

WorldWatch

by **David C. Grabbe**

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," May 2002

Religious Persecution

»Following the recent Israeli military action against Palestinian terrorists, anti-Semitism is beginning to increase. In France and Belgium, Jewish synagogues and school buses have been burned, and in Cairo, Egypt, an angry mob had to be driven away from the Israeli Embassy with water cannons. Even Germany has called for increased security at Jewish synagogues. It should be noted that, as anti-Semitism rises, people practicing so-called "Jewish" customs such as the Sabbath and holy days may easily be mistaken for Jews.

» In France, largely due to a controversial new anti-cult law, Baptists, Evangelicals, and Protestants, along with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Church of Scientology members, all report incidences of growing intolerance and discrimination, both by citizens and the government. The French secret police have increased their scrutiny on religious groups, major and minor. French security authorities are monitoring even the largest evangelical church in the country. According to Catherine Picard, a member of the French National Assembly, ". . . proselytizing is not authorized by the French government. When religious groups talk about having the right to proselytize, the local government may authorize such activities, but in reality such practices are illegal."

Portugal

Portugal has become the latest European Union member country to shift to the political right. This mirrors other conservative election results in fellow EU members Denmark and Italy during the past year.

Drought

Drought has engulfed nearly a third of the United States, threatening to confront some places this summer with what experts say could be their worst water shortages in years. Already, New York and Baltimore are pumping water from temporary supplies. Thousands of shallow wells in New Hampshire and Georgia have run dry. In Kansas, some ranchers are hauling in water or selling off cattle. The entire states of Wyoming and Montana have been declared drought disaster areas. Overall, drought has spread to about 30 percent of the country, according to the Climate Prediction Center of the National Weather Service. That is an unusually broad reach but still far short of the 1930s Dust Bowl.

HIV/AIDS

» Russia's top AIDS-prevention official, Vadim Pokrovsky, has estimated that a million Russians will die of AIDS in the next decade. While health authorities in Russia have

registered about 182,000 HIV-positive people, only 10 to 15 percent of the population has undergone testing. Last year, 100,000 new cases of HIV were registered, more than double the figure from the year before.

» George F. Lemp, director of the AIDS Research Program at the University of California, recently disclosed that a study of Hispanic men ages 18 to 29 years old in the border cities of Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego, California, indicates the HIV/AIDS rate is 18.5 percent in Tijuana and 35 percent in San Diego. The rate in Los Angeles hovers around 16 percent, while in Long Beach, San Francisco, and Riverside, the rate is near 9 percent.

» According to Stephan Lewis, special envoy of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Ethiopia has crossed the five percent infection rate of HIV and AIDS infection. Nearly three million Ethiopians are infected.

Berlusconi and the Media

» Debt-laden KirchMedia, which owns the majority of Germany's biggest television broadcaster, is close to being purchased in order to avoid liquidation. While the deal is not finalized, the new controllers will likely be the Lehman Brothers investment bank, Rupert Murdoch, chairman and CEO of News Corp, and Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. If this transaction takes place, it will put Berlusconi in a position of great influence over Europe's media.

» Italy's center-right government passed a law that legitimizes Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's ownership of the country's biggest media empire. Now he can legally retain his controlling stake in the Mediaset group, which runs Italy's three main private television stations. He can also keep his controlling stakes in Mondadori, Italy's largest publishing house, and Mediolanum, Italy's largest financial services group.