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GENERAL

**Across regions**

**UNICEF statement on deadly attacks on children in Yemen and Pakistan**

The massacre today of more than 100 children in an attack on a school in Pakistan, and the reported killing of at least 15 school girls in a car bombing in Yemen, mark a dark day in the closing weeks of a bleak year for children around the world. There can be no justification for such unspeakable savagery against children as they go about the simple act of going to school, or against teachers as they work to educate them. Each life taken in Peshawar and Al Bayda today is a future lost forever.

**UNICEF -** [**http://www.unicef.org/media/media\_78121.html**](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_78121.html)

**Uganda says begins sending ex-Congo rebels back home**

Uganda began sending home more than 1,000 fighters of a rebel group from DR Congo on Tuesday after Kinshasa pressured it to return them to prevent them regrouping to fight again. Some 1,430 fighters are believed to have fled into Uganda after Congolese and UN forces quashed their rebellion in eastern DRC in 2013. Most live in military-run camps awaiting amnesties promised under a peace deal. Kinshasa has been pressing Uganda and Rwanda to repatriate the fighters, fearing they could start another rebellion in its troubled eastern region.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/1-000-drc-ex-rebels-break-uganda-camp-204043782.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/1-000-drc-ex-rebels-break-uganda-camp-204043782.html)

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-uganda-security-idUSKBN0JU29520141216?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-uganda-security-idUSKBN0JU29520141216?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews)

CEE/CIS

**Across CEE/CIS**

**Up to 10,000 Russian soldiers still in Ukraine**

Up to 10,000 Russian soldiers and their heavy weapons are still deployed in rebel-held eastern Ukraine despite a new ceasefire, a top Ukrainian military commander said on 16 December. Close to 50,000 Russian soldiers are also stationed along Ukraine's eastern border, where heavy weaponry has continued to flow in since the 9 December truce started, he added. The ceasefire with pro-Russian rebels was introduced in hopes of ending an eight-month conflict that has claimed at least 4,700 lives and displaced close to one million people, the UN said.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/10-000-russian-soldiers-still-ukraine-kiev-200751187.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/10-000-russian-soldiers-still-ukraine-kiev-200751187.html)

**Russia**

**Putin Holds Late-Night Talks on Ukraine with European Leaders**

Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his French, German and Ukrainian counterparts agreed in a phone call early Wednesday that they wanted talks between Kiev, Moscow and rebels controlling parts of eastern Ukraine to resume as soon as possible. The telephone conversation came after the White House confirmed that US President Barack Obama will sign into law fresh sanctions against Russia. The Kremlin said in a statement that the leaders "continued discussion of the crisis situation in Ukraine" and stressed the "necessity of a stable ceasefire" in conflict-hit eastern Ukraine.

**AFP -** [**http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159499-putin-holds-late-night-talks-on-ukraine-with-european-leaders**](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159499-putin-holds-late-night-talks-on-ukraine-with-european-leaders)

**Turkey**

**Youth killed in clashes with police in southeast Turkey**

17-year-old boy was shot dead during armed clashes between police and assailants in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey overnight and one police officer was wounded, security sources said on Wednesday. It was the latest in a series of deaths highlighting the fragility of a two-year-old peace process between the government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group, which has waged a three-decade insurgency in the region.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217111134-s9bdr/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217111134-s9bdr/?source=search)

**Ukraine**

**New Ukraine peace talks may be held Sunday in Minsk - Poroshenko**

A fresh round of peace talks involving Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe may be held in the Belarussian capital on Sunday, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said on Wednesday. "There is hope that a session of the three-way 'contact group' will be held in Minsk on Sunday," Poroshenko said at a news conference in Warsaw, Interfax-Ukraine news agency said.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217121737-35lu4/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217121737-35lu4/?source=jtTheWire)

EAP

**Philippines**

**Philippines to get frigates, gunboats, helicopters as tension simmers**

The Philippines aims to buy two frigates, two helicopters and three gunboats for deployment in the South China Sea where a territorial dispute with China has lent urgency to the need to bolster forces, a Philippine navy officer said on Wednesday. China claims nearly the entire South China Sea, rejecting claims to parts of it by the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan. The confrontation between the Philippines and China has been particularly tense since June 2012 when China seized a rocky outcrop known as the Scarborough Shoal which is believed to be rich in oil and natural gas as well as fisheries resources.

**Reuters-** [**http://news.yahoo.com/philippines-frigates-gunboats-helicopters-tension-simmers-081048568.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/philippines-frigates-gunboats-helicopters-tension-simmers-081048568.html)

**Communist rebels announce cease-fires for Christmas and pope's visit**

Philippine communist rebels have declared cease-fire periods for the Christmas holidays and for the visit of Pope Francis next month. The Communist Party of the Philippines ordered its New People's Army on Wednesday to halt offensives against soldiers and police on Dec. 24-26, Dec. 31-Jan. 1 and during the pope's visit on Jan. 15-19. The military earlier this week announced a month-long cease-fire with the communist rebels through to Jan. 19, but said that operations against Muslim militants will continue. The rebels says the cease-fire for the pope's visit is "an opportunity for religious celebration and to raise outstanding issues such as military abuses and violations of human rights." corruption.

**AP -** [**http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/17/philippine-communist-rebels-announce-cease-fires-for-christmas-and-pope-visit/**](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/17/philippine-communist-rebels-announce-cease-fires-for-christmas-and-pope-visit/)

ESA

**Tanzania**

**AG Frederick Werema quits amid corruption row**

Tanzania's Attorney General Frederick Werema has resigned, making him the first casualty of a corruption scandal that has rocked the government. MPs last month called accused him of authorising the fraudulent transfer of about $120m (£76m) to an energy firm. He denied wrongdoing, but quit because the controversy had "disrupted the country's political atmosphere", a presidential statement said. The corruption allegations have led to donors suspending aid to Tanzania.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30513108**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30513108)

LAC

**Across LAC**

**Number of babies born with HIV decline 78% in LAC- UNICEF mention**

The number of babies born with HIV in Latin America and the Caribbean declined by 78 per cent between 2001 and 2013, according to a new report from the Pan American Health Organization/WHO (PAHO/WHO) and **UNICEF**. The report: [*Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis*](http://www.paho.org/hq../index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7264%3Aelimination-mother-child-transmission-hiv-congenital-syphilis&catid=4679%3Acha-hiv-topics&Itemid=39600&lang=en)in the Americas, takes stock of progress in the region’s countries toward the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. Using data from PAHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS, the report estimates that 10,700 babies were born with HIV in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2001. By 2013, the number had declined 78% to just over 2,300, representing around 5 per cent of all babies born in the region to mothers with HIV.

**PAHO -** [**http://www.paho.org/hq../index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=7264%3Aelimination-mother-child-transmission-hiv-congenital-syphilis&catid=4679%3Acha-hiv-topics&Itemid=39600&lang=en**](http://www.paho.org/hq../index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7264%3Aelimination-mother-child-transmission-hiv-congenital-syphilis&catid=4679%3Acha-hiv-topics&Itemid=39600&lang=en)

**Bolivia**

**HRW claims laws violate human rights**

Bolivia should amend several laws that undermine the rights to freedom of association and expression, due process guarantees, and children’s rights, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a letter to the Bolivian President. These laws, which are incompatible with Bolivia’s international human rights obligations, were approved during the Bolivian President second term, from 2010 through 2014. In December the Plurinational Assembly approved a key modification to a 2010 problematic law that regulates procedures for the criminal prosecution and impeachment of high level officials and magistrates. But changes are also needed in other recent laws that significantly restrict the exercise of basic rights – on child labor, regulation of nongovernmental groups, torture, and racism.

**EFE -** [**http://www.efe.com/efe/noticias/english/world/hrw-claims-bolivian-laws-violate-human-rights/4/2060/2492557**](http://www.efe.com/efe/noticias/english/world/hrw-claims-bolivian-laws-violate-human-rights/4/2060/2492557)

**Colombia**

**Nine FARC members killed by army raid**

Nine members of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas were killed in an aerial bomb attack by the Colombian army and in clashes with troops in a southeastern jungle region, the Colombian President reported. The operation, which military and police sources said involved the use of planes and helicopters, took place in Meta province, a vast area where the guerrillas maintain a heavy presence. "Military forces and police in Meta take down nine members of fronts 7 and 27 of the FARC and capture four. Offensive continues. Let's not drop our guard," the Colombian President reported.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-colombia-farc-idUSKBN0JU0BW20141216**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-colombia-farc-idUSKBN0JU0BW20141216)

**Guyana**

**Opposition seeks court order against government**

Guyana's main opposition party has asked a high court in the country to ban the administration of President from any spending that wasn't earlier approved by legislators. The request comes over a month after the Guyanese President temporarily suspended the opposition-controlled National Assembly to avert a no-confidence vote. The main opposition party, a Partnership for National Unity, said on 16 December that the court has given the government a week to answer the complaint. Together with the Alliance for Change, the party has a one-seat majority in Parliament. The President has said he will dissolve parliament altogether and soon announce a date for elections. They must be held within three month following dissolution.

**AP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/guyana-opposition-seeks-court-order-against-govt-164352570.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/guyana-opposition-seeks-court-order-against-govt-164352570.html)

**Mexico**

**Eleven dead in vigilante shootout in western Mexico**

A shootout between rival vigilantes in Mexico's western Michoacan state has left 11 dead, authorities said on Tuesday, in the clearest sign yet of renewed unrest in an area President Enrique Pena Nieto's government said had been pacified. The federal government's security commissioner for the state, Alfredo Castillo, told reporters the clash pitted two rival vigilante groups against each another in the town of La Ruana, about 241 km from Morelia, the state capital. Castillo did not elaborate on what provoked the shootout. On Sunday, vigilante groups blocked several highways in Michoacan, but there were no reports of injuries or major damage.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217064425-bgepv/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217064425-bgepv/?source=search)

MENA

**Iraq**

**Iraq Kurds launch Sinjar offensive after coalition air strikes**

Kurdish forces launched an operation to retake the town of Sinjar in northwestern Iraq early on Wednesday after heavy coalition air strikes on Islamic State positions in the area overnight, Kurdish security officials said. If the peshmerga succeed in recapturing the town, it would open up a corridor to Sinjar mountain, where hundreds of minority Yazidis have been besieged by IS militants since August. It would also be a symbolic victory for the Kurds, whose reputation as fearsome warriors was bruised after Islamic State overpowered the peshmerga in Sinjar and killed or captured hundreds of Yazidis.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217112134-3ll3x/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217112134-3ll3x/?source=search)

**Libya**

**African leaders urge West to act on Libya**

African leaders have urged the West to intervene in crisis-hit Libya and prevent instability from spreading across the Sahel and destabilizing fragile regional governments. Speaking at an African security summit in Senegal on Tuesday, leaders from Libya's neighbours called on NATO to help stem the flow of weapons to armed groups in the region. Fighting between forces loyal to Libya's western recognised prime minister, Abdullah al-Thinni, and self-declared Islamist groups threatens nations including Chad, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/african-leaders-urge-west-act-libya-201412171306708936.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/african-leaders-urge-west-act-libya-201412171306708936.html)

**State of Palestine**

**Palestinians agree merged UN text with France**

A draft resolution on ending the Israeli occupation will be submitted to the UN Security Council Wednesday after the Palestinians agreed with France on a merged text, foreign minister Riyad al-Malki said. "The draft that will be presented today (Wednesday) is the French draft based on Palestinian observations and decisions," Malki told AFP. "It will be presented to the Security Council as a blueprint, and could be put to a vote 24 hours after that," he added. The European-backed draft had set a two-year deadline for conclusive peace talks, without touching on the issue of Israel's occupation.

**AFP-** [**http://news.yahoo.com/palestinians-agree-merged-un-text-france-084208100.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/palestinians-agree-merged-un-text-france-084208100.html)

**US urges caution as Palestinians bid for UN vote**

The US is trying to carefully navigate a path forward as Palestinians seek to push hopes for a Palestinian state to the top of the UN agenda, top US diplomat John Kerry said Tuesday. But as the Palestinians threaten to submit a draft text Wednesday to the UN Security Council, Kerry hinted Washington did not believe now was the right time as Israel gears up for snap elections in March. Amid reports of competing Arab-backed and French-led resolutions, Kerry has been meeting his European and Russian counterparts as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to gauge support for the Palestinian UN push.

**AFP** -[**http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-us-urges-caution-as-palestinians-bid-for-un-vote-2014-12#ixzz3M5h4ZKJx**](http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-us-urges-caution-as-palestinians-bid-for-un-vote-2014-12#ixzz3M5h4ZKJx)

**EU court takes Hamas off terrorist organizations list**

The General Court of the European Union has annulled the bloc's decision to keep the Hamas on a list of terrorist groups. The decision had been based not on an examination of Hamas' actions, but on "factual imputations derived from the press and the internet", judges found. But it said a funding freeze from being blacklisted would continue for three months or until an appeal was closed. Hamas dominates Gaza and fought a 50-day war with Israel in the summer.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30511569**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30511569)

**Syria**

**Around 200 soldiers, militants reported killed in battle for base**

Around 100 Syrian soldiers and 80 fighters were killed during a two-day battle in which insurgents captured the Wadi al-Deif military base, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said on Tuesday. The Britain-based group said Islamist insurgents including al Qaeda's [Syria](http://bit.ly/1svQDtr) wing, the Nusra Front, on Monday took the base next to the country's main north-south highway linking Aleppo with Damascus. Fighters also captured the smaller Hamidiya base, southwest of the Wadi al-Deif, the Observatory said. The group said that around 120 soldiers were captured in the assault, citing insurgent sources.

**AFP -** [**https://news.yahoo.com/nearly-200-dead-syria-bases-lost-qaeda-monitors-092339489.html**](https://news.yahoo.com/nearly-200-dead-syria-bases-lost-qaeda-monitors-092339489.html)

**UN extends monitoring for aid convoys**

The UN SC was set to adopt a resolution on 17 December to keep in place permission for UN convoys to cross Syrian borders to deliver desperately-needed aid, diplomats said. Resolution 2165, which was adopted in July, allows trucks to pass through rebel-held areas from Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. But the permission ends in January 2015. In a new text, the Council says it has decided to renew the green light, through 10 January 2016. They stress that 12.2 million Syrians are in urgent need of aid "of whom 7.6 million are internally displaced, 4.5 million are living in hard-to-reach areas and 212,000 are trapped in besieged areas, including Palestinian refugees," the text says.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/syria-un-extends-monitoring-aid-convoys-010017780.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/syria-un-extends-monitoring-aid-convoys-010017780.html)

**Yemen**

**Clashes in Rada’a have left thousands internally displaced**

Since October, Rada’a city has been engulfed in a spiral of violence between Houthis, members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and allied tribesmen. The ongoing fighting has effected a number of neighboring towns and villages, leaving thousands displaced. In December, the Yemen Times visited Rada’a city and its surrounding areas in an attempt to get a better grasp of the situation-including the living conditions of the IDPs who were forced to flee their homes as a result of the fighting.

**Yemen Times -** [**http://www.yementimes.com/en/1842/report/4698/Clashes-in-Rada%E2%80%99a-have-left-thousands-internally-displaced.htm**](http://www.yementimes.com/en/1842/report/4698/Clashes-in-Rada%E2%80%99a-have-left-thousands-internally-displaced.htm)

**Car bomb attack kills 25, including 15 children**

A suicide car bomb attack in central Yemen targeting a Shiite militia leader killed 25 people including 15 children on Tuesday, security and medical sources said. The children were killed when their school bus was caught up in the attack targeting the home of a leader of the Shiite militia, known as Huthis, in the town of Rada, a local security source reported, blaming the attack on Al-Qaeda militants. A medical source confirmed 25 people had died in the attack.

**AFP** - [**http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-car-bomb-attack-kills-25-including-15-children**](http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-car-bomb-attack-kills-25-including-15-children)

**Al Jazeera** - **http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/twin-yemen-car-bombs-leave-dozens-dead-2014121615352245192.html**

SA

**Afghanistan**

**Drone strike in Afghanistan kills 4 Pakistani Taliban, 7 others – official**

US drone strike in eastern Afghanistan killed four Pakistani Taliban and seven other insurgents, a district official said Wednesday. Mahlem Mashuq, the governor of Sherzad district in Nangarhar province, said the drone's missiles hit a pickup truck killing all 11 occupants on Tuesday afternoon, as members of the Pakistani Taliban were staging a siege on a school in the Pakistani city of Peshawar near the Afghan border.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217062955-0azuy/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217062955-0azuy/?source=jtTheWire)

**Afghan Taliban condemn Pakistan school attack**

The Afghan Taliban have condemned a raid on a school in neighboring Pakistan that left 141 dead in the country's bloodiest ever terror attack, saying killing innocent children was against Islam. "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has always condemned the killing of children and innocent people at every juncture," the Afghan Taliban, which often target civilians, said in a statement released late Tuesday.

**AFP -** [**http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159491-afghan-taliban-condemn-pakistan-school-attack**](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159491-afghan-taliban-condemn-pakistan-school-attack)

**Pakistan**

**Pakistan in mourning as parents bury children after school attack**

Pakistan woke up to a day of mourning on Wednesday after Taliban militants killed 132 students at a school in the city of Peshawar in a grisly attack which shocked the nation and put pressure on the government to do more to tackle the insurgency. People around the country lit candles and staged overnight vigils as parents prepared to bury their children during mass funerals in and around Peshawar - a big, volatile city on the edge of Pakistan's lawless tribal belt. Pakistanis may be used to almost daily militant attacks against the security forces but an outright assault on children stunned the country, prompting commentators to call for a tough military response.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217052354-9c8ph/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217052354-9c8ph/?source=search)

**Pakistan PM lifts moratorium on death penalty after Taliban attack**

The Pakistani prime minister lifted a moratorium on the death penalty on Wednesday, a day after Taliban gunmen attacked a school, killing 132 students and nine teachers, a government spokesman said. Mohiuddin Wani said Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had approved the decision of a ministerial committee to life the moratorium.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217074557-828zb/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217074557-828zb/?source=jtTheWire)

**Sri Lanka**

**Burning issues ahead of January polls**

As Sri Lanka gears up for a presidential election five years after the end a long separatist rebellion, the country, especially the war-scarred North, faces a raft of unresolved chronic problems. Analysts regard many of them as long-term drivers of conflict. The front-runners in the January poll are incumbent President, who is seeking an unprecedented third term (thanks to a constitutional amendment passed by the ruling United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), and his former minister of health. Both are southerners. Neither candidate has released his campaign platform. In Sri Lanka’s former war zone in the North, there is widespread apprehension that post-war issues are unlikely to take top-billing.

**IRIN -** [**http://www.irinnews.org/report/100946/burning-issues-facing-sri-lanka-ahead-of-january-polls**](http://www.irinnews.org/report/100946/burning-issues-facing-sri-lanka-ahead-of-january-polls)

WCA

**Cape Verde**

**Volcanic eruption destroys two villages**

The biggest eruption of Cape Verde volcano Pico do Fogo in decades has destroyed two villages and threatens a forest reserve on 16 December, officials said. Some 1,500 people were forced to abandon their homes before the lava flow reached the villages of Portela and Bangeira on Fogo island, the fire brigade chief reported. More than 1,000 people were evacuated from the Cha das Caldeiras region at the foot of the volcano immediately after it first erupted in November. The head of civil protection services, said that the lava gained ground.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/volcanic-eruption-cape-verde-destroys-villages-130602449.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/volcanic-eruption-cape-verde-destroys-villages-130602449.html)

**DR Congo**

**Looming offensive prompts "humanitarian fallout" fears**

Plans by the DR Congo army and UN peacekeepers to again take on one of the oldest insurgencies in the country have sparked concern for civilian populations and raised questions about the wisdom of the operation, set to take place in early 2015. Only a couple of hundred members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) have so far complied with an ultimatum to disarm by 2 January and take part in a demobilization and reintegration programme. MONUSCO's military spokesperson confirmed that the UN force would "take part in operations against the FDLR rebels with the FARDC when the deadline of 2 January 2015 is reached.

**AFP -** [**http://news.yahoo.com/un-dr-congo-launch-hunt-militants-blamed-massacres-212643985.html**](http://news.yahoo.com/un-dr-congo-launch-hunt-militants-blamed-massacres-212643985.html)

**IRIN -** [**http://www.irinnews.org/report/100947/looming-drc-offensive-prompts-humanitarian-fallout-fears**](http://www.irinnews.org/report/100947/looming-drc-offensive-prompts-humanitarian-fallout-fears)

**Scores killed in rebel attacks**

Unidentified rebel fighters have killed at least 184 civilians and wounded many others in attacks on villages in Beni territory in eastern DR Congo since October. Such killings amount to war crimes. Victims and witnesses described to Human Rights Watch brutal attacks in which rebel fighters methodically hacked and shot civilians to death with axes, machetes, and firearms. Senior UN and Congolese army officials say they believe the recent attacks were carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan-led Islamist rebel group that has been active in Beni territory since 1996. Some officials say the ADF may be acting together with fighters from other armed groups.

**HRW -** [**http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/16/dr-congo-scores-killed-rebel-attacks**](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/16/dr-congo-scores-killed-rebel-attacks)

**Ghana**

**Ghana must cut "ghost workers" from payroll before aid resumes - EU**

Ghana must remove "ghost workers" from its public sector payroll before the European Union resumes budget support suspended a year ago, the EU ambassador to the West African country, William Hanna, said on Tuesday. EU grants worth up to 200 million euros ($250.14 million) could be crucial as Ghana seeks to recover from a fiscal crisis that has slowed the rapid GDP growth the country enjoyed for years due to its exports of gold, cocoa and oil.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217084805-cxg9o/?source=fiOtherNews2**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217084805-cxg9o/?source=fiOtherNews2)

**Mali**

**Mali ends last quarantines, could be Ebola-free next month**

Mali has released from quarantine the last 13 people being monitored for Ebola, and the country could be declared free of the virus next month if no further cases are recorded, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday. Mali has recorded six deaths from Ebola, which, according to the latest WHO data published on Monday, has killed some 6,841 people in neighboring Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia in the worst epidemic of the viral hemorrhagic fever.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-health-ebola-mali-idUSKBN0JU1NR20141216**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-health-ebola-mali-idUSKBN0JU1NR20141216)

**Nigeria**

**Boko Haram could 'disenfranchise Nigeria voters'**

At least 1.5 million people displaced by the insurgency in north-east Nigeria may not be able to vote in elections if the law is not changed, an electoral official has told the BBC. Discrepancies in the law needed to be resolved in "very good time" or people could be disenfranchised, he added. Ex-military ruler Muhammadu Buhari will challenge President Goodluck Jonathan in the February election. Boko Haram's insurgency has mainly affected opposition strongholds.

**BBC-** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30501381**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30501381)

**Sierra Leone**

**Sierra Leone announces house-to-house searches**

Sierra Leone is due to mount house-to-house searches in the capital Freetown to find hidden cases of Ebola. President Ernest Bai Koroma also said that Sunday trading would be banned and travel between districts restricted. The measures come after the authorities banned all public celebrations of Christmas and New Year in a bit to tackle the virus.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30511208**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30511208)

The Brief is produced by UNICEF's Emergency Operations Centre (OPSCEN) and is a daily compilation of the main humanitarian, political and security-related media stories from around the world. It aims to provide field offices and senior decision-makers with critical information related to humanitarian emergencies and staff security.

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