VOA NEWS

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From Washington, this is VOA news. I'm Doug Bernard reporting.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced his administration is imposing new sanctions against North Korea.

He spoke to a friendly audience Friday at the Conservative Political Action committee conference.

"I do want to say, because people have asked, North Korea, we imposed today the heaviest sanctions ever imposed by our country before."

The details of the sanctions came from his Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, who briefed reporters at the White House.

"Today's actions will significantly hinder North Korea's ability to conduct evasive maritime activities that facilitate illicit coal and fuel transports, and limit the regime's ability to ship goods through international waters."

The announcement comes as the president's daughter, Ivanka, is in South Korea, attending the close of the Winter Olympic Games.

Later on Friday, the president held a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull where Mr. Trump was asked about school violence and his plans for gun control.

"(If) the bad guy thinks that somebody's in this room with a weapon, that's going to be pointed at him with live bullets, he's not even going into the school. It's the one way you're going to solve it. You're not going to solve it with gun-free spaces."

President Donald Trump.

Rick Gates, a former top adviser to President Trump's campaign, pleaded guilty in the special counsel's Russia investigation to federal conspiracy and false statements charges.

The court finally shows Mr. Gates plead guilty, accusing him of conspiring against the U.S. government.

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U.N. diplomats are still working on last minute negotiations on a resolution to implement a 30-day cease-fire across Syria and lift sieges on towns, including Eastern Ghouta. Efforts are being made to avoid a Russian veto.

A morning vote was delayed until the afternoon as they tried to find consensus. That delay has now also been delayed. Russia had expressed objections to the draft on Thursday.

U.N. investigators said that they have identified more than 40 South Sudanese officials and military officers who may be responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The report from the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, which was released on Friday, details acts of cruelty against South Sudanese civilians.

Commission member Andrew Clapham: "There are victims that we've spoken to and who have given testimony to us, who have been mutilated, gang raped often by up to a thousand men if not more."

The alleged crimes occurred during South Sudan's ongoing civil war, which has killed tens of thousands and uprooted more than four million people from their homes.

Pope Francis invited Catholics and members of other religions on Friday to observe a day of prayer, fasting and initiatives for peace dedicated in particular to South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Sabina Castelfranco has more for VOA.

The pope said that while prayer is always an effective resolution, more can be done.

Hundreds of Congolese and South Sudanese answered the pope's call Friday by attending special masses both at home and abroad.

The situation in both countries has deteriorated with increasing violence. In the DRC, Catholic charity Caritas predicts that 2.2 million children will suffer from severe acute malnutrition this year, and 13.1 million people will need aid in order to survive.

Sabina Castelfranco, for VOA news, Rome.

The United States says it will open a new embassy in Jerusalem in May to coincide with Israel's 70th anniversary.

The State Department said Friday the new embassy will be located in a building that currently houses the U.S. consular operations in Jerusalem before moving to a separate annex by the end of 2019.

Until now, the U.S. embassy has been located in Tel Aviv.

And twin car bombs that went off in Somalia's capital have killed 18 people and wounded 20 others. That's according to the capital's ambulance services.

In Washington, I'm Doug Bernard.

That's the latest world news from VOA.