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Massive Protests in Algeria

By Darby Hickey, IMC Boston

Over the past weeks hundreds of thousands have demonstrated in Algeria for greater rights for the Berber minority. Recent gatherings were sparked by the killing of a Berber teenager by police. After days of continuous rioting in the Kabylie region, as well as a march of 200,000 in Algiers, the death toll was estimated at 80 by independent sources, and the army seemed poised to intervene.

It is unclear how the
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Reporters, activists silenced in Indonesia

By Jessica Rucell, IMC Global

PEUDADA, ACEH, INDONESIA--Two female Achinese human rights activists and one Norwegian reporter have been detained by the Indonesian police here.

The movement for independence in Aceh continues to draw violent opposition from the Indonesian government. The stakes in the struggle are particularly high

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War escalates in Colombia

By Chris Strohm, IMC-Washington, D.C.

CAQUETA, COLOMBIA--U.S.-backed military operations in Colombia have moved into full force as a war in this country escalates and the United States moves to increase its intervention throughout the South American Andes.

A third battalion of Colombian soldiers, trained by U.S. Special Operations Forces and equipped with U.S. weapons, graduated into service May 24 to join two other battalions already deployed in the muddy, tropical jungles of southern Colombia. The battalions constitute the military component of "Plan Colombia," a six-year, \$7.5 billion effort crafted by U.S. and Colombian officials. The United States has already committed \$1.3 billion to the plan, most of which is for interdiction and military support.

As a follow-on, the U.S. State Department's budget for 2002 includes \$800 million for the "Andean Regional Initiative," which will provide military and economic assistance to Colombia and neighboring countries. The budget has been submitted to Congress and is currently under review.

However, U.S. policy toward this war-torn South American country is being heavily criticized by non-governmental organizations and some lawmakers for being too focused on military intervention, and for not doing enough to address human rights

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Photo courtesy cineak, www.squat.net/cineak

"No Second Vietnam"

On 28 May, activists demonstrated outside the Dutch Parliament in The Hague, Netherlands, against Dutch participation in the U.S.'s "Plan Colombia".

The government of the Netherlands is considering a deal that would give the U.S. military access to the Dutch airforce bases on the Caribbean islands of Aruba and Curaçao (the last Dutch colonies) to use as bases for secret surveillance flights into Colombia.

Argentinean strikers shut down airports

From IMC Argentina

Employees of Aereolinas Argentina have been on strike for over three weeks to protest job losses, wage reductions, and reduced hours. The government of Spain owns Aerolineas through its agent, the *Sociedad Estatal de Participaciones Industriales* (SEPI—the "State Society of Industrial Participation") and is threatening to close down the airline, an act that would affect 7000 families and leave Argentina without its only national airline.

Strikers have taken over buildings and are blocking landing-fields, causing delayed

and cancelled flights. They have also set up "Worker Camps" at both the metropolitan and the international airports. Support for the employees among the Argentinean populace has been vocal and widespread.

Ten years ago, SEPI took over Aerolineas, which was then publicly-owned, and has since cut 5000 jobs, sold off the majority of its equipment, and reassigned most of its flights to Iberia, a privately-owned Spanish airline. The government of Spain also owns interest in utilities in Argentina. These arrangements strike many as Colonialism and have not been

popular. The current uprising by airline workers is only the most recent vocalization of dissatisfaction.

The pressure on SEPI has been somewhat effective. On 1 June, some workers finally received their pay from hours' worked in April. Left out were those workers who have been fired in the meantime, and pay for days since the strike has been in effect.

The workers are now calling for solidarity demonstrations worldwide at Spanish Embassies "in your country or city".

For more information, visit argentina.indymedia.org

Students win victory against prison-builders

On May 30, Sodexho-Marriott, the French multinational food service provider, announced that it was divesting itself of its shares in Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a private prison builder.

This announcement followed a year of protests on campuses across the US against Sodexho-Marriott. Student action had already led to American University severing its contracts with Sodexho-Marriott on April 9, citing issues relating to "social

responsibility." Oberlin College followed suit two days later.

Sodexho-Marriott became the largest institutional provider of food services in North America in 1998 when Sodexho acquired Marriott Management Services, then the largest shareholder in CCA.

Privately owned prisons have been condemned for being poorly managed and unregulated, with underpaid, non-organized guards who are minimally trained. Mistreatment of prisoners and escapes commonly result.

*"This is proof that students can affect positive change and hold companies accountable for their actions. Hopefully this will send a signal to other companies that they will have to act responsibly or else face negative consequences."
(Kevin Owen, American University student)*

Global battle against GMOs

Compiled from various IMCs

Biotechnology corporations have been developing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) for almost ten years now. Laboratory-bred hybrids are in the food supply and experimental plants and insects have been placed in the wild. No one knows how these newly invented lifeforms will affect the health of people or the environment in the long-term.

Most governments have been hesitant to regulate GMOs because biotechnology companies make huge donations to political parties and candidates. In the absence of any reasonable oversight, the battle to make biotechnology corporations accountable has erupted at the grassroots level worldwide.

Early in the morning of 27 May, 2001, three fields of a pilot variety of colseed were destroyed in Belgium, in the countries of Nazareth, Velzeke-Rudershove and Zonnegem. The fields are owned by Aventis, which purchased Plant Genetic Systems, a Belgian start-up company originally founded by Professor Marc van Montagu with the financial assistance of the University of Ghent.

Using public money to fund products that are sold for private profit is not limited to Belgium.

Dozens of U.S. universities are involved in research and development of GMOs, often in partnership with private corporations that demand the right to patent all the university's findings. On 21 May, 2001, the office of Toby Bradshaw at the University of Washington was burned down by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) because Bradshaw is, in ELF's words, "the driving force" in genetically modified tree research.

Though organizations like the Sierra Club condemn tactics such as crop-destruction and arson as criminal activity, other activists point out that tainting the food supply with what could be poison is a much greater crime—a crime against humanity.

Popular outcry is forcing governments to respond. The Academy of Medicine in China has proposed that all food containing GMOs be labeled. In April, Sri Lanka officially banned the importation of all food containing GMOs.

The battle is far from over. Professor Montagu put it this way: "I'm afraid that the responsible politicians are fighting rearguard actions [against foes who] have little to do with reality: the almighty interests of the industrial and financial economy."

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abuses committed by the Colombian military and other armed groups, particularly right-wing paramilitaries.

Workers and students in Colombia told the Independent Media Center they believe U.S. military intervention is escalating the war in their country. In recent years, urban areas have been a safe haven for people fleeing the violence in rural areas. But a day after the third battalion was deployed, two bombs exploded in downtown Bogota, killing four civilians and injuring 26. No groups have claimed responsibility for the bombings.

"Plan Colombia is the fuel for war," one worker said.

Officially, the war in Colombia is against the production and smuggling of cocaine and heroin. Although Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative include money for social and economic programs, the military component has been the only portion to materialize so far.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) said conditions will most likely be placed on the next aid package to Colombia to help ensure that human rights abuses are not committed and that violators are brought to justice.

"The Colombian Army has a long history of abusive conduct, and not disciplining people in its own ranks who commit atrocities," he said. "Today, some army units work hand in glove with the paramilitaries who increasingly do the dirty work, massacring whole villages suspected of sympathizing with [left-wing] guerrillas. The top military leadership talks about human rights, but has not done nearly enough to cut the army's ties with the paramilitaries."

And massacres continue in the countryside. On May 31, armed men dressed in Army camouflage hurled grenades at houses in the farming village of Los Tupes, killing eight people, including five children.

For more information, visit colombia.indymedia.org

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recent violence will affect the ongoing conflict between the secular government and Islamic insurgents, who often recruit in underprivileged communities like the Berbers. The government has been accused of using the volatile situation as an excuse to persecute its opponents. Over 100,000 people have been killed since 1992, when elections were called off as Islamic factions were about to take power.

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because of the presence of an ExxonMobil natural gas facility in the province.

The two activists and one reporter were on their way to interview two victims of the Indonesian police: a woman who was raped, and the mother of a baby who died after being doused with boiling water.

For more on Aceh, see issue #6 (22 May 2000) or visit www.indymedia.org

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