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Working Together to Save Newborn Lives

Olympic Gold Medalist and six-time World Record Holder in the 5,000 meter run, Meseret Defar, U.S. Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, Save the Children, and Ministry of Health staff came together on March 16 at the Black Lion Hospital to promote the use of low cost methods of reducing infant mortality.

Ethiopia has one of the highest newborn mortality rates in the

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Ambassador and Mrs. Yamamoto and Meseret Defar visit with patients and staff at the Kangaroo Mother Care unit of the Black Lion Hospital's neo-natal care department.

USAID, CARE Launch PSNP PLUS to Improve Micro-Finance and Market Linkages

Led by a consortium of partners, project supports GOE's Safety Net Program

Glenn Anders, USAID Mission Director, speaking at the PSNP PLUS official launch held at Hilton Hotel.

On Tuesday, March 17, 2009 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), CARE, and a host of consortium partners, launched PSNP PLUS, a new nationwide development project that will assist poor, rural households in food insecure areas that benefit from the Government of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). This three year project will move households towards graduation from PSNP through market-driven approaches to diversify their livelihoods, build assets and link

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Working Together to Save Newborn Lives . . .

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world, with 120,000 babies dying annually. Two-thirds of those deaths occur in the first 24 hours of life, and the majority of deaths are a result of treatable and preventable conditions. According to Professor Bogale Worku, Head of the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health at Addis Ababa University, "Ethiopia is working hard to meet the millennium goal of reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds, but without more emphasis on newborn mortality we will not make it." Professor Bogale continued, "It is the right of every child to survive, develop, and be part of the future of Ethiopia."

"We thank the Ministry of Health and Save the Children for taking the lead in efforts to reduce newborn mortality in Ethiopia," said Ambassador Yamamoto. "The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is partnering with the Ministry to help expand access to life-saving services through the construction of more than 70 health centers across Ethiopia and support for Health Extension Workers at the community level," he continued. "Working together we can improve the health of mothers and babies."

Safe the Children's Saving Newborn Lives Program, which is funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to reduce neonatal mortality through low cost high impact intervention.

To accomplish its goal of reducing the infant mortality rates, Save the Children has worked with the Ministry of Health to introduce techniques like Kangaroo Mother Care. This method of care is a special way of wrapping a baby next to a mother to facilitate skin to skin contact and breastfeeding while fostering a stronger bond between the mother and her infant. This method of care has been shown to reduce medical costs while improving the survival rates of pre-mature infants. In 2008 Save the Children, in collaboration with USAID's ACCESS Program, came together to support the Federal Ministry's of Health's goal to expand the highly successful Kangaroo Mother Care program to over six hospitals across Ethiopia. The Kangaroo Mother Care Unit at Black Lion Hospital was the first one to open thirteen years ago.

"The great thing about Kangaroo Mother Care is that you don't need a hospital setting to do this," said Dr. Tedbabe Degefie, Senior Health Specialist for Save the Children. "This is a practice that has been proven to be effective in places where incubators don't exist or electricity is scarce – as well as in industrialized nations – the warmth from the skin to skin contact is the essential element," continued Dr. Degefie.

One of the primary concerns for pre-mature or malnourished infants is heat loss. As such Save the Children has initiated a campaign "Knit One Save One", an infant cap knitting initiative. With support from volunteers representing every one of the 50 states in America, Save the Children has been able to provide yet another low cost effective way of reducing infant mortality. Visiting the Kangaroo Mother Care Unit from Nevada was obstetrical nurse, Vicki Akin. Vicki, who has delivered more than 3,000 babies in the United States came to Ethiopia as a guest of Save the Children to present the caps that she has been knitting for newborns.

"I am very excited to be in Ethiopia and to take back the message to all Americans that we can all do something to reduce infant mortality – whether it is government's making this issue a priority; donors increasing resources; individuals knitting hats and giving of their time and resources; or parents providing the appropriate care – we can all do something," shared Ms. Akin.

Tigist Wolde-Yohannes, a first time mother of two one month old twins said of the cap initiative, "I am happy for getting the caps. As I gave birth to preterm babies, they need to be kept warm. So far I didn't get caps that fit them, but the ones I got today really fit them and it keeps them warm."

On their visit to the Black Lion Hospital, the Ambassador and his wife, Margaret Yamamoto, gave the hats that volunteers had made to the newborns in the neonatal ward. One young mother in the hospital who had the chance to visit with the Ambassador said, "The thing that made me very happy today is the fact that the American Ambassador and his wife, as well as the

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USAID, CARE Launch PSNP PLUS to Improve Micro-Finance . . .

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to financial services and markets.

Glenn Anders, USAID Mission Director, joined Ato Mitiku Kassa, State Minister for the Disaster Management and Food Security Sector, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, CARE and consortium members participated in the official ceremony held at Hilton Hotel. "The new PSNP PLUS program is a perfect complement to the innovative safety net program led by the Government of Ethiopia. Our additional support will strengthen the financial skills and resources of vulnerable Ethiopians and, most importantly, lift them from a life of poverty," Glenn Anders said.

The Government of Ethiopia's PSNP provides food and financial resources to 7.4 million chronically food insecure and most vulnerable people to help stabilize their income and assets. In operation since 2004, the PSNP works to support rural transformation, prevent asset depletion, encourage household level production and investment, and promote market development. PSNP receives financial support from seven international donors, including USAID.

While food aid distribution and community level public works projects make people more resilient to food shortages, they are not enough to permanently graduate people from the safety net program. The PSNP PLUS project is designed, therefore, to assist poor households by linking them to micro finance services and functioning markets, a necessary step to lift people out of dependence on the PSNP.

The PSNP PLUS project will work with micro finance institutions to develop products and services which will increase the financial assets of PSNP beneficiaries, as well as strengthening the financial literacy and business skills of the PSNP beneficiaries themselves to promote savings. The project will target four agricultural products – honey, haricot beans, livestock fattening, and cereal production – to increase farmer's incomes. Information on the entire value chain within each enterprise will be shared with farmers to help them improve their product, market linkages, and income. Overall, the project aims to help more than 212,000 Ethiopians in four regions, including Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray and parts of the rural Dire Dawa Administration.

The PSNP PLUS project is being implemented by a consortium of national and international NGOs. CARE is responsible for overall consortium management and implementation in collaboration with Catholic Relief Service (CRS), the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and Save the Children UK (SC-UK). Technical assistance will be provided by SNV for value chain development; Feinstein International Center of Tufts University for impact assessment; and CARE for microfinance. ♦

Working Together to Save Newborn Lives . . .

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Ethiopian athlete Meseret Defar, came here to visit us. And more the Ambassador put the caps on my babies -- the caps are very nice which will keep my babies warm. I thank them all."

During his visit, Ambassador Yamamoto praised the efforts of the Ministry of Health and Save the Children and thanked Meseret Defar for "being a role model for women in this country. It is truly admirable that you are spending your time giving back to your country."

According to Ms. Defar, "Today is my first time to see children in this situation. I am touched inside. My plan for the future is to engage wholeheartedly in efforts that aim at reducing the death of mothers and children in Ethiopia."

For more information contact Getachew Dibaba at Save the Children U.S. in Addis Ababa (Tel. 0911-125-201/011-372-8455) ♦

Diplomat Says Horn of Africa Crises Require African Solutions

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Staff Writer

Somalis celebrate on the streets of Mogadishu after moderate Islamist leader Sheikh Sharif Ahmed was sworn in as Somalia's president January 31, 2009.

Washington — While foreign policy specialists believe it is important that solutions to economic and political challenges in the Horn of Africa — Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia — be African "owned," international entities will continue to have an impact on the region.

Acting Assistant Secretary for Africa Phillip Carter recently told a panel on conflict in Somalia that the United States and international partners remain committed to moving a peace process forward "with the goal of creating political and economic stability in Somalia and fostering basic security."

But, "above all," that "peace process must be Somali-owned and -led," Carter told the participants in the March 10 discussion, jointly sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Institute for Peace.

Somalia, without a unified government since the early 1990s, increasingly has come under the sway of warlord militias and terrorist groups whose fighting precipitated a humanitarian crisis and turned the capital of Mogadishu into a war zone over the last 16 years.

Acting Assistant Secretary for Africa Phillip Carter

Carter said the United States is actively supporting the deployment of an African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia as well as providing $5 million for the creation of a more permanent joint security force.

The United States and a number of European and African nations are part of an international contact group facilitating peace talks in Djibouti between Somali groups whose chaotic fighting has enabled pirates operating off the coast to prey on international shipping with relative impunity.

Carter, who recently returned from a Somalia crisis meeting in Brussels, Belgium, added, "One thing we discovered in our contact group discussion was a wide range of interests among a bunch of different donors and countries to support" peace efforts in Somalia.

At a March 12 hearing before a House of Representatives subcommittee, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia David Shinn said, "It is essential to continue to work with the countries in the region and the traditional donor countries, including the members of the European Union, Norway, Canada, Australia and Japan."

At the same time he agreed with Carter that Africans need to chart their own destinies. "The United States cannot and should not be expected to solve the problems of the Horn on its own," he told lawmakers.

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Ethiopian Singer Adinew Performs at VOA

Washington, D.C., March 11, 2009 – Singer Abonesh Adinew, nicknamed Abiti, performed traditional Ethiopian music at the Voice of America's (VOA) today, sharing her passion for her native culture with listeners of African Beat.

"Wherever you go, you cannot forget where you are coming from," said Adinew, 38, who came to live in the Washington, D.C., area decade ago. A native of Haikoch and Butajira in Southern Ethiopia, Adinew performs professionally in the United States and around the world.

Adinew said her goal in performing is to educate the world about Ethiopia. A singer for 20 years, she sings in different Ethiopian languages with musical selections from various ethnic groups.

On African Beat, Adinew's opening song, Baleageru, talks about the countryside and the people who live there. Her first album, which has the same name, was a best seller in Ethiopia.

VOA's African Beat (www.voanews.com/english/africa.African.beat.cfm), first broadcast in 2006, is a daily one-hour music program showcasing various styles of music popular throughout the African continent.

The Voice of America, which first went on the air in 1942, is a multimedia international broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. VOA broadcasts approximately 1,500 hours of news, information, educational, and cultural programming every week to an estimated worldwide audience of more than 134 million people. Programs are produced in 45 languages.

For more information, please call VOA Public Relations at (202) 203-4959 or e-mail ask-voa@voanews.com. ♦

Diplomat Says Horn of Africa Crises Require African Solutions . . .

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INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE REGION

Shinn, now an adjunct professor of political science at George Washington University, mentioned a number of countries that now are interested in the Horn region, including "Egypt and some of the Arab Gulf states, which have a direct interest in developments in the Horn."

In Sudan, China has become "the principal non-African influence, and has a growing presence in Ethiopia and Eritrea," he said. "China will not always agree with Western donors on the best approach to the region, but it has cooperated in Sudan and Somalia and should increasingly be brought into discussions concerning the Horn."

Shinn said Russia should be part of the consultative process "if for no other reason than to try to minimize the potential negative impact of its arms sales and because it has expressed a growing interest in investing in countries like Ethiopia."

The former diplomat said India is "a major player" in the Horn, especially in Ethiopia, which is its principal African recipient of economic assistance. Recently, Turkey has also made an effort to increase its relations in the Horn, especially with Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti, Shinn said.

South America also has interests in the region, Shinn told the House panel. "Although Brazil's main African focus is West Africa and the [Portuguese-speaking] countries, it is expanding ties with Sudan and Ethiopia."

Shinn stressed that all the countries mentioned should be part of efforts to solve problems in the region. In addition, the United Nations and agencies like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, African Development Bank, Arab Development Bank and Arab League (Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti are members) also "have the ability to influence developments in the Horn."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov) ♦

Growing Crisis in Darfur Is Not Acceptable

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have agreed to seek ways to end the immediate humanitarian crisis in Darfur and work toward long-term peace and stability in Sudan.

After Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir was charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Darfur region of Sudan, he ordered 13 international aid groups expelled from the country in retaliation. The nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are not involved with the ICC's actions, were providing about 4.7 million people with foreign assistance for food, shelter and protection from an ongoing insurgency.

"We have a potential crisis of even greater dimensions than what we already saw," Obama said during a March 10 White House meeting with Ban. "It is not acceptable to put that many people's lives at risk."

U.N. officials said that the expulsion of the NGOs has paralyzed nearly half of the U.N.'s assistance programs to Darfur and limits the ability to meet ongoing humanitarian needs.

"We need to be able to get those humanitarian organizations back on the ground," Obama said.

Obama said the United States wants to work actively with the United Nations in arresting the immediate crisis, but also in setting the stage for long-term stability in a region that has not known peace for decades.

President Obama, right, listens as U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon answers questions at the White House.

Sudan has been wracked with civil strife for nearly four decades as more than 2 million people have died or been killed by intermittent fighting and famines, and millions more displaced from their homes within Sudan or to neighboring countries. The current fighting in the Darfur region, which is in western Sudan and about the size of France, began in 2003 when two rebel groups emerged to challenge the central government for control over Darfur, all of which has led to a major international humanitarian crisis.

The United Nations and the African Union have a joint peacekeeping force in Darfur, though it has not reached full strength. The United States provides support to the peacekeepers.

Although the United States is neither a member of the ICC nor a signatory to the 2002 Rome treaty that created it, the United States does believe that war criminals should be brought to justice and that the Sudanese government has an obligation to comply with the ICC.

"The United Nations and the United States share common visions and objectives for peace, stability, development and human rights," Ban said at the White House meeting, which is the first since Obama became president in late January.

Ban said he is concerned that 2009 is becoming a make-or-break year, which is full of crises on many fronts for the United Nations, the United States and the whole international community.

The "United Nations stands ready to work together with you, Mr. President, to make this make-or-break year turn into make-it-work, full of optimism and resolution," Ban said.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. (http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/)

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov) ♦

Reach of U.S. Civil Rights Law Debated, Reviewed Decades Later

By Michelle Austein Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — The reach of a landmark civil rights law continues to be interpreted years after its passage, as the Supreme Court recently demonstrated in its ruling regarding the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

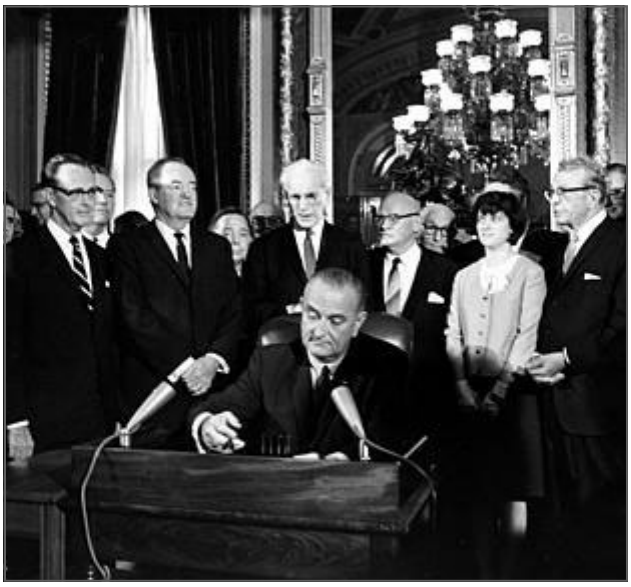
On March 9, the Supreme Court narrowed the scope of the act, ruling in a 5-4 decision that governments are not required to draw electoral district boundaries in a way that helps minority voters elect the candidate of their choice, unless the minority group makes up at least 50 percent of the area's voting-age population.

The Voting Rights Act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, sought to remove formal and informal barriers that kept African Americans from freely casting ballots. These included poll taxes — a fee for voting — and literacy requirements. The act also established federal oversight of electoral districts with a history of disenfranchising minority voters. The act, under Section 2, prohibits "voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard, practice, or procedure ... which results in a denial or abridgment of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color."

Since its passage, the Voting Rights Act has been renewed and expanded periodically by Congress. The exact meaning and reach of the act's provisions have been debated and reviewed by courts numerous times during the past 40 years.

Enforcement of the act has improved the ability of minorities to elect the representatives of their choosing. But just how much assistance the act guarantees has been a subject of debate and the issue at question in the case Bartlett v. Strickland.

In Bartlett, minority voters in one of North Carolina's state legislative districts argued they should be protected from redistricting because they have been able to elect African-American candidates by building effective coalitions even though African-American voters do not constitute a majority within the district. African-American voters make up about 39 percent of the population in this district, commonly referred to as a "crossover" district.



The reach of the Voting Rights Act, signed by President Johnson in 1965, continues to be debated today.

In defending its decision to dismantle the district, the state contended that minority groups cannot assert they are protected under the act unless they represent 50 percent or more of the population.

The court agreed with the state, determining that North Carolina does not have an obligation to design a district that enables minorities to elect, with the support of a small number of nonminority voters, their chosen candidate.

"Section 2 does not impose on those who draw election districts a duty to give minority voters the most potential, or the best potential, to elect a candidate by attracting crossover voters," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in his opinion.

Furthermore, by determining whether a potential district is a crossover district, government officials and courts would be in the "untenable position of predicting many political variables and tying them to race-based assumptions," Kennedy wrote. "The judiciary would be directed to make predictions or adopt premises that even experienced polling analysts and political experts could not assess with certainty."

The court's ruling could have an impact following the 2010 census, when some electoral boundaries will be redrawn as new population data become available.

State legislatures define congressional districts in a process that often can become politically contentious. The political party in control of a state's legislature may consider how the court's ruling gives it greater flexibility to draw district boundaries in a way that it believes will benefit its party. ♦

New Guantánamo Detainee Policy Rooted in International Law

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration has issued new standards for holding terrorism suspects at the Guantánamo Bay detention center that are rooted in international law and mark the White House's latest step toward final closure of the facility by early 2010.

"As we work toward developing a new policy to govern detainees, it is essential that we operate in a manner that strengthens our national security, is consistent with our values, and is governed by law," Attorney General Eric Holder said in a March 13 statement. "The change we've made today meets each of those standards and will make our nation stronger."

The policy was outlined in a brief issued earlier in the day by U.S. Department of Justice attorneys to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, where lawyers representing 40 Guantánamo detainees are exercising their right to challenge their imprisonment. They won this right under a landmark 2008 Supreme Court decision, Boumediene v. Bush.

Under the new administration policy, Guantánamo detainees no longer would be viewed as "enemy combatants" to be held solely under the president's constitutional authority as commander in chief of the U.S. armed forces. Instead, the attorneys explained, the United States now will base its authority to hold terror suspects on "the laws of war," including the Geneva Conventions and other international legal obligations, as they were used to shape the "Authorization for the Use of Military Force" issued by Congress following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

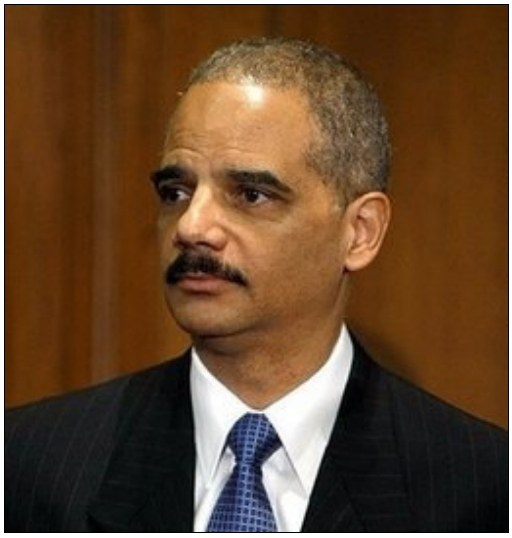
"The President has the authority to detain persons that the President determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, and persons who harbored those responsible for those attacks," the brief read. "The President also has the authority to detain persons who were part of, or substantially supported, Taliban or al-Qaida forces or associated forces that are engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners, including any person who has committed a belligerent act, or has directly supported hostilities, in aid of such enemy armed forces."

The new policy addresses critics of the Guantánamo system by firmly establishing the president's authority to detain terror suspects in accordance with international law as defined in a variety of sources, from the United Nations Charter to the principles of collective self-defense used by NATO and the Organization for American States.

At the same time, the attorneys said, the new policy places an additional burden of proof on the U.S. government to establish specific reasons why continued detainment of individual Guantánamo detainees remains warranted.

"Given the nature of the irregular forces, and the practice of their participants or members to try to conceal their affiliations, judgments about the detainability of a particular individual will necessarily turn on the totality of the circumstances," government attorneys wrote.

The new detainee policy likely will undergo additional legal refinements, Holder said, but now will serve as the new administration's legal position as it faces more than 200 additional detainee appeals in U.S. courts, as well as a parallel legal review of all Guantánamo cases ordered by President Obama January 22.



Attorney General Eric Holder

Under Obama's executive orders, an interagency committee made up of the attorney general, the secretaries of the departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security, and top military and intelligence officials will continue to review the complex legal issues surrounding detaining suspected terrorists.

The United States wants to try 80 of the prisoners on terrorism charges. It has already cleared 50 others for release, but cannot return them to their home countries out of

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Nowruz Event in United States Celebrates Iranian Culture

By Ralph Dannheisser
Special Correspondent

Washington — New immigrants from Iran, native-born Americans and area residents young and old gathered on the National Mall in Washington to share a preview celebration of the Persian New Year, Nowruz.

Wishes of "Happy Nowruz" filled the halls of the Smithsonian Institution's Freer and Sackler art galleries March 7 as the visitors enjoyed a day of musical performances, storytelling, fire jumping and Persian delicacies. Revelers crossed paths with the mythical New Year character Haji Firooz and admired a traditional haft-sin table filled with items emblematic of good luck and nature's spring rebirth.

Nowruz — "new day" in Persian — occurs on the date of the vernal equinox, this year on March 20. But festivities traditionally cover 13 days, and the early start avoided conflicts with home-based celebrations.

While Nowruz traditions trace back some 5,000 years, this New Year is designated as 1388 on the present-day Iranian calendar, dated from the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Medina.

The event was a first for the Freer and Sackler galleries, but one that officials hope to repeat annually, according to Claire Orologas, head of education and public programs for the galleries.

Adapting an ancient Nowruz custom, youngsters jumped over a simulated fire composed of streaming shards of red plastic. The activity symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, as the troubles of the old year are left behind.

Some 40 elderly Iranian-American men and women, many using walkers and wheelchairs, joined an enthusiastic audience in the Freer auditorium to hear singer Mamak Khadem and an ensemble featuring santur — a type of dulcimer — keyboard, clarinet, saxophone and drums. The visitors came from Nu Horizons, a senior citizens center in nearby Silver Spring, Maryland. Nu Horizons numbers about 80 Iranian Americans among its 100 clients, according to Maria Elena Anawisa, the facility's activities coordinator.

Families and groups of friends enjoyed the fortuitously spring-like warmth of the day in the Freer's courtyard, sharing long-grain rice, kebabs, spinach soufflé, the traditional noodle and bean soup ash-e reshteh, baklava and tea as they sat at tables arrayed around a central fountain. Scores of others waited patiently in the serving line until the manager, overwhelmed by the unexpectedly large crowd, called out, "No more food."

Sonny Tabrizian, an architect, and his wife, Parvin, a nurse, in the United States for 40 years, were celebrating their continuing link to their Persian culture. They took a pair of visiting Americans aside to explain the traditions they still cherish, the pride clear in their beaming faces and their voices.

Ladan Judge, who came from Tehran when she was 15, and her American husband, Gregg, brought their son Daniel, 11.

Daniel said the haft-sin table — containing items like apples, hyacinth, vinegar and wild olives, selected because all begin with the Persian letter "sin," or "s" — was like the one that his family displays at home each year when they celebrate Nowruz. His father, Gregg Judge, said his own growing involvement in Persian culture "has been an interesting journey for me because, being American, it was brand new." He said the couple is raising Daniel with an appreciation for both cultures.

Mazda Shasaghi, who arrived from Iran four months ago, was there with her 8-year-old twins, Kiarash and Kianoush. She had been delighted to hear about the event. "We're trying not to forget our language and our old tradition. That's very important," she said.

Christine Fonsale Rogerson and her daughter Juliette, 5, learned about the event from Juliette's kindergarten teacher, who is Iranian. "She said there was going to be food and games," Juliette said.

Guiding the kids who jumped over the simulated flames was Bhnam Taleblu, a freshman at George Washington University and a member of the college's Iranian Cultural Society. Taleblu was costumed in a flowing white robe and equally flowing white beard — a representation, he explained, of "an old wise man ushering in the new year."

Born in the United States of Iranian immigrant parents, Taleblu said that, raised in a traditional family, he absorbed much of his historic culture. "I think that's the beauty of Iranian culture, that regardless of what's going on politically, whatever our global crisis might be, we always have a culture to take refuge in," he said.

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Clinton Spoke with Pakistani Leadership about Chief Justice

By Merle David Kellerhals, Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A decision to reinstate the Pakistani chief justice came after telephone calls by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to Pakistani leaders over the weekend of March 14–15, a State Department spokesman said.

"The secretary wanted to make sure that Pakistani officials understood what our views were on the current situation and the importance of there not being any violence, and the need for political dialogue," acting department spokesman Robert Wood said at the March 16 daily press briefing.

"The secretary made no demands."

Wood said Clinton telephoned Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and opposition leader and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He said Clinton wanted to tell the leaders that nonviolence was the best course and that the "Pakistani people need to be assured that the leadership was taking their interests, first and foremost."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

On March 16 in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital city, Gilani announced that the government will reinstate Iftikhar Muhammed Chaudhry as Pakistan's chief justice of the Supreme Court at a March 21 swearing-in ceremony, according to news service reports. Gilani also announced that several other judges would be restored.

Former President Pervez Musharraf fired the chief justice in a 2007 dispute. More than 60 judges also were fired but have been reinstated.

The reinstatement announcement came after protests and clashes over the weekend between supporters of Chaudhry and the government. The United States was concerned about further instability, Wood said.

"The political situation in Pakistan has been a concern to the United States and other governments around the world," Wood said. "And what we have tried to encourage the Pakistanis to do is to take a look at the situation, understand what the implications are of further political instability and to take steps necessary to move the country away from the brink."

Wood praised the Pakistani government for taking the actions to reinstate Chaudhry. He said that Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke and U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson also were involved in the process.

"These were decisions that had to be taken by the Pakistani leadership. And in the end I believe they acted in the best interests of the Pakistani people," Wood said. ♦

Nowruz Event in United States Celebrates Iranian Culture . . .

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Meanwhile, George Mason University student Soroush Rahmani roamed the hallways in the bright red garb of Haji Firooz, whom he described as a symbol of the good times at hand with "winter over and the new year beginning."

Complimented on his excellent command of English, Rahmani, who immigrated eight years ago, had a ready answer: "You go to a new place, you've got to learn the language, learn the culture and live it that way," he said.

Washington has a substantial Iranian-American population. A spokesman for the National Iranian American Council estimated that more than 30,000 live in the metropolitan area, out of about 1 million nationwide.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov) ♦

U.S.-China Partnership Faces Formidable Agenda, Says Clinton

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and China face a formidable agenda, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, pledging to work with China to address common challenges and seize common opportunities.

"This is a very important relationship to both of our countries, and the United States intends to work together with China to build a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship," Clinton said March 11 in a joint press appearance with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

The minister's visit to Washington follows Secretary Clinton's recent consultations in Beijing, and both meetings were dominated by considerations about what two of the world's largest economies could do to confront the global financial crisis. Talks between the two top diplomats will lay the groundwork for President Obama's first official meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao on the sidelines of the G20 meeting of developed and emerging economies in London in April.

"The United States and China have a joint responsibility to help ensure that the summit yields tangible progress and concrete action steps toward a coordinated global response to stabilize the world's economy and to begin a recovery," Clinton said.

As in the United States, China has taken steps to stimulate consumer demand and make strategic investments aimed at restarting economic growth, which Clinton praised as "a very positive step."

Yang was scheduled to continue the conversation on the global economy with Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner later in the day, followed by White House meetings with President Obama and his top advisers March 12.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, left, is greeted by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Beijing Saturday, Feb. 21, 2009.

On the foreign policy front, Clinton and Yang discussed efforts to restart the Six-Party Talks to eliminate nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula, Washington and Beijing's parallel partnership with fellow members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany to convince Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, and the Obama administration's progress toward a new international strategy to stabilize Afghanistan and the Pakistan border region.

Clinton and Yang also discussed the mounting humanitarian crisis in Sudan's Darfur region, which threatens to worsen in the aftermath of the International Criminal Court's decision to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.

While the United States and China are celebrating the 30th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations this year, Yang's visit also comes as the world observes the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising. The State Department's annual report on human rights recently concluded that Chinese authorities have acted against global human rights standards by significantly increasing cultural and religious repression in Tibetan areas.

"We urge China to reconsider its policies in Tibet that have created tensions due to their harmful impact on Tibetan religion, culture and livelihoods," said State Department acting spokesman Robert Wood in a March 10 statement. "We believe that substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives, consistent with the Dalai Lama's commitment to disclaiming any intention to seek sovereignty or independence for Tibet, can lead to progress in bringing about solutions and can help achieve true and lasting stability in Tibet."

Open and honest dialogue on human rights differences will remain a key component of U.S.-China relations, Clinton said.

"It has been a core belief of ours

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Economy Seen as Overarching Issue for Americas Summit

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — While economic prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability are primary issues for the fifth Summit of the Americas in April, the overarching issue confronting the Western Hemisphere is the current economic crisis, says a senior U.S. diplomat.

Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon

"We have to protect the social gains we've made in the past decade in this hemisphere," Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon said at a March 12 Washington conference.

Shannon, who is assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs, said the broad agenda of the 34-nation summit, which is being held April 17–19 in Port of Spain, the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago, focuses on promoting human prosperity, energy security and environmental sustainability. But the current economic crisis and access to increased credit and lending from multilateral banks, subregional banks and international development banks will be major topics of the three-day meeting of hemispheric leaders, he said.

Protecting the political and economic gains that have been made is important, but it is critical that economic recovery is not built on the backs of the poor, Shannon said. And, hemispheric nations should not let differences on other issues impede progress, he added.

President Obama, who will be making his first appearance at the Summit of the Americas and meeting most hemispheric leaders for the first time, will bring an attitude of mutual respect and a genuine desire for engagement, Shannon said at an Inter-American Dialogue conference on the summit.

This summit is the first meeting of all 34 democratic heads of government from Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada and the United States since the 2005 Mar del Plata Summit in Argentina that ended without resolution on a number of contentious issues. Cuban leader Raul Castro has not been invited to attend, though future relations with Cuba will be discussed.

To date there have been four summits of the Americas, two special summits of the Americas, and a number of ministerial-level summits held since 1994, when the Clinton administration hosted the first regional leaders' meeting in Miami.

The Summit Implementation Review Group has been meeting to reach consensus on the draft summit declaration that will be presented to hemispheric leaders for final approval on the closing day of the conference. The group is the political and negotiating body responsible for follow-up on summit mandates, coordinating the summit agenda and preparing for future summits.

The Trinidad and Tobago ambassador to the United States, Glenda Morean-Phillip, told the conference that the draft document being prepared will be completed by the end of March.

Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow, who is a special adviser to the Obama administration for the Summit of the Americas, said two processes will converge at the summit. The first is the summit implementation process, which is completing work on the draft document.

Ambassador Jeffrey Davidow

The draft document that will be considered by hemispheric leaders is large and complicated, with six sections that address prosperity, energy security, environmental sustainability, public security, democratic governance and summit progress, he said.

"This is an important negotiation," Davidow said, because it can be instrumental in determining how effective the summit can be.

The second process is preparation of the United States delegation led

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G20 Ministers Pledge to Continue Action on Recession

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — G20 finance ministers and central bank governors reached a "strong consensus on the need for both recovery and for reform" to deal with the current global economic recession, says U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

The finance ministers and central bankers said in a joint communiqué March 14 that they "are prepared to take whatever action is necessary until growth is restored." The ministers and bankers met March 13-14 in London to set a common agenda for a summit of G20 leaders on April 2, also in London.

"This is a global crisis, and it requires a coordinated global response," Geithner said March 14. "It requires aggressive actions to fix our financial systems and get credit flowing again."

In the joint communiqué, the finance ministers and central bankers agreed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international financial institutions must increase their lending capacity as soon as possible to help emerging and developing economies that are facing the most urgent need for fresh funds.

The G20 also agreed with a plan floated by the United States to boost an emergency fund the IMF uses to assist troubled national economies, though the exact amount was left open for summit leaders to decide. "The G20 supports our proposal for a substantial increase in the emergency resources for the IMF and an expansion of its membership," Geithner said March 15 at a post-meeting press conference in London.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner talks at a press conference at the G20 Finance Ministers meeting at a hotel near Horsham, England, Saturday, March 14, 2009.

In addition, the communiqué said the G20 central banks have aggressively cut interest rates in most countries, and the central banks will maintain these policies as long as needed to support credit needs.

The communiqué also called for the IMF to assess the actions that have been taken by individual G20 nations to stimulate their economies and determine if more is required. The United States had hoped the G20 would take a stronger stance for expanded economic stimulus plans similar to the $787 billion plan implemented by the United States.

Geithner said the G20 has agreed to a comprehensive plan of regulatory reforms for financial markets including hedge funds, and a system of registration and oversight of all credit rating agencies.

"We must establish a much stronger form of oversight and clear rules of the game more evenly enforced across the international financial system," Geithner said.

Finally, the G20 ministers and bankers said that they would commit to fighting all forms of trade protectionism and maintain open trade and investment.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog. (http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/)

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U.S. Institute Helps Developing Nations Put Climate Data to Use

By Cheryl Pellerin
Staff Writer

Washington — As climate variability drives alterations in the physical environment, it is increasingly critical that all nations — especially the most vulnerable — are able to understand and harness climate and weather data in their efforts to adapt to a changing planet.

Since 1996, a research institute established as a cooperative agreement between the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Columbia University in New York City has embraced this mission.

Twenty miles (32 kilometers) north of Manhattan Island, New York, at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), 50 scientists and 20 staff members work with U.S. agencies and international organizations to help meteorological services in developing nations better understand, anticipate and manage the effects of seasonal climate fluctuations. IRI is part of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

"IRI has been a pioneer as an institution at the interface between climate science and society," IRI Director-General Steve Zebiak told America.gov, "the aspects of society that ultimately can and must use climate information to improve their practices, and learning what works and what doesn't."

CLIMATE AND SOCIETY

IRI scientists have expertise in agriculture, food security, water resources, health, natural resource management, climate and weather.

The impact that climate variability can have on such agrarian economies is well reflected in the case of Ethiopia, where economic growth and food imports closely track variations in rainfall. (T. Wolde-Georgis/IRI)

Their wide-ranging projects address early warning systems for malaria in Eritrea, climate variability management in South and Southeast Asia, the impacts of water resource management in Brazil, climate-based early warning for food security in West Africa, weather insurance contracts in Central America and much more.

Core funding for such projects comes from NOAA, but IRI also receives funding from NASA for environmental monitoring and climate risk management, the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation for research efforts and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

There is growing recognition, Zebiak said, "that the issue of climate risk is not just an environmental issue, but a very serious development issue."

In 2008, IRI received a $900,000 multiyear grant from Google.org, the philanthropic arm of the company behind the world's most popular search engine, to improve the use of forecasts, rainfall data and other climate information in East Africa, and to link weather and climate experts with health specialists to better predict infectious disease outbreaks. Internationally, the institute works in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO); the World Health Organization, for which IRI serves as a collaborating center on early warning systems for malaria and other climate-sensitive diseases; the United Nations Development Programme; the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent; and others.

IRI arose, Zebiak said, because "there was a need to have an institution that was not only trying to advance the scientific and technical

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aspects of producing useful information, but doing what turns out to be the harder step of trying to figure out if and how that information can be made useful in practice for societies."

THE HARDER STEP

Not long after IRI was established, NOAA began working with the institute and international partners — including WMO, the European Network for Research in Global Climate Change and the United Kingdom Meteorological Office — to hold the first climate outlook forums in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia.

The forums involve scientists and representatives of university and government forecasting organizations, national meteorological services and international forecasting centers. At each meeting, the climate scientists fashion seasonal forecasts for their regions.

Before the forums were established, regions received conflicting forecasts from universities, national meteorological services and international centers. No one knew which forecast to believe.

"Reliable forecasts are one of the first steps toward advanced planning, whether for avoiding adverse outcomes or taking advantage of beneficial outcomes," Simon Mason, head of IRI's Climate Program, told America.gov. "An early warning of a good or bad rainfall season provides a potentially massive opportunity to prepare in advance for unusual climate conditions."

The forums are designed to improve the scientific quality of the regional forecasts and improve the way the forecasts are communicated.

Traditional forecasts are "quite complex and fairly abstract and difficult to understand," Mason said. "We've been working with media in the regions to help translate the forecasts into understandable language."

BIG ACHIEVEMENT

Working with the African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development, IRI recently evaluated 10 years of climate outlook forum results from West Africa, the Greater Horn of Africa and southern Africa to determine whether the forecasts correctly indicated increased or decreased changes in dry or wet conditions.

According to the assessment, forecasts have been skillful, Mason said, but some consistent errors in the forecasts need attention, including a tendency to overpredict normal rainfall and underpredict dry conditions.

"I can report that these consistent errors were fully recognized by the participants and the forecast for the coming season has been corrected in response to those evaluations," Mason said.

"It's not going to sound exciting to Joe Smith on the street," he added, "but in terms of the climate community, this is quite a big achievement."

More information about the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (http://iri.columbia.edu) is available at the institute's Web site.

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New Guantánamo Detainee Policy Rooted in International Law . . .

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concern for their safety, according to Defense Department officials.

The Obama administration on March 12 named Under Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried as its new special envoy to coordinate the transfer of the Guantánamo detainees.

The 27-nation European Union has expressed support for the closure effort, and plans to send a high-level delegation to Washington to discuss the issue March 16-17, according to media reports.

The full text of the statement on Fried's appointment (http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/March/20090313142432xjsnommis0.8969232.html&distid=ucs) is available on America.gov.

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Telling America's story

U.S.-China Partnership Faces Formidable Agenda, . . .

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that every nation must not only live by but help shape global rules that will determine whether people enjoy the right to live freely and participate to the fullest in their society. Indeed, our own country must continually strive to live up to our own ideals," Clinton said. "We make clear to all nations, including China, that a mutual and collective commitment to human rights is important to bettering our world, as are efforts on security, global economics, energy, climate change and other pressing issues."

Clinton and Yang also discussed a March 9 confrontation between five Chinese ships and the USNS Impeccable, an unarmed, civilian-operated naval surveying vessel operating in international waters in the South China Sea. U.S. National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair told a congressional panel March 10 that it was the most serious security incident since 2001, when China forced the landing of a U.S. military plane flying over international waters 110 kilometers from Hainan and held its crew for 10 days.

"We both agreed that we should work to ensure that such incidents do not happen again in the future," Clinton said.

What actions do you think President Obama should take to strengthen relations with China? Comment on America.gov's blog (http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/).

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Economy Seen as Overarching Issue for Americas Summit . . .

(Continued from page 12)

by Obama. The president, Davidow said, will come to the summit with a spirit of equality, equity and responsibility. And Obama is coming to cooperate, Davidow said.

The president is coming to meet with hemispheric leaders, exchange ideas and listen, Davidow said. There will be three sessions the first day and on the last day the 34 hemispheric leaders will conduct a retreat without delegations or aides, he said.

Davidow said the summit is "a golden moment" to address significant regional issues.

Before meeting with summit leaders in mid-April, Obama travels to London April 2 for a critical meeting of the G20 group of economies to address the expanding economic recession. Five of the Western Hemisphere countries will attend the G20 meeting — Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva will meet with Obama at the White House March 14, according to the White House.

"The president looks forward to consulting with President Lula on effective measures to respond to the global financial crisis during the upcoming G20 meeting, ensuring a productive agenda for the Summit of the Americas in April, and on ways to deepen cooperation on other wide-ranging issues in the bilateral relationship," the White House said in a prepared statement.

What foreign affairs decisions should President Obama consider? Comment on America.gov's blog (http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2009/01/21/day-2-what-should-obama%e2%80%99s-top-priorities-be/).

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