VOA NEWS

January 17, 2018

This is VOA news. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting.

The United States said Tuesday it is withholding tens of millions of dollars from the U.N. agency that supports Palestinian refugees and could cut more if reforms are not made.

The State Department confirmed to reporters that the administration will withhold $65 million from its initial 2018 contribution to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency.

The U.S. gives about $364 million annually to the agency, paid in two installments, making it the agency's top donor.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with representatives of other nations Tuesday in Vancouver, Canada, to talk about pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Foreign ministers from 20 nations met in Vancouver. They said that [north] sanctions pressure must continue against North Korea until it abandons its nuclear program.

Pope Francis expressed his "pain and shame" over Chile's sexual abuse scandal on Tuesday.

They were his first comments in Chile on a crisis that has scarred the Roman Catholic Church's credibility in the country.

He asked for forgiveness and promised to make every effort to support the victims and ensured that "such things do not happen again."

President Trump's former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, spoke behind closed doors Tuesday with a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives that is investigating whether Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election.

The interview comes after his public falling out with the president.

This is VOA news.

Burundi's government recently proposed constitutional changes that would, among other things, allow the president to stay in office beyond 2020. But civil society groups say the government is now arresting opponents of those changes in advance of an upcoming referendum.

For VOA, correspondent Mohammed Yusuf reports from Nairobi.

Officially, Burundi's government has banned anyone from campaigning for or against the proposed changes to the constitution. But civil society groups accuse the government of targeting those suspected to urging voters to reject the changes.

The government says the changes are aimed at strengthening and advancing the country's laws after more than two years of political violence.

The violence was triggered in April 2015 when President Nkurunziza announced he will run for a controversial third term. Opponents said he was violating constitutional term limits and the peace deal that ended Burundi's civil war.

Now, critics believe Nkurunziza is maneuvering to stay in power beyond the end of his current term in 2020.

Burundians will vote on the proposed changes in May.

Mohammed Yusuf, for VOA news, Nairobi.

Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga, whose National Super Alliance contests the results of October's re-run election, is defiantly vowing to inaugurate himself as the "people's" president at the end of January if there is no dialogue beforehand with President Uhuru Kenyatta.

He made the promise in a television interview Tuesday with VOA's Swahili Service.

President Trump criticized Democrat lawmakers Tuesday, saying their demands to include protections for young undocumented immigrants in a bill that would prevent a government shut-down this week would cost the military.

On Twitter he said, "The Democrats want to shut down the Government over Amnesty for all and Border Security. The biggest loser will be our rapidly rebuilding Military."

Democratic leaders have said they will most likely oppose a measure that does not protect young immigrants known as "Dreamers," including the nearly 800,000 who entered the United States unauthorized and received protection from deportation through DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, since its creation five years ago.

And, a cold span that's descended across northeast Russia is so severe that it has broken the public thermometer in the world's coldest village.

A new electronic thermometer in Oymyakon showed it to be at -62 degrees [Celsiu] Celsius, that is, but then it broke because it was too cold.

You can find more on these and other late breaking and developing stories, from around the world, around the clock, at voanews.com and on the VOA news mobile app. I'm Jonathan Jones reporting from the world headquarters of the Voice of America in Washington.

That's the latest world news from VOA.