

UNSC condemns embassy attacks

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council strongly condemned Friday attacks on US and other Western embassies and consulates, as violence raged over an American-made video mocking the Prophet Mohammed.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the series of violent attacks against embassies and consular premises of member states in multiple locations on September 13 and 14," said the statement. The council issued a reminder of "the fundamental principle of the inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises," condemning violence against the sites as "unjustifiable regardless of their motivations."

US President Barack Obama and State Secretary Hillary Clinton return to their seats after speaking during the transfer of remains ceremony marking the return to the US of the remains of the four Americans killed in an attack this week in Benghazi, Libya yesterday. *Inset*, US Marines carry caskets of the dead bodies at the Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

PHOTO:
AFP



US consulate attack was planned: Libya

AFP, Benghazi

The deadly attack on the US consulate in the Libyan city of Benghazi was planned and "meticulously executed," the country's assembly chief told AFP yesterday.

"I don't want to talk about what happened in other countries but as for Libya, the operation was meticulously executed," Mohammed al-Megaryef said of the wave of protests across the world over a US-produced film mocking Islam.

"There was planning. It was not a peaceful protest which degenerated into an armed attack or aggression. That's how it was planned," he said.

US ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans were killed on Tuesday when suspected Islamic militants fired on the consulate in the eastern Libyan city with rocket-propelled grenades and set it ablaze.

"The attack itself and the manner in which the attack occurred ... confirms that this was planned and programmed to achieve a purpose," Megaryef said.

The attack "was prepared, especially since it coincided with the date of September 11," he said in reference to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States claimed by al-Qaeda.

"I do not exclude discovering things that will link al-Qaeda and the US consulate attack," said Megaryef but added that it was "very early to talk about the investigation."

US military and intelligence agencies have launched an elaborate manhunt in Libya against the militants suspected of staging the most serious assault on an American diplo-

ANTI-US PROTEST

Obama vows to 'stand fast'

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama has vowed to "stand fast" against spreading anti-US violence raging in the Arab world, as he mourned four Americans slain in Libya after their remains were flown home.

In a heart-rending homecoming, four transfer caskets draped in American flags were slowly borne Friday from the belly of a giant C-17 transport plane by Marines in dress uniform, and set down in a hangar.

US ambassador Chris Stevens and the three other Americans died Tuesday when a mob furious over an anti-Muslim Internet video made on US soil torched the American consulate in Benghazi, part of a region-wide eruption of violence.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," Obama said, quoting the Bible as he honored four "American patriots" for embodying national qualities of courage, hope and idealism.

"Their sacrifice will never be forgotten, we will bring to justice those who took them from us. We will stand fast against the violence on our diplomatic missions," Obama said at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington.

As he spoke, a furious wave of anti-American violence ripped across the Middle East and North Africa, with a crowd invading the US embassy compound in Tunis, and guards at the US embassy in Khartoum firing warning shots at protesters.

Fresh violence erupted in Yemen and Cairo and demonstrations took place in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iraq, Israel and the Gaza Strip, Morocco, Syria, Kuwait, Nigeria and Kenya.

Six people were killed and dozens injured in Friday's violence alone.

Obama said that the "awful" loss and terrible images may cause some to question the dangerous work of US diplomats abroad, but argued that

America must not abandon its global mission to spread dignity and freedom.

US military and intelligence agencies have already launched a manhunt in Libya for the militants who staged the assault on the consulate in Benghazi.

"There's an intense focus" on finding the attackers, a US defense official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Late Friday, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced that the United States was positioning military forces so that it can respond to unrest in as many as 17 or 18 places in the Islamic world.

"We have to be prepared in the event that these demonstrations get out of control," Panetta told Foreign Policy magazine.

He has spoken personally to the leaders of Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and the White House said he sent a personal message to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan asking him to speak out against the violence.

PRESIDENTIAL POLL

Obama leads Romney by three points

AFP, New York

US President Barack Obama is leading his Republican rival Mitt Romney by three points, even though many Americans remain dissatisfied with the situation in the country, a new opinion poll shows.

The survey joint survey by CBS News and the New York Times showed that 49 percent of likely voters will support Obama in the November 6 elections, while 46 percent gave their preference to Romney.

According to the survey, Romney is preferred to Obama among likely voters aged 65 and over, but the incumbent president leads among younger voters.

Obama also leads among women voters by 53-41 percent.

Syria conflict is global threat

Says new peace envoy after meeting Assad

REUTERS, Damascus

International mediator Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday said that the escalating Syrian conflict posed a global threat after talks with President Bashar al-Assad.

Activists say more than 27,000 people have been killed in the 18-month-old uprising against Assad, which started as mainly peaceful calls for reform but has become a bloody insurgency which is deepening sectarian tensions in the Middle East.

"This crisis is deteriorating and represents a danger to the Syrian people, to the region, and to the whole world," Brahimi told reporters in Damascus after he spoke with Assad for an hour at the presidential palace.

It was Brahimi's first meeting with Assad since he replaced Kofi Annan as mediator two weeks ago, taking on a mission which the veteran Algerian diplomat described as "nearly impossible".

President Bashar al-Assad also called for



Lakhdar Brahimi

dialogue between Syrians during the meeting with Brahimi, state television reported.

"The real problem in Syria is that of combining politics with the work being done on the ground," said Assad. "The political work continues, in particular by calling for dialogue between Syrians based on the aspirations of all Syrians."

"The success of political action is dependent on putting pressure on the countries that finance and train the terrorists, and which bring weapons into Syria, until they stop doing so."

Assad said his government would "cooperate with all sincere efforts to solve the crisis, so long as the efforts are neutral and independent."

Clashes broke out in Syria's main cities of Damascus and Aleppo yesterday, following a bloody day in which 132 people were killed nationwide, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

NEWS IN brief

16 bodies found in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

A total of 16 dead bodies were found Friday in northern Mexico as a war between drug cartels over lucrative delivery routes to the United States continued to take its toll.

Nine of the dead were found hanging from a bridge in the northern border city of Nuevo Laredo, a killing spree authorities blamed on drug gang violence.

A Mexican drug cartel claimed responsibility for the murders, a state government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. He did not say which cartel.

Some 40 percent of Mexican exports sent by land to the United States cross through Nuevo Laredo, making the town a choice site for drug smugglers.

Pirate Bay co-founder detained

AFP, Stockholm

The co-founder of The Pirate Bay file sharing website was on Friday detained in Sweden, days after his deportation from Cambodia, officials said.

Gottfrid Svartholm Warg, 27, faces a one-year prison sentence for promoting copyright infringement in his home country.

"The person who was recently arrested in Cambodia, suspected of hacking computer data provider Logica, was placed in detention today (Friday)," said the Swedish public prosecutor's office in a statement.

Warg was arrested in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh on August 30 at Stockholm's behest and expelled late on Monday.

Two others were also suspects in the case, the

Neil Armstrong buried at sea

AFP, Washington

The cremated remains of legendary American astronaut Neil Armstrong were scattered at sea on Friday, in a ceremony aboard a US aircraft carrier paying final tribute to the first man to set foot on the moon, NASA said.

US Navy personnel carried Armstrong's remains to the Atlantic Ocean one day after a somber memorial ceremony at the Washington National Cathedral for the famously reserved Apollo 11 commander, who died August 25 at the age of 82.

Armstrong's widow Carol was presented an American flag at the ceremony aboard the USS Philippine Sea that included a bugler and rifle salute.

Also present Thursday was John Glenn, the former US senator and first American to orbit the



PHOTO: AFP

An opposition activist carries a poster depicting Russia's President Vladimir Putin during an anti-Putin protest in central Moscow yesterday. Thousands marched through Moscow to protest against the rule of Putin in a test of the opposition's challenge to the Russian president four months after his inauguration.

SA cops crack down on striking miners

AFP, Marikana

South African police yesterday fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse workers at platinum giant Lonmin's strike-hit Marikana mine in a crackdown on rising unrest in the key industry.

An AFP photographer on the scene said rubber bullets were used after hundreds of workers regrouped in a shantytown near where police shot dead 34 people last month.

Protesters threw stones at officers and set tyres alight. One man was bleeding after being shot in the arm and the side of his body.

A police helicopter kept watch from above as officers in armoured trucks clashed with workers who had earlier dispersed after tear gas was used to break up a gathering.

Police said they had also staged an early morning raid on worker hostels, seizing traditional weapons and arresting five people.

The government Friday announced a security crackdown to stamp out the strife that has hit the northwest town of Rustenburg's platinum belt and forced mines to suspend operations.

The strikes have spilled over from a bitter wage battle at world number three platinum producer Lonmin, whose Marikana operation has been crippled since a wildcat strike erupted last month.

The Marikana mine exploded into violence that has killed 45 people in all.

Gunmen kill 4 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen shot dead four people, including a police colonel, in two attacks in northern Iraq yesterday, security and medical officials said.

Gunmen attacked a home in the village of Hajj Ali, south of the main northern city of Mosul, killing three cousins, police First Lieutenant Dahtan Nayef al-Juburi and Dr Wissam Abboud from Mosul General Hospital said.

And gunmen wearing military uniforms opened fire on a car carrying Colonel Saba Mohammed, north of Tikrit, killing him and wounding his driver, a police lieutenant colonel and a medical source said.

Violence in Iraq is down from its peak in 2006 and 2007, but attacks remain common.

Pope calls for religious harmony in Mideast

AFP, Beirut

Pope Benedict XVI urged Middle Eastern Christians and Muslims yesterday to forge a harmonious, pluralistic society in which the dignity of each person is respected and the right to worship in peace is guaranteed.

Speaking to political and religious leaders on the second day of a three-day trip to Lebanon, he stressed that people must repudiate vengeance, acknowledge their own faults and offer forgiveness to each other.

Those who desire to live in peace must have a change of heart, Benedict said, and that involves "rejecting revenge, acknowledging one's faults, accepting apologies without demanding them and, not least, forgiveness."

He said the universal yearning of humanity for peace can only come about through community, comprised of individual



persons, whose aspirations and rights to a fulfilling life are respected.

The pope came with a message of peace and reconciliation to it and to the wider Middle East, which have been torn by violence, often sectarian, over the years.

Benedict noted that Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in the Middle East for centuries and that there is room for a pluralistic society.

"It is not uncommon to see the two religions within the same family. If this is possible within the same family, why should it not be possible at the level of the whole of society?"

"The particular character of the Middle East consists in the centuries-old mix of diverse elements. Admittedly, they have fought one another, sadly that is also true. A pluralistic society can only exist on the basis of mutual respect, the desire to know the