

Work through the various examples with an eye to whether the “rule of law” is present. If not, then what element(s) of the definition we worked out in class is/are problematic? What would need to change in order for the “rule of law” to be present?

The New York Times
January 13, 2005

Saudi Court Orders Lashings for 15 Demonstrators
by Hassan M. Fattach

In a rare public display, the Saudi government announced on Tuesday that a religious court had sentenced 15 demonstrators, including one woman, to public lashings and prison terms for taking part in demonstrations against the government.

The punishments were announced in the newspaper Okaz. Normally, such floggings are carried out in public but without prior notice. The fact that these floggings were announced was taken as an indication that the government wanted to make an example of the demonstrators. The demonstrators, members of the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, were among a small crowd that took part in protests in Jidda in mid-December. Another demonstration took place in Riyadh at the same time. Government officials were not available for comment.

The religious Shariah court handed down sentences ranging from two to six months and 100 to 250 lashes. Under Saudi religious law, lashings are administered with a thin reed by a man holding a book under his arm, so that the arm cannot be raised above the shoulder. According to Saudi Arabia's English-language newspaper, Arab News, the state's prosecutor decried the sentences as being too lenient.

Many people were surprised by the government's announcement of the sentences of flogging, which is seen as an ultimate humiliation and carries connotations of heresy. Dissidents are often jailed, said Khaled M. Batarfi, managing editor of Al Madina, a newspaper in Jidda, "but this is much stronger and has this religious dimension of being punished for ethical crimes."

Many dissidents point out that the government recently encouraged demonstrations against terrorists. "This means that demonstrations are not contrary to Islam," said a writer and dissident, Mansour al-Nogaidan. "But in this demonstration, they were considered heathens, which is why they are getting flogged."

A London-based dissident, Saad al-Fagih, called for the Dec. 16 demonstrations, which advocated replacing the royal family with an elected leadership, an independent judiciary and a new constitution guided by Islamic law. Less than a few hundred people took part in the demonstrations, said Mr. Batarfi, who witnessed the protests in Jidda. Heavy security on the day of the planned protest -- especially in the capital, Riyadh -- helped thin the number of demonstrators, organizers say.

Saudi Arabia accuses Dr. Fagih of being a radical Islamist exploiting social and economic discontent in the kingdom. Last month, at the urging of the United States and the Saudi government, the United Nations placed Dr. Fagih on a list of those having connections with Al Qaeda.

"They have given us huge publicity and cleared us in the public eye," Dr. Fagih said from his home in London. "A substantial part of the community believed that we were manufactured by Western intelligence, so now this is actually quite good for us."

The New York Times
June 3, 2008, p. A1

CHAVEZ DECREE TIGHTENS HOLD ON INTELLIGENCE
By SIMON ROMERO

President Hugo Chavez has used his decree powers to carry out a major overhaul of this country's intelligence agencies, provoking a fierce backlash here from human rights groups and legal scholars who say the measures will force citizens to inform on one another to avoid prison terms.

Under the new intelligence law, which took effect last week, Venezuela's two main intelligence services, the DISIP secret police and the DIM military intelligence agency, will be replaced with new agencies, the General Intelligence Office and General Counterintelligence Office, under the control of Mr. Chavez.

The new law requires people in the country to comply with requests to assist the agencies, secret police or community activist groups loyal to Mr. Chavez. Refusal can result in prison terms of two to four years for most people and four to six years for government employees.

"We are before a set of measures that are a threat to all of us," said Blanca Rosa Marmol de Leon, a justice on Venezuela's top court, in a rare public judicial dissent. "I have an obligation to say this, as a citizen and a judge. This is a step toward the creation of a society of informers."

The sweeping intelligence changes reflect an effort by Mr. Chavez to assert greater control over public institutions in the face of political challenges following a stinging defeat in December of a package of constitutional changes that would have expanded his powers.

Mr. Chavez, who has insisted the defeat will not dampen his ambitions to transform Venezuela into a Socialist state, said the new law was intended to guarantee "national security" and shield against "imperialist attacks."

He lashed out at its critics as being agents of the "empire," meaning the United States.

The law's stated aim of protecting Venezuela follows a history of antagonism between the governments in Caracas and Washington, dating at least from the Bush administration's tacit support for a short-lived coup against Mr. Chavez in 2002.

Recently, Venezuela has claimed it was subject to military intimidation from the United States ... Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin announced the intelligence overhaul in a public appearance here last week, saying it was needed to combat "interference from the United States" by having intelligence agency workers imbued with "ideological commitment."

On Monday, however, Mr. Rodriguez Chacin softened his tone, saying the law would not lead to political intimidation or restrict freedom of expression. "We are talking about the responsibility all Venezuelans have with the security of the state and the resolution of any crime," he said.

The drafting and passage of the law behind closed doors, without exposing it to the public debate it would have had if Mr. Chavez had submitted it to the Assembly, also contributed to the public uproar and suspicion.

One part of the law, which explicitly requires judges and prosecutors to cooperate with the intelligence services, has generated substantial concern among legal experts and rights groups, which were already alarmed by the deterioration of judicial independence under Mr. Chavez.

While the language of this passage of the law, and several others, is vague, legal experts say the idea is clear: justice officials, including judges, are required to actively collaborate with the intelligence services rather than serve as a check on them.

"This is a government that simply doesn't believe in the separation of powers," said Jose Miguel Vivanco, Americas director for Human Rights Watch, the New York-based rights organization. "Here you have the president legislating by decree that the country's judges must serve as spies for the government."

Mr. Chavez's opponents here grasped for reasons as to why he chose this moment for the intelligence overhaul, with his government grappling with economic problems like climbing inflation and slowing economic growth even as the price of oil, the lifeblood of Venezuela's economy, remains near record levels. ...

"This is the most scandalous effort to intimidate the population in the 10 years this government has been in power," said Rocio San Miguel, a prominent legal scholar who heads a nongovernmental organization that monitors Venezuelan security and defense issues.

Ms. San Miguel said information her group had collected could be deemed illegal under the new law. The group has data from military sources showing that Mr. Chavez's efforts to create a force of one million reservists had fallen far short.

"Under the new law, this information could be considered a threat to national security and I could be sent immediately to jail," she said. "Effectively this is a way to instill fear in NGOs and news organizations and parts of society that remain outside the government's reach."

[UPDATE: Note that this Chavez ultimately backed away from this law.]

The New York Times
April 15, 2008, p. A7

Zimbabwe Court Rejects Release of Election Results
by Celia W. Dugger

The High Court of Zimbabwe on Monday dismissed an opposition demand for the immediate release of the results of a presidential election held 16 days before. Independent monitors say that the country's autocratic president, Robert Mugabe, trailed badly in the vote and that he may have lost outright.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change, contending that Mr. Mugabe and the military are illegally clinging to power, has called for people across the country to protest by staying home from work on Tuesday.

"We are working with a regime that has perfected the art of interfering with the judiciary," said an opposition spokesman, Nelson Chamisa. "The court has chosen to be a pillar in a collapsing regime."

Zimbabwean election officials said in a state-run newspaper that on Saturday they plan to start a recount of the presidential and parliamentary votes in 23 districts. A ruling on an opposition challenge of a recount is expected Tuesday in the same court system that rejected the opposition's case on Monday.

Election monitors say the late recount is illegal and vulnerable to fraud because the integrity of the ballot boxes has not been safeguarded.

Election authorities had earlier announced that the opposition party won the most seats in Parliament, costing ZANU-PF, the governing party, control of the lower house of Parliament for the first time since the country's independence in 1980. But a recount that switches the results in many of those seats would allow it to reclaim its majority. ...

Like the opposition, the groups say evidence is proliferating that the government is seeking to intimidate its opponents and carry out what amounts to a coup. ...

"The rule of law is under attack through the use of violence," said Irene Petras, executive director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.

Some analysts say the opposition's options are narrowing. The recount ruling means that the courts, believed by many Zimbabweans to be politically compromised, are unlikely to be an effective avenue of appeal. ...

The Moscow Times
May 25, 2007

'Because of This Law, I've Become Homeless'

by Natalya Krainova

Lidia Gaidar fought back tears as she told how she had come home from work last month and found the lock had been changed on the door of the apartment where she had lived for 13 years.

Gaidar and her husband divorced in 1998 but still lived together. Then he abruptly decided to kick her out -- and there was nothing she could do about it.

"Because of this new Housing Code, I've become a homeless person," said Gaidar, 49.

Gaidar is among hundreds of people in Moscow who have found themselves out on the street under the 2005 code, which allows homeowners to evict estranged family members through court or the sale of the home.

While the law might sound logical to Western ears, the issue is not as simple as the protection of homeowners' rights. Eviction can mean not only having to find a new place to live, but also the loss of free health care, free public education and the right to work in Moscow.

Amid a growing public outcry, the State Duma is to consider in a first reading Friday an amendment that would bar the eviction of minors.

At issue is Article 31 of the Housing Code, which says a homeowner can evict family members after a divorce. The law allows children born to the couple to be classified as "former children" if they live with the evicted parent.

For MTLidia GaidarNatalya Fyodorova, who was thrown out by an abusive former husband when she was pregnant with their son, says that is not fair. No court had ordered her eviction when she left, but she said did not have the strength to fight her ex-husband. The pregnancy was difficult, and she spent much of her pregnancy in the hospital anyway.

By the time her son, Bogdan, was born, she had been evicted by a court. Fyodorova and her son now live with a relative. Under the law, her son lost his right to be registered at his father's apartment because he lives with her.

"This law was passed in order to destroy families," Fyodorova said.

Court rulings that allow minors to be evicted by labeling them "former children" are illegal and contradict the Family and Civil codes, said Pavel Krashennikov, the chairman of the Duma's Legislation Committee who drafted the amendment that comes up for a vote Friday and helped write the Housing Code.

"When they say that the Housing Code allows the eviction of minors, it's a lie," Krashennikov said by telephone. "It is just being interpreted incorrectly, and we need to work this out."

The Housing Code in combination with Article 292 of the Civil Code also allows the owner to sell the home while the former spouse and children are still registered residents. The new owner can then evict them on the grounds that they are not members of his family.

This is in stark contrast to the old 1983 Housing Code, which forbade the owner from evicting former relatives or selling the home without their consent, effectively guaranteeing all people a place to live.

Police threw Darya Tyazhelova, together with her baby son, 17-year-old sister and mother out of the

apartment where she had lived for more than a decade last New Year's Eve.

A court ordered the eviction because the ownership of the apartment had changed hands. Tyazhelova's stepfather had sold the apartment to a niece, and she asked the court for the eviction because Tyazhelova's family was not her family.

The family now lives with friends, leaving seven people in a one-room apartment.

The authors of the Housing Code said the main aim was to secure the rights of homeowners, who make up 80 percent of the population.

"Former spouses must be evicted because they are now strangers," said Yelena Getman, a co-author of the Housing Code and a senior official at the Constitutional Court.

"But that does not rule out a marriage contract where spouses can spell out their own terms," she added.

Getman said the Constitution does not guarantee a person's right to live at any particular address.

People who are evicted are reluctant to visit their local passport offices to let police officers put the necessary stamps into their passports showing they no longer are registered Moscow residents. To do so would deprive them of many rights, they said.

Tyazhelova, 27, said her 2-year-old son would not qualify for free medical care at the local children's clinic and would be barred from kindergarten. Her 17-year-old sister would not be able to study or work. Tyazhelova herself, now on maternity leave, would not be able to keep her job or find a new one.

Gaidar, who has held various state jobs over the past 30 years, would face dismissal if her bosses knew she did not have registration. In the month after being locked out of her apartment, she has been renting a room from an alcoholic neighbor.

The Moscow City Court could not say how many people have been evicted since the law came into force on March 1, 2005. A court spokeswoman, Anna Usachyova, said the court's statistics department was temporarily closed for a "reporting period."

The Federal Court Marshals Service, which enforces court rulings, does not keep statistics on evictions, spokesman Stanislav Radchenko said.

But the Victims of the Housing Code advocacy group said more than 300 people have been evicted in Moscow alone.

Forty people, including 35 who were evicted, have complained to ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, said Zinaida Nikolaichuk, head of a department in the ombudsman's office that oversees housing rights.

"Of course there are a lot more people who have been evicted under the new Housing Code. Those 35 are only the ones who came to us after all other attempts failed," she said.

She said there was little she could do to help. "It's impossible to challenge the court decisions because they are legal," she said.

The New York Times
April 25, 2007, p. A8

Indonesian Court Acquits Newmont Mining
by Donald Greenlees

An Indonesian court acquitted Newmont Mining Corporation, the American mining giant, and one of its senior executives on Tuesday of charges of polluting a bay here with toxic waste from a now defunct gold mine, in a case that became a litmus test of foreign investor confidence in Indonesia.

Ending a 21-month trial that pitted an emboldened national environmental lobby against Newmont Mining, a panel of judges found there was no evidence to support criminal charges that the company had polluted Buyat Bay, off the island of Sulawesi, with toxins including arsenic and mercury.

The chief prosecutor said the verdict would be appealed.

Prosecutors had asked the court to impose a three-year jail term and a \$55,000 fine on Richard B. Ness, the chief of the Newmont unit that controls the mine, who is a United States citizen. They had also sought a \$110,000 fine against the company.

But the chief judge, Ridwan Damanik, told the Manado District Court that the case, which followed a lengthy police investigation and the monthlong detention of five Newmont executives, including an American and an Australian, should never have resulted in criminal proceedings.

"The police evidence doesn't stand up," Mr. Damanik told a packed courtroom. Reading from a 260-page judgment, he added that the prosecution had failed to show that Newmont's system of depositing mine waste, called tailings, at the bottom of the bay via a half-mile-long pipe had polluted the environment or caused health problems for local villagers.

Mr. Ness, 57, who for a large part of the criminal proceedings had been forbidden to leave Indonesia, said that he was pleased the judges had determined that the legal procedures that allowed the case to get to court were fundamentally flawed.

"We are all thrilled with the fact that after two and a half years we have been exonerated from the horrendous allegations that were brought before us originally," Mr. Ness said in an interview after the verdict.

He added, "We should never have even gotten this far; we shouldn't have been in court."

But Purwanta Sudarmaji, the state prosecutor, said in an interview later that he intended to appeal the verdict. Under Indonesian law, the prosecution has 14 days to lodge the appeal.

Environmental activists expressed disappointment with the verdict. About 1,000 anti-Newmont protesters gathered for the verdict outside the court, which was cordoned off and had a heavy police presence.

"Newmont was found not guilty because of legal procedures, but not on the substance," said Siti Maimunah, coordinator of the Mining Advocacy Network, an environmental group, in an interview from Jakarta.

The case against Newmont has had national significance for environmentalists and investors because both sides saw it as a vital test of the balance between development and environmental protection in a country that has some of the richest mineral deposits in the world, including gold, copper, nickel and coal.

Investors and some senior government officials feared that a guilty verdict against Newmont, one of

the world's biggest mining companies, would be another severe blow to the growth of the mining industry when investment was already at a historic low. Environmentalists said they hoped that the case would act as a restraint on what they say has been a permissive attitude toward the resource extraction industries.

For Newmont, which is based in Denver, the case also became a focus of shareholder concern about the environmental and social standards adopted by the company in developing countries, where regulations are sometimes less stringent than those in the United States.

A group of institutional investors in Newmont, with links to religious organizations, have proposed a resolution for the independent monitoring of the environmental and social impact of the company's operations. Newmont executives said the board of directors was planning to endorse the adoption of the resolution on Tuesday at its annual meeting in Wilmington, Del.

Still, the legal victory on Tuesday gives Newmont executives very little incentive to change the method of disposing of tailings at sea by submarine pipe -- the issue that was at the heart of the environmental case against the mine in Indonesia. This method is also used at a much bigger Newmont mine on the island of Sumbawa, in eastern Indonesia.

"One of the real positives about the outcomes from this is that basically the judges assessed whether ocean disposal of tailings caused pollution, and the answer is no," Bob Gallagher, vice president for Asia Pacific operations of Newmont, said in an interview. "So in fact, I think it is a very positive outcome in terms of the disposal of tailings."

The case against the company's local unit, Newmont Minahasa Raya, centered on claims made in 2004 by a doctor and some local residents that toxins used in the mining process and pumped into the sea with the tailings caused a variety of illnesses, including skin rashes, lumps and dizziness. They alleged that a baby had died as a result of exposure to the mine's toxins. The charges came as the mine was shutting down after eight years of operation.

A subsequent police investigation, which involved the testing of samples from Buyat Bay, found unsafe levels of heavy metals and resulted in the filing of criminal charges. This was supported by a report in November 2004 from a group of experts engaged by the Environment Ministry, which found that arsenic levels in fish posed "high risks to human health." Arsenic is a byproduct of the mining process.

The indictment prepared by prosecutors alleged that the waste pumped into the bay had polluted the environment and caused health damage to the population, and that the pumping was done without the proper waste disposal permits.

But the prosecution's case was weakened when the doctor who brought the initial health claims retracted her statement in a letter sent to the police. A \$543 million civil lawsuit brought on behalf of villagers was dropped. But Newmont did reach a \$30 million good-will agreement with the government that provides for 10 years of environmental monitoring and community development aid.

The New York Times
October 10, 2007, p. B7

File-Sharing Students Fight Copyright Constraints
by Rachel Aviv

When Zachary McCune, a student at Brown, received an e-mail message from the university telling him he might have broken the law by downloading copyrighted songs, his eyes glazed over the warning and he quickly forgot about it. "I already knew what they'd say about file-sharing," he said. "It's become a campus cliché."

But the next day, he realized the message had an attachment from the Recording Industry Association of America, a trade group that is coordinating legal efforts by record companies to crack down on Internet piracy. The attachment told Mr. McCune he faced a lawsuit with potential fines of \$750 to \$150,000 for every illegally downloaded song.

"I was stunned by the extremity of the punishment for taking songs I could have bought for a few cents," he said. "It seemed grossly out of proportion."

Twelve Brown students received these letters; Mr. McCune ended up paying \$3,000 to settle the claim. But the experience made him interested in changing intellectual property regulations. Last spring he co-founded Brown's chapter of Students for Free Culture, a national organization sprouting up on college campuses that advocates loosening the restrictions of copyright law so that information -- from software to music to research to art -- can be freely shared.

"The technology has outpaced the law," said Mr. McCune, who is now a sophomore.

Established at Swarthmore College in 2004, the group has chapters at more than 35 universities across the country. "We will listen to free music, look at free art, watch free film and read free books," reads its manifesto, posted on its Web site, freeculture.org. "We refuse to accept a future of digital feudalism."

Members assert that the Internet has made it necessary to rethink copyright law, and they talk about the group's goals with something like the reverence that earlier generations displayed in talking about social or racial equality. ...

The New York Times
May 22, 2007, p. A1

Harsh Birth Control Steps Fuel Violence in China

by Joseph Kahn

An intensive campaign to enforce strict population-control measures, including forced abortions, prompted violent clashes between the police and local residents in southwestern China in recent days, witnesses said Monday, describing the latest incident of rural unrest that has alarmed senior officials in Beijing.

Villagers and visitors to several counties of the Guangxi Autonomous Region in southwestern China said rioters smashed and burned government offices, overturned official vehicles, and clashed with the riot police officers in a series of confrontations over the past four days. They spoke on the condition of anonymity, fearing retribution.

They gave varying accounts of injuries and deaths, with some asserting that as many as five people had been killed, including three officials responsible for population-control work. A local government official in one of the counties affected confirmed the rioting in a telephone interview but denied reports of deaths or serious injuries.

The violence seemed to stem from a two-month crackdown in Guangxi to punish people who violated the country's policy that sets legal limits on the number of children families are allowed to have.

According to accounts posted on the Internet by villagers and witnesses, officials in several parts of Guangxi mobilized their largest effort in years to roll back population growth by requiring mandatory health checks for women and forcing pregnant women who lacked approval to give birth to undergo abortions. ...

Coercive measures, including forced abortions and sterilizations, were common in the 1980s, when the so-called one-child policy was first strictly enforced. More recently, many parts of China have been relying more on financial penalties and incentives to limit the growth of its population, which is 1.3 billion.

But local officials who fail to meet annual population control targets can still come under bureaucratic pressure to reduce births or face demotion or removal from office.

Several people said in the Internet accounts of the campaign in Guangxi that officials had issued fines starting at 500 yuan and ranging as high as 70,000 yuan, or \$65 to \$9,000, on families who had violated birth control measures at any time since 1980. The new tax, called a "social child-raising fee," was collected even though most violators had already paid fines in the past, the people said.

According to an account on Longtan, a Web forum, officials in Bobai County in Guangxi boasted that they collected 7.8 million yuan in social child-raising fees from February through the end of April. Many families objected strongly to the fees and refused to pay. ...

The New York Times
October 30, 2007, p. A1

Twists, Turns and Roadblocks Just to Apply for a Driver's Test
by Michael Wines

"You will never drive this way again in your life," Cullen says.

Cullen, a laconic fellow with disheveled hair and a cigarette sagging from his lips, is maneuvering a clapped-out Toyota down a suburban Johannesburg street. He yanks his hand brake up at every stop. He lowers it only after he has hit the gas and the Toyota is straining forward like a leashed Labrador after a biscuit. Cullen swivels constantly in search of cars behind him, cars in his side mirrors, cars in every alley, cars at every intersection.

Occasionally, he watches the road ahead.

"I need a drink," he says.

Cullen is a South African driving instructor. You would drink, too. His job is to teach people how to pass South Africa's driver's license examination, a trial of the country's K53 method of defensive driving. Herein lies a problem, for the K53 method resembles normal driving about as much as Snoop Dogg resembles Perry Como.

But not the only problem. Securing a South African driver's license is not as simple as passing the K53 test, which is not simple at all. It also requires that one apply for the license, a bureaucratic process so daunting that it set off riots this year. It necessitates eye examinations before applying for a license and before the road test -- and all over again, should one fail. It often demands that one game the driving examiner, who may wish to flunk the hapless applicant to meet the day's failure quota.

It is helpful to learn South Africa's extensive and sometimes charming traffic code, which sometimes rates children between 6 and 13 as one-third of a passenger and includes a road sign that depicts a stick-figure man astride an ostrich.

If one does all this, one can proceed to take the K53, and flunk on the merits. For the K53 is just part of the Catch-22 that faces every aspiring motorist here: To drive legally, one very sensibly needs a license. Except that licenses often seem impossible to get.

All right, not impossible. They are nevertheless very difficult. In a two-year period that ended in July, the national transport ministry says, 1.5 million people applied for driver's licenses. Fewer than 4 in 10 actually received them. Over all, the government says, South Africa has about 8.5 million motor vehicles and 7.8 million licensed drivers. The nation's transport minister said in July that so few motorists get licenses because they do not study hard enough for their exams, and he could be right: the K53 is hardly a no-brainer.

Based on Britain's national driving exam, the K53 effectively requires an applicant to imagine that he is driving a live claymore mine under assault by guerrillas in bumper cars. The hand brake must be engaged silently at all stops (ratchet-clicking is strictly forbidden), and all mirrors must be checked every seven seconds. Points are deducted for glancing at the gearshift, driving too slowly, failing to ensure that head- and taillights are securely attached, failing to check the play on the clutch pedal, failing to look beneath the car for leaks and several score other sins.

There are many ways to fail instantly, including permitting one's automobile to roll backward, even an inch, while stopping or starting. ...

In practice, he acknowledged, it appears that very few people pass the K53 on the first try. South African drivers tend to throw caution not just to the winds but into a deep ravine, often with a derisive farewell blow of the horn. Red lights are frequently treated like a matador's red cape ...

Even though the K53 method has been used for a dozen years -- or perhaps because so few drivers have obtained licenses -- traffic accidents and deaths are rising fast, to 15,400 fatalities last year, up nearly 9 percent from 2005. The fatality rate per mile traveled, the best measure of road safety, is five times that in the United States ...

Another reason may be that the exam is stacked against some applicants. The \$25 fee to schedule a driver's exam is split between the national and local governments. Some localities, Mr. Ronald said, have become so fond of that easy money that they are notorious for flunking applicants, apparently in the expectation that they will pony up \$25 more to reapply.

And many might, were it easy to reapply. It is not. License applicants are supposed to apply by telephone, which has proven less than successful. "I have attempted to call the call center -- in quick succession -- 271 times. Not joking," one miserable soul wrote in November on the Internet site drivers.com. "I have gotten through to music and voice prompts 18 times. Each time this lasts for three minutes, before you are disconnected."

Early this year the government installed a computer system to manage auto-related matters. The system promptly broke down. In the ensuing chaos, supplicants for driver's licenses began to line up outside motor vehicle offices before sunrise, waiting hours to get a precious application form. In July the police rushed to one Johannesburg office after throngs of furious would-be drivers tried to break down the doors to apply for licenses.

"People seem to judge by the long queues that the system is not working," a spokesman for the Transport Ministry said at the time. He added, soothingly, "It's not true."

To be sure, South Africans' licensing misery is, in one odd way, a sign of progress. "A lot of the backlog is caused by the huge upsurge in the number of formerly disadvantaged people who can now afford to buy a car," said Les Stephenson, the motoring editor of the Independent Online Web site. "Unfortunately, the traffic department just can't keep up."

Indeed. In one instance sure to warm the heart of any applicant, a heroic woman recently locked herself and her two children, ages 8 and 2, inside a Cape Town motor vehicle office after bureaucrats refused to hand over her new driver's license on the grounds that they were closed -- 15 minutes before the posted quitting time of 3 p.m.

Few drivers are so persistent. With genuine licenses so hard to obtain, a growing black market offers bootleg ones, usually obtained from corrupt motor vehicle officials, for \$150 to \$450. In the last two years, investigators found more than 42,000 fake licenses on the government's own computer registry, and arrested a thousand people, including scores of bureaucrats, on charges of subverting the licensing process.

That total does not include undetected scams, which are legion, and fakes sold by forgers and thieves. Among those caught in the act is the speaker of the South African Parliament, Baleka Mbete-Kgositsile, nabbed in 1997, but not prosecuted, for procuring a phony license from a government testing center.

Ms. Mbete had a ready explanation. She was, she said, too busy to stand in line.

CARACAS, Venezuela — President Hugo Chávez has used his decree powers to carry out a major overhaul of this country's intelligence agencies, provoking a fierce backlash here from human rights groups and legal scholars who say the measures will force citizens to inform on one another to avoid prison terms. On Sunday, Mr. Chávez referred to critics of the intelligence law as de facto supporters of the Bush administration and of the Patriot Act, the American antiterrorism law that enhances the ability of security agencies to monitor personal telephone and e-mail communications. Mr. Chávez's new intelligence law has similar flourishes. For instance, it authorizes his new intelligence agencies to use "any special or technically designed method" to intercept and obtain information. The General Intelligence Office is the internal intelligence agency of Venezuela. According to the New York Times, as of June 3, 2008, this agency replaced the Dirección de los Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención;^[1] however this appears to be incorrect.^[2] See also^[edit]. Dirección de los Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención. References^[edit]. ^ "Chávez Decree Tightens Hold on Intelligence", by Simon Romero, June 3, 2008, New York Times. ^ ^[1]^[permanent dead link]. This article about government in Venezuela is a stub. (Read on: Chávez decree tightens hold on intelligence). As a missionary in Romania from 1995 - 1997, I ran into rampant suspicion and skepticism. Much more often than not when asking a neighbor or 'stander-by' if they knew when a person I was looking for might return or if the person was 'around', I would get the ever quick reply of "Dece vrei sa stii?" (meaning: "Why do you want to know?"). Without fail, this phrase came packaged in an inflection and look of complete suspicion. The "Dece vrei sa stii?" syndrome was only one of many symptoms ev