

"Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues"

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About CRP News & Background

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Russia reacts to NATO's missile shield

US-Russian relations have been turning into tensions, becoming once again a focal point in the history. Seriousness and attention have been recalled as essential in order to face latest Russian threats of activating its defence asset to neutralise emerging dangers.

The continuous expansion of the NATO toward the East has caused prompt reactions from Russia, invoking reasons connected to international security risks. NATO's membership invitation to Montenegro has been commented by Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as a meaningless step from the point of view of European security and mainly as a risk of increasing fuelling tensions on the continent. After Croatia and Albania, which formally entered the Atlantic Alliance in 2009, Montenegro will be the third state of the Balkans region to become a member. Viktor Ozerov, the head of the Russian Federation Council's Defence and Security Committee, stated that, as a consequence, Montenegro has become a state which is a potential member of the threat toward Russia. Tensions arising from the Balkans region have been deteriorating



'Remember, Putin - It's me who won the gold!'

Political cartoon by Ranan Lurie. Image: Ranan Lurie

after the recognition of former NATO Secretary-General Andres Fogh Rasmussen as an adviser to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. The Russian reaction, in this occasion, has been clearly expressed by deputy chairman of the Foreign Affairs



Committee. As reported by Russian non-governmental news agency Interfax, the deputy told that Rasmussen's appointment was "a hostile gesture" toward Russia and "it shows Ukraine has chosen the West and NATO as a vector of its drifting movement". But the situation regarding the United States and Russia international relations, once again as a central point in the history, is not just political. The present scenario involving the Eastern European countries is dangerously military. In 2010, NATO launched a project consisting of a progressive deployment of missiles interceptors and radars in the abovementioned region and in Turkey. The goal is to merge missile defence assets provided by individual Allies into a consistent defence system, in order to safeguard European populations from the threats linked to the proliferation of ballistic missiles. The matter under consideration concerns a long-term aim, expected to be realised between 2010 and 2020. Some radars have already been activated in Turkey and, until the end of the project, Spain will host four US Aegis warships at its port in Rota. Finally, Poland and Romania have agreed to host US land-based missiles. As declared purpose, the defence shield has been architected in order to safeguard Europe against the so-called rogue states, such as Iran. It is possible to identify four of the substantial features which make a state "rogue" and these are: support for terrorism, blameworthy way of treating citizens, hostile propaganda against the US and, lastly, attempts in producing weapons of destruction.

The placements of US missiles in nearby countries such as Romania have activated the most worrisome reaction from Russia. The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin firmly stated that Poland and Romania should not be involved in ballistic missiles defence shield. NATO's initiative consequences are inevitable, according to the Russian president, who clearly pointed out that now that missiles defence are deployed in nearby countries, Russia will be forced to carry out measures to ensure its own security. He insisted by saying "this is not a defence system, it is part of US nuclear strategic potential and a step to rock international security and to start a new arms race, in which Russia will not be drawn". The NATO has promptly counterstruck reaffirming that the system is meant to defend Europe against rogue states like Iran and not intended to target Russia's nuclear arsenal. This has been followed by the explanation of how the system has been planned. It relies on deployed radars to detect a missile launch into space. Some mechanisms will measure the rocket's trajectory, in order to destroy it



*Barack Obama meets with Vladimir Putin to discuss Syria, 29 September 2015.
Photo: Kremlin.ru [Wikimedia Commons]*



in space before it re-enters the earth's atmosphere. Those interceptors can be fired from ships or ground sites. NATO's spokeswoman Oana Lungescu has commented any threats from Russia as "unjustified and irresponsible".



*Obama at a bilateral meeting with Putin during the G8 summit in Ireland, June 17, 2013.
Photo: Pete Souza ([Pete Souza tweet](#))*

Additional protests against the construction of the defence shield have been raised in Moldova, after the arrival of US troops from Romania for training exercises. US soldiers arrived on May 2, for military training scheduled to last for more than two weeks. The US Embassy in Chisinau said that the training session was focused on demolition

operations, medical treatment and evacuation, and field maintenance. Moldova's pro-Russian opposition, as announced, staged protests against the exercises. On the same day, US Navy chief asked Russia to stop buzzing his ships. The activation of Russian warplanes has been defended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, saying that it was a decision of the pilots to take a look at the US navy destroyer "from a safe distance". Secretary of State John Kerry condemned the Russian actions and remarked upon the possibility of the navy ship to open fire.

Russia can rely on one of the most powerful military strength in the world. As Vladimir Putin himself has stated Russia is referring to aleatory measures and will not activate its defence until there will be the need to face a concrete threat. Experts do not believe in an actual intention of Russia of entering a war against the NATO, but, as they suggest, what Putin announced about the intention to adjust budget spending to neutralise "emerging threats" to Russia and the continuous rearmament of Russian troops and ships should be taken seriously by Washington.

“Russia will be forced to carry out measures to ensure its own security”



Global Slavery Index says almost 46 million people trapped in slavery

Almost 46 million people are living as slaves globally with the greatest number in India but the highest prevalence of slavery in North Korea, according to the third Global Slavery Index released on 31 May.

The index, by Australia-based human rights group Walk Free Foundation, increased its estimate of people born into servitude, trafficked for sex work, or trapped in debt bondage or forced labour to 45.8 million from 35.8 million in 2014. Andrew Forrest, founder of Walk Free, said the rise of nearly 30 percent was due to better data collection, although he feared the situation was getting worse with global displacement and migration increasing vulnerability to all forms of slavery.

Incidences of slavery were found in all 167 countries in the index, with India home to the largest total number with an estimated 18.4 million slaves among its 1.3 billion population. But North Korea ranked as worst in terms of concentration with one in every 20 people in slavery and its government doing the least to end this with reports of state-sanctioned forced labour.



*Thousands of children work as bonded labourers in Asia, particularly in the Indian subcontinent.
Photo: Krish Dulal [Wikimedia Commons]*

Forrest acknowledged the latest data was likely to attract criticism with some researchers accusing the index of flawed methodology by extrapolating on-the-ground surveys in some countries to estimate numbers for other nations. The 2016 index was based on interviews with about 42,000 people by pollster Gallup in 53 languages in 25 countries.

The data for North Korea, for example, that found there were 1.1 million people there in slavery, was compiled through extrapolation, testimony from North Korean



refugees and information gathered during three country visits by Walk Free. But Forrest said a lack of hard data on slavery in the past had held back efforts to tackle this hidden crime and it was important to draw a “sand in the line” measurement to drive action. He challenged critics to produce an alternative. Forrest said the Global Slavery Index aims to measure the prevalence of slavery in the 167 most populous countries as well as the level of vulnerability of people to enslavement and strength of government efforts to combat this.

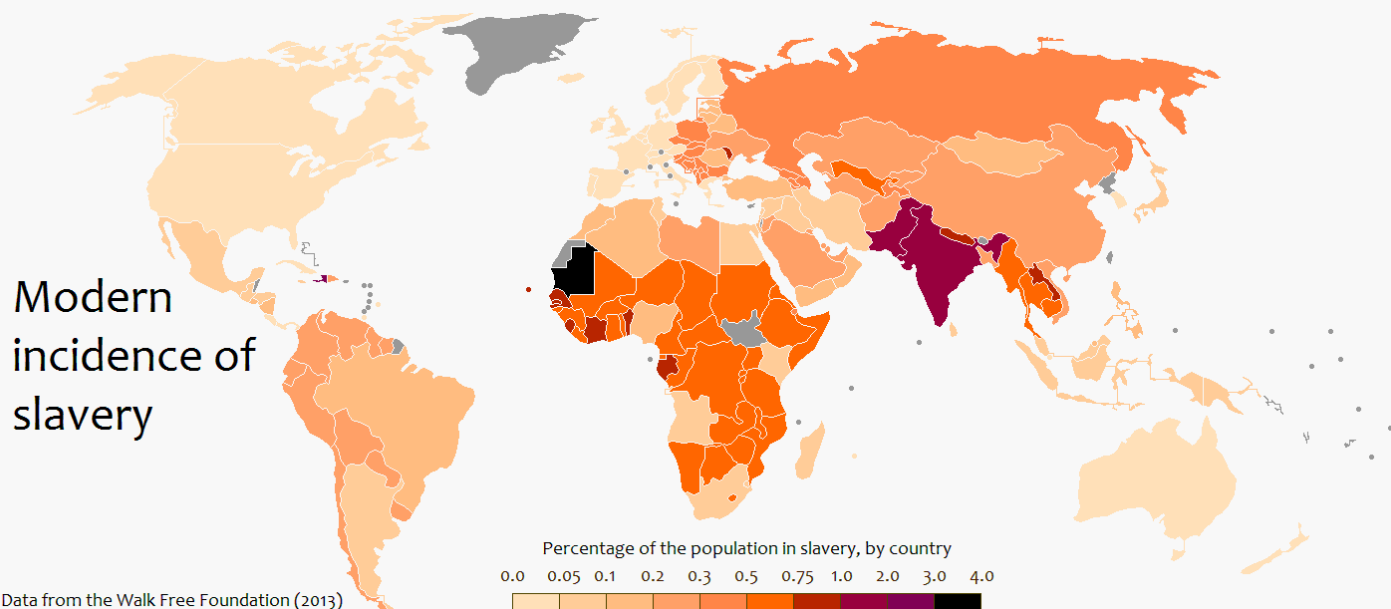
The 2016 index again found Asia, which provides low-skilled labour in global supply chains producing clothing, food and technology, accounted for two-thirds of the people in slavery.

About 58 percent of people living in slavery are in five countries – India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan. However the

countries with the highest proportion of their population enslaved were North Korea, Uzbekistan, Cambodia, India and Qatar. The governments taking the least action to tackle slavery were listed as North Korea, Iran, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Hong Kong. By contrast the governments taking most action were the Netherlands, the United States, Britain, Sweden and Australia. While Europe has the lowest regional prevalence of slavery, Walk Free said it was a source and destination for forced labour and sexual exploitation.

The impact of a mass influx of migrants and refugees fleeing conflicts and poverty has yet to be seen.

Forrest called on governments and companies to take action. “This is not AIDS or malaria. We have caused slavery and because it’s a human condition we can fix it,” he said.



Modern incidence of slavery, as a percentage of the population, by country. Estimates from the Walk Free Foundation. Estimates by other sources may be higher.
Image: Kwamikagami [Wikimedia Commons]



French social partners give raise to their voice

The labour market reforms have been the focal point of France's political life during the last months. At the instigation of the European Commission, the draft bill proposed by the French socialist government aims to provide the economic upturn to the country, which is struggling with the problems of unemployment and national debt. But the amendments to the Labour Code do not seem easy to be introduced.

Various points, wanted by the Minister of Labour Myriam El-Khomri, contribute to make the reforms controversial, regarding workers' guarantees. They include subject matters such as: the possibility for firms to hire and fire in an easier way, the consequent reduction of costs in the court, amendments to the legal amount of working hours, as well as to the overtime remuneration, the growth of the labour market flexibility. What has made the situation become more critical has been the French cabinet's decision to force plan through the rarely used article 49.3 of the French Constitution, allowing the government to bypass the parliament's

vote. The initiative, announced by Prime Minister Manuel Valls, has been followed by the opposition of the National Assembly, which voted the confident motion. The impetus has been rejected and the bill has been discussed by the Senate on the 14th of June.



Myriam El Khomri.
Photo: Claude Truong-Ngoc [Wikimedia Commons]

The government's plans have caused the reaction of some of the trade unions, immediately followed by the protests of French population. The first national rally against the implementation of these measures took place in Paris, on the 9th of March, triggering a series of protests which



have inflamed France. Not only Paris, but also Bordeaux, Nantes and Lyon have been the scene of escalation of actions wanted by the General Confederation of Labour (Cgt); the leading union of the opposition. On the 23rd of May, the strikes of the oil refinery choked off fuel supplies, a few days later, on the 25th, railway workers joined the strike, ending with some of the generating stations slowing down their production. Strikes and public manifestations represent instruments, recognised by the legal system as "weapon" which can be used by a group of individuals, in order to shed a light on civil or political rights which are somehow being threatened. But what it is happening in France is a licit protest giving rise to a rebellion, studded with episodes of violence and clashes with the police.

The government argues the provisions contained in the draft law will make France's rigid labour market more flexible, but opponents state that it will erode job security and do little to bring down the unemployment rate, stuck at 10 percent and nearly 25 percent for young people. As the Alternatives économiques' sociologist Sandrine Foulon has explained in a recent interview: "this reforms are much more incisive and potentially dangerous in so far as they abolish guarantees, by the introduction of new exceptions to the labour law, especially in regard of working hours, overtime and layoffs". In addition, there is another reason which lead the French public opinion to become aware of the need to raise its voice and which is meaningful to be discussed. This is the case of a draft law which has been elaborated

without social consultation. Social democracy is based on negotiation and this phase of the process has been set aside for what concerns the labour market reforms. This is the additional ground from which the tension arises and the additional reason for the trade unions, guided by the Cgt, to ask for the retreat of the bill.

The stake connected to the government manoeuvre is high and it is represented by the defence of civil and political rights. Through the protest, French people are expressing a common feeling, caused by the potential risk of these reforms, which could progressively lead to nullify guarantees and dismantle the social conquests of the past years.

French trade unions calling for strikes to disrupt Euro 2016 tournament

The unlimited strikes against labour reforms have not come to an end yet. French unions have called for strikes in 10 cities to disrupt the Euro 2016 tournament. The country's most powerful union, the General Confederation of Labour announced it will organise action to hit the Paris metro as well as bus services from June 2. France's national railway company's unrest and Air France resolution in its threat of blocking the services contribute to football fans difficulty with travelling to matches. Euro 2016 is expected to attract about 2.5 million extra visitors to France. Virgile Caillet, general delegate of sports and leisure industries body Fifas, told French news portal BFMTV the strikes gave a "very negative image" of France.



Brexit referendum is approaching

The year of 2016 has been interesting with the discussion of the United Kingdom to exit the European Union, or mostly known as Brexit. The decision delivered by the UK government sparked many responses nationally, regionally, and internationally. Even within the UK parliament itself, supports are split into two: those who are in favour of Brexit and those who are against the Brexit.

One common comment that people have voiced in regards of Brexit, and the thing that fears people the most, is how Brexit, if it happens, will shake the economy, not just regionally but also globally. As a matter of fact, earlier this year the pound's rate fell down to its lowest level against the dollar. It will affect the UK's security as well knowing that there is a rapid rise of terrorism this year. Not only that, Britons will have to sacrifice the membership of a prestigious club where supports from within is very crucial in terms of politics, security, and economy.

The Brexit campaigners argue that without being a member in the EU, the UK can still have a stable economy and trade through World Trade Organisation rules and mechanisms. However, former head of

WTO, Peter Sutherland, argues differently. He argues that the Britons will face more difficulties to operate their services with the EU under the WTO rules since WTO does not provide member countries a single market pass within EU which enables one country to distribute goods without too many mechanism and rules.

Within the UK's government itself, many debates and campaigns have been going on as it is getting closer to the voting date. The conservatives send a letter to the British Prime Minister David Cameron to say that he has failed the Britons by breaking his promise to curb immigrations. As a response, PM Cameron states that the Brexit campaigners are moving the debates from economy to immigration since they have lost the first battle.

However, one thing that is certainly sure is that by quitting the EU, the UK's economy will be affected. It will also affect global economy and it will be a hard thing to fix. Whether or not the UK's economy will stay stable after leaving the EU, quitting such a prestigious group will change the course of politics, security, and economy of every country.



Greece starts clearing Idomeni refugee camp

Greece is heavily affected by both the migration influx and the debt crisis. Idomeni is the full-scale camp where several thousand refugees found their shelter for months. It was Europe's largest informal refugee camp and the informal crossing point for hundreds of thousands of refugees in the direction of Macedonia in 2015. Last year, Greece was the main entry point into Europe for millions of migrants, and due to the illegal migration and the slow asylum procedures thousands of refugees, migrants got stuck in Greece.



Syrian refugees arrive from Turkey with a plastic boat at the airport area of Mytilini, Lesbos island, Greece on 13 December 2015. Video caption: Ggia [Wikimedia Commons]

In May the refugee camp was basically evacuated by the Greek authorities. What adverse economic effects does Greece have to tackle as a consequence of the significant setback of trade resulting from

the recent situation? What possible changes are to be expected following the evacuation of the refugee camp?

Around Idomeni's camp 8,000 migrants mainly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Morocco, have spread along the railway tracks close to Macedonian border. The railway line at the border was paralyzed due to the actions of the refugees. Generally, the majority of refugees affirms that staying along the tracks and in certain cases on trains too offers better conditions. Besides, many children spent the nights in open air.

The human rights organizations also criticised deteriorating conditions such as poor sanitation systems, risk of infection and overcrowding so the claims of asylum seekers seem to be justified.

As a result of all these the company TrainOSE experiences a severe crisis. TrainOSE is a railway company in Greece which currently operates all passenger and freight trains on OSE lines. The company, formerly a subsidiary of the Hellenic Railways Organisation (OSE), has been an independent state-owned company since 2008. TrainOSE is the sole railway provider of passenger and cargo transport in that part



of Greece. The proper operation of TrainOSE is vital for transportation firms and as a consequence for the whole national economy too but it is doubtful when the main operation lines will reopen. For the heavily indebted Greece the settlement of the issue of TrainOSE presents another significant challenge.

The association of suppliers of Thessaloniki in mid-May estimated the damages to be around 6,000,000 euros. Nevertheless, Italy's State Railways, the Russian Railways and GEK-TERNA have all expressed their interest in the acquisition of the company. Owing to the effects of makeshift camps along the main lines the value of TrainOSE is sharply falling, and the company is less attractive for the investors.

At the end of May the Greek police started the evacuation and the relocating process towards state-run centres, South and Northwest of Thessaloniki. The evacuation in the camp was carried out in a non-violent way despite their tents which served as their homes having been demolished by bulldozers.

The opening of these new camps may contribute to the reduction of human and drug trafficking within the camp borders.



What is more, contrary to the camp in Idomeni the new ones offer running water, shower facilities, electricity and all the other basic necessities. David Miliband, the former British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs proposes both social and labour market integration instead of the creation of refugee camps, since through integration – beside other beneficial effects – a number of countries could be relieved of the burden of extra social provisions. In his opinion the asylum seekers will consider staying or returning home as soon as the conditions are stable in their home countries.

“Greece was the main entry point into Europe for millions of migrants, and due to the illegal migration and the slow asylum procedures thousands of refugees, migrants got stuck in Greece”



Iraqi offensive in Fallujah

The fight against the Islamic State (IS) militant group is continuing in the Middle East. In January 2014 Fallujah which is the de facto capital of the West Iraq Anbar province was the scene the proclamation of the Caliphate. Why does the city bear such importance for them? In addition to strategic reasons prestige considerations also dominate for IS. In May Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced in Baghdad that the military forces launched an offensive to recapture the city which is located that 60 km from Baghdad.

The Iraqi units started operations, but encountered significant resistance from part of the IS. The Baghdadi military forces

are opening more and more fronts against the Islamic State. After one and a half years the US forces managed to create such ground forces that help eliminate the garrisons of the so-called Caliphate along the Euphrates and the Tigris.

As the city was invaded by the IS more than two years ago, a full-fledged security and defence strategy could be worked out by the militias. However, the offensive was successful in May because the Iraqi ground units in the US-led coalition in cooperation with the air corps have successfully cleared the southern part of Fallujah. Beside the successful mission and apart from military considerations the international community has to focus on long-term effects, with special regard to humanitarian values. The liberation of Fallujah will further intensify the sectarian and ethnic differences that may reach beyond Anbar province. Since IS takes advantage of the sensitivity of the marginalised Sunni population It has created an alternative narrative.

The Islamic State tends to suggest that the Iraqi government represents only the Shia population of the country, which rather threatens the Sunni people of the city by



*The city of Fallujah, Al Anbar Province, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004.
Photo: LCPL Joel A. Chaverri, USMC [dodmedia.osd.mil]*



military operations, who represent a minority in the country as a whole. The IS communication asserts that Sunnis may be even expelled from the city after a possible invasion of the city by government forces. However, there is a growing significance of Baghdad, since the militant and sectarian interference rule is threatened.

At the same time, even the Shia religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urges the government to take action as soon as possible. Humanitarian crisis is unfolding in



Mosque in Fallujah after the liberation of Fallujah by Iraqi Armed Forces and The People's Mobilization (Shi'a militias). Photo: Mahmoud Hosseini [tasnimnews]

the city. The UN warns that over 80 families had managed to escape since the middle of May. The main aim is to protect civilians and the international community has to unite forces and stop the crimes of Islamic State.

About 100,000 civilians are estimated to be present in Fallujah – the population was three times bigger before the war. The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross issued statements – appealing for the warring parties to protect civilians, who have limited access to food, water and healthcare and who now risk being used as human shields. On a number of occasions the IS has used civilians as human shield, even more complicating both the air strikes and the ground offensive of Iraqi forces. Unfortunately, through the insufficient provision of civilians and the lack of basic necessities such as drinking water, medicine and hindered charity transports the fight for the liberation of Fallujah may turn into a humanitarian disaster.

“after one and a half years the US forces managed to create such ground forces that help eliminate the garrisons of the so-called Caliphate along the Euphrates and the Tigris”



Insurgency in Manipur

On May 21st 6 members of the Assad Rifles soldiers (an Indian government military group) were killed in an ambush in Manipur. The soldiers were in the region to inspect a landslide, and were returning to join their battalion when they were ambushed. The attackers were able to escape into thick jungle, stealing several guns. The Manipur region is home to several militant groups, the result of a history of turmoil in the region.

The Manipur region was an autonomous kingdom within India as early as 1110. They only lost autonomy when they were conquered by imperialist Britain. After India gained independence from Britain, Manipur operated autonomously for two years, until, the Maharaja agreed (or was forced as many believe) to sign an agreement with the Indian Union. In 1949 the Manipur region joined the Indian Union, and the troubles began. Many groups contested the joining of the Indian Union as they hoped to re-establish the autonomy of the Manipur kingdom. The incorporation into the union led to the formation of many different militant insurgent groups questing for secession and claiming the merger with India was unfair and invalid. The situation was similar with many of the other states in the Northeast, which had operated independently for some time before being

forced to join the Indian Union. Manipur was given statehood in 1972, a move which many hoped would end the insurgencies, but the gesture was not enough for many insurgent groups.

The North East region, including Manipur, is home to many insurgent groups questing for greater autonomy or secession of their various states. Since the 1980's Manipur has been declared an area of disturbance by the Indian government. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was applied to the region of Manipur after it was declared an area of disturbance. This act contains clauses that allow the military to act forcibly, and with full immunity for their actions in the areas of disturbance. The nature of the act, and especially the full legal immunity for any action by the military, had, and still, provokes many human rights agencies into denouncing the Indian government. It is believed the act has been used to perpetrate violence against civilians in the areas under its purview, and has led to an increased sense of injustice in the insurgents.

Violence has increased this year between insurgents and the military in Manipur, highlighting the fact that still, more than 60 years later, the Indian government has not been able to quell, or placate, the insurgents.



G7 agrees need strong message on South China Sea

The South China Sea issue heats up, after the G7 countries agreed on the further need to send China a strong message. The South China Sea issue has been the focus of a lot of international speculation this year as The US and China have been arguing over the issue. China, Japan, and several other Southeast Asian countries have long argued over possession of certain areas of the South China Sea. Tensions have risen as the US has increased its military presence in the region and concluded military deals with Japan and the other Southeast Asian countries. China has responded by increasing their own military presence and issuing a warning stressing the non-interference of western countries. On the 26th of May Japan made statements at the G7 summit saying that it supported a peacefully rising China. It said it was, however, opposed to forcible moves by China to change the status quo. The other G7 members agreed with Japan's statements, concluding that the group would send China a message to stick to a peaceful rise.

Obama has also called for the peaceful resolution of the South China Sea issue the day before the G7 statement. He reminded China that the US' motivation in the conflict is that of keeping navigation and overflight in the region free. He urged for a resolution of the maritime issues.

China responded negatively to the statements issuing from the G7. China reiterated its previous comments about non-intervention, and Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying replied that the G7 members have nothing to do with the South China Sea issue. The G7 members are the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom. She asked that the G7 members should not "hype up" the issue for personal gains. The spokeswoman also claimed that the statement is not beneficial for stability in the region. She was quoted as saying, "China is extremely dissatisfied with what Japan and the G7 have done."

China to send nuclear submarines into Pacific

Fears that China and the US are heading towards an arms race were exasperated this May as China revealed plans to send nuclear submarines to the Pacific Ocean. China claims aggressive US military moves, including US plans for a South Korean anti-ballistic missiles system, make their decision inevitable. They cite fears that US systems in the area have out-paced Chinese ones, and the nuclear submarines are to be used as a deterrent force. The decision increases already high tensions in the region over the South China Sea issue.



Obama visits Vietnam

Since the end of the war in 1975, Obama is the third American president to visit Vietnam. His three-day trip has been seen as an attempt to strengthen Vietnam's capacity to deal with China's claims in the South China Sea. Obama's visit has formally reset the relationship between the former foes with the lifting of a decades-old US arms embargo.

After Hanoi barred several dissidents from meeting the US leader, Barack Obama has urged Vietnam to abandon authoritarianism, saying basic human rights would not jeopardise its stability. Trade has dominated the trip, with multibillion-dollar deals unveiled, as well as further endorsement by both sides of the planned Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Obama insisted, in his general discourse, which caused one to remember to the bloody war that defined both nations but also looked to the future, that "upholding rights is not a threat to stability".

Lifting the embargo on lethal weapons sales had "jettisoned what remained of US leverage to improve human rights in Vietnam – and basically gotten nothing for it" reported by Human Rights Watch because on March 23 and 24, 2016 seven

activists were sentenced by the Communist party, which has ruled since 1954, for "spreading anti-state propaganda". In addition, about 100 prisoners are in jail for political reasons.

Obama vowed American support to keep sea routes open for all. To the delight of his audience in a country where anti-China sentiment is growing he also stated that: "Big nations should not bully smaller ones, disputes should be resolved peacefully."

Washington has announced this visit as a chance to cement ties with Vietnam, a fast-growing country with a young population seen as a key element in America's diplomatic pivot to the Asia-Pacific.

In his speech, the US president made an allusion to the long standing shadow of the war, recognizing the enduring "ache" for the families of the millions of Vietnamese and almost 60,000 Americans who died. But looking forward, he declared that the new relationship founded on economic, educational and security bonds shows how nations can reshape their histories and "advance together" Additionally, He added "When you look at Vietnam right now it seems a culture of entrepreneurship is really beginning to grow."



Conflict in West Papua escalates, demand for independence arises

West Papua and Indonesia have a very tense relationship since the United Nations allowed West Papua to integrate with Indonesia in 1963. Up until then, West Papua was still occupied by the Dutch colony even though Indonesia had its independence since 1945. The nationalist Indonesian government at that time argued to integrate West Papua since the beginning since it was also under the Dutch colony. The idea of Indonesian independency was to free the people from the Dutch colony, including the West Papuans. However, the counterargument used by the Dutch colony was that the West Papuans were ethnically different and they would continue to administer the territory until they see that the West Papuans were capable of self-determination.

However, the vote to integrate West Papua into Indonesia involved violence from the Indonesian military towards the West Papuans to vote for integrating with Indonesia. The vote was only involving less than 1% of the West Papuans population, which was around 1000 people. The violence and injustice over the fate of West Papua sparked the independence activists to campaign for an independent West Papua from Indonesia. The fight for independence of West Papua is only one of the several conflicts the Indonesian government faces against the separatist groups. Other conflicts can be seen in Aceh, East Timor, and Maluku.

There has been a rise of tension and violence in the past years. One of the reasons is because the independence movement, the United Liberation Movement for West Papua, is trying to get the international attention from the neighbouring countries of the Melanesian countries, Australia, and New Zealand. Currently, West Papua is getting supports from the Melanesia Spearhead Group consists of four Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands, and also the Kanak and Social Liberation Front of New Caledonia. Since 2015, Indonesia was recognised as an



associate member and the the United Liberation Movement for West Papua was recognised as an observer.

This month, there have been more demonstrations happening in West Papuan cities. It is only a part of larger, peaceful demonstrations which have been happening in the past two months in most West Papuan urban centres. The largest and most widespread demonstrations reportedly occurred on May 2nd when police arrested around two thousand people in Jayapura alone. The demonstrations were organised by the West Papua National Committee which is a part of the movement itself. On May 31st, over a thousand demonstrators gathered in the capital city of Jayapura to support for the Free Papua Movement and its bid for full membership in the Melanesian Spearhead Group. The demonstrations at that day also include large gatherings in Manokwari, Fakfak, and Wamena, as some of the major towns in West Papua.



The Indonesian National Armed Forces has been accused of committing human rights abuses in Papua. Photo: Gitoyo aryo [Wikimedia Commons]

The demonstrations are not only showing support for the movement's MSG membership, but also another expression of



Free West Papua protest in Melbourne, Australia, August 2012. Photo: Nichollas Harrison [Wikimedia Commons]

independence aspirations among the West Papuans. However, the police authority declared that security forces would not tolerate freedom of expression in public where it involved promoting the idea of independence for West Papua. Therefore, the police had arrested hundreds of West Papuans who handed flyers and asking people to join the demonstrations before the demonstrations take place.

In relations to the independence movement of West Papua, it has been getting an international attention and also supports from many. Early in May 2016, several Pacific leaders went to London to participate in the International Parliamentarians for West Papua meeting at Westminster. The IPWP is a cross-party global network of politicians who support self-determination for West Papuans. The meeting was attended by representatives of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua and several heads of government, including the Prime Minister of Tonga, Akilisi Pohiva.



The Minister of Lands of Vanuatu Ralph Regenvanu who led the government of Vanuatu during the meeting highlighted the increase of recognition of West Papua by the United Kingdom, MSG members, and other Pacific countries for example. The London meeting was focusing on bringing an internationally supervised vote in West Papua by the end of the decade.



Unofficial Morning Star flag, used by supporters of West Papuan independence¹².
Photo: Pumbaa80 [Wikimedia Commons]

The London meeting's outcome was also to demand for the United Nations to bring independence to West Papua by providing supervision, assistance, and advocacy. Many of West Papuans demanded the UN not to do the same mistake they did in the 1963 with the voting mechanism to integrate into the Indonesian sovereignty. The vote, so called as "the act of free choice", was deemed as a betrayal to the West Papuans and it needs to be fixed. Benny Wenda, the independence leader, wants to take West Papua out of Indonesia's control. West Papua has been under Indonesia's sovereignty for about 50 years and, he argued, it has costed West Papua about 500,000 people being

massacred by the Indonesian government. On one hand, the Indonesian government is trying to prevent something similar to the secession of East Timor to happen with West Papua, based on political and economic reasons. However, the West Papuans has brought up the unfairness since it was first being integrated into Indonesia as an initial reason, along with the continuing violence there, to separate themselves from Indonesia.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth, the former Bishop of Oxford, and also a co-founder of the IPWP described West Papua as "one of the great neglected scandals of our time". The Indonesian president Joko Widodo has largely failed to follow through on the West Papua's autonomy and freedom, despite has been verbally softening on those issues. The violent attacks and alleged abuses by military and police, including mass arrests and crackdowns on peaceful protests, have continued. The Indonesian government is being demanded by international actors to focus on the West Papua's case and put a stop of the violence by the authorities.



"Bring West Papua back to the family."

Digital poster accessed at the online campaign materials of the Free West Papua Campaign.

<https://www.freewestpapua.org>



Economic crisis in Venezuela

Step by step, Venezuela has been shutting down. This country has long been accustomed to painful shortages, even of basic foods. But Venezuela keeps drifting further into uncharted territory. In recent weeks, the government has taken what may be one of the most desperate measures ever by a country to save electricity: a shutdown of many of its offices for all but two half-days each week.



*Shoppers waiting in line at a government-run MERCAL store.
Photo: The Photographer [Wikimedia Commons]*

But that is only the start of the country's woes. Electricity and water are being rationed, and huge areas of the country have spent months with little of either. Many people cannot make international calls from their phones because of a

dispute between the government and phone companies over currency regulations and rates.

Coca-Cola Femsa, the Mexican company that bottles Coke in the country, has even said it was halting production of sugary soft drinks because it was running out of sugar.

In mid-May protests turned violent in parts of the country where demonstrators demanded empty supermarkets to be resupplied. The government also said it would continue its truncated workweek for an additional 15 days.

The growing economic crisis – fuelled by low prices for oil, the country's main export; a drought that has crippled Venezuela's ability to generate hydroelectric power; and a long decline in manufacturing and agricultural production – has turned into an intensely political one for President Nicolás Maduro.

This month, he declared a state of emergency, his second this year, and ordered military exercises, citing foreign threats. But the president looks increasingly encircled.

American officials say the multiplying crises have led Maduro to fall out of favour with members of his own socialist party, who they believe may turn on him, leading to chaos in the streets.



Old allies like Brazil, whose leftist president, Dilma Rousseff, was removed this month pending an impeachment trial, are now openly criticising Venezuela. José Mujica, the leftist former president of Uruguay called Maduro “crazy like a goat.”

The regional tensions came to a head on the third week of the month when Maduro went on television to chide the Organisation of American States, which has criticised Venezuela's handling of the economic and political crises. Maduro took aim at Luis Almagro, its secretary general, calling him a “long-time traitor” and implying he was a spy. Almagro responded with an open letter blasting the president, calling on him to allow the recall referendum his opponents are pushing this year to remove Mr. Maduro from office.

Venezuela's government says the problems are the result of an “economic war” being waged by elites who are hoarding supplies, as well as the American government's efforts to destabilise the country.

But most economists agree that Venezuela is suffering from years of economic mismanagement, including over-dependence on oil and price controls that led many businesses to stop making products.

The German airline, Lufthansa, has announced that it will suspend flights to Venezuela from 18 June due to economic difficulties in the country. The company also said currency controls in Venezuela made it impossible for airlines to convert their earnings into dollars and send the money abroad. Venezuela's economy has been



Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro.
Photo: Hossein Zohrevand – tasnimnews [Wikimedia Commons]

hit hard by a sharp drop in the price of oil – the country's main source of income. The country has high inflation and severe shortages of basic goods. It noted that the demand for international flights to Venezuela had dropped in 2015 and in the first quarter of the current year. However, it said it hoped to restore services in the near future.

Some airlines are now requiring passengers to pay their fares in dollars. Venezuela's government has defended its policies, saying it must prioritise. Caracas says it is using its foreign reserves – which are now scarce - to pay for essential items such as medicines and industrial machinery.



Some Venezuelans are channeling their frustrations into demonstrations against the government. Maduro's opponents, who now control the National Assembly, have been staging weekly protests in support of the recall referendum.

Venezuela's public schools are now closed on Fridays, another effort to save electricity

Chavista students from Venezuela's new public universities created under the Bolivarian Revolution gathered in Plaza Venezuela in the heart of Caracas before marching to Miraflores presidential palace. The students were received by President Maduro, who lauded the advances in public higher education over the last seventeen years and announced a series of measures aimed at safeguarding Venezuela's public universities in the midst of a severe economic crisis.

In addition to an immediate 54% increase in wages and pensions for university employees, Maduro unveiled a further 20% raise effective in September as well as a 100% rise in scholarships – now up to 8,000 bolivars a month – together with the launch of 10,000 new scholarships under the Ayacucho system. The head of state also approved the creation of a new scientific fund of 900 million bolivars aimed at financing 106 socio-productive projects in the nation's universities, though no further details were offered.

Opposition students hailing from private and autonomous public universities also

took to the streets on 12 May. Rallying outside of the Central University of Venezuela, they marched to Plaza Venezuela, where university authorities held meetings with the Vice-Minister of University Education, Andres Eloy Ruiz, over budgetary disputes.

Marching under the banners of Venezuela's predominately rightwing-controlled student organisations, the students espoused a patchwork of heterogeneous demands, ranging from university autonomy and increased state funding to the ouster of the democratically-elected Maduro. Other students lauded the recent dismissal of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff in an impeachment trial, widely condemned as a coup internationally, as well as the election of President Mauricio Macri, a former businessman and ardent free market reformer in Argentina. They took the developments as a welcome sign that the continent could be moving away from the alignment with leftwing administrations which marked the 2000s.

The opposition march comes on the heels of a series of violent student protests in recent weeks and months that has seen the destruction of public property as well as the killing of two police officers in March. Opposition students were key protagonists in 2014's violent anti-government protests known as the "guarimbas" that resulted in the death of 43 people, the majority of whom state security personnel and passerby.



■ News in Brief

Domestic Affairs affecting international relations

The independent candidate won the Austrian presidential election

■ Austria presidential election ended with Alexander Van der Bellen winning the election. He ran as an independent candidate with the backing of the Green party. He was the Green party leader from 1997-2008 and a retired economics professor. In the election, he was running against Norbert Hofner, a candidate from the Freedom party who is known for his far-right, anti-immigrant, and eurosceptic campaigns. Van der Bellen won the votes at 50.3% slightly more than Hofner who received 49.7% with the total votes of 4,6m ballots cast. Despite of the Green party winning the election, there is still a growing fear in Austria knowing that 49.7% voted for an extreme far-right candidate. Van der Bellen argues that it will be a tough job to do knowing how diverse in opinions Austrian people are based on the votes.

Israel to charge Netanyahu's wife

■ The Israeli police recommended that prosecutors press charges against Netanyahu's wife on May 29th. The recommendations are based on an investigation by the police fraud squad over whether or not the Prime Minister's wife had misused state funds at her personal and official residences. Netanyahu and his wife deny the claims, yet the police recommendation to press charges gives weight to the accusations. It is yet to be seen whether or not state prosecutors will move forward and press charges based on the recommendations.

Bahrain releases rights activist

■ Zainab al-Khawaja, the opposition activist who had been imprisoned with her toddler son since March, 2011 uprising, on "humanitarian" grounds, and another defendant identified as Irena Bogotova who had also been jailed with her four-year-old son have been released by Bahraini authorities announced a public prosecution official. A dual citizen of Bahrain and Denmark, Khawaja had been convicted of insulting King Hamad by ripping up a picture of him, and had chosen to keep her 17-month-old son with her in jail. It has been reported by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights that Khawaja was jailed for three years and one month on charges including tearing up the monarch's picture and insulting a police officer. Khawaja, a Shia Muslim, is the daughter of prominent rights activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, who is serving a life sentence for plotting to overthrow the Sunni regime.



New Taliban leader election in Afghanistan

■ The Taliban Shura or Council unanimously elected Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzadah as their new leader on May 25. The Taliban in a press release earlier that week confirmed the death of their leader, Mullah Mansour, and said he was killed as a result of a US drone attack on the 21st May 2016 along the Afghanistan border in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. The coming weeks will prove crucial for Afghanistan not only because of an expected escalation of the Taliban attacks, but also because of the strained US and Pakistan relations after the death of the Taliban leader in Pakistani soil and the consequent impacts of the strained relations between the two countries on the military operations of the Taliban and the bleak prospect of peace negotiations with the Taliban.

Chad's former head of state found guilty for crimes against humanity

■ For 26 score years Hissène Habré's victims waited for justice, which finally they got it on 30 May 2016. Hissène Habré, former dictator of Chad was found guilty of crimes against humanity, summary execution, torture, rape and is sentenced to life imprisonment in Dakar, Senegal.

Presidential elections in Peru

■ Pedro Pablo Kuczynski won Peru presidential elections. A slight victory resulting from a second ballot which has seen Kuczynski gaining the 50.22 % of the votes, against the 49.88 % earned by Keiko Fujimori, daughter of ex-president Alberto Fujimori. PPK, a 77-year-old former World Bank economist, lost the run for the presidency of the Republic in 2011, paying his role of lobbies and oil and mining companies' candidate. National reconciliation, economic recovery, fight against poverty are the main subject matters on which Kuczynski has based his election campaign for the 2016 round of voting.

Three missing journalists freed by Colombian rebel group

■ One Spanish journalist and two local correspondents missing in a lawless region of Colombia have been freed by the rebel group. Rebels identifying themselves as members of the National Liberation Army, or ELN, handed her over to a delegation led by Catholic priests in the volatile Catatumbo region. The ELN announced in March that it would begin formal peace talks with the government, as the larger Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. President Juan Manuel Santos has said the talks will not begin until the ELN releases all its hostages but the group has rejected the government's conditions and has continued kidnapping civilians.



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The last military dictator of Argentina was jailed over international death squad plan

■ Reynaldo Bignone, an 88-year-old former general and known as the last military dictator in Argentina, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for his role in the Operation Condor under which an international death squad was set up by six South American military dictatorships during the 1970s and 80s. The Operation Condor allowed death squads from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay to cross into one another's territory to kidnap, torture, and kill political opponents who had fled across the border. 105 cases of "illegal arrest" followed by death covered by the trial involved foreign nationals of Uruguay (45 people), Chile (22 people), Paraguay (13 people), and Bolivia (11 people, who were killed while living in exile in Argentina). It is a big step for human rights groups in Argentina as it is the first time the existence of the Operation Condor has been proved in the court.

Brazilians are not happy with the interim government

■ Not long after the suspension of Dilma Rousseff from her position as the president of Brazil, people are already disappointed by the interim government. The reason is the interim government is appointing non-representative, all-male, cabinet and launching neoliberal policies that will hurt millions of working and poor people in Brazil. It is argued that the interim government has no mandate to reverse the social program which has been helping 40m Brazilians out of poverty. Despite not being happy with Dilma Rousseff, Brazilian people are also not happy with the interim government's actions, which is led by the acting president Michel Temer, on the social programs.

US issues travel alert for Europe

■ The US State Department has issued a travel alert for Europe this summer, partially due to the number of high profile events likely to draw large numbers of tourists. The Euro 2016 football championship, the Tour de France, and the Catholic World Youth Day in Krakow, are large events that could be targeted for terrorist attacks. The US previously had set a travel alert for Europe after the Brussels attacks in March, that was set to expire in June, they have now extended it until August 31. They warn that tourists and touristic places and events may be particularly vulnerable to attacks this summer. As always, the general advice is to stay cautious and alert no matter where you are.



■ News in Brief

Bilateral relations

Obama visits Hiroshima

■ Walking alongside with Shinzo Abe the Japanese Prime Minister, Barack Obama became the first sitting US president to visit Hiroshima. 71 years ago that the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb on Japan, obliterating the city of Hiroshima, killing 140,000 people and ushering in a new era of nuclear conflict. Obama, before his visit made known that once in Hiroshima, he would honour all those who died in the Second World War, but he would not apologise for the atomic bombings.

North Korea threatens South Korean ships

■ South Korea's navy on 27 May fired five rounds of warning shots to chase away a North Korean military vessel and a fishing boat that briefly crossed into South Korea-controlled waters. The South had also fired warning shots after a North Korean patrol boat moved south of the boundary in February. Since North Korea held a rare ruling party congress earlier this month, it has been demanding the South accept its calls to resume talks after months of animosities touched off by Pyongyang's nuclear test in January and long-range rocket launch in February. South Korea has rejected the overture, saying the North must show tangible commitment to nuclear disarmament first.

Turkey threatens to block EU migration deal

■ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned the European Union that if Ankara was not granted its key demand of visa-free travel within the bloc, Turkey would block laws related to the landmark deal to stem the flow of migrants to Europe. Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel warned after talks with Erdogan that the target of the end of May to agree visa-free travel for Turks was unlikely to be met. Erdogan also complained about the EU's wariness in handing over to Turkey a promise of 3bn euro followed by another 3bn to help Syrian refugees.



■ News in Brief

International relations

Three shipwrecks and over 700 deaths as migrant crisis flares on Mediterranean

■ First came a battered, blue-decked vessel that flipped over on 25 May, as terrified migrants plunged into the Mediterranean Sea. The next day, a flimsy craft capsized with hundreds of people aboard. And on 27 May, still another boat sank into the deceptively placid waters of the Mediterranean. Three days and three sunken ships are again confronting Europe with the horrors of its refugee crisis, as desperate people trying to reach the Continent keep dying at sea. At least 700 people from the three boats are believed to have drowned, the United Nations refugee agency announced, in one of the deadliest weeks in the Mediterranean in recent memory.

Chief negotiator in Syrian peace talks resigns

■ Following the continued failure to negotiate peace, the chief negotiator in the Syrian Peace Talks, Mohammad Alloush, resigned in the last days of May. He announced his resignation was due to the Syrian Government's lack of cooperation. The government has continued civilian attacks and violence, way-laying the talks. The High Negotiation Committee, of which Alloush was a part of, had suspended its talks with the Syrian government in Geneva in April, without plans to resume them. The resignation of Alloush heightens fears that the talks will never resume.

Syrians returned to Turkey face bad conditions

■ As a result of the EU-Turkey deal for the readmission of migrants entering Greece from sea routes, groups of migrants were returned to Turkey in April and May. Reports from human rights groups say Syrian migrants who have been returned to Turkey under the deal are being detained in awful conditions. Under European law, Return Agreements can only be concluded with safe third countries, and many question whether Turkey fits the criteria. The Syrian migrants were not allowed contact with lawyers or health care workers in the camps. Turkish officials claim that they will be released soon, but others doubt an end to the detention, saying that other Syrian migrants have been detained in the site since early February.

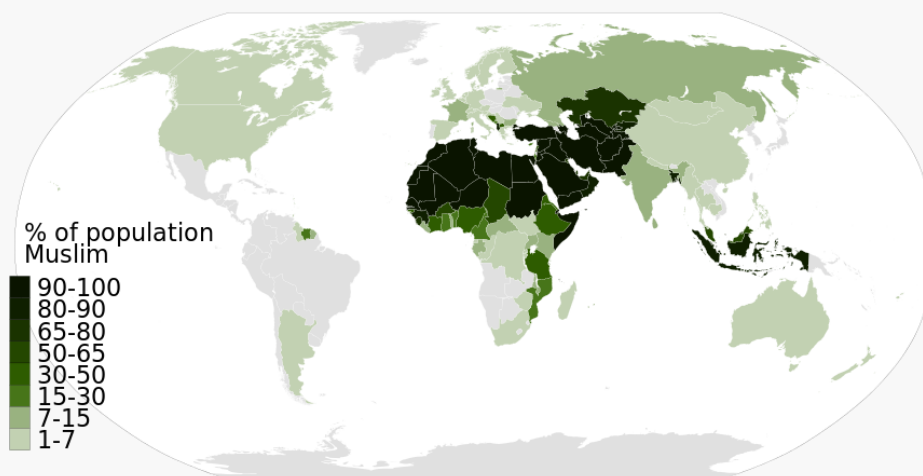
The new resolutions resulting from the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly

■ The Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly closed on May 28, 2016, approving new resolutions on different matters. They include: WHO's Framework for Engagement with Non-State Actors; the sustainable Development Goals; the International Health Regulations; tobacco control; nutrition, HIV, hepatitis. Specifically, prioritising universal coverage and strengthening implementation of the International Health Regulations, accelerating the expansion of access to medicines and vaccines, especially for children, have been underlined, among the others, as priority aims by the Assembly.

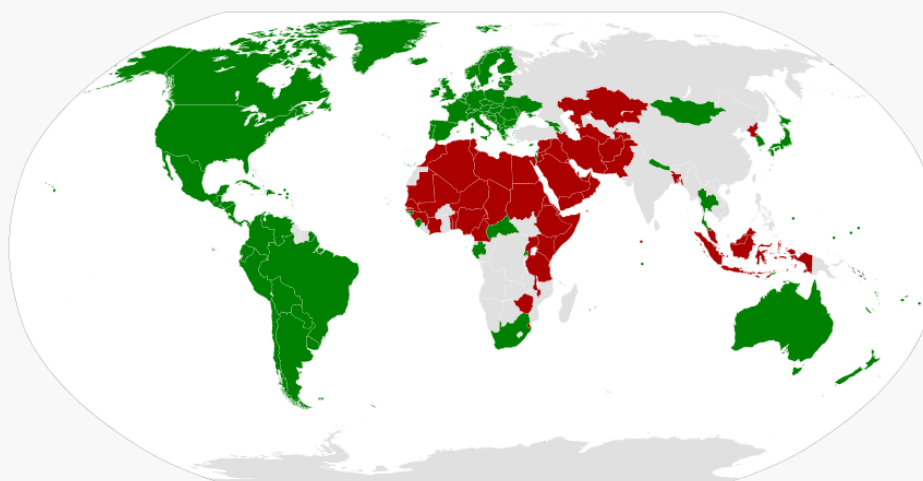


11 LGBTQ+ groups are blocked from the UN meeting on ending Aids without reason

■ A group of 51 Muslim states has blocked 11 LGBTQ+ groups from attending the United Nations World high-level meeting on ending Aids. Egypt, on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, wrote to the president of the general assembly to object the 11 LGBTQ+ groups without any reason written on the letter. In response to that, the United States, Canada and the European Union have shown their concerns by highlighting the fact that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to be living with HIV/Aids, not involving them in a high-level meeting on Aids will question the UN mechanism itself. Samantha Power, the US ambassador to the UN, says the move is a part of a way larger trend to block the participation of NGOs in UN meetings on spurious or hidden grounds.



World Muslim population by percentage (Pew Research Center, 2014).
Image: M Tracy Hunter [Wikimedia Commons]



LGBT rights at the United Nations

- Support** – Countries which have signed a General Assembly declaration of LGBT rights or sponsored the Human Rights Council's 2011 resolution on LGBT rights (94 members).
- Oppose** – Countries which signed a 2008 statement opposing LGBT rights (initially 57 members, now 54 members).
- Neither** – Countries which, as regards the UN, have expressed neither official support nor opposition to LGBT rights (46 members).





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