

NEWS IN BRIEF

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SUDAN

FIGHTING BETWEEN SOUTHERN SUDAN'S ARMY AND A REBEL FACTION HAS LEFT MORE THAN 100 PEOPLE DEAD and a month-long ceasefire in January shattered. According to MSNBC, control over the town of Fangak has been passed between government troops and those loyal to former Southern army commander George Athor. In what is soon to be the world's newest country, Athor's revolt is the result of a lost election for governor of Jonglei, one of the largest of Southern Sudan's 10 states.



UNITED STATES

"WE WANT NEW YORK CITY TO BE THE SAFEST CITY IN THE WORLD TO HAVE SEX," Dr. Monica Sweeney, the city's assistant health commissioner, told Reuters News. The city's health department released a smart-phone application that provides information on the nearest free condom distributor. In the last five years, the city has given out an average of 3 million free condoms every month. The smartphone application is the newest part of New York's safe sex program, and is available on both the iPhone and Android phones.



ECUADOR

THE CHEVRON CORPORATION WAS FINED \$8 BILLION by an Ecuadorean Judge for environmental damages inflicted upon the South American nation's northern jungle. According to NPR, the fine is the newest development in a 17-year-old dispute over contamination from an operation that took place from 1972 through 1990. While the Ecuadorean plaintiffs are seeking reparations for "the cleanup of soil, subterranean water, health, (and) indigenous communities," Chevron officials contend that Texaco's cleanup was successful and that the operation's partner, the state oil company Petroecoador, continued polluting after Texaco pulled out.



TUNISIA

FORMER PRESIDENT ZINE EL ABIDINE BEN ALI IS NOT ALONE IN FLEEING a politically unsettled Tunisia, as thousands of citizens are also fleeing the country to escape the political uncertainty. According to NPR, 4,000 arrived illegally to Italy's southern islands in one week alone. The island of Lampedusa, a mere 75 miles from the North African nation, has received most of the immigrants, who are being contained in fenced-in soccer stadiums. Those involved in the exodus are risking fines and prison time, as a law that was imposed by Ben Ali and is still in effect prohibits emigration to Europe.

Rapa Nui occupy government buildings and hotel to protest eviction from land

By Brandy Mitchell
STAFF WRITER

For the last six months, the Rapa Nui clan — an indigenous people who have lived on Easter Island for centuries — have occupied various government buildings and the Hotel Hanga Roa, a luxury hotel costing \$800 per night.

Officials had previously completed two raids, removing the indigenous protesters from all of the buildings except the hotel, and on Feb. 6, the remaining protesters were removed and charged with trespassing.

The protest revolves around plans to further develop Easter Island, in addition to conflicts over the land where the Hotel Hanga Roa is built and tourism profits.

According to the Herald Sun, Marisol Hito — a Rapa Nui native — claims the land was loaned to the Chilean government in 1970. The lease term was to be 20 years, during which time a hotel was to be developed in an effort to create revenue for the locals living on

Easter Island.

However, in the 1990's, the hotel was sold to the Scheiss family, a powerful investment group, according to the BBC.

In 2008, Chile signed the international indigenous peoples treaty requiring compensation to be paid by governments to indigenous peoples, according to Today Online.

Twenty Rapa Nui clan members — men, women, and children — were injured in December 2010, when authorities attempted to clear protesters from a building using pellet guns.

The protest has received attention from Congressman Eni Faleomavaega of American Samoa and Senator Daniel K. Akaka of Hawaii, who sent letters to Chilean President Sebastian Piñera discussing their concern about the situation.

Faleomavaega and Akaka have also written to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton requesting that she stand up for the Rapa Nui.

"(The Chilean government needs to) make every effort to conduct a dialogue in good faith with

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representatives of the Rapa Nui people to solve, as soon as possible, the real underlying problems that explain the current situation," said the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People James Anaya to BBC News in January.

"Utterly irregular and illegal," said Rapa Nui lawyer Rodrigo Gomez regarding the eviction to BBC News.

According to The Canadian Press, Judge Norah Bahamondes has suspended the trespassing charges against the clan until the land dispute has been settled.

"This decision makes us proud," said Hito to The Santiago Times. "It has shown that the raids and abuses were unjustified and that the government, (President Sebastian) Piñera, (Interior Minister Rodrigo) Hinzpeter, in addition to the prosecution, turned against us and in favor

of the powerful without waiting for the establishment of who is the true owner of the land."

Schiess is willing to move forward in proving that she owns the land, claiming its private ownership was grandfathered in under a 1979 law

that limited ownership of land to native islanders.

The Rapa Nui are not the only indigenous people in Latin America who are pursuing land claims, but often the cases are difficult to win.

"In many Latin American countries it is hard for the indigenous peoples to find enough support to pursue land claims," said Part-Time Lecturer in Foreign Languages Edith Lebrato Shepherd.

As to when the land issue will be resolved, Rapa Nui lawyer Rodrigo Gomez had the following comment for Radio New Zealand International:

"We are not able to know about that because the court has its own timing. So we couldn't say, but (we expect it to sit) during the next six months."

While it is uncertain how long it will take for the courts to decide who the legal owner of the land is, Hito advised that they are not giving up.

"This is just the beginning, we will go to the very end," said Hito to the Radio Cooperativa.