Hours after the army chief’s death, President Joao Bernardo Vieira was assassinated. “With the new leadership in Guinea Bissau that country’s stand regarding Casamance is still uncertain.” (IRIN news service 18/9) Fresh violence in Casamance p. 18012

SOUTH AFRICA

Annual Crime Statistics

The politically sensitive, but delayed, report shows that tackling crime remains one of the key challenges.

The annual crime statistics for the year ending March 2009, which were due for release before the April parliamentary elections, but were delayed, were published on September 22nd (for the full report see: saps.gov.za; issafrica.org).

Crime levels in South Africa remain one of the key challenges facing the country. The statistics by the South African Police Service (SAPS) provide detailed information on the levels of reported crime. Crime figures show that the overall crime rate increased in 2008-09 by 0.3% after steady decreases in the previous four years.

But an up-to-date assessment of whether crime is increasing or not is difficult to make because of the way the government releases the figures. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) has called on Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa to revert to the practice of his predecessor, Charles Nqakula, of releasing crime statistics twice a year.

The overall murder rate has continued on its downward trend, with a 3.4% decrease and a general decline since 1994. But other categories of crime show significant increases. Sexual offences climbed by 10.1%, house robberies by 27.3% and commercial crime by 18.7%.

The fact that all the provinces have seen increases in serious crimes is “particularly worrying”, said Johan Burger, senior researcher in the ISS’s crime and justice programme. “An upward curve in aggravated robbery, however small, is a matter of national concern. It is for this reason that the rise by just less than 1%, after a decrease of 7.4% in the previous financial year, should be taken seriously.”

One of the few areas where police achieved their crime reduction target was in crimes against children, which dropped by 9.3%. “All the categories of crimes against children depict decreases in excess of eight percent, which clearly fall within the seven to ten percent reduction target with regard to the incidence of contact crime,” the report stated.

However, the report also showed that only a fifth of all crimes against children reported were solved.

The conviction rate for murder cases was 11%, for common assault 36% and for sexual offences 10.7%.

Crimes against women, with the exception of 30,124 reported sexual offences, decreased by 3.4%. A total of 2,436 women were murdered—a third of them in the context of domestic abuse. It marks a decrease of 4.2% compared to reported cases the previous year.

The police have set a target of reducing all forms of contact crime by at least 7% every year.

Releasing the annual crime figures Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa said a 10% increase in sexual offences was one of the most worrying aspects of the statistics, but was partly to blame on a law change that broadened the definition of sex crimes to include, for example, male rape.

Police Commissioner Bheki Cele, a close ally of President Jacob Zuma, has the difficult task of turning around the nation’s surging crime rate, which affects South Africans in poor townships and informal settlements more than those in wealthy suburbs.

With one of the highest homicide rates in the world, South Africa has been struggling for years to reduce the violence. 2010’s FIFA World Cup soccer tournament has increased the pressure for action, amid fears that a major crime could taint the event.

The apartheid-era police force was feared and distrusted, and now surveys indicate eroding confidence in the contemporary force, due in large part to corruption and the frequent reluctance of police to act on crime reports or visit crime scenes. Wealthy suburbs are policed by “24-hour rapid response” private security squads and farmers volunteer for rural patrols.

Since his appointment in July, Cele, an ANC member who served as a provincial chief of security and transport, has toured the country, meeting provincial commissioners and addressing the 1,116 station commanders. He has taken to dropping in at police stations unannounced, speaking to people lining up for service.

To combat crime, legislation increasing the power of police to act with deadly force will soon go to parliament. (Los Angeles Times 27/9; SAPA 23/9; Mail & Guardian 25/9)

SUDAN

NCP Still Controls Oil

A new report suggests the government is withholding oil money from the impoverished government of Southern Sudan, threatening the fragile peace.

A September 7th report by UK-based resource lobbying group Global Witness, Fuelling Mistrust: the Need for Transparency in Sudan’s Oil Industry, reveals serious inconsistencies in the oil production and revenue data published by the Khartoum government and a general lack of financial accountability. Both are undermining the peace deal which oil wealth-sharing underpins.

The National Congress Party (NCP) dominates the power-sharing government and also controls the production and sale of the oil, most of which is in the South. Under the CPA, half the revenue from Southern (but not Northern) oil wells should go to the government of southern Sudan (GOSS). The money is vital to the South: it accounts for 98% of government income, making the GOSS the world’s most oil-dependent government. Although the wells subject to revenue sharing are all in the South, it is the government of National Unity (GNU) in Khartoum that markets the oil and reports on how much has been sold and at what price. In reality, this means the NCP controls Sudan’s oil industry.

Southerners have long suspected trickery in the wealth-sharing agreement, proclaimed internationally as a great success. Although Kenya, Britain, Norway and the United States played important roles in negotiating the agreement, they gave the SPLM little support when it raised complaints about inequities in the sharing of oil-revenues.

Suspicions have persisted that the NCP was withholding money, underreporting the amount of oil sold and changing the fees and figures in its favour. No one can verify what it reports; this lack of transparency has added to the feeling of mistrust. The new evidence documented by Global Witness, which investigates links between natural resource production and conflict, reveals that the production figures published by Khartoum are lower than those published by the China National Petroleum Corporation. The CNPC is the main operator of the producing oil blocks and the new report may prompt Beijing to investigate further; it already faces pressure over its arms sales to Sudan.

The report argues that without greater transparency, timelier reporting and