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**Peace Programs Monthly Update: June, 2016**

**Choice of countries for updates** (pg. 2)

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 cross-cutting 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.

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#### IRAQ

##### [Efforts to Retake Fallujah from ISIS Deemed Successful](#)

Beginning May 22, a US-led coalition to counter the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), Iraqi government forces, and supporting militias advanced on Fallujah in an effort to recapture the key city. ISIS seized control of the city in late 2013, and has held it since. From its seat in Fallujah, approximately forty miles west of the Iraqi capital, ISIS launched terrorist attacks and bombings on Baghdad. The groups slowly made progress, first reclaiming towns on the outskirts such as Karma and Naymiyah. 20,000 Iraqi soldiers and supporting Shiite militias were brought in, assisted by US airstrikes, and together they entered the urban areas of the city. ISIS forces mounted a fierce counterattack, utilizing human shields and land mines, yet the Iraqi military and allied militias continued their push into the city in early June and continued to claim southern Fallujah neighborhoods. After retaking a key road from ISIS on June 11, the Iraqi Army secured a safe route, known as al-Salam Junction, for civilians to leave Fallujah. The Norwegian aid group, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), stated that as of June 13 approximately 27,580 civilians fled Fallujah since the offensive began. There are about 50,000 civilians still trapped in Fallujah and more than 43,000 Iraqis from Fallujah have been displaced over the last three weeks. Special forces supposedly met little resistance as they entered the center of the city on June 17, towards the symbolic main government administration building where the Iraqi flag was raised to signify the beginning of the re-establishment of government control in Fallujah. On June 26, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi issued a celebratory statement on Iraqi state TV, stating that the battle for Fallujah is over. According to an Iraqi commander, the Iraqi army only has yet to clear the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) out of two more neighborhoods in Fallujah, Jolan and Al-Muallemin. The five week offensive has displaced approximately 85,000 people. Civilians are expected to be able to reenter the city in the coming weeks, however the UN has issued a warning that civilian resettlement in Fallujah should be slow and cautious as IEDs are still present throughout the area. Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi stated that the majority of Fallujah is “safe and habitable.”

([Al Jazeera](#) / [BBC](#), June 6; [Daily Star](#) / [New York Times](#), June 13; [UPI](#) / [NRT](#) / [Al Jazeera](#), June 22; [Foreign Policy](#), June 24; [BBC](#) / [Slate](#) / [Newsweek](#), <http://www.newsweek.com/iraq-liberates-fallujah-isis-474678> 26 June 2016)

##### [Iraqi Army Looks towards Mosul](#)

The Iraqi Army is advancing towards Mosul after the liberation of Fallujah. During a trip to Fallujah, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi pledged to reclaim Mosul. Mosul was taken by the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 and their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is suspected to be hiding there. On June 14, the Iraqi Army reclaimed Nasr, a village 35 miles south of Mosul as part of the new initiative. The United States (US) and the International

Coalition against IS stated that they will plan logistics for the Iraqi army but will not take a lead role on the military offensive. The US and coalition military efforts are limited to advisory roles and air support, which now includes apache helicopters. US President Barack Obama and Iraqi President al-Abadi indicated that the offensive in Mosul will begin by the end of 2016. The initiative comes amidst US concerns over the Iraqi Army's ability to retake the city. US military officials expressed concern over the Iraqi Army's inefficient supply lines, out of date front line maintenance system and soviet era equipment. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also raised humanitarian concerns about civilian displacement during the proposed offensive on Mosul.

([The New York Times](#), June 4; [The Washington Post](#) / [Reuters](#) June 13; [Newsweek](#) June 28)

### US Congress Approves 2.7 Billion Dollar Loan for Iraq

The United States (US) Congress approved a 2.7 billion dollar loan for Iraq to be used for war materials such as ammunition and maintenance equipment for vehicles and fighter jets. The funds will also be used to maintain navy ships stationed at the Umm Qasr port that are protecting southern oil platforms. The loan comes as an economic relief to an Iraq that has suffered economically from falling oil prices.

([Reuters](#) / [Business Insider](#), June 29)

## ISIS/DAESH

### ISIS Claims Responsibility for International Attacks

The Islamic State in Syria and al-Sham (ISIS) claimed responsibility for four international attacks in June. On June 12, Omar Mateen committed a mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people. Mateen pledged allegiance to ISIS and made other claims to terror affiliations in a phone call to the police. ISIS then claimed Mateen was an ISIS fighter. On June 13, a French police captain was killed outside his home in Maghnanville before his wife and son were taken hostage by Larossi Abala. Abala killed the wife and left the son unharmed. Abala pledged allegiance to ISIS during a live stream of the attack which he posted to Facebook. ISIS then claimed Abala was an ISIS fighter. On June 26, the ISIS news agency Amaq claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing on the border between Syria and Jordan in which 7 Jordanian security forces died. The King Abdullah of Jordan responded by closing the borders and vowing to hit back "with an iron fist." On June 27, an ISIS affiliate in Yemen executed seven coordinated attacks at security checkpoints in Mukalla killing 43. ISIS and Al-Qaeda have been using the civil war in Yemen to execute attacks and gain terrain.

([CNN](#), June 12; [The New York Times](#), June 13; [Al Arabiya](#), June 27; [Al Arabiya](#), June 28)

## ISRAEL/PALESTINE



## Paris Peace Initiative Underway as Ban Ki-moon Visits Israel/ Palestine

Talks organized by the French government began in Paris on June 3rd to reaffirm the commitment of states to the two-state solution. Neither a Palestinian delegation nor an Israeli delegation were in attendance for the preliminary meeting aimed at creating a framework for future talks, but John Kerry, Ban Ki-moon and representatives of the Arab League, the European Union and some Arab states were present. The European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs Council passed a resolution supporting the initiative. The Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas supported the initiative saying that it marked an end of the US's monopoly on mediation between Israel and Palestine. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu supports an initiative proposed by Egyptian president Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi that would bring Israeli and Palestinian representatives face to face, rather than through a European mediator. Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry Dore Gold also criticized the Paris plan, calling it a form of "colonialism" comparable to the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. Prior to the negotiations the French government stated that they would recognize Palestine if the initiative failed, but later walked back from that position. Most commentators are pessimistic about the possibility of success from these negotiations, citing distance between the positions of the two sides. In related news, Naftali Bennett of the Jewish Home Party has announced that his party would leave the government if it recognized a Palestinian state. At the end of June, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon made his final visits to Israel and Palestine in an attempt to plea for the avoidance of a "one state reality". Standing beside Netanyahu, Ban Ki Moon condemned terror attacks on Israelis, while making it clear that Israel's security measure do not solve the problem. In Palestine, Ban condemned the Gaza blockade, stating that "the closure of Gaza suffocates its people, stifles its economy and impedes reconstruction efforts. It's a collective punishment for which there must be accountability."

([Middle East Monitor](#); [The Guardian](#) June 3 / [Times of Israel](#), June 5 / [Middle East Monitor](#) June 6 / [Al-Jazeera](#) June 28)

## Tel-Aviv Attack Prompts Troop Boosts and Home Demolitions

On the night of the June 8<sup>th</sup> 2 Palestinian men from the occupied territories opened fire at a café in Tel Aviv, killing four Israelis and wounding 6. The attackers were both from the Hebron area and had entered Israel illegally from the occupied West Bank. Israeli and Palestinian Authority officials have both condemned the attack, while the mayor of Tel Aviv and the PA both attributed the cause of the attack to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the denial of civil rights to the majority of Palestinians. The mayor of the attackers' home village also suggested the attacks were linked to security force violence. The deputy defense minister of Israel rejected these claims. Hamas and the Progressive Front for the Liberation of Palestine both made statements supporting the terror attack, while Israeli lawmaker Bezalel Smotrich expressed "concern" that the attackers were captured alive instead of being executed extra-judicially. In response, the new Israeli defense minister Avigdor Lieberman has enacted a policy of collective punishment for the attack; the village the attackers came from has been cordoned off, proceedings have been begun to demolish the homes of the attackers family members and moves have been made toward the reestablishment of the policy of holding the bodies of Palestinians who die in attacks against Israelis. Israel has also halted 83,000 travel permits for Ramadan, further restricting the freedom of movement for Palestinians, and have announced they will increase the number of security forces in the occupied territories.

([Haaretz](#), 9 June / [Middle East Eye](#), 9 June / [Ma'an news](#), 9 June / [Al-Jazeera](#), 9 June)

## Turkey and Israel Finalize the Resumption of Diplomatic Relations

Turkey and Israel finalized a deal to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries. Ties between the two were strained after Israel imposed a blockade of Gaza and dissolved completely in 2010 after the Mavi Marmara incident when nine Turkish citizens were killed by Israeli military in an on-board clash. The Free Trade Agreement between the United States (U.S.), Israel, and Turkey established in April can only enter into force after a normalization of relations. Turkey dropped its “absolute” demand for lifting the blockade of Gaza in order to facilitate the agreement in favor of a compromise that would allow Turkish aid groups to deliver aid to Gaza through a port in a new artificial island off the coast of Gaza. The project will cost \$5 billion and will include a sea port and an airport. Gaza’s current seaport is too small to handle container ships, which Turkey plans to send, Gaza’s Yasser Arafat International Airport was destroyed in 2000 when Israel bombed the radar station and control tower. The development is being called “Separation Island” and would allow for controlled economic activity between Gaza and the rest of the world. Funding is expected to come from international state sponsor and donors. Israel will not contribute financially to the effort, but it has agreed to allow international construction agents to enter its waters to build the port. The deal also included permission to deliver much needed humanitarian aid to Gaza, a territory the United Nations (UN) deemed “unlivable” in the next 5 years. Gaza is also suffering from a water crisis, as the European Union (EU) Commissioner Johannes Hahn noted that 95% of the water in Gaza has become undrinkable during a visit to a desalinization plant under construction. Turkey reaffirmed that talks with Hamas would not end because of the deal, as many in Hamas were worried that Turkey would be forced to take a more active role in detaining Hamas members abroad. Hamas praised Turkey's new normalization deal with Israel, making several statements supporting the move and praised Turkey for its "official and popular efforts to end the Gaza blockade".

([International Middle East Media Center](#), June 14; [Newsweek](#), June 21; [Saudi Gazette](#), June 22; [Voltaire / Breitbart](#), June 23; [Ma'an News](#) / [Al-Jazeera](#), June 28)

## Israeli Military Revokes Hannibal Directive

The Israeli military revoked the Hannibal directive, a provision that allowed the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to use maximum force when preventing the capture of soldiers even at the soldiers’ risk, on June 28<sup>th</sup>. An anonymous military official told press that chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot ordered a new procedure to be created in cases of abduction. The Hannibal directive was a secret directive written by officials in the IDF in the late 1980s, supposedly ending in 2000. The directive was still in use in the past decade, and different interpretations of Hannibal existed within the IDF. In 2011, the IDF released statements to soldiers prior to the release of Gilad Shalit, calling on soldiers to do anything to avoid capture. During the Gaza war of 2014 Second Lt. Hadar Goldin was abducted in an ambush near Rafah. The IDF invoked Hannibal and carried out a devastating bombardment of Gaza in which an estimated 135 Palestinians were killed, drawing international condemnation. It is unclear whether or not the new procedure for abductions will have an effect on Israel’s prisoner exchange policies.

([The New York Times](#), June 29; [Haaretz](#), June 30)

## Knesset Passes New Anti-terror Law, Approval for Additional Settlement Funds

The Knesset passed a controversial new law significantly expanding the definition of terrorism and expanding the power of the defense minister. The law advances a much broader definition of terrorism and members of terrorist organizations to include "passive members" who do not have a role in the organization's activity.

Aiding terrorism has been redefined to someone who provides goods or services to a terrorist even in the person was not aware they were supplying someone committing a crime. The standard of being aware of the crime to be considered abetting it has been replaced with an evidence a "reasonable person" would have been aware of the crime. The law also gives the defense minister, currently far right minister Avigdor Lieberman, the power to confiscate property of alleged members of terrorist organizations in a way similar to how administrative detention has allowed detention without trial. The laws have been added to Israel's civil law code, so they will only take force in Israel proper, not the Occupied Territories. In addition to the new anti-terror law, Knesset approved an additional 18 million shekels for settlement related projects in the West Bank on June 19. The 18 million will be added to an already approved 80 million for various projects. The Israeli Tourism Ministry reported that 20% of the budget will be allocated to tourism projects beyond the Green Line, the border decided on in the 1949 Armistice Agreement. The ministry cited an increase in tourism to the West Bank as the reason for an increased budget. Palestine Liberation Organization secretary general Saeb Erekat condemned the additional funding, referring to it as a "slap in the face of the international community." He believes that with the expansion of funding into West Bank projects "Israel is doing everything possible to sabotage every effort to achieve a just and lasting peace." Criticism has also come from the Israeli left. Zionist Union lawmaker Amir Peretz criticized the coalition government of spending money on settlement projects rather than on re-distribution projects within Israel.

([Haaretz](#), June 15; [Ma'an News](#), June 16; [The Times of Israel](#) / [Al-Arabiya](#), June 19)

## LIBYA

### [Government of National Accord Forces Lead an offensive to Retake Sirte](#)

Pro-Government of National Accord (GNA) forces began an offensive the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-held coastal city of Sirte on June 8. As GNA forces enter the city, they were met with ISIS resistance and suicide bombings. Spokesman for Libya's GNA forces, Reda Issa, confirmed that advancing GNA forces were hit with three suicide bombings on June 12 during the offensive. ISIS launched several suicide attacks after the beginning of the offensive; however, despite continued resistance, a spokesperson for the GNA forces told press that they had recaptured the city's port and the al-Sawara neighborhood on June 13. The UN envoy to Libya Martin Kobler was impressed by this progress, but reminded "all fighters to respect international humanitarian law." Once entering Sirte, GNA forces discovered secret ISIS jails inside houses and an explosives factory.

([CNN](#), 23 June / [AlJazeera](#), 22 June / [Telegraph](#) / [The Times](#) / [Daily Mail](#), 19 June; [Middle East Eye](#), June 27; [Africa News](#), June 28)

### [UN and EU Approve Missions to Libya](#)

On June 13, the United Nations (UN) Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) until December 15, 2016. UNSMIL monitors human rights, provides humanitarian assistance and support institutions in Libya, and works to counter the proliferation of arms. The Security Council also encouraged the Government of National Accord, the UN backed government, to support political outreach and reconciliation efforts, and to include women in democratic transition, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, the Security Council called for Libyan forces to unite in a

fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The UN Security Council also unanimously approved a crackdown on maritime arms smuggling off the coast of Libya. The resolution allows European Union (EU) vessels to seize boats suspected of smuggling illegal weapons. The EU maritime forces were already monitoring and seizing boats suspected of human trafficking. This resolution expands their duties into capturing arms smugglers. Members of the UN expressed concern that weapons were reaching terrorist organizations in Libya such as the Islamic State. The UN envoy to Libya stated the country has 20 million weapons for a population of 6 million. Libya has been under a UN embargo since 2011, however the new unity government is allowed to import arms with UN approval. On June 20, EU ministers agreed to boost their naval presence and operation in the Mediterranean in order to address the number of migrants leaving from Libya by sea. Operation Sophia, an EU naval operation to counter human smugglers in the Mediterranean, has been extended until July 27, 2017. Operation Sophia has also been expanded to include training Libyan coastguards and navy, and implementing the UN arms embargo off the coast of Libya. Operation Sophia began on June 22 2015, and has saved an estimated 16,000 lives.

([UN News Centre](#), June 13; [News 24](#) / [Reuters](#), June 14; [BBC](#), June 15; [Gulf News Libya](#) / [European Council](#) / [ABC](#), June 20)

### Thousands of Migrants Rescued off the Coast of Libya

The Italian coast guard estimated that they had rescued more than 3,500 migrants less than 35 miles from the Libyan coast in 27 operations on June 26. Between June 23 and June 26, more than 10,000 migrants had been rescued from the Mediterranean, including 5,000 on one day. Officials said that calm sea conditions, which makes travelling in overcrowded boats less of a risk, have led to a large number of migrants to attempt to cross the Mediterranean. All migrants, which are believed to have come from West Africa, were transferred to ports in southern Italy, however it is not known yet if they will be able to stay in Italy. On 29 June, an Italian naval operation began to salvage the wreckage of a boat that sunk on 18 April 2015 which carried approximately 700 migrants. The boat is believed to have flipped and sunk when many passengers tried to get the attention of a passing ship, although supposedly most of the migrants were locked in the lower quarters of the ship by the people smugglers whom they paid to take them across the water. The boat was found by the Italian navy in May of last year, nearly 85 miles from the coast of Libya. Although only 169 bodies have been discovered thus far, the Italian government has set the goal of identifying all the bodies and giving a proper burial to all. If possible, they also seek to locate and notify any existing family members. This accident has been the single deadliest since the Mediterranean refugee trips began.

([USA Today](#), June 26; [Deutsche Welle](#), June 27; [Wall Street Journal](#) / [Al Jazeera](#), June 29)

## MOROCCO

### Polisario Front Leader Abdelaziz Dies

Mohamed Abdelaziz, former secretary-general of the Polisario Front movement, died at the age of 68 on Tuesday, May 31. The Front works to end Moroccan presence in Western Sahara, declaring the area the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976, though Morocco still considers it to be its “southern provinces.” Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced a week of mourning for Abdelaziz while the

Front has declared a 40 day mourning period followed by the appointment of a new secretary-general. The conflict between SADR and Morocco currently remains deadlocked over a referendum on self-determination. Morocco remains the only African country not to be a member of the African Union though the SADR is a full member.

([The Wall Street Journal](#), May 31; [BBC](#), June 1)

### Moroccan King Mohammed VI: Starts the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema to Combat Religious Extremism

The Moroccan King Mohammed VI announced the creation of the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema. The foundation brings together 120 Ulema, or Muslim scholars, from 31 countries in Africa to promote the values of moderation, tolerance, and coexistence in Islam in order to combat religious extremism in the region. King Mohammed VI also opened a religious training center entitled the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Morchidines, and Morchidates just over a year ago. This religious training center aims to educate and promote a moderate form of Islam “based on the Maliki rite and Sunni Sufism,” reports the Moroccan American Center for Policy. The United States (US) State Department has applauded King Mohammed VI’s anti-radicalization strategies in 2014 and 2015.

([Morocco on the Move](#), June 16; [The New Times](#), June 17)

## RUSSIA

### Russia Announces Ceasefire Initiatives after Kerry’s Critiques

On June 15, United States (US) Secretary of State John Kerry accused Russia of violating the Syrian ceasefire agreement signed in February and stated US patience with Russia is ‘very limited’. Secretary Kerry also said members of opposition groups need to be held accountable for ceasefire violations. The night after Kerry’s remarks, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov called for a “long-term ceasefire” in Aleppo. Bogdanov urged the opposition and the Syrian government to resume United Nations peace talks in Geneva. The Russian defense ministry also reportedly initiated an immediate two-day ceasefire effective at midnight, a “regime of calm”, in hopes to stabilize the situation in Aleppo. During the reported ceasefire announcement, Russia accused al-Nusra Front of initiating attacks and rebel forces of waging war in southwest Aleppo. The Russian ceasefire claim did not specify which groups were included in the agreement. Since the ceasefire was called, it has been broken by all parties including Russian forces, who dropped airstrikes over Aleppo less than 24 hours after the ceasefire was called.

([Al Arabiya](#), June 15; [BBC](#) / [Times of Israel](#), June 16)

### U.S. and Russian Jets Nearly Clash Above Syria

On 16 June, United States (U.S.) F/A-18 fighter jets had a close encounter with Russian SU-34 fighter jets after the Russian jets carried out airstrikes on U.S.-backed Syrian opposition forces. While the Russian jets left when the U.S. jets arrived at the scene, the Russian forces returned and attacked when the F/A-18’s momentarily left

to refuel. The Pentagon made a statement about the incident, noting that "Russia's continued strikes at At-Tanf, even after US attempts to inform Russian forces through proper channels of ongoing coalition air support to the counter-ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) forces, created safety concerns for US and coalition forces." Russia has denied the allegations, stating that it is the U.S.' responsibility to inform the Russia of the whereabouts of U.S.-backed rebels, which they supposedly did not do. Many U.S. officials have raised questions regarding the validity of these claims, particularly in light of video clips from media outlet Russia Today showing Russian jets being equipped with the RBK-500 ZAB-25 cluster bomb that was used to destroy in the Khmeimim airbase in Syria. The clip was very quickly removed, but later recovered by activists.

([Middle East Eye](#) / [Israel National News](#) / [The Daily Beast](#) - June 20)

## EU Envoys Extend Economic Sanctions on Russia

On 21 June, 28 European Union (EU) envoys unanimously decided to extend the financial, defense, and energy sanctions against Russia until the end of January 2017, due to the conflict in Ukraine. The sanctions have been in place since July 2014. While hugely supported by countries like the United Kingdom (UK), several countries, such as Germany and Italy, questioned whether the sanction extension is necessary and if the EU needs to be trading with Russia.

([Guardian](#) / [RT](#) / [Reuters](#) - June 21)

## SYRIA

### Syrian Defense Force Advance on Manbij, Near Conquest of City

United States (US)-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have mounted an offensive to reclaim Manbij from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has been under heavy pressure to cede the city. The U.S. Central Command confirmed that the coalition has conducted 233 airstrikes in and around Manbij in recent weeks, and is operating a small Special Forces team in the area. The SDF laid siege to the city on May 31 but waited to launch an assault out of concern for civilians. On June 23, forces began to enter from the western and northern edges of Manbij, making their way towards the city center. Manbij is strategically essential to ISIS fighters: critical supply lines from Turkey to Syria run through Manbij, leaving ISIS vulnerable. The United Nations (UN) warns of a humanitarian crisis because the offensive has displaced 20,000 civilians and stands to uproot 216,000 in the coming weeks if fighting continues.

([Seattle Times](#) / [BBC](#) / [Reuters](#) / [ARA News](#), June 23; [Gulf News](#) / [Middle East Eye](#) / [Al Jazeera](#), June 22)

### US Diplomats Urge Strikes against Assad in Syria, Kerry Rejects Proposal

On June 16, fifty-one employees of the United States (US) State Department signed a "dissent channel cable" criticizing President Barack Obama's policies on Syria, calling for targeted military strikes against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The mid-level diplomats urged for military action against the Syrian government in response to Assad's inability to comply with the February ceasefire agreement and his contribution to the dire humanitarian crisis in the country. Military strikes against Assad would be a complete shift from Obama's



current policy which consists of working with Assad and Russia while only bombing Daesh. The day the dissent cable was released, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John Brennan told Congress that Assad is stronger now because of Russian air support. Russia's ongoing ceasefire violations in Syria continue to create tension with the US. On 21 June, Secretary of State John Kerry met with a small group of the mid-level Foreign Service Officers who signed the "dissent channel cable." In the 30-minute meeting, Kerry never explicitly agreed with the dissenters, but implied that military action was considered before and previously rejected. State Department spokesman John Kirby then announced that the US continues to believe "there's no military solution to the conflict in Syria," but will be looking into further policy options. There is speculation that the dissent cable hopes to shape the policy of the next president, as candidate Hillary Clinton proposes to be more hawkish towards Assad and candidate Trump purposes to work with Russia to find a solution.

([NYT / WSJ](#), June 16; [NYT / WSJ](#), June 21; [Al Arabiya](#), June 22)

### [After More challenges for Aid Deliveries, Aid Convoys are permitted to Enter Besieged Areas](#)

On June 2, Syria's United Nations (UN) Mission announced that it approved humanitarian aid deliveries to thirty six regions, including eleven besieged cities. The UN has labeled nineteen areas in Syria as besieged. President Bashar al-Assad's government stated that it will permit a limited amount of aid deliveries of food, medical assistance, and other supplies. On June 2, Bouthaina Shaaban, a senior adviser to President Bashar al-Assad, appeared via Skype at the National Press Club, and claimed that "the Syrian people are able to feed themselves" and do not need aid drops. On June 9, the Syrian government approved humanitarian convoys to reach all of Syria's besieged areas. However, the UN envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, expressed concern that Assad's "approval... does not mean delivery," stressing that the government has issued such approvals in the past before ultimately blocking convoys from entering besieged areas. Meanwhile, in response to an attack on its border guards, Jordan has closed the border to persons and vehicles, including refugees and aid convoys. Meanwhile, a car bomb of unknown origins at a Jordanian border crossing has caused Jordan to close the border, even to humanitarian convoys.

([CNN / New York Times / Wall Street Journal / The Washington Post / US News](#), June 2; [CBC News / BBC](#), June 3; [Middle East Eye / Sputnik News](#), June 9; [U.S. News / BBC / Al Jazeera / New York Times](#), June 21; [Deutsche Welle](#), June 22)

### [Assad, Backed by Russia, Moves Forward against Daesh](#)

The Syrian army crossed into the Daesh-held Raqqa province on June 5 with help from heavy Russian airstrikes. This is the first time Syrian forces entered Raqqa since Daesh claimed the area in August 2014. In the offensive, 26 Daesh members and nine government troops were killed. The army is now 40 kilometers from Tabqa, which has a strategic airbase and reservoir. The Syrian army's advances are part of a Russian backed offensive against Daesh. The Russians have been providing the Syrian army with air support across the country, but concern has been raised over civilian casualties in Daesh controlled areas. On June 6, Russian warplanes hit a market in the Daesh-held city of Ashara killing 17 civilians. Reports say Russian warplanes are also taking part of the current bombing in Aleppo by the regime against anti-government supporters. However, preliminary reports collected by Carter Center researchers indicate that this offensive has floundered in the face of Daesh counterattacks, forcing Assad's forces into retreat.

([Al Jazeera](#), June 5; [Reuters](#), June 6)

## [New Syria Army Advance Repelled by Daesh near Syria-Iraq Border](#)

Daesh successfully repelled an offensive by the United States (US) trained New Syria Army (NSA) in an attempt to take the Daesh-held border town of Boukamal on 29 June, the Daesh Amaq news agency confirmed. On 28 June the US-backed opposition group briefly seized the Hamdan Military Airport northwest of the city, but have since been pushed back. The New Syria Army was supported by International Coalition airstrikes and US helicopters in the initial advance. Spokesman for the NSA Mozaheem al-Saloum told press that the offensive included hundreds of fighters, and that the group was coordinating the attack with Iraqi militias on the Iraq side of Boukamal. Al-Saloum also stated that Daesh had dug defensive trenches around the city and planted landmines throughout the areas surrounding the town. The failure of the offensive was recognized, but al-Saloum reiterated that this was only "phase one" in retaking the border town.

[The New York Times](#) / [ABC](#) / [BBC](#) - 29 June 2016

## [As Ramadan Commences, Hundreds Killed by Continued Hostilities in Syria](#)

The United Kingdom-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) claims that Russian airstrikes and barrel bombs have intensified. In Aleppo the government continued to drop barrel bombs, destroying three hospitals. SOHR estimates that over 300 civilians have been killed in Aleppo in the first half of June alone. Last week, a spokesman for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad announced that the government would permit aid to be delivered to besieged areas by air convoy. The United Nations (UN) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) were able to provide food and medical aid to Daraya for the first time since it came under siege four years ago. Hours after supplies were delivered, however, the Local Council of Daraya claimed that at least 28 crude explosives were dropped onto the city by helicopter. These casualties come as August 1, the revised date for the third round peace talks, approaches. The UN special envoy to Syria, Stefan de Mistura, continues to push for a fruitful discussion on political transition, however a report by the Syria Campaign published on June 15 states that the UN has lost impartiality in the Syrian conflict by allowing the Assad government to control the flow of aid. This arrangement, in reality, allocates 88% of humanitarian aid to government-controlled areas.

([The Guardian](#), June 16; [Al-Jazeera](#) / [Reuters](#) / [BBC](#), June 15; [Al-Jazeera](#), June 13; [Rudaw](#), June 12; [Al Jazeera](#) / [Daily Mail](#) / [Middle East Eye](#), June 10)

## TURKEY

### [ISIS Suspected of Carrying out Attack on Istanbul's Atatürk Airport](#)

On June 28, three suicide bombers opened fire and then detonated suicide bombs in the international terminal of Istanbul's Atatürk Airport. Atatürk Airport is one of the busiest airports in the world and served over 60 million people in 2015, making it the third busiest airport in Europe. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that "he strongly condemned" the attack and "Turkey will continue its fight against all terrorist organizations at all costs until the end of terrorism." At least 43 people have died, with thirteen of them being foreign nationals and at least 239 people were injured. The Istanbul's governor's office stated that 109 of 239 injured had been discharged from the hospital. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack,



however Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said that findings point towards the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has rarely claimed responsibility for attacks against the Turkish state, but has always quickly taken responsibility for assassinations of Syrian activists within Turkey. The Turkish prime ministry announced a day of mourning on June 29 and flags will be flown at half-mast. The airport reopened at 2:20 a.m on June 29, however there are many flight cancelations and delays. Turkish police detained 13 suspects in the attacks, including three foreign nationals, in raids in Istanbul and the Aegean coastal city of Izmir on June 29. On June 30, ISIS still had not taken responsibility for the attack, however, sources reported that the attackers were Russian, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz nationals. One of the attackers, Osman Vadinov, allegedly crossed into Turkey from Raqqah, the ISIS stronghold in Syria, in 2015 and that the organizer of the attack may have been Akhmed Chatayev, a Chechen who may be an ISIS recruiter.

([Hurriyet Daily News](#) / [Anadolu](#), June 28; [BBC](#) / [Al Jazeera](#), June 29; [Hurriyet Daily News](#) / [Al Jazeera](#) / [BBC](#), June 30)

### [Kurdish Groups Carry out Attacks in Istanbul, Southeastern Turkey](#)

On June 29, Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) fighters detonated a roadside bomb that destroyed a military armored vehicle in Diyarbakir province in southeast Turkey. The Turkish military said two soldiers were killed and three were wounded. Two attacks also occurred on June 28 in Diyarbakir province; in these attacks two soldiers were killed and three were wounded. Additionally, seven police officers and four citizens were killed in a bombing in central Istanbul, close to the Grand Bazaar, on June 7. The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), a splinter group of the PKK, claimed responsibility for the attack. Since the attack was near a major tourist site, the group may have been trying to damage Turkey's tourism industry. On June 8, a car bomb exploded at a police station in the Midyat district of Mardin in southeastern Turkey, which killed three and wounded more than thirty. Prime Minister Binali Yildirim placed responsibility for the attack on the PKK. More than 400,000 people have been killed in Turkey's conflict with the PKK since the group began its insurgency in 1984, but there has been a surge in violence since the ceasefire collapsed in July 2015.

([Al Jazeera](#) / [BBC](#), June 7; [Reuters News Agency](#) / [Al Jazeera](#) / [Anadolu Agency](#), June 8; [Reuters](#) / [Hurriyet Daily News](#), June 29)

### [Turkey Takes Steps to Restore Ties with Israel, Russia](#)

On June 26, Turkish leaders announced that they would take steps to restore ties with Russia and Israel. Relations crumbled between Turkey and Israel in May 2010 when Israeli troops took an activist ship to enforce a naval blockade and ten Turks were killed. The improved relationship has large implications for Israel in terms of its economy and natural gas exports. The deal has led to Turkey's ability to send humanitarian aid and other non-military products to Israel-controlled Gaza strip, which it had previously not been able to do due to the naval blockade. A 10,000 ton shipment is planned to be shipped out will to Gaza on the week of July 4, and work on ending Gaza's water and power crises is set to begin shortly. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey will continue to meet with Hamas because of their role in regional security. Hamas has expressed concern over the talks with the Turkish-Israeli talks, however ending talks with Hamas is not part of the Turkey-Israel deal. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin have also agreed over the phone to meet in person to take "necessary steps" to mend ties between Russia and Turkey. President Erdoğan apologized on June 26 for shooting down a Russian warplane in November 2015 to President Putin and the family of the Russian pilot killed in the incident. According to the Turkish President's office, the two leaders discussed "reiterating their commitment

to reinvigorate bilateral relations and fight terrorism together." Putin and Erdoğan will meet in China in September during the G-20 summit. Turkish officials also said they plan to prosecute the Turkish citizen who allegedly killed the Russian pilot after he was ejected from his plane. Putin also announced that he had removed travel restrictions to Turkey and they would begin the process to normalize trade and economic ties with Turkey

([Hurriyet](#) / [The Jerusalem Post](#) / [Al-Arabiya](#), June 22; [Eyewitness News](#) / [Huffington Post](#) / [Los Angeles Times](#) - 27 June 2016; [BBC](#) / [Deutsche Welle](#) June 29)

### [Amid Renewed EU Talks, Turkish FM Criticizes 'EU's Double Standards' on Terror Groups](#)

At a press conference in Brussels, Belgium on June 30, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu criticized the European Union (EU) on Thursday for "double standards over terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). He said distinctions should not be made between terrorist groups and that showing solidarity "only where there is a terror attack" is not enough and that solidarity needs to be shown in the overall fight against terrorism. Turkish officials are in Brussels to discuss Turkey's bid to join the EU; Turkey argued that the EU needs Turkey for economic and geopolitical reasons, especially after the Brexit vote on June 23. The EU has continued to put pressure on Turkey to amend its anti-terrorism laws, however Çavuşoğlu stated "New demands directed at Turkey would encourage terrorists. We cannot make any changes in our anti-terror laws." Earlier in June, Hansjoerg Haber, the EU envoy to Turkey resigned citing issues related to Turkey. Haber was displeased with the EU-Turkey migrant deal in March that would grant Turkish citizens visa-free travel. Medical charity, Doctors Without Borders, also critical of the EU-Turkey deal announced it would not accept any more funding from the EU on June 17. Talks on the visa-free travel deal were postponed earlier in June because Turkey had not fulfilled all criteria for the deal, however on June 30, Çavuşoğlu said Turkey expects the EU to keep its promise because Turkey had "fulfilled almost all criteria in the roadmap."

([The Wall Street Journal](#) / [Al Arabiya](#), June 14; [Wall Street Journal](#) / [The Guardian](#), June 15; [BBC](#), [Independent](#), [MSF](#), June 17; [Anadolu](#) / [Reuters](#) / [BBC](#), June 30)

### [Human Rights Organizations Report Syrians Killed by Guards at Turkish Border; Turkey Denies Allegations](#)

On June 19, the Local Coordination Committee, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported at least eight Syrian civilians were killed by Turkish guards near the Syrian border town of Khirbat Jouz. In response, Tanju Bilgiç, of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, denied the allegations and further stated that Turkey has only been taking the actions necessary to defend its borders from terrorist organizations and human smugglers. Turkey asserted that it will maintain its open-door policy, meaning that it will only admit Syrians whose lives are "under imminent threat." Reports from all three human rights organizations varied in the number of Syrian civilians killed in the attack. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights' most recent reports estimate that 16 civilians were killed and injured during the attack, including four women and three children. Past reports, including a Human Rights Watch report published in May 2016, also levied accusations against Turkish border guards for the shooting and beating of Syrian refugees.

([Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#) / [Wall Street Journal](#), June 19; [Daily Sabah](#), June 20)

## AMERICAS

### ARGENTINA

#### [Former Junta Leader Reynaldo Bignone and 14 other Ex-members of the Military Sentenced for Operation Condor Crimes](#)

Forty years after the plan for suppressing political opposition in six Latin American dictatorships, an Argentine Federal Court has sentenced to prison Argentina's last dictator, Reynaldo Bignone, and 14 other former military officials for human rights crimes. The ex-general, who ruled Argentina in 1982-1983, is already serving life sentences for multiple human rights violations during the dictatorship. The trial started in 2013 with 32 people under investigation. During the case, several defendants were either removed from the judicial process or died, such as the dictator Jorge Rafael Videla. It's the first time that a court is ruling against the Condor plan.

([La Nacion](#), May 28; [BBC](#), May 28; [Clarín](#), May 27)

#### [President Mauricio Macri Gives more Autonomy to the Army](#)

President Macri has repealed a historical Decree issued by former President Alfonsín in 1984 (two months after the re-establishment of democracy). The Decree was aimed to increase the civilian control over the military by transferring powers to the Ministry of Defense. Macri has now returned the power to decide over promotion and tenures to the military. Considering the complicated history of military interferences in the political power, many critics see it as an “unjustified step backwards”. However, Macri stated during the Army Day (May 31<sup>st</sup>) his will of “starting a new phase and set aside past divisions”. The repulsion of the Decree might respond to this effort.

([El Pais](#), June 2; [Diario Hoy](#) June 2; [La Nacion](#), June 1)

#### [Former Deputy Minister for Public Works of Argentina Arrested](#)

José López, who served as Deputy Minister for Public Works during the 12 years of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner presidencies, was detained on June 14. López, known for being the right-hand man of former federal planning minister Julio de Vido, was arrested while he was trying to hide 9 million dollars in a monastery. He was detained on suspicion of money laundering. This was a severe blow for the kirchnerism movement that adds up to the movement's crisis: Cristina Kirchner is facing corruption charges, and many deputies are trying to reorganize the 'peronism' faction abandoning the 'kirchnerism'.

([Clarín](#), June 14; [ABC News](#), June 15)

## President Mauricio Macri Announces Electoral Reform

On June 23, President Mauricio Macri announced a package of measures that will conform the draft for the electoral reform. The proposal includes a single electronic ballot; suppression of ‘multiple lists’ that allowed candidates to participate in national and departmental elections simultaneously; and the mandatory celebration of a presidential debate. Participation in the primary elections (PASO) will keep being mandatory: Every citizen must vote for one party, or cast a blank ballot.

([El Nuevo Herald](#), 23 June; [Ámbito](#), 23 June; [La Nación](#), 23 June)

## BRAZIL

### Brazil's Transparency Chief Quits Over Corruption Probe Tape

Minister of Transparency Fabiano Silveira has resigned his post after the leak of his declarations about the Lava Jato corruption case, in which he gave advice to two politicians involved (the President of the Senate and the former president of Transpetro). The situation provoked pressures from civil servants who refused to work under his direction. President Michel Temer appointed Torquato Jardim, one of the country’s biggest specialists on electoral law, to substitute Fabiano Silveira.

This was the second resignation caused by the leak of the conversations regarding the Operation Car Wash, after the resignation of Senator Romero Jucá, who used to hold the Ministério do Planejamento (Cabinet of Planning). On June 17<sup>th</sup>, a third minister of Temer resigned: Enrique Eduardo Alves, Minister of Tourism.

([Correio Braziliense](#), June 1; [BBC](#), May 31; [Globo](#), May 30)

### Suspended President Dilma Rousseff Supports Referendum to Poll Popular Support for New Elections

Dilma Rousseff has called for a referendum on whether to hold early elections if she is not removed from office in the impeachment process that is expected to conclude in August. This would require a constitutional amendment by Congress, and the party’s faction led by Interim President Michel Temer has already expressed its opposition to early elections.

([Clarín](#), June 10; [La Nación](#), June 10; [The Guardian](#), June 10)

### Governor of Rio de Janeiro Declares a State of ‘Public Calamity’ over Finances

On June 17, governor of Rio de Janeiro State Francisco Dornelles, declared a state of “public calamity” over the finances of the region. The decree issued blamed the decline in the prices of oil as one of the reasons that has led to difficulties in providing basic public services. The State recognized the risk of a total collapse of public healthcare services, education, public safety and transportation. President Michel Temer has promised substantial financial help. This can represent a big impediment for the correct organization of the Olympic Games.

([O Globo](#), June 17; [Folha de Sao Paulo](#), June 17; [BBC](#), June 17)

## COLOMBIA

### Colombia: Country with Highest Displacement Rates

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Colombia is home to 6.9 million internally displaced persons, making it “the country with the most internally displaced people in the world.” Despite government programs to address the issue, in the last year alone “113,700 new displaced victims were registered” and only few “return to their place of residence.” Main causes for displacement in Colombia include the “ongoing clashes between military, leftist guerilla groups and successor groups.” Colombia’s internally displaced make up “13 percent of the country’s entire population” but since 2010, the number of annually displaced persons has begun to fall.

([Colombia Reports](#), 20 June; [El Espectador](#), 20 June; [UNHCR](#), 20 June; [World Bulletin](#), 21 June)

### Government and FARC Rebels Sign Bilateral Ceasefire and Disarmament Agreement

FARC leader “*Timochenko*” and Colombian President *Juan Manuel Santos* signed a bilateral and definitive ceasefire in Havana on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. This historical moment brought negotiating parties in agreement over the 3<sup>rd</sup> point on the peace agenda, *The End of Conflict*. In correspondence to the bilateral ceasefire, there was agreement on the “definitive surrender of weapons,” “security guarantees/fight against criminal organizations,” and finally the countersignature. Cuban representative, *Rodolfo Benitez*, read the joint communiqué on behalf of the parties, which stated that once a final agreement is signed (D Day) the disarmament process would begin and be completed within a maximum of 180 days. In this regard, 23 transitional zones would be formed as well as 8 camps in order to “monitor and oversee disarmament” as well as oversee the demobilization of guerillas and their reintegration into civilian life. Furthermore, the government and FARC made a commitment to curb the “phenomenon of paramilitarism” and “maintain the upmost respect for human rights” in the process. The progression will be permanently monitored and guaranteed through a tripartite mechanism including the “United Nations and the Union for Latin American and Caribbean States.” The FARC has been fighting the Colombian state in a conflict that has left more than 260,000 dead and approximately 7 million displaced.

([Colombia Reports](#), 23 June; [El Pais](#), 23 June; [El Colombiano](#), 24 June)

## CUBA

### Cuban Communist Party (PCC) Opens ‘Consultation Process’ for Economic Plan

In late May, the PCC published two documents approved at its Seventh Congress in April, the “Conceptualization” of the Cuban socioeconomic model and a draft of the “National Plan for Economic and Social Development Until 2030.” The “Conceptualization” lays out the theoretical basis for Cuba’s social and

economic model, whereas the “National Plan,” which has yet to be completed, lays out the specific measures for the fulfillment of the “Conceptualization.” The legalization of family-owned, small-, and medium-sized businesses is a project to be considered and developed in the next 14 years as the Party shifts the socioeconomic model to include a private sector that “complements” central economic planning and socialist business models such as cooperatives. The final draft of the National Plan will not be released until 2017. From June 14 to September 20, the PCC will conduct a nationwide “democratic debate as part of the consultation process” regarding the two central documents, according to the state-run media. The consultation process is meant to elaborate and refine the documents before their final approval by the PCC Central Committee. The Central Committee will oversee the direct participation of millions of Cubans from “broad sectors of society.” All measures must pass through the *Asamblea del Poder Popular* (APP), Cuba’s legislative body, before going into effect.

([El Nuevo Herald](#), May 28; [Cubanet](#), June 2; [Granma](#), June 14; [En Cuba Hoy](#), June 15; [CubaNet](#), June 15)

### Over 700 Arbitrary Detentions Recorded in May

The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN), a human rights opposition group on the island, reported 724 arbitrary detentions in May, a number that suggests a relative decline from previous months in 2016 in which arbitrary detentions consistently passed 1,000. On Sunday June 5, police arrested around 40 individuals associated with the Ladies in White (*Damas en blanco*), a human rights activist group that stages weekly marches on Sundays. The CCDHRN has recorded 6,075 instances of arbitrary detention in Cuba in 2016 with varying levels of violence. Though their count of political prisoners, 86, is lower than historic levels in Cuba, short-term arbitrary detentions and police harassment have increased since the reestablishment of U.S.-Cuba relations. In May, the group recorded 37 instances of physical aggression, 228 instances of harassment, and three acts of vandalism. Because international human rights groups are not granted entry by the Cuban government, outside observers have been unable to corroborate the CCDHRN’s counts.

([El Nuevo Herald](#), June 6; [CubaNet](#), June 6; [Martí Noticias](#), June 7)

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

### Disputes and Recounts Follow May 15 Nationwide General Election

Various civil associations, protest groups, and opposition parties have disputed the results of the May 15 general elections, accusing fraud, irregularities, and mismanagement by the electoral authority, the *Junta Central Electoral* (JCE). Six of the seven ex-presidential candidates that ran against incumbent President Danilo Medina of the *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* (PLD) have maintained that they do not recognize the election results as legitimate. In response, the JCE issued a statement rejecting the ex-candidates’ accusations of fraud at the presidential level and argued that the irregularities that did occur were so small that the ultimate result was unaffected. After a flurry of legal appeals and petitions, the Superior Electoral Court ordered the manual recount of votes from 224 polling places at the municipal, congressional, and congressional candidate preference levels. *Partido Revolucionario Moderno* (PRM) ex-presidential candidate Luis Abinader initiated legal action on behalf of the PRM, claiming that his party was wrongfully denied five

Congressional deputy seats, four Senate seats, and five mayoral seats that were given to the PLD in violation of constitutional guarantees for representation of minority parties according to the D'Hondt proportionality method. In response, Congress is working on a new Law of Political Parties and Electoral Regime Law, which are set to be approved by the end of July.

([Diario Libre](#), June 2; [Hoy](#), June 8; [Hoy](#), June 8; [Diario Libre](#), June 21; [Diario Libre](#), June 22; [Hoy](#), June 23)

#### 46th General Assembly of Organization of American States Hosted in Santo Domingo

From June 13 to 15, the General Assembly of the OAS held its 46th session in Santo Domingo with the official theme of "Institutional Strengthening for Sustainable Development in the Americas." Dominican Foreign Minister Andrés Navarro was elected President of the General Assembly after being nominated by the Haitian delegation. In his opening remarks as host of the convocation, Dominican President Danilo Medina called on the OAS to pass a resolution that would offer reparations in the form of an official apology for the regional body's role in the 1965 invasion and occupation of the island nation, which Navarro requested formally later in the session. In a unanimous vote, all 34 member nations approved the declaration of apology on June 15. On June 14, opposition ex-candidates for the Dominican presidency marched to the General Assembly to present "evidence" of alleged electoral irregularities. The high-profile diplomatic event took place amid tension that has followed the contested May 15 national elections.

([El Universal](#), June 13; [Diario Libre](#), June 14; [Hoy](#), June 15; [Diario Libre](#), June 16)

## GUATEMALA

#### Aldana Continues Fight Against Corruption Amidst Attacks

Attorney General and head of the Public Ministry (MP), Thelma Aldana, discussed that her, along with other public officials fighting for justice in Guatemala, is experiencing psychological and physical threats amidst the ongoing hearings and investigations into state corruption in Guatemala that occurred under the former administration. She commented that she is aware of the "hidden powers" in the country that seek to derail her duties and undermine her credibility, but assured that security measures have been taken to ensure the safety of her and others. She explained that while she does feel fear at times, she stressed the importance of overcoming these adversities so that the work of the MP and International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) may continue.

([Siglo 21](#), June 29; [El Periodico](#), June 21)

#### Commitment to Peace Accords Will Continue

Twenty years after the signing of Guatemala's Peace Accords, the Secretariat for Peace has organized five conferences that will take place this month to address the progress of the agreements. Victorina Salanic, head of the Secretariat for Peace, commented that the meetings are aimed at re-launching the commitments with plans for concrete action. Marco Antonio Barahona, with the Central American Institute for Political Studies,



commented that the meetings recognize that commitments will continue with more realism and vigor in creating a future development agenda.

([Siglo 21](#), June 2)

### Women Reject Proposed Reforms to Femicide Law

On June 1st, a group of women representing different social organizations spoke out to Congress to reject the proposal of a bill that seeks to penalize women that misuse the Femicide Law. The bill, proposed the day before, would criminalize false allegations on the grounds that "good men" were being affected by "women taking advantage of the law," according to Sandra Patricia Sandoval, head of the National Convergence Front (FCN). Sonia Acabal, with the Network Against Violence Against Women, commented that the ruling would be a great setback for the progress that has been achieved in human rights for women in Latin America and the right to live free from violence.

([La Hora](#), June 1)

## HONDURAS

### Mission Against Corruption in Honduras (MACCIH) Receives 5.2 Million Dollars from the U.S.

U.S. Ambassador in Honduras announced an important approval of funding from the United States to the Support Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH). The *Mission* will receive 5.2 million dollars. The Governments of Canada, Germany, and the European Union are already supporting the MACCIH. The importance of these funds lies in the fact that the MACCIH is an organism dependent on the Organization of American States (OAS) that is funded exclusively by the contributions of the international community. The involvement of the United States is partly due to the corruption scandal in the Honduran National Census related to the issuance of false identity documents to Arab citizens, who used them to enter the U.S with a tourist visa.

([La Prensa](#), June 3; [La Tribuna](#), June 3)

### Mission Against Corruption in Honduras (MACCIH) Discusses Models of Electoral Campaign Financing to Reform the Current Legislation

The Support Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) is collaborating with the Legislative power and the Congress to draft a new electoral campaign financing law. The objective is to prevent political parties from receiving illegal financial flows that would corrupt the political process. One of the main points currently being discussed is the establishment of caps to electoral campaign donations.

([El Herald](#), June 14; [La Tribuna](#), June 14)



## Honduras's Supreme Court Selects Members of the Commission Responsible for Appointing Judges for Anti-corruption Tribunals

On June 20, Rolando Argueta, president of Honduras's Supreme Court, named the new commission responsible for selecting judges to lead the special anti-corruption tribunals established by the MACCIH (Mission against corruption supported by the OAS). The Supreme Court has left Judge José Rodríguez out of the commission due to his alleged involvement in a corruption case. The commission consists on two judges, a representative from MACCIH and a secretary of the civil society, who has a right to speak but not to vote.

([La Prensa](#), June 20; [El Herald](#), June 20; [La Tribuna](#), June 21)

## MEXICO

### Combating Corruption in Mexico with “3 For 3” Law

Designed as a measure to hold officials accountable, the citizen-backed legislation which was launched via an online platform, would ask candidates and public officials to disclose three crucial pieces of information; personal assets, possible conflicts of interests, and taxes. The bill is currently in Mexico's congress but has faced various roadblocks, as it is currently part of a broader set of reforms that would make up a *National Anticorruption System*. After its passage in the legislature, *Enrique Peña Nieto* decided to exercise his executive power and partially veto the law. His legal counsel *Humberto Castillejos* “issued the amendments to 15 articles of the *Law on Administrative Responsibilities*”, which reverted the measure back to congress. The initiative has gained wide public support given that corruption in Mexico “may represent as much as 9 percent of the country's GDP” according to the World Bank.

([The New York Times](#), 28 May; [Animal Político](#); 30 May; [Milenio](#) 2 June; [El País](#) 24 June; [Proceso](#), 24 May; [Noticanarias](#), 24 May)

### UN Condemns Violence in Mexico amidst Violent Clashes

The UN High Commissioner for Human rights has “condemned Sunday's unrest in the southern state of *Oaxaca*” and has additionally called on the government to “conduct an exhaustive and impartial investigation” into the violent demonstrations that resulted in the death of at least “8 protesters and more than 100 injured”. Violence came after several days of protest on behalf of teachers from the *National Coordinator of Education Workers* (CNTE), who are opposed to both the “sweeping educational reform” and the recent arrest of union leaders. During the clashes “protesters threw stones and burned vehicles” while Associated Press journalists “saw riot police firing on protestors.” According to Mexico's Interior Minister, *Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong*, state and federal prosecutors have prepared to investigate the clashes to determine “whether the use of weapons by the state and federal police was adequate or not.”

([CNN](#), 20 June; [The New York Times](#), 20 June; [France24](#), 21 June; [Proceso](#), 21 June)

## Union Leaders to Meet with Government Officials Regarding Protests in Mexico

After various condemnations by activists, civil society and international entities including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, representatives from Mexico's national Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) and the Mexican Interior Minister Osorio Chong, have agreed to meet. The objective of the meeting is to "listen to the ideas and arguments of the CNTE and advance solutions to return calm to the regions of the country that have been affected by the recent demonstrations." Although the CNTE had requested formal dialogue with government delegates for months, the escalating violence and organized mass rallies have "forced the groups to the negotiation table." Similar incidents have occurred in 2006, however, this week's violence has brought increasing criticism to the extent of police accountability and use of force. According to a UN report on extrajudicial and arbitrary executions, "accountability in Mexico is insufficient" and the "extrajudicial executions and excessive use of force by security agents in Mexico persists."

([TeleSur](#), 21 June, [El Universal](#), 22 June; [Huffington Post](#), 22 June; [NBC News](#), 22 June)

## NICARAGUA

### President Ortega Denies Election-monitoring Access to the Carter Center and other International Observers

On June 4, 2016, the VI National Sandinista Congress chose Daniel Ortega as the Candidate of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) for November Presidential elections. This is the seventh nomination in 32 years and, if Ortega wins, he will be the politician who ruled the country for more years in Nicaraguan history. The Congress adopted a resolution in which it gave full power to Ortega to name a Vice President and select the candidates for the National Assembly and the Central American Parliament.

Daniel Ortega delivered an inflammatory speech where he assured that there would not be international observation of the elections. He specifically mentioned the Carter Center, the OAS, and the EU, accusing the organizations of having *imperialist interests*. Ortega also inveighed against the members of the diplomatic corps, referring to an incident in 2006 in which the Spanish ambassador arranged a meeting to help the opposition parties converge in a coalition.

In response, the Carter Center issued an official statement that received widespread coverage in the Nicaraguan media and in social networks.

([La Prensa](#), June 4; [Confidencial](#), June 5; [The Washington Post](#), June 5; [La Prensa](#), June 7)

### Leader of the Main Party in the Opposition (PLI) Sees his Legal Representation Revoked by the Supreme Court

The Nicaraguan Supreme Court has finally ruled on the case in which different factions disputed the legal representation of the main party in the opposition, the Partido Liberal Independiente (PLI). The Court has resolved in favor of Pedro Reyes' faction of the party. The decision has been highly criticized, since Eduardo

Montealegre is the public leader of the PLI, and the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) already decided in his favor in 2014. Judges aligned with the party in power -the Sandinistas (FSLN) - compose the Court.

Until the case was solved, the Supreme Court ordered not to give any seats to the members of the PLI in the Departmental and Regional Electoral Councils, which started its activities with only the representatives of the Sandinista party. These events constitute a severe blow to Nicaraguan democracy.

([La Prensa](#), June 8; [El Nuevo Diario](#), June 8)

### Two American Civil Servants and One Researcher Expelled from the Country

On June 16, the American researcher Evan Ellis (who was conducting research on the Nicaraguan Canal Project) and two civil servants were expelled from Nicaragua. The Government justified the expulsion by declaring that the civil servants were undertaking customs services inspections without the knowledge of the Nicaraguan authorities. According to the United States, they were on an official mission working with private enterprises, in order to inspect the products that would enter the United States. Laura Dogu, U.S. Ambassador in Nicaragua, assured that the two American civil servants who were expelled from Nicaragua were in the country with absolute knowledge of the local authorities. She declared that the expulsion can affect bilateral relations, and that the U.S. needs to be certain that its public officers will be allowed to enter Nicaragua.

Six environmentalists and one Mexican student have also been detained or expelled from the country arbitrarily this month. In response to these events, the United States and Mexico have issued warnings to citizens who travel to Nicaragua.

([La Prensa](#), June 16; [Nación](#), June 16; [The Telegraph](#), June 17)

## PERU

### Kuczynski Receives Accreditation as President of Peru

After winning Peru's "tightest presidential race in the country's history," Pedro Pablo Kuczynski received the credentials necessary by the National Electoral Jurors (JNE) to name him as president for 2016-2021. During his acceptance speech, Kuczynski reiterated the need for "unity in Peru" citing the electoral race as "evidence of the many differences there are amongst Peruvians." Given that the electoral results "were virtually split through the middle," the now president-elect said "I ask for unity between those who voted for me and those who did not, I will work for everyone." Additionally he said there was a need for a "social revolution" in Peru that would allow for greater inequality throughout the country.

([El Comercio](#), 28 June; [El Peruano](#), 28 June ; [La Republica](#), 28 June; [Peru 21](#), 28 June)

### President Humala Enacts Law on Missing Persons

In Peru, President *Ollanta Humala* enacted Law No.30470 on Missing Persons, "in response to the demand of various international human rights organizations and victim's family." In an effort to help national reconciliation, it allows the Ministry of Justice and Human rights to "establish, implement and monitor the search for disappeared persons during the 1980-2000 violence." Additionally it creates a national registry of

missing persons as well as burial sites. The law prioritizes the humanitarian aspect of missing persons by articulating measures that allow for the “search, analysis and restitution of remains.” It is estimated that in the two decades of violence, about “16,000 missing persons were registered.” The country’s ombudsman’s office recently stated that it would take “at least 70 years to recover most of these persons.”

([El Comercio](#), 22 June; [Entorno Inteligente](#), 22 June; [La Republica](#), 22 June; [RPP](#), 22 June)

## VENEZUELA

### Opposition Successfully Activates Recall Referendum Process, Passing First Stage

The preliminary stage to activate the process of recalling President Nicolás Maduro ended on Friday, June 24 after 409,313 Venezuelans successfully validated their signatures at 128 electoral stations throughout the country with the 300 fingerprint machines that the National Electoral Council (CNE) made available for the process nationwide. Delays and alleged irregularities in various regions slowed the process. On June 22, there were reports of detentions of citizens en route to a validation site by the National Guard in Carabobo state and a detonated tear gas bomb in a validation site in Macarao state. The opposition coalition *Mesa de Unidad Democrática* attributed the irregularities, large wait times, and long lines for signature validation to an intentional operation by the Maduro government and the CNE. On June 27, the CNE announced it would take 20 working days to count the validated signatures. If Maduro is recalled before January 11, 2017, new presidential elections will be held; but if the recall were to occur after that date, the sitting vice-president would assume office.

([El Universal](#), June 22; [El Nacional](#), June 22; [El Universal](#), June 24; [El Nacional](#), June 27)

### Organization of American States (OAS) Permanent Council Meets to Address Venezuelan Crisis

In a June 1 special session of OAS Permanent Council (PC), delegations approved a declaration by consensus that supported all initiatives for dialogue in Venezuela while respecting sovereignty and non-interference. On June 21, the PC convened to receive a presentation by Spanish Ex-Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero on the dialogue process that he is heading through the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Delegations expressed urgent and broad support for his mediation efforts, which seek to reconcile President Maduro’s government and the opposition. On June 23, the PC convened at the request of OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro to receive his report on the state of constitutional and democratic governance in Venezuela after he invoked the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC). The agenda of the session did not include any declarations or votes, so no decisions were taken. The Venezuelan, Bolivian, and Nicaraguan delegations voiced strong opposition to the report and the invocation of the IADC, accusing Almagro of interventionism and the violation of procedural norms. The PC will convene in the near future to consider whether the IADC applies to Venezuela, though no date has been set. Under Article 20, the IADC calls for OAS intervention in the instance of an unconstitutional alteration of a member country’s democratic order.

([El Nacional](#), June 21; [El Universal](#), June 23; [El Nacional](#), June 23)

## AFRICA

### BURUNDI

#### [UN Human Rights Chief: Burundi May Explode into Ethnic Violence](#)

Burundi's human rights record is under scrutiny at the U.N. Human Rights Council over the objections and anger of that country's government. The council said it is alarmed at the rise in rights violations in Burundi since last year's political crisis. It wants the violations to stop, because it fears an ethnic conflict with devastating consequences for all of central Africa. The United Nations and the government of Burundi have polar opposite views on what is happening in the country, a year after President Pierre Nkurunziza was elected to what his critics call an unconstitutional third term. While the government accused the U.N. of a campaign of distortion, U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra-ad al-Hussein expressed great concern over the terrible reality that is playing out. In a report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council, Zeid accused Burundi government agents and associated militia of killings, disappearances and arbitrary arrests. He said he is alarmed at the prospect of an escalation in ethnic violence. The International Criminal Court recently said it will open a preliminary examination into violence in Burundi. U.N. rights chief Zeid welcomes that. He is urging the authorities to bring all those responsible for crimes to justice, and for the country to resolve its crisis through an inclusive national dialogue.

([VOANews](#)/ [Reuters](#)/ [Human Right Watch](#)/ [Daily Mail](#), June 29)

#### [AU Delegation in Burundi to Assess the Security Situation](#)

A delegation of the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission (AUPSD) arrived in Burundi on June 22nd for a three-day peace mission to assess the security situation in the country. On their arrival, the AUPSD met with stakeholders of Burundi's peace process to analyze the situation and find a lasting solution to its problems. The mission is expected to meet also with the head of state Pierre Nkurunziza, a source told AFP on condition of anonymity. During the three-days, the PSC will also have consultations with government bodies, the opposition and civil society organizations. Led by the Permanent Representative of the Congo to the AU, Lazare Makayat Safuesse, the mission met with Burundi's former President Domitien Ndayizeye who reiterated the need for inclusive dialogue. The peace mission of the AU Peace and Security Council follows that of February embarked upon by five African heads of state to the country. The AUPSD during the crisis in Burundi had advocated for the sending of 5,000 men to end the cycle of violence. This recommendation was not agreed upon by the summit of heads of state in January after vehement rejection by the Burundi government.

([Africanews](#), June 22)

#### [Human Trafficking: The Confession](#)

After several days of complete denial, the police finally came to admit the existence of human trafficking and even made arrests. On Sunday, June 19, Pierre Nkurikiye, the police spokesman, announced the arrest of seven

people involved in the trafficking of girls and women to the Gulf countries namely Oman and Saudi Arabia. “There are three Burundians and four Kenyans including two females,” he said. In the process, 11 companies were involved in human trafficking. Among the companies involved, four are Burundian and the other 7 are foreign including Gulf and Kenya. “It's a cross-border network of criminals.” According to Pierre Nkurikiye, at least 267 people have already been subject to human trafficking to the Gulf since April 19, 2016.

([IWACU](#), June 27)

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

### Increased Internet Prices Stir Protest

On June 11, Internet prices experienced an increase by as much as 500% across all operators. The increase was hugely unpopular among young people and journalists, whose primary mode of communication was hugely affected. 5 individuals were questioned after the police dispersed a peaceful protest on the night of June 11, self-entitled “Nuit Debout”. The police justified its actions claiming that the organizers had not required the approval of the authorities to manifest.

Among the individuals participating in the protest that night was the journalist and co-founder of Politco.cd Patient Ligodi. The famed journalist was detained and transported to camp Lufungula on the same night, where he was accused of participating in a movement that sought to ‘destabilize de Republic’s institutions’. Ligodi was released, shortly after midnight, after increased pressure by Internet users, family members and various organizations such as the National Union for Congolese press (UNPC), Journalist in Danger (JED) and MONUSCO. The police had deleted all of the photos and videos of the protest and confiscated his second phone and recorder.

On June 16, professional media organizations decided to join forces against the increase of Internet prices. As a result, the National Union of the Congolese press (UNCP) and Journalists in danger called for a day without press on June 20 that would seek to return to previous rates.

The “Day without Press” forced a decrease in Internet prices but rates did not return to previous levels at the beginning of the month despite additional pressure by the authority for telecommunication regulations (ARPTC).

([Politico](#), June 11; [Jeune Afrique](#); [Groupe L'avenir](#), June 12; [RFI Afrique](#), June 16; [Radio Okapi](#), June 21)

### Opposition Conclave United in Brussels Reaches Agreement

The representatives of the Congolese opposition, who met in Brussels at the beginning of the month, committed to stand united against sitting president Joseph Kabila. Led by Etienne Tshisekedi, the opposition, which nicknames itself “the reconciliation”, agreed to an ultimatum. The latter ultimatum included terms such the organization of elections within the constitutional framework, the release of political prisoners and the reexamination of the electoral commission, the CENI. In addition, the conclave formally refused the offer of a discussion with sitting president Kabila and his majority party.

In response, the presidential majority accused the opposition conclave of preparing an institutional coup d'état in a press conference on June 11. Speaking for the presidential party, the general secretary, Aubin Minaku, rejected all the claims formulated by the opposition.

On June 15, the general-secretary of the African Union, Edem Kodjo, declared that he intended to meet the opposition conclave in Brussels. The purpose of the trip was to revive the possibility of a dialogue between the majority party and the opposition in united in Brussels.

Tshisekedi declared that the opposition would not engage in discussion with President Joseph Kabila under current frameworks despite Kodjo travels and efforts.

([RFI Afrique](#), June 10; [RFI Afrique](#), June 11; [RFI Afrique](#), June 15; [Radio Okapi](#), June 18)

### [Warlord Jean-Pierre Bemba Jailed over War Crimes](#)

The former Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba has been jailed for 18 years following a ruling from the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and sexual violence. Bemba was accused of failing to stop his rebels, from the group MLC, from killings and raping in neighboring Central African Republic (CAR) in 2002 and 2003. While Bemba remained quiet during the trial, his defense team says they will appeal against the decision.

([RFi Afrique](#); [BBC](#); [Radio Okapi](#), June 21)

### [UN Notes an Increase in Human Rights Violations](#)

The latest report of the UN concluded that 384 Human Rights violations have occurred in the DRC during the month of May. This number represents an increase from April, which counted 364 violations. Eastern DRC registered the greatest number of violations, notably in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri.

([Politico](#), [RFI Afrique](#), June 23)

## GHANA

### [The Electoral Commission Responds to the Supreme Court Orders on Voter Registration](#)

The Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana declared in its statement issued on May 19 that would abide by orders of the Supreme Court on voters' registration process. According to the statement, the EC has under any law currently in force no power to unilaterally delete the names of persons from the voter register. It follows that the EC will implement the Supreme Court orders only by following existing applicable laws on cleaning the register. Therefore, the EC is not going to delete the names of persons who had been previously registered using the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) cards as their form of identification, as the Supreme Court and other stakeholders' request, since at the time of registration there was no law barring voters to register with the NHIS cards. In reaction to the EC decision, the Justice of the Supreme Court Jones Dotse made a statement insisting that using the NHIS cards for the voter registration is unconstitutional, as the NHIS cards aren't based on Ghanaians citizenship, but only on residence in Ghana. Therefore, any foreigner who is resident in Ghana



for six months and more can register under the NHIS card, even though is not eligible to vote. The Supreme Court calls on the Electoral Commission to clean the register of those undesirable persons. Nevertheless, to prevent the disenfranchisement of Ghanaians citizens registered with the NHIS cards, they should be given the opportunity to re-register according to the law.

([Citi News / Peace Online](#), May 19; [Ghana News](#), May 21; [News Ghana](#), May 24; [Citi FM Online / Class FM Online](#), May 26)

## November Elections: Police Consider Blocking Social Media

The Ghana Police Service is considering shutting down social media platforms in Ghana on the day of the elections, November 7. The Inspector General of Police, John Kudalor, said that the use of social media by politicians, especially from the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), for election-related activities, has created tensions in the country, hence the proposed shutdown will reduce the tension.

Subsequently, various stakeholders expressed their disagreement with the Police intention:

The opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) said that it would not allow the Ghana Police to go ahead with its decision since the move would not only cause chaos but affect transmission of information as well as operations of the traditional media, relying heavily on social media platforms for any story ideas. The NPP advised the police to rather put mechanisms in place to make a routine check on social media and traditional media instead of blocking those platforms.

The Alliance for Accountable Governance (AFAG) believes that blocking or restricting access to social media should not even be an option to consider at all, as it is a blatant violation of freedom of expression. AFAG finds it unacceptable that instead of the Ghana police to harness the power of the social media for superior surveillance and monitoring of hot-spots during the elections, they are rather contemplating shutting it down.

Prof Audrey Gadzekpo of the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana has warned that every attempt of the Police to block social media on Election Day would be resisted via protests by social media users on streets.

([Class FM Online](#), May 26; [Class FM Online / GhanaWeb / Ghana Web / News Ghana / Vibe Ghana](#), May 27)

## Electoral Commission to Exhibit Voter Register

The Electoral Commission (EC) is said to exhibit the provisional voters' register from Monday, July 18, 2016 to Sunday, August 7, 2016. The EC is finalizing the compilation of the provisional register for this exercise. The exhibition, which was originally scheduled to take place in June, has been shifted to July due to the legal battles that the EC was confronted with. In preparation for a successful exhibition, the EC is also training technicians and selected key trainers in all 10 regions of the country. According to the statement of Alhaji Amadu Sulley, the EC Deputy Commissioner in-charge of Operations, the EC will also clean the register during the exhibition exercise.

The EC intends to biometrically verify or validate voters during the exhibition period, but is not to make validation compulsory. This means that dead people and other illegal entries, including non-nationals, may remain on the register unless party agents and citizens exercise their right to raise objections at the exhibition



stage. Therefore, political party agents are said to be prepared to challenge suspicious identifiable names on the electoral roll during the exhibition period. Political parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party (NPP), have printed copies of polling station registers for their agents, who are going through the list to identify dead people, minors and foreigners. The intention is to challenge, in accordance with the law, every single suspicious name identified during the exhibition period. Once an objection is raised, the exhibition officer has no choice but to flag the name and provide the challenge forms to be filled for the magistrate to determine the case on the face of the evidence that can be provided during adjudication. The challenge process, which is expected to begin in early August, is such that every single case of objection should go before a district magistrate for adjudication. With hundreds of thousands of such challenges anticipated, this could seriously affect the electoral calendar.

([Ghana Web](#), June 11; [Vibe Ghana](#), June 22; [Citi FM Online](#) / [Modern Ghana](#), June 23)

## LIBERIA

### Global Witness Scandal

Liberia has been embroiled in a corruption scandal since mid-May, set off by a report published by the international watchdog group, Global Witness. The report, entitled “The Deceivers,” detailed linkages between several top Liberian government officials and the United Kingdom-based Sable Mining Company during 2010, alleging that Sable had made payouts to multiple lawmakers to try to rewrite key concession laws in order for Sable to acquire the concession for Mount Wologizi in Lofa County. “The Deceivers” also accused the Senator, lawyer, and Unity Party (UP) Chairman, Varney Sherman—who was then representing Sable Mining in Liberia—of brokering the bribery. Following the report’s publication, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf created a taskforce to investigate Global Witness’s claims; it has since been involved in collecting information both domestically and internationally, having sent one member to the United States and a delegation to London to meet with government authorities there as well as Global Witness itself. Both the US and Britain have made commitments to support Liberia in the ongoing probe. The judiciary, for its part, has been indicting and prosecuting various individuals implicit in the scandal. So far, notable indicted persons include Varney Sherman; House of Representatives Speaker, Alex Tyler; former Chairman of the National Investment Commission, Richard Tolbert; the South African director of Sable’s Liberia operations, Klaus Piprek; and the CEO of Sable Mining, Andrew Groves. Meanwhile in the Legislature, tensions continue to run high, as factions form around and against the accused.

([All Africa](#) May 24, [Front Page Africa](#) May 25, [Front Page Africa](#) June 1, [Front Page Africa](#) June 2, [Front Page Africa](#) June 20, [Reuters](#) May 26)

### UNMIL Drawdown

Today, June, 30<sup>th</sup>, marks the official conclusion of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) drawdown, wherein the Government of Liberia is to assume all responsibility for the country’s security. The peacekeeping force, established in September 2003 following the end of the Liberian Civil War, has been responsible for the institutionalization and strengthening of the security sector, including working closely with the Liberian National Police and the Armed Forces of Liberia to establish a sustainable security environment. Despite ambient anxiety over prospects sans UNMIL, government authorities and UNMIL officials alike have been assuring the public that Liberia is capable of handling its own security responsibilities. Drawdown

activities have been taking place across the country over the last several weeks, with UNMIL outposts handing over authority and materials to local administrations. Speaking at headquarters on May 27<sup>th</sup>, the head of UNMIL, Farid Zarif, expressed confidence in Liberia, lauding the security sector for all the progress it had made. He also made a point of noting that UNMIL's drawdown did not mean abandonment—roughly 1,200 military officers and 600 police officers will remain on the ground to assist the government in the months to come.

([Daily Observer](#) June 20, [Liberian Observer](#) May 30, [New Dawn](#) May 21, [UNMIL](#) May 6)

## Election Season Begins

The National Election Commission's (NEC) official countdown to the 2017 Presidential and Legislative elections began this month, with general elections set for October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Twenty-two political parties already have out forth candidates for the presidency, and countless individuals have thrown themselves into the running for legislative seats. As the first set of elections to be held without UNMIL since before the Civil War, authorities in charge have been working to establish a culture of hyper-vigilance. The NEC has released a set of dates for civic education events and registration processes leading up to the elections and has also released new social media platforms, including on Facebook and Twitter—to raise awareness. As the country prepares, one logistical issue is the lack of national identification cards. Debate has sprung up over whether a complete identification initiative—in which all Liberians are registered—should be pursued or whether the process should be limited to voting age individuals specifically, given budget and time restraints. Both the NEC and the National Identification Registry (NIR) have been in discussion over this issue, though there is, at present, no cooperation between the two bodies on intentions to work together.

([Daily Observer](#) June 2, [Front Page Africa](#) June 23, [Front Page Africa](#) June 26)

## ZAMBIA

### Post Newspaper Shutdown, International Community Critical

On June 21, the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) seized all accounts, cash, and property at The Post Newspaper Printing Plant in Lusaka. The Post owes K53.8 million (\$4.94 million USD) in unpaid taxes, but claims that the amount is almost entirely paid off. On June 28 police assaulted and arrested The Post Editor-in-Chief Fred M'membe and his wife and deputy editor, they were released later that day with charges of criminal trespass and “uttering forged documents.”

The Zambian government has received widespread criticism for its action against The Post from various stakeholders including the International Press Institute, the Law Association of Zambia, the European Union, and the United States. The American embassy in Lusaka released a public statement expressing its deep concern over the timing of the closure of The Post, calling it the loss of a key independent voice during the campaign period and election cycle. The US urged the Zambian government to find a way forward that allows The Post to reopen immediately.

The government has become defensive over the criticism for its actions. Following the statement by the American embassy, the government released their own statement saying, “We do not appreciate being patronized by people enjoying our hospitality. It is insulting to our intelligence as hosts that are fully aware of international affairs.” President Lungu has said that if the US and others would like to see The Post open again, they should pay The Post’s overdue taxes.

([Lusaka Times / ZNBC](#), June 22; [Zambian Eye](#), June 23; [Lusaka Times](#), June 24; [The Post](#), June 26; [Lusaka Times / Lusaka Times](#), June 28)

## Concerns Over Electoral Integrity Grow

Transparency International Zambia (TIZ) expressed its alarm at the number of errors discovered in the voters register in advance of the August polls. Consultants from the UN Development Program recently announced that they found 132,000 voters who share the same registration details. The number could be very significant in the upcoming election as the last election in 2015 saw President Lungu beat Hichilema by only 27,000 votes. TIZ encouraged the Electoral Commission of Zambia to address the issues before the election to guarantee the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. In response, the ECZ announced that it has deregistered five voters through its formal review process. In reference to the widespread allegations of Malawi nationals registering to vote, the ECZ said that it can only act when information is authenticated.

The Zambian Air Force (ZAF) also stands accused of interfering with opposition campaigning by rejecting flying permits, a necessity for national campaigning in Zambia, and canceling large rallies. UPND has publically called for the resignation of senior ZAF officials who they accuse of coordinating with PF and President Lungu to rig the coming election. The government responded to the accusations by calling them categorically false. The Defense Minister responded to the accusations by saying that the ZAF is not biased against UPND, rather the party made its requests for use of airspace at inappropriate times.

([The Post](#), June 21; [Lusaka Times](#), June 23; [Zambian Eye](#), June 27; [The Post](#), June 28; [Lusaka Times](#), June 30)

## ASIA

### BANGLADESH

#### Rule of Law Breakdown in Bangladesh

Recent events in Bangladesh have called attention to the inconsistent application of established legal procedures in the country’s justice system. Earlier this June, over 11,000 people were detained in a mass-arrest campaign. Authorities claim that the majority of arrests were actually part of a separate mission to enforce outstanding warrants. The campaign – and the deaths of two suspected militants in reported crossfire with police – meant to curb the surge in violent targeted attacks occurring in Bangladesh, resulted in an outcry against arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and the conditions faced by detained persons. Human rights groups and government officials alike have condemned the disproportionate use of authorities’ use of force in dealing with suspects (although some government officials have defended law enforcement). Reports

have also highlighted the lack of due process after suspects are detained. After arrests, often performed without a warrant on the basis of weak evidence, suspects may be held indefinitely without being formally charged or taken to trial. Revelations into the investigation of Mukul Rana, one of the recent suspects killed, have even called the authorities' investigation techniques into question. Furthermore, jailed persons are likely to be subject to abuse and deprived of their constitutional rights to legal counsel. Experts maintain that growing political repression by the government has contributed to an atmosphere in which extremists threatening the country can thrive, and that the increasing politicization of what should be an impartial system further perpetuates violence in the country.

([The Daily Star](#), June 16; [Human Rights Watch](#), June 17; [World Politics Review](#), June 20; [Prothom Alo](#), June 21; [The Daily Star](#), June 22; [The Daily Star](#), June 23)

### Natural Disasters Wreak Havoc on Bangladesh

Natural disasters pose a significant threat to Bangladesh. In just the last six years, they have caused Bangladesh to lose approximately 2.3 billion dollars. In late May, Cyclone Roanu made landfall and left 200,000 people homeless. While agencies such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have distributed supplies, resources are quickly being depleted and thousands of people are still in need of assistance following the storm. Further, Bangladesh is experiencing worsening riverbank erosion and flooding due to climate change. Higher temperatures have resulted in greater amounts of melting snow and ice. Increased rainfall, in concert with large deposits of silt brought from run-off waters, cause the rivers to overflow and flood surrounding areas, catalyzing riverbank erosion. An estimated 50,000-200,000 people in Bangladesh are displaced every year by the phenomenon. Families are unable to escape from areas prone to flooding and erosion because there is almost no demand for affected land, leaving them without means to relocate. Disasters exacerbated by climate change will continue to pose a threat for at least the next three decades, according to a recent report published by the World Bank. A total of 20 million people live in disaster-prone areas across the country.

([Reliefweb](#), June 9; [Prothom Alo/Reuters](#), June 22; [Gulf Times](#), June 28)

### Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Budget Faces Criticism

Bangladesh's 2016-2017 fiscal year budget has faced an onslaught of criticism ever since its proposal at the beginning of June. The majority of the criticism has focused on the size of the revenue collection target and the Annual Development Program. However, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) recently released a statement denouncing the budget for alleged discrimination against lower-income groups. The anti-corruption organization reported that the measures outlined in the budget would increase instability and inequality within the country if passed, pointing out that a quiet increase in taxes and a decrease in the tax-rebate scope will disproportionately affect Bangladesh's disadvantaged. The measures are meant to ensure the country meets the unrealistically high revenue collection target set in the budget, but are unsustainable, according to the executive director of TIB. The World Bank also assessed the budget, heavily criticizing the document's proposals. However, the organization stated that the focus should not be on the budget's size, but rather on its eventual outcomes. Most recently, economists have called attention to the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation techniques to assess the budget's gender impact. In comparison with that of this year, the new budget substantially increased the amount allocated for women, but without the necessary evaluation techniques, the true impact of the budget remains unclear. The budget was passed on June 30th.

([New Age](#), June 3; [The Daily Star](#), June 21; [New Age](#), June 23; [The Daily Star](#), June 28; [New Age](#), June 30)

## CHINA

### Merkel Visits China for Talks on Trade and Investment

German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived in Beijing on Sunday, June 12th, marking her ninth visit to China in her eleven years of office. (International Business Times) During her three-day trip, she met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping. The primary concern of her visit was to settle rising worries over trade and investment between China and Europe. China is Germany's largest source of imports and fourth largest overall trading partner, with a total trade volume of \$183 billion. (Japan Times) One of the main industries of concern is steel. Europe and America accuse China for encouraging 'steel dumping', or facilitating the production and export of low-priced Chinese steel to overseas markets, overwhelming demand and hurting domestic production in those regions. Earlier this month, China promised to rein in production of steel and other 'bloated' industries in talks with the United States. (New York Times) Both sides have stated their desire to avoid a 'trade war' and carry on a peaceful economic relationship.

Chancellor Merkel also stressed the need for 'reliable and transparent' rules for foreign investors in China. Foreign investors state that the confusing and unfair structure of rules in China create an uneven playing field for foreign investors. In the past, Merkel has threatened to impose investment restrictions in Europe for Chinese investors if China did not do more to create an equal legal system for investment.

(Bloomberg) (Bloomberg; June 12, International Business Times / Japan Times / New York Times; June 13)

### Ambassador Wu Jianmin's Death Leads to Debate in China

Wu Jianmin, a leading Chinese diplomat for decades, died in a car crash on June 18, 2016 at the age of 77. He had previously served as an interpreter for Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, as well as Chinese ambassador to France, the Netherlands, and the United Nations in Geneva. Known for being one of China's most prominent "doves," for years Wu has been a major voice calling against nationalism and populism in Chinese and global politics. His views calling for peace and reconciliation were mainstream in the 1980's and 1990's, but have since fallen out of favor following President Xi Jinping's presidency. (Financial Times).

Wu's death sparked a series of online debates, with some commenters stating that Wu's views represented a different era, a time in which China was not as powerful as it is today. One representative comment on The Global Times' network stated that Wu's worldview was "too nice to the Americans," and that praising him would only "backfire." Western analysts such as Orville Schell, who heads the Asia Society's US-China Center, credit Wu, both in life and since his death, for revealing the "vigorous, perhaps even destabilizing debates going on... behind the scene," in the upper rungs of China's government. (BBC).

(The Financial Times, 18 June 2016) (BBC, 22 June 2016)

## Award-winning Tibetan Director Detained, Hospitalized in China

Tibetan director Pema Tseden was detained on June 25th by Chinese police at the airport in Xining, Qinghai province. He had just arrived on a flight from Beijing, and had returned to the baggage area in order to retrieve a forgotten bag. Sonam, a producer travelling with him at the time, stated that Mr. Tseden was confronted by airport staff for re-entering the baggage claim area, and was forcibly detained by Xining airport police. Police stated that because of Mr. Tseden's 'refusal to cooperate' he sustained minor cuts during the arrest, and ordered him to serve five days in detention for disturbing the public order. Upon visiting the detention center, Sonam reported that Mr. Tseden had sustained 'many injuries to his wrist and hand' due to handcuffs. On Monday, June 27th, Mr. Tseden was taken to the hospital after "feeling dizzy and complaining of tightness in his chest." (New York Times)

Pema Tseden is the first director in China to make films entirely in the Tibetan language. His 2009 film, *The Search*, won the Grand Jury Prize at the Shanghai International Film Festival. His films explore the clash of Tibetan and Chinese identity and culture, and has been praised for his depictions of everyday life in Tibet. The Film Director's Guild of China released a statement demanding that the police make public full information regarding the arrest, including the reason for utilizing forceful measures. (Reuters) Despite the topic of his films, Mr. Tseden had previously avoided controversy or any involvement in political activities.

Mr. Tseden's arrest comes following news that American pop star Lady Gaga has been banned from China. Lady Gaga had met with the exiled Tibetan Leader, the Dalai Lama, the previous weekend, and posted the resulting 20-minute conversation to Facebook. Lady Gaga's songs have previously been placed on a blacklist by the Chinese Ministry of Culture for "poor taste and vulgar content".

(The Guardian; June 28, New York Times / Reuters; June 29)

## TIMOR-LESTE

### Timor-Leste Joins ASEAN in 2017

According to the statement made on May 24 by the Indonesian Ambassador to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Rahmat Pramono, Timor-Leste will become a member of the ASEAN in 2017. A part of the feasibility study evaluating country's politics, security and economy has been finished, the socio-cultural assessment is expected to be completed by the end of the 2016. The Ambassador said that Timor-Leste must also undertake development of its human resources, however this can be done after joining the ASEAN. Deputy foreign affairs and cooperation minister of Timor-Leste, Roberto de Soares, commented that being part of the ASEAN will further safeguard own independence and sovereignty of the country, and peace and stability in the region. On the other hand, Timor-Leste could also be a bridge between ASEAN and the Pacific, contributing through its own linkages and partners. By this Soares pointed to the fact that Timor could connect ASEAN with the community of Portuguese speaking countries.

(Antara News, May 25; The Jakarta Post, May 26)

## CNE Law Alteration Introduced

President of the Republic, Taur Matan Ruak, has promulgated the alteration of the law of electoral administration regulating the Electoral National Commission's function. An unnamed source from President Office said that the president had promulgated the CNE Law, but he was unhappy because there were some points that could affect the independence of this institution's service in the future as it seems to hide the political parties' interest. According to the previous Electoral Administration Law, CNE was composed of 15 people representing Catholic Church, Muslim people, National Parliament, Government, Court, Public Prosecution, Public Lawyers, and Civil Society to maintain the independence and the balance in the body. The alteration of the law implements that the CNE would be composed only of seven people representing National Parliament, Government, Court, Public Prosecution, and President of the Republic. Moreover, the CNE President, who was previously chosen by the CNE members, will be instead appointed by the Parliament.

(Guide Post Magazine, June 8)

## FRETILIN and CNRT to Form Coalition in 2017

Political parties FRETILIN and CNRT will form coalition after the 2017 general elections. The coalition is aimed to realize the Timor-Leste's founding fathers' dream of creating peace and stability to develop the country and take people out of poverty. FRETILIN Party Secretary General, Mari Alkatiri, said on Sunday June 12 that the parties will be united to guarantee the future leadership of Timor-Leste. Nevertheless, during the pre-election period, doing election campaigns, the two parties will walk on their own.

(Guide Post Magazine, June 13)

## Horta Ready to Run for the 2017 Presidential Elections

The Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Jose Ramos Horta, said on Thursday June 23 that he was ready to run for the 2017 presidential election. The ex-President of the republic affirmed that he would consult with the Catholic Church and political parties about his presidential nomination.

(Guide Post Magazine, June 24)