs

Police in Kasama (a city in Northern Province) arrested 28 UPND cadres and confiscated seven bottles used to make petrol bombs at the house of UPND vice presidential candidate Geoffrey Bwalya Mwamba, known as GBM. Police originally approached the cadres as they were tearing down PF campaign posters (tampering with campaign materials violates the Electoral Code of Conduct). The cadres then reportedly fled to GBM's house for protection – GBM was away in the Copperbelt campaigning. UPND responded by saying that the bombs were planted at GBM's house by police after the initial raid was conducted. The party also claims that K345,000 (\$36,087 USD) went missing from the house during a police search.

([Zambia Reports](#) / [BBC](#) / [Zambian Eye](#), July 20)

ECZ lifts suspension on campaigns in Lusaka & Namwala

The Electoral Commission of Zambia officially lifted the suspension on political campaigning in Lusaka and Namwala after 10 days. The commission also announced a new partnership with the Dag Hammarskjold Institute for Peace to hold a series of conflict prevention/management workshops for political party leadership.

([Lusaka Times](#), July 18)

ECZ accused of preparing to cancel elections, rejects claims

Speaking at a large campaign rally on July 15 (located outside of the Lusaka area where campaigning was banned until July 18), UPND presidential candidate Hakainde Hichilema (HH) claimed that the Electoral Commission of Zambia was conspiring to postpone or cancel the elections in an effort to support PF. HH offered no specific details but claimed that the ECZ was trying to provoke candidates and parties into breaching the Electoral Code of Conduct.

ECZ spokesman Cris Akufuna publically refuted the claims that the commission were intending to cancel or delay the upcoming tripartite election. The commission called the accusations, which were leveled by Hakainde Hichilema and the UPND, “baseless and unmerited.” The ECZ has no legal power to cancel elections.

([The Post](#), July 18; [Lusaka Times](#), July 19)

ASIA

BANGLADESH

[Seventh Anniversary of RTI in Bangladesh: Time for Introspection](#)

Right to Information (RTI), or Freedom of Information (FOI), laws have seen a rapid expansion in recent decades. In total, 108 countries have adopted RTI laws, but 80 of those countries have only done so in the last 25 years. While freedom of information is essential to good governance, it is also often a contentious subject among public officials, as such laws are sometimes perceived to present a challenge to their authority and ultimately a tool that can be used against them. It has been seven years since the passing of the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh. Despite her party’s role in securing the adoption of the law, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s opinion of the law is relatively unknown, most likely because she is unaware of the key factors and issues involved in the law’s implementation. However, the Right to Information Act’s implementation needs to be addressed. Currently, approximately 10,000 information applications and 200 RTI complaints are filed annually in Bangladesh. For comparison, India experiences six million applications and 35,000 RTI complaints annually. Despite the current underwhelming use of the law, politicians feel no pressure to address problems in the law’s implementation. As it stands, the law poses little threat to politicians, as they are less likely to be forced to reveal damaging information, and the number of applications currently creates little to no burden. While the work of dedicated non-governmental organizations and activists may help to sustain the law, without the support of the country’s officials and the Information Commission, the law may fall out of use.

([The Daily Star](#), July 15)

[Bangladesh Youth Vulnerable to Militancy](#)

Bangladesh’s youths have been the target of government efforts to keep track of and control militant groups within the country. Recent attacks led by university-aged men, particularly the attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery, have indicated that young people are the most vulnerable to the recruitment efforts of militant groups. The Rapid Action Battalion, Bangladesh’s elite anti-terrorism force, has recently released a list of 260 missing young men who they fear could be working with extremists. Those included on the list have been missing for at least a year. Police officials expect that the number will continue to grow as they gather more information from the men’s families and other sources. The government has been urging families to report missing youths since the Holey Artisan Bakery attack. The nation’s universities have also been included in the effort against extremism. Education Minister Nurul Islam Mahid Nahid reported that militancy has gripped

Bangladesh's schools and universities. Teachers and professors have been asked to keep an eye on their students for signs of involvement with militant groups.

([Reuters](#), July 20; [Prothom Alo](#), July 21)

Visually Impaired Demand More Braille Books on Law

During the distribution of Braille editions of 13 laws and policies to the visually impaired, activists urged the public to support those with disabilities in gaining equal access to government and social services. The public must throw their support behind those with disabilities, as they are unable to enjoy equal rights and privileges, stated officials at the event. The Braille books distributed at the event were organized by the Manusher Jonno Foundation, a partner of The Carter Center's Global Access to Information program, which then gave the books to five organizations dedicated to assisting the visually impaired. Those with disabilities often don't enjoy the same access to government services as those without disabilities, but the Braille books would better enable these individuals to exercise their rights, according to Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam. Activists at the event also called for all laws to be made accessible in Braille and for the government to make "information and technology related facilities" more easily available to those with disabilities.

([The Daily Star](#), July 20)

CHINA

Philippines Reject Bilateral Negotiations with China on South China Sea Ruling

Following the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) last week, China has remained firm on its intention to ignore the international jurisdiction over the South China Sea issue. The ruling had been a sweeping victory for the Philippines, which had brought the case against China to the international tribunal. While China had rejected the authority of international law, it had remained open to an out-of-court bilateral agreement with the Philippines. On Tuesday, July 19th, China's hopes were dashed when Philippines Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay publicly rejected the offer of his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. Mr. Yasay, who met with Mr. Wang on the sidelines of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Mongolia, stated that a meeting with China, which would have meant disregarding the ruling of the PCA, was "not consistent with our constitution and our national interest." (The Wall Street Journal)

It is unclear which direction China will take following this development; it may choose to either double down on its hardline strategy or take a softer approach to negotiations. Publicly, they have taken the former approach, announcing their intent to defend their territorial claims through various state media agencies and in speeches given by state officials. The newly elected Philippines president, Rodrigo Duterte, has announced long announced his intent to pursue bilateral talks with China. However, the outpouring of nationalism on both sides following announcement of the verdict has made pursuing such negotiations more of a difficult political maneuver. In China, video of angry citizens breaking their phones in response to the verdict has gone viral, and there have been small protests held outside U.S. fast food restaurants.

Despite his public rejection, Mr. Yasay also insisted that there were still “room for us to talk very quietly using backdoor channeling”, signaling that the Philippines would continue to try to reach a settlement with China. (Washington Post) Next week, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will travel to the Philippines to meet with President Duterte. The South China Sea will likely be one of the main focuses of their meeting.

([The Washington Post](#); July 19, [The Wall Street Journal](#), July 20)

MYANMAR

[Suu Kyi Meets with UNFC to Discuss Upcoming Panglong Conference](#)

Aung San Suu Kyi met with a senior delegation from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a bloc of nine non-signatories of last year's ceasefire agreement, to discuss the upcoming Panglong Peace Conference. The general secretary of UNFC stated "If some armed ethnic groups aren't able to be included at this stage, negotiations for their participation will continue, but if we wait for the participation of all groups, then we are not going to have the dialogue." This signals that the Panglong Conference may not include all ethnic groups as major actors had hoped. The UNFC would like Suu Kyi to address ongoing clashes throughout Myanmar between the military and armed ethnic groups. There was also a suggestion that government armed forces had made it difficult for all armed ethnic groups to participate in talks. One suggestion included a formal understanding between government forces and rebel groups before proceeding with peace talks. At least one of the leaders of the armed groups left the talk between the Myanmar government and the UNFC dissatisfied. Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly stated that the groups should consider what they can offer rather than what they want to demand. The UNFC has been invited to attend the framework review for the peace conference scheduled for the first week of August but would not wield any decision making power in the meeting. More than a dozen rebel groups are slated to host their own talks later this month in Kachin state.

([Channel News Asia](#), July 17; [Myanmar Times](#), [Mizzima](#), July 18; [Myanmar Times](#), July 19)

[Religious Affairs Minister Urges Measures to Rein in Religious Intolerance](#)

The religious affairs minister has urged the official monastic regulatory body, State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, to take action against monks engaged in inappropriate behavior that incites intolerance against non-Buddhists. The minister was also critical of the monks' use of social media calling it a waste of time and a platform for creating tension. It was further stated that the government wishes to push the Interfaith Dialogue Group to protect religious freedom.

([Democratic Voice of Burma](#), July 15)

[Myanmar's Military Investigates Death of Villagers carried out by Soldiers](#)

Major Thein Zaw of the Myanmar Army's Northeast Command said several soldiers had been arrested in the face of five civilian deaths reportedly carried out by soldiers of the armed forces. A senior army officer allegedly promised family members of the murdered villagers a full investigation of the deaths and offered

monetary compensation. Rights groups like Amnesty International have said it is rare for soldiers to be held accountable for their actions. News of the killings spread quickly throughout the country via technology which likely made it difficult for the military to brush off the crimes. Villagers reported soldiers entered into the village in Shan state and tied up and led off the victims before killing them. In a press conference on July 20th, the army took responsibility for troops who had violated the law and killed civilians and promised action would be taken against the soldiers.

([Reuters](#), [Irrawaddy](#), July 20)

Long-delayed Religion Census Reveals Modest Muslim Increase

The highly anticipated census data on religious affiliation has finally been released in Myanmar. According to the figures, Buddhists make up 87.9 percent of Myanmar's population which has decreased 1.5 percent over the last 30 years. 6.2 percent of the population identifies as Christian, 4.3 percent identifies as Muslim, and .5 percent of the population is Hindu. The total population is an estimated 51.4 million. The number reflect a slight increase in non-Buddhist populations since the last census in 1983. Most census data was released last year but data on religious and ethnic composition was withheld due to fears of heightened tension during the landmark November elections. Figures on the Muslim population were expected to be double what the actual census data reflected.

([Myanmar Times](#), July 21)

NEPAL

No-Confidence Motion and Budget Bill at a Deadlock in Nepal Parliament

Politics have become increasingly polarized in Nepal as the House Speaker Onsari Gharti declared all business would be tabled on Friday, July 15th and the focus would be on the no-confidence motion filed against current Prime Minister Oli's government. The announcement came as Gharti declined a request to allow the passage of the Finance Bill which is necessary for implementation of the budget. Gharti belongs to the Maoist party, the joint initiator of the no-confidence motion, which hopes to form a new government if the Oli government fails. However, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) will not let Parliament discuss the no-confidence motion until budget-related bills are put on the priority list. The governing UML and NC- Maoist alliance are locked in a power struggle over which issue should be addressed first. The UML has demanded the budget be addressed because it was part of Parliament business long before the no-confidence motion was put forth. It is unclear who will triumph in the deadlock but it is said addressing the no-confidence motion before the budget would violate parliamentary regulations and procedures.

([The Indian Express](#) July 16; [Kathmandu Post](#), July 21)

Nepal: Madhesis to Vote against Oli Government during No-trust Motion

An alliance of Madhesis, a large ethnic minority from the southern region of Nepal, and other ethnic minority groups have decided to vote against Prime Minister Oli's government in the no-confidence vote. The parliament will discuss the no-trust motion on Thursday, July 21.

[\(The Indian Express, July 18\)](#)

TIMOR-LESTE

[Timor-Leste is PIDF Newest Member](#)

The Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) has welcomed Timor Leste as part of the growing country members of the forum. This followed the signing of the instrument of accession by Hernani Coelho da Silva, Foreign Affairs Minister of Timor Leste, on July 14, signaling their formal admission to the PIDF Charter. Timor Leste becomes the 13th member of the PIDF (11th member state).

[\(The Fiji Times, July 19\)](#)

[ASEAN is Preparing Condition for Timor-Leste](#)

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Roberto Soares, affirmed that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had prepared condition for Timor-Leste as they were seriously discussing the adherence of TL with ASEAN. “We see that ASEAN has a seriousness and commitment to discuss and prepare condition for future adherence of Timor-Leste with ASEAN,” Soares said. He made the statements after disseminating information about the process of Timor-Leste’s adherence with ASEAN for the student at the Universidade Oriental Timor Lorosa’e (UNITAL).

[\(Guide Post Magazine, July 15\)](#)