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WORLD NEWS

by Blase Kornacki, Abby Okrent,
Jennifer Rohleder, and Mauro Zinner*

AFRICA

AVIAN FLU POSES IMMINENT THREAT TO AFRICA

The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (“FAO”) announced that there is an increased risk of the bird flu spreading to North Africa and East Africa.¹ The FAO warns that East Africa in particular will have difficulties containing the flu.² The close proximity between humans and animals in East Africa creates an ideal situation for spreading the flu to people.³ A number of African countries have already responded to predictions of avian flu. For instance, Congo-Brazzaville banned poultry imports.⁴ South Africa’s Department of Health placed an urgent request for the flu medicine Tamiflu to be approved for use in the country.⁵ Kenya has established a surveillance network of the health ministry, veterinarians, and the livestock ministry to monitor incidences of bird flu.⁶

MALAWI FOOD CRISIS WORSENS AND FARMERS ARE UNABLE TO OBTAIN FERTILIZER

Malawi’s food shortage is now at the level of a crisis, brought on by the worst drought in a decade.⁷ During August 2005, the number of people admitted to hospitals for starvation and malnutrition increased between 29 and 40 percent as compared with August 2004.⁸ The president of Malawi declared the entire country a disaster area, and aid agencies are concerned that half of the country’s population could starve by April.⁹ By the time the crisis becomes visible to donor countries it is already too late to save many people.¹⁰

Bad harvests brought on by drought and a delay in seed and fertilizer delivery last year are blamed in part for the crisis.¹¹ Malawi’s president promised subsidized fertilizers; however, the government cancelled a \$30 million deal for subsidized fertilizer from Saudi Arabia when U.S.-based Citibank refused to process the deal.¹² The United States claims that the Saudi Arabian company has ties to al-Qaeda.¹³ Malawi is looking into other options for fertilizer.¹⁴ The UN World Food Programme estimates that it will require \$76 million to feed nearly three million Malawians until the harvest in April.¹⁵

KENYAN NATIONAL PARK PUT INTO TRUST STATUS FOR MAASAI

Kenya’s President Mwai Kibaki announced a plan in early October to hand over a national park to the Maasai community.¹⁶ The decision will downgrade the Amboseli National Park

from national park to national reserve and place it in a trust status for the Maasai.¹⁷ Conservation groups oppose the move, saying that it will harm the country’s international tourism industry.¹⁸ The conservation groups and some government ministers allege that President Kibaki’s purpose in downgrading the park was to woo Maasai votes in a Constitutional referendum.¹⁹ Maasai leaders responded that these conservation groups are just unhappy because they are no longer needed in the park.²⁰ Kenya’s Shadow Attorney-General Mutula Kilonzo believes that President Kibaki violated the Constitution by downgrading the park without the Parliament’s approval.²¹

Amboseli National Reserve has been handed over to the county council, though the Kenyan Wildlife Service will continue running the reserve.²² Local and international wildlife organizations will be given a role in managing the reserve as well.²³

AMERICAS

LICENSING OF THE SÃO FRANCISCO RIVER IN BRAZIL

The Federal Court of Bahia, in Salvador Da Bahia, Brazil, suspended the process of obtaining an environmental license to the Government of Brazil, granting injunctive relief to those who oppose the government’s desire to take advantage of the São Francisco River’s waters to conduct a transposing project to irrigate the north-east desert regions of the country.²⁴ Without this license, it is not possible for the government to begin the irrigation program; thus, the government plans to appeal the court’s decision. According to the Government of Brazil, the project will benefit twelve million people that suffer from the region’s desertified conditions.²⁵ The opponents of the project argue that several major implications of the project were not debated with the local population.²⁶ These issues include the revitalization of the river,²⁷ which is completely deteriorated, and the environmental impact assessment that did not consider the consequences to the “Bacia do São Francisco” (the flow of the river) and to the rivers that will receive its water.²⁸

Luiz Flávio Cappio, a Bahia bishop, became a symbol against the transposition. He performed an eleven day hunger strike against the project arguing, among other point points, the politically tinged intent of the project.²⁹ The São Francisco River runs 1680 miles from the southeast of Brazil to the increasingly dry northeast, and is responsible for 75 percent of the water for that region.³⁰

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MOUNTAINS OF WASTE IN NEW ORLEANS AFTER KATRINA

The largest and most complicated cleanup in American history has begun in New Orleans, Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which tore through the Gulf Coast in August 2005.³¹ Although New Orleans authorities want its people returned as soon as possible, 22 million tons of waste must still be removed.³² In addition to the material debris, the waste includes toxic household chemicals such as freon and mercury, which have made the city look and smell like a landfill.³³ Many of the residents are wearing gloves to protect themselves from bacteria and germ contamination.³⁴ Authorities estimate that it will take at least 3.5 million truckloads to haul the chemical and material waste away.³⁵

ASIA

THAILAND DEDICATES SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Thailand demonstrates its commitment to Millennium Development Goal Eight to develop a global partnership for development through the disbursement of its development aid. In comparison to wealthier nations like Japan, Italy, and the United States, which contribute around one-third of their development aid to Least Developed Countries (“LDCs”), Thailand contributes nearly all of its development assistance to LDCs.³⁶ In addition, among developing countries in Asia, Thailand has the lowest tariffs on imports from LDCs, and its imports from LDCs makes up over three percent of its total imports – higher than any other middle-income country.³⁷

EUROPE

PREVENTING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH THE AVIATION SECTOR

On September 27, 2005, the European Commission (“Commission”) issued a communication outlining a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from air travel by admitting aircraft operators to the European Union (“EU”) Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (“ETS”).³⁸ The aviation industry’s overall contribution to EU greenhouse gas emissions is only around three percent; however, its emissions are growing faster than any other sector, which risks undermining the progress made in other industries.³⁹ For example, a roundtrip flight for two between Amsterdam and Phuket in Thailand, produces significantly more carbon dioxide than the average new car produces in an entire year.⁴⁰ The Commission believes that admittance into the ETS will provide a permanent incentive for airlines to minimize their greenhouse gas emissions.⁴¹ The proposed emissions cap applies to both EU carriers as well as foreign airlines operating in EU airports.⁴² The Commission claims that admittance to the ETS will provide the same environmental benefit with a lesser impact on ticket prices or on the rest of the economy when compared to imposing a tax on aviation fuel.⁴³

EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY CLIMATE CHANGE SATELLITE FAILS TO LIFT OFF

In response to climate modeling that suggests that the frozen parts of the Earth are the most sensitive to climate change, the European Space Agency (“ESA”) had planned to launch an ice-monitoring satellite called CryoSat on October 8, 2005.⁴⁴ The mission, scheduled to last one thousand days, was developed to assess the rate at which the ice caps are thinning and contribute data to the ongoing debate on global warming.⁴⁵ The satellite’s main payload was a radar altimeter designed for ice, making it the first of its kind, as altimeters used in previous missions were designed for use over land and sea.⁴⁶ Due to an unfortunate glitch in the launch sequence, the CryoSat launch failed and the satellite fell into the Arctic Ocean, north of Greenland near the North Pole, with no damage to any populated areas.⁴⁷ The ESA may still consider recreating CryoSat together with industry, depending on cost and other factors to be decided by ESA’s Program Board.⁴⁸

MIDDLE EAST

WORLD FOOD PROGRAM’S FUNDING SHORTFALL IN IRAQ

The United Nations’ World Food Programme (“WFP”) reports that 20-34 percent of Iraq’s population is undernourished.⁴⁹ The WFP launched aid operations in September of 2004 to remedy food shortages in the war torn country.⁵⁰ These operations have recently hit a major roadblock. In a September 21, 2005 press release, WFP announced a 56 percent funding shortfall that is jeopardizing its operations in Iraq. The \$66 million U.S. operation aimed at supporting three million people, half of them children, has only received \$29 million thus far.⁵¹ The operation runs until the end of this year; however, with the current financial problems, it is likely to fall well short of its goals.

Funding for security and reconstruction projects in Iraq has taken precedence over much needed food and health programs.⁵² “Millions of Iraqis are dying and require urgent action and support from the whole world, but politics and security issues have caused people to forget the poor and those desperate for food,” said Ahmed Abdul Walled, a senior official in the Iraq Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation.⁵³ If further funding does not materialize, the WFP may have to cut back or even cease its operations in Iraq.⁵⁴

STRUGGLING TO MEET THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN YEMEN

The Human Development Report (“HDI”), which measures life expectancy, school enrollment, literacy, and income, has regularly ranked Yemen among the world’s poorest countries.⁵⁵ The recently published 2005 report placed Yemen two points lower than last year’s ranking.⁵⁶ Yemen ranks 151 out of 177 countries, and ranks last in the Middle East.⁶⁷

According to the United Nations Development Programme (“UNDP”), at its current rate of progress Yemen is

unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goals.⁵⁸ The Yemeni government blames this year's shortcomings on insufficient donor support.⁵⁹ Yemen's UNDP Resident Representative Flavia Pansieri supports the government's assertions, pointing out that Yemen has only received a third of

the average received by the Least Developed Countries.⁶⁰ Pansieri suggests a redistribution of government funds to remedy the deteriorating situation and recommends a reduction in defense expenditures in exchange for increased funding in the health and education sectors.⁶¹



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ENDNOTES: World News Continued on page 75