VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Anne Ball reporting.

The United Nations human rights office on Friday rejected reported remarks by U.S. President Donald Trump describing immigrants from several countries as coming from an expletive, meaning dirty and impoverished.

Lisa Schlein reports for VOA from Geneva.

Agency spokesman Rupert Colville calls Trump's remarks clearly "racist."

"You cannot dismiss entire countries and continents (as ‘shitholes'), whose entire populations, who are not white, are therefore not welcome. The positive comment on Norway makes the underlying sentiment very clear."

He says policy proposals targeting entire groups on grounds of nationality or religion go against universal values.

Colville warns comments by a major political figure can have damaging and dangerous consequences.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

Trump denies he used the vulgar language reported, but Democratic Senator Dick Durbin says he was there and heard him use the language.

President Donald Trump approved new sanctions on Iran Friday, stopping short of re-imposing harsh sanctions intended to push Tehran to give up nuclear weapons research.

Trump gave Congress and European allies 120 days to improve the agreement or face U.S. abandonment of the pact.

Also, new measures were imposed to target Iranian businesses and individuals.

An administration official said the sanctions are part of a broader effort to counter Iran's "reckless" and "destabilizing behavior."

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In the latest tit for tat between Turkey and the United States, the Turkish Foreign Ministry has issued a travel advisory urging the country's citizens to reconsider visiting the U.S., citing security concerns.

The Foreign Ministry website says they observe "an increasing number of terror plots and acts of violence in the U.S." The travel advisory cited the risk posed by far right and racist groups and urged Turkish citizens to take precautionary measures.

The advisory mirrors one used Friday by the State Department in which U.S. officials urge Americans to reconsider traveling to Turkey.

Activists are celebrating a Botswana court case that allowed a transgender man the right to change his gender identity. Until recently, South Africa was the only African nation that allowed such transformations.

VOA's Anita Powell reports from Johannesburg.

The news came right before Christmas, says lawyer Tshiamo Rantao, whose client recently became the first transgender man in Botswana to be granted an identity document with his chosen gender.

It was, Rantao says, cause for celebration for a man who spent a decade fighting for recognition. But his victory is underscored by a harsh reality: ND, as Rantao's client is known in court documents, did not want his real name known due to concerns for his safety.

"He was concerned that he could be targeted."

Currently, South Africa is the only other nation in the region with laws that explicitly protect sexual minorities.

And cross this conservative patch of Africa, religious leaders and some politicians have condemned those who do not conform to traditional gender roles, arguing such behavior is un-African or offensive to society.

Anita Powell, VOA news, Johannesburg.

Greek protesters clashed with police on Friday after a march of some 20,000 against new reforms to be voted on in parliament.

Bill Gallo has the details.

Protesters struck at shield-wielding riot police with flagstaffs outside the parliament building, with police responding with buttons and ??? tear gas into the crowds.

The bill would restructure family benefits, introduce a new process for property for closures and make it harder to call a strike.

The draft law has outraged many Greeks who have seen living conditions and incomes plummet since the country first sought international aid in 2010.

Bill Gallo, VOA news.

Meanwhile, the Thomas Fire, the largest wildfire in California's recorded history and the one that stripped Santa Barbara hillsides where mudslides are now being fought, was finally reported 100% contained Friday.

I'm Anne Ball.

That's the latest world news from VOA.