

# Trump Names Islamophobe to UN Migration Post



Ken Isaacs, head of international relief for Samaritan's Purse, is seen speaking about an outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in 2014.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Trump administration's nominee to coordinate billions of dollars in assistance to migrants around the world has suggested in social-media posts that Islam is an inherently violent religion and has said Christians in some cases should receive preferential treatment when resettling from hostile areas.

In tweets, social media posts and radio appearances, Ken Isaacs, a vice president of the Christian relief organization Samaritan's Purse, made disparaging remarks about Muslims and denied climate change — a driving force behind migration, according to the agency the State Department has nominated him to lead.

In June, after a terrorist attack in London, Isaac reposted and commented on a CNN International story that quoted a Catholic bishop saying "This isn't in the name of God, this isn't what the Muslim faith asks people to do."

Isaacs was announced Thursday as the Trump administration's pick to become director general of the United Nations' International Organization for Migration, or IOM. The 169-member organization has a nearly \$1 billion annual operating budget and for decades has deferred to the United States, one of its top benefactors, to lead the organization.

In a statement, spokeswoman Heather Nauert at the State Department said the agency would continue to sup-

port the nomination and stressed that Isaacs has a proven record of helping diverse populations around the globe.

During the administration of President George W. Bush, Isaacs served as the U.S. Agency for International Development's director of foreign disaster assistance.

Isaacs once ridiculed Obama for wanting to accept large numbers of Syrian refugees as a "foolish and delusional" attempt to "show cultural enlightenment."

Isaacs wrote that he had spent two hours in the refugee camp and that his visit had been long enough to conclude that there were dangers lurking in the groups of refugees.

In other social-media posts, Isaacs divided refugees along religious lines and said Christians in at least one instance should receive preferential treatment.

Ibrahim Hooper, national communications director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said that "this type of nomination coming from the Trump administration is a symptom of its deep hostility toward immigrants, migrants and Muslims."

Hooper said Isaacs' professed views should be disqualifying: "It is imperative these positions maintain neutrality with regard to religion, national origin and ... frankly have some sympathy for those who are migrating for no choice of their own but the economic and social pressures they are under."

# North Korea Slams 'Screams of Trump Terrified'



This undated photo released by Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on February 4, 2018 shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un (C) at Pyongyang Trolley Bus Factory.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korea hit back at U.S. President Donald Trump Sunday over his State of the Union address, describing the speech as "screams of Trump terrified" by Pyongyang's power.

The comments follow months of fiery rhetoric by Trump, which has drawn criticism at home for repeatedly using highly-menacing language.

During Wednesday's address, Trump hit out at what he described as North Korea's "reckless pursuit" of atomic weapons while vowing to wage "a campaign of maximum pressure" to derail the nuclear threat.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un declared his country a fully-fledged nuclear power last November after testing an intercontinental ballistic missile Pyongyang said is capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

A spokesperson of the North's foreign ministry Sunday said the speech reflected "the height of Trump-style arrogance, arbitrariness and self-conceit," in a statement carried by the state-run KCNA news agency.

"Trump also insisted upon the 'maximum pressure' against our country, viciously slandering our most superior people-centered social system," the statement added.

"However, it is no less than screams of Trump terrified at the power of the DPRK that has achieved the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force and rapidly emerged as the strategic state recognized by the world," it said, using the North's official name.

The North said Trump's comment revealed a "sinister intention to do something against us by relying on strength while talking about 'American resolve.'"

"If Trump does not get rid of his anachronistic and dogmatic way of thinking, it will only bring about the consequence of further endangering security and future of the United States," the foreign ministry said.

Relations between the two countries reached fresh lows last year with the North launching a series of missiles and staging its most powerful nuclear test to date, in a challenge to Trump who has threatened to "utterly destroy" the country.

But in a move that seemed aimed at easing tensions and after months of persuasion from Seoul, the North last month said it would send its athletes to the Winter Olympics, due to kick off in the South Friday.

Some have already arrived in South Korea.

# Greeks Rally Against Macedonia in Name Row



A giant Greek flag hangs from a crane waves over protesters during a rally in Athens, Feb. 4, 2018.

ATHENS (Reuters) -- Tens of thousands of Greeks staged a mass rally in Athens Sunday, urging the government not to compromise in a festering name row with neighboring Macedonia.

As a huge Greek flag flew over central Syntagma Square, Greeks from all over the country and abroad chanted "Hands off Macedonia", "Macedonia is Greek" and "We won't leave until we are vindicated".

Athens objects to Macedonia's name, arguing it suggests that Skopje has claims to the territory and heritage of Greece's historic northern region of the same name.

However, leftist Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has

been considering a resolution to the 27-year-old dispute, angering many opposition members and his own nationalist coalition partners.

Among those in the crowd was former premier Antonis Samaras - who was foreign minister when the name dispute began in 1991 - along with mayors, senior clerics and army officers.

Organizers said they expected around a million participants on Syntagma Square.

"Macedonia is Greek and only Greek. They are trying to steal history. We all have to fight and let the world know," Allia Sarellis said, a member of the Greek diaspora who flew in from the United States.

Around 2,500 buses from northern Greece and two ships from Crete brought thousands of demonstrators, reports said. Police declined to give numbers.

Some protesters wore traditional garb, including the uniform of Greek guerrillas who fought Bulgarian bands and Ottoman forces in Macedonia in the early 20th century.

"Thousands of Cretans have shed their blood for Macedonia," a bearded Cretan protester told Skai TV.

The protest - the second on the Macedonia issue in a fortnight - has been organized and funded by Greek diaspora groups, with the support of retired officer associations, cultural unions and church groups.

Renowned Zorba the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis was the keynote speaker despite battling health issues at 92.

Theodorakis has trouble walking, but was galvanized after self-styled anarchists vandalized his home with red paint late Saturday.

Anarchists were planning a counter-protest nearby, with riot police deployed to keep the two crowds apart.

Two weeks ago, tens of thousands had protested in Thessaloniki, the capital of Greece's Macedonia region. Police had estimated the turnout at over 90,000, while organizers claimed at least 400,000 attended.

The dispute has remained unresolved since the former Yugoslav republic's independence in 1991.

# Germany's Political Paralysis Persists Amid Deadlock



German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends a session of the Bundestag in Berlin, November 21, 2017.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that her conservatives faced tough negotiations with the Social Democrats (SPD) on Sunday as they strive to form a ruling coalition, and it was unclear when the two blocs would be able to wrap up the talks.

More than four months after a national election, Europe's largest economy and pre-eminent power broker is in political paralysis, causing concern among investors and partner countries that policy-making on key issues like Britain's looming departure from the European Union and euro zone reform may be held up.

The conservatives and SPD had set themselves a Sunday deadline to agree on renewing the "grand coalition" that has governed since 2013 but some politicians said the discussions could run into Monday or Tuesday - and even then SPD grassroots members still need to agree to any deal.

"It's not yet possible to say how long it will last - we did good groundwork yesterday but there are still important issues that need to be resolved," Merkel, in office for 12 years, said before heading into negotiations.

The parties reached agreements on en-

ergy and agriculture on Saturday but continued to haggle over healthcare.

Merkel, who is betting on the SPD to secure her fourth term in office, added: "I'm going into talks with goodwill today, but I also expect that we'll face difficult negotiations."

SPD leader Martin Schulz said the opposing sides had edged closer on many issues in recent days but remained at odds over his party's demand to abolish fixed-term contracts for workers and its call to replace Germany's dual public-private healthcare system with one insurance system for all.

Healthcare and labor market policy are crucial for the SPD, whose 443,000 members - many of whom oppose forming another awkward partnership with Merkel after their party suffered its worst postwar result in September's election - will get the chance to veto any final coalition deal.

The conservatives have rejected SPD calls for sweeping reform of health insurance and talks are now expected to focus on improving public healthcare, such as by changing billing rules for doctors, who earn more by treating private patients.

# Erdogan Rejects Option of Partnership With Europe

ROME (Dispatches) -- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rejected proposals of a partnership with the EU, insisting full membership to the bloc is the only option, in an interview published Sunday.

Hosting Erdogan on a visit to Paris in January, French President Emmanuel Macron said it was "hypocrisy" to say progress could be made on Turkish EU membership, floating the idea of a partnership instead.

The EU must "keep its promises" to Turkey, Erdogan told Italy's Stema ahead of his arrival in Rome Sunday evening for a 24-hour visit.

"The EU is blocking access to negotiations and suggests that lack of progress is because of us. It's unfair. Just like it is that other countries are pushing for options other than membership," he said. "We want full membership. Other options are not satisfactory," he added. He stressed the country's "important" role stemming the flow of migrants to Europe, which he said offered "security and stability" to the continent.

Turkish ambitions to join the EU date back over half a century but accession talks started in October 2005.

Out of the total of 35 chapters needed to be closed to join the EU, 16 have been opened with just one closed. No new chapter has been opened since financial and budgetary provisions were opened in June 2016. The Turkish leader also defended his recently-launched "Olive Branch" operation in the northern Syrian region of Afrin, fighting Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia which Ankara sees as a terror group.

"The Turkish armed forces are not in Afrin to fight armed Kurdish groups. We don't have problems with the Kurdish Syrians, we are only fighting terrorists, and we have the right to do it," Erdogan insisted, repeating that Turkey was not seeking territorial gains. Erdogan's flying visit to Italy included a meeting with his Italian counterpart Sergio Mattarella.

He is also the first Turkish president to visit the Vatican in 59 years, where he thanked Pope Francis for challenging U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem Al-Quds as the so-called capital of the occupying regime of Israel, a city also claimed by Palestinians.

"We are both in favor of the status quo and we have the will to protect it," he said.

# News in Brief

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- At least two people were killed and 70 others injured Sunday when a train carrying 147 people and a freight train collided in the eastern U.S. state of South Carolina, authorities said. The Amtrak train - Train 91 - traveling between New York and Miami derailed in Cayce, outside the state capital Columbia, in the collision with the CSX freight train, which took place at around 2:30 am (0730 GMT). Amtrak, the national U.S. railway service, said in a statement that the lead engine derailed along with some passenger cars. Eight crew members and 139 passengers were on board. U.S. media reported injuries ranged from cuts and bruises to broken bones. The Lexington County Sheriff's Department confirmed all passengers had been evacuated. The local Red Cross opened a shelter in a school to help passengers. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said it was investigating the incident.

NEW DELHI (AFP) -- A tanker with 22 Indian crew members on board has gone missing off West Africa, officials said Sunday, in waters plagued by piracy. The Panama-registered MT Marine Express, loaded with 13,500 tons of petrol, had been anchored off the Benin city of Cotonou before authorities lost contact with the vessel Thursday. The Hong Kong-based Anglo-Eastern shipping company, which manages the tanker, said the last contact with the crew was made on Thursday. Local media reports said it was the second ship to go missing from the area in the last month. In January, MT Barret went missing but the crew, most of them Indians, were released six days later after reportedly paying a ransom, the Hindustan Times said.

CONAKRY (AFP) -- Guinea began voting Sunday in the first local elections since the end of the era of military dictatorship following eight years of delays. The municipal council elections, originally scheduled for 2010, have been repeatedly delayed due to a lack of funds, political infighting and the 2013-2016 Ebola crisis. Failing schools, unemployment, electricity shortages and corruption allegations are all election issues in the West African country. Guinea gained independence from France under "father of independence" turned paranoid dictator Ahmed Sekou Toure, who ruled until his death in 1984. More than 5.9 million Guineans were registered to vote in the polls from 7am.

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) -- Voters in Cyprus were choosing between a conservative incumbent and a left-leaning independent in a presidential runoff Sunday, hoping the winner can overcome skepticism about a deal to reunite the ethnically divided island nation. Their choice will also depend on which candidate they feel can deliver more benefits from a rebounding economy. It's the second time that President Nicolas Anastasiades has faced off against independent Stavros Malas in a runoff. Earlier polls have shown Anastasiades handily beating Malas, but the independent's strong showing in the first round of voting could make it a closer race. Anastasiades, 71, says Cyprus needs more of his experienced leadership to stay the course and not to repeat policies that set the economy on a downward spiral.

DHAKA (AFP) -- A Bangladeshi farmer lost both legs when he stepped on a landmine reportedly planted by Myanmar security forces in a buffer zone between the two countries, officials said Sunday. The incident happened near the southern Bangladesh border town of Naikhongchhari Saturday when Badir Rahman crossed into the zone. "His cow strayed inside the Myanmar border in no-man's land. He accidentally stepped on a mine when he went there to fetch the cow," Sarwar Kamal said, a local government administrator. The 45-year-old was rushed to a local clinic and later moved to hospital in the southern port city of Chittagong. "His condition is very critical," Marjia Khatun said, a nurse.

MILAN (AP) -- The extreme right-wing suspect in a shooting rampage that wounded six African migrants in Italy has demonstrated no remorse for his actions and was "lucid and determined, aware of what he had done," an Italian law enforcement official said Sunday. Luca Traini, 28, was being held in jail as police investigate him on multiple counts of attempted murder for Saturday's shooting rampage in the central Italian city of Macerata, with the aggravating circumstance of "racial hatred." Traini was an unsuccessful candidate last year in a local election for the anti-migrant Northern League party and friends have been quoted by ANSA as saying he previously had ties with the neo-fascist Forza Nuova and the CasaPound political parties.