

"Save Regina" Update

June 26, 2005

Regina and David are happily getting back to "normal." And, yes, Regina was able to treat her children to a trip to the zoo, thanks to the generosity of a St. Mary's family. (Local reporters had noted on TV that after hugging her newly-freed Mommy, five-year-old Lydia said she just wanted to go to the zoo.)

No date has yet been scheduled for Regina's new hearing. Since she was set free on her own recognizance, this coming Friday she must appear in Chicago's federal building to assure the government that she is still here. Her lawyer will meet with her afterwards to start preparing her for the questioning she can expect in court.

I am so grateful that somehow -- only God knows how!-- we all managed to keep Regina from being deported. Truly it was a miracle! We are getting an even clearer picture now of how perilous her deportation would have been.

On Friday, June 24, just before our local fundraiser at Club Timbuktu, the BBC reported that the Netherlands announced during a special session of parliament that they have suspended the return of failed asylum-seekers to Congo! They had information that Congolese authorities have been secretly obtaining records of deportees and torturing them on their arrival. This is huge – a European government has officially recognized the inhumanity of sending a failed asylum-seeker back to Congo! (Article below.)

Meanwhile, local Congolese are getting more disturbing news from relatives about mounting tension in the capital city of Kinshasa, where conditions are extremely volatile. Two years ago the U.N. pressured four contentious warlords to form a transitional government, appointing each of them to serve as a vice-president under President Joseph Kabila. This government was to rule only until June 30, 2005, this Thursday, when U.N. mandated elections are supposed to be held. However, no preparations have been made. None. No census, no voter registrations, no ballots. The four vice-presidents are too busy jockeying for position.

Remember, each warlord commands his own private militia which in turn is linked to the army of a neighboring country. While for months the people have been pressuring them not to delay elections, the Kabila government has resorted to a tactic of Mobutu's final years – don't draw international attention by killing prominent political leaders; instead, eliminate grassroots organizers, including those of the PALU party. These deaths have been reported in recent months. As June 30 nears, local Africans are now hearing from families and friends in Kinshasa that households are arming themselves with machetes.

It is worth remembering that Regina was a prominent grassroots agitator for the PALU party when she fled in 1995. Her name was listed by the Congolese Government among four who were forbidden to leave the country. "Save Regina" literally saved Regina.

Also, I just received a phone invitation from Mr. Kadima of the Pan African Community Association inviting me and the "Save Regina" Committee to speak at their huge, annual African picnic on July 9 at Dreztko Park on Bradley Road. This event draws upwards of 500 Africans from Wisconsin, surrounding states and even from New York.

Since the "Save Regina" effort affects so many of their families, they want to feature our effort. The media will also be invited. We are scheduled to speak at about 4:00 o'clock, exact times to be determined by the end of this week.

Sister Josephe Marie

BBC News

Netherlands halts Congo Returns

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4618807.stm>

The Netherlands has suspended the return of failed asylum-seekers to the Democratic Republic of Congo following reports of documents being leaked.

Congolese officials are reported to have obtained confidential documents on several deportees and then abused them.

Dutch Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk announced the temporary halt to returns during a special session of parliament.

She said an independent inquiry would investigate how Dutch files may have ended up with Congolese immigration.

Mrs Verdonk came under pressure in parliament to take action following the report by the Network current affairs programme on Tuesday.

On a number of occasions in the past she has reassured parliament that failed asylum-seekers' files were kept secret.

Dutch media reports that human rights organisations had also warned that deportees faced the serious risk of imprisonment, extortion and assault if unmasked as asylum-seekers.

A five-year war in DR Congo is officially over, however armed bands continue to roam parts of the east, killing, raping and looting.

www.SaveRegina.org

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/4618807.stm>

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