



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

“Mini” Trade Fair to Highlight Leading Women Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia

U.S. Embassy Charge d’Affaires Ambassador Vicki Huddleston hosted a “Mini” Trade Fair on Saturday, November 18, for some of Ethiopia’s leading women entrepreneurs. The trade fair showcased such top-quality goods as textiles, handicrafts, traditional and modern clothing, leather, jewelry, shoes, flowers and home furnishings. The event was held on the lawn of the U.S. Embassy compound.



The purpose of the fair was to highlight the exciting things that women-owned enterprises are

doing and making in Ethiopia today, to promote the importance of entrepreneurship among women, and to draw attention to the issues women business owners face. Approximately 30 entrepreneurs exhibited their products and goods.

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United States Urges Sudan To Agree to Peacekeeping Plan

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States wants the current conflict in Darfur to be the Sudanese region's last, said Andrew Natsios, the U.S. presidential envoy to Sudan.

The United States supports the United Nations' plans for bringing peace to Darfur, Natsios said during a speech at the

Brookings Institution in Washington November 20. The United States stands behind the framework established by leaders in a meeting at the African Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 16, he said.

The framework, agreed to by leaders from the African Union, the Arab League, the United States, the United King-

dom, China, the European Union and other nations, affirmed the major elements of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1706. These elements include calling for the Darfur peacekeeping force to be expanded to 20,000 members. The force would be primarily African and commanded by an African general, but would be funded predominantly by the United

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“Mini” Trade Fair to Highlight Leading Women Entrepreneurs . . .

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This “Mini” Trade Fair is the outcome of an initiative spearheaded by U.S. Chargé d’Affaires, Ambassador Vicki J. Huddleston, to bring together women leaders in business and professional life to seek common ground and search for solutions to common problems.

In July 2006, Ambassador Huddleston hosted a discussion with more than 30 women entrepreneurs, women elected officials and women working in government ministries. During the meeting participants shared life stories and discussed the challenges they had each faced in pursuing a successful life and ca-

reer. This meeting became a monthly gathering and over time, coalesced into what is now called the Women Entrepreneurs Group, comprised of leading women entrepreneurs, government officials, members of parliament, and representatives from civil society, international organizations, and diplomatic missions.

The Women Entrepreneurs Group builds on ongoing efforts by the U.S. Mission in Ethiopia, such as the USAID-supported AGOA+ Program, which assists women entrepreneurs overcome such challenges as lack of capacity in production and marketing. These efforts include sponsoring women-owned

companies to attend U.S. based trade fairs, commercial “match-making” services, website development, training, and on-site technical assistance by commodity-specific experts.

In 2005 and 2006, the U.S. Mission actively supported women exporters to take greater advantage of AGOA. Another USAID/Ethiopia program provides loan guarantees to small- and medium-sized businesses through three private banks. Women entrepreneurs are also playing a significant role in Ethiopia’s booming cut-flower export sector. ♦



Amb. Huddleston and Addis Ababa Interim Mayor Berhanu Deressa along with exhibitors at the “Mini Trade Fair” on November 18.

United States Urges Sudan To Agree to Peacekeeping Plan . . .

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Nations. The United Nations' command-and-control structure would be used.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Lam Akol agreed in principle to the Addis Ababa document, Natsios said during a State Department press briefing November 20. There are still outstanding issues to which the Sudanese government must agree, including the number of troops involved. "We urge the Sudanese government to adopt the package that was a consensus document of the international community," Natsios said at the briefing.

The meeting in Addis Ababa was followed with a strong call for a cease-fire, said Jean-Marie Guéhenno, U.N. under secretary-general for peacekeeping. Guéhenno, also speaking at the Brookings Institution November 20, said a cease-fire will not work unless a serious political process is established. "Just throwing a force at the problem will not solve the problem," he said. "If that force is deployed without a credible political

process going on, it will not work." "The political process has to be re-energized and the United Nations is now ready to take its responsibility alongside the African Union to help that political process," Guéhenno said.

Meetings that follow up on the issues discussed in Addis Ababa will be sponsored jointly by the United Nations and the African Union. The agreement also calls for the United Nations and the African Union jointly to appoint a special representative of the U.N. secretary-general. Both Natsios and Guéhenno said one of the past difficulties in reaching agreements on Darfur is that there had been multiple negotiations occurring among different groups. This plan should eliminate that difficulty, they said.

Guéhenno said the peacekeeping force must be deployed in cooperation with the Sudanese government. "Discussions will have to take place between the U.N., the African Union and the government of Sudan so that we are all clearly agreed on the timing and nature of the deployment that we are going

to have to make expeditiously," he said.

Natsios said there has been suspicion within the Sudanese government that the United States has a hidden agenda for its involvement in Darfur, a claim which he called "nonsense." "The only agenda the United States has in Darfur is a human rights and humanitarian agenda," he said.

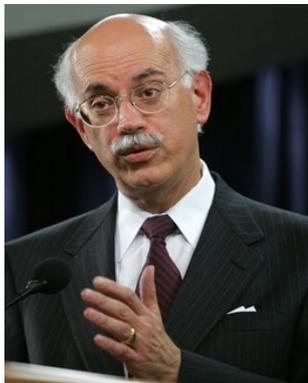
For a peace agreement in Darfur to be successful, Natsios said, groups will have to be disarmed. What makes this conflict in Darfur more destructive than previous wars in the region is the introduction of heavy weaponry, he said.

The mandate of the current African Union force ends on January 1, 2007. Additionally, in January 2007 there will be a new U.N. secretary-general and a new U.S. Congress. Both Guéhenno and Natsios agreed that because of these factors, there is an urgent need for the parties involved in the Darfur negotiations to reach final agreements. "No time can be lost," Guéhenno said. ♦

Andrew Natsios's Statement On Darfur

The U.S. Department of State on November 16, 2006, issued the following statement from the President's Special Envoy to the Sudan Andrew Natsios:

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Chairperson of the African Union Commission Alpha Oumar Konare convened a high-level meeting at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa on the situation in Darfur.



Andrew Natsios

Representatives of the international community approved a new framework for protecting victims of the atrocities in Darfur, and resolving the political crisis. In a consensus document, representatives from the African Union, including Gabon, South Africa, Senegal, Rwanda, Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo, the Arab League, including Egypt and

Libya, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, Russia, the European Union, and Sudan affirmed the major elements of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1706. This includes the expansion of the peacekeeping force in Darfur to approximately 20,000. The force would be primarily African in composition and commanded by an African general. The United States welcomes the successful outcome of this historic meeting. ♦

Arab-American Comics Use Laughter To Build Bridges

By Judy Aita
USINFO Staff Writer

New York -- The writer Oscar Wilde once said that "laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship," and a group of Arab-American writers, actors and comedians are living that adage at the New York Arab-American Comedy Festival by combining their talents to entertain as well as foster understanding.

The festival "was never intended to be an annual event, but just a way to showcase artists and try to do something that gave a positive image of Arab Americans in America" in 2003, said co-founder Dean Obeidallah at a press conference prior to the opening. "We chose to foster understanding, dispel stereotypes, make people understand who we are a little, and define us in a much more accurate way."

But the festival has continued, enjoying a five-night, sell-out stint in 2005. While very popular among Arab-Americans, each festival has attracted more and more Americans of other ethnic backgrounds -- and even casting agents, directors, and producers. The 2006 edition was expanded to six nights -- from November 14 to November 19, moved to the larger Gotham Comedy Club and had three parts: sketch comedy nights (comedic theater), stand-up comedy nights and a night of short comedic films.

Maysoon Zayid, a comedian and co-founder of the festival, said the performers are from a variety of countries and of different religions. "The

one thing that unites us is that we are Arab American. It's about us being Americans first and being Arab by heritage," she said.

Obeidallah added that "stand-up is truly an American invention. So as Americans we're certainly proud of our heritage of being Arab; as Americans we use what we know to relate to other Americans."

"Certainly people laughing in an audience . . . makes it more difficult for them to be angry at you," he said.

"I always believe that if they're laughing, they're agreeing with you. I may be delusional, but that's what I feel. If they can laugh with you why can't we get along?" Obeidallah asked.



"The thing we don't have in common that makes us more unique -- we also want to change the world. And that's our goal through comedy. We want to change people's perception of Arabs, who we are in America and that we're a force to understand," he said.

CAN ARABS BE FUNNY?

Waleed Zuaiter, an actor and co-producer who was born in the United States and grew up in Kuwait, said that the goal is to "show the world how funny Arabs can be, because nobody really looks at us as funny."

"Can Arabs be funny? I hope so," Obeidallah said.

The performers are reaching out and bringing their culture and talents into the American mainstream as other ethnic groups have done by playing up idiosyncrasies, showing off writing skills and performance techniques.

The festival's content has evolved, Obeidallah said, "from being under siege to affirmatively defining who we are and not being afraid of making fun of American policies or American pop culture."

"Just as any other comic makes fun of American pop culture or American policy, we don't feel we should be deprived of that opportunity because of our heritage," he said.

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MAKING FUN OF POP CULTURE

The routines at the first festivals centered on "we're Arabs, we're like you, we don't want any problem; we want to get along in this country," Obeidallah said.

In 2005, they turned the spotlight on themselves, he said. "We felt ... people are a little bit more understanding and that transitory anger had passed."

"This year, for the first time, we're more focused on making fun of American pop culture and certain American issues that are in the world today," he said.

"Comedy is not just to make people laugh. It certainly is political in nature and we want to have fun and we want people to think at the same time," Obeidallah said.

In 2006, one comedy sketch is a parody of an Army recruiting ad entitled "we're looking for a few good Arabs." Another teaches Arabs how to be a real American in five easy lessons that include learning words such as iPod. There are many jokes about President Bush.

"It is going to be politically charged, it's still going to be funny. We're not giving speeches. It's always going to be funny. That is the goal," Obeidallah said.

The performers all are professional comedians, actors and writers and were selected through auditions. "This isn't a hometown play," said Zayid. The festival is a nonprofit organization. No performer is paid for his or her appearance. Money earned through ticket sales will be used to produce next year's festival.

Obeidallah is a former attorney turned stand-up comic. He currently is co-producing a new comedy show entitled The Watch List for Comedy Central's Internet channel. The show, which is slated to begin in December, is the first produced by a major entertainment company that stars all Middle Eastern-American performers. Obeidallah also has performed comedy in Beirut, Lebanon; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Haifa, Israel and Ramallah on the West Bank.

Zayid is an actress and professional comedian who has performed in top New York clubs and toured exten-

sively in the United States and abroad. She writes a biweekly column, The Palestinian American Princess' Guide to NYC, for The Key newspaper and was the first comedian to perform stand-up live in the Palestinian Territories.

More information (<http://www.arabcomedy.org/>) on the New York Arab-American Comedy Festival is available on a festival Web site.

For more information on U.S. society, see Population and Diversity (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Byliner: U.S. Business Opens Doors to People with Disabilities

The following article is reprinted from the State Department's electronic journal, *Disability and Ability* (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/1106/ijse/ijse1106.htm/>). This publication has been released in advance of International Day of People with a Disability on December 3.

Language versions of this journal as well as information on other journals are available at USINFO eJournals (<http://usinfo.state.gov/pub/ejournalusa.html>).

(begin byliner)

Hiring People with Disabilities: Good for Business
By Elizabeth Kelleher

In 1998, a Belgian student named Sacha Klein left Brussels to spend a semester at a U.S. university. He ended up enrolling as a four-year student, graduating with a computer-science degree, and landing a summer internship at Virginia-based consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, where management liked him enough to offer him a full-time position. Today, he designs information systems for Booz Allen, studies toward a master's degree in business, and dreams of someday being his own boss.

He is deaf.

"This is truly the land of opportunity," Klein said in a conversation using an instant-messenger computer program. "Employers do not look at your disability, but at your abilities."

Since the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which obligated government

agencies to hire people with disabilities, Congress has passed 11 major laws to improve access to education, transportation, technology, and housing. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) opened the door for people like Klein to contribute to the U.S. economy in ways no one imagined before.

The ADA is a civil rights law that bars discrimination by employers. It requires businesses to make accommodations to allow a person with a

put the United States ahead of the 44 other countries with disability-discrimination laws. Katherine McCary, a vice president of SunTrust Banks Inc. and president of a business group that promotes hiring people with disabilities, said European managers tell her they want to hire people with disabilities, but that they can't get to work. "The ADA did a lot for us, in terms of creating access into and out of buildings," McCary said.

Roy Grizzard, assistant secretary of labor, has held recent seminars in EU countries and Vietnam on architectural solutions. "Curb cuts [ramps from sidewalks to streets at intersections] almost everywhere and transportation accommodations ... allow people to go to work," he said.

Klein thinks attitudes matter, too. Had he stayed in Europe, he said, he would not have been able to become a white-collar professional, but would have been put on track for factory work.

While one can paint a rosy picture of U.S. companies embracing people with disabilities, in the early 1990s, the ADA was greeted with panic by the business community, which predicted enormous costs and out-of-control litigation. A federal hotline offering advice on workplace accommodations went from handling 3,000 calls per year before the law to 40,000 calls per year in the mid-1990s.

The cost of accommodations turned out to be zero in half the cases and averaged about \$500 in the other

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disability to do a job for which he or she is qualified. This might mean giving a diabetic breaks during the workday to check his blood-sugar level or providing software for a blind person to use a computer.

In addition to workplace accommodations, the ADA requires public facilities to remove architectural barriers that hinder people with disabilities from shopping, going to the theater, or using public toilets.

Some experts believe such widespread architectural changes have

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half, according to the Labor Department. Employers report that workers with disabilities are loyal and productive, Grizzard said, so "balance that [\$500] with the cost of a good day's work for a good day's pay from a long-lasting employee."

As to lawsuits, Peter Susser, an attorney for the employment and labor law firm Littler Mendelson, said there still is a lot of litigation, despite court rulings narrowing the definition of disabled under the law. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which handles claims of discrimination under the ADA, has received a steady stream of charges—averaging 16,000 per year and representing about one-fifth of all discrimination charges—since the law took effect. The government found 18 percent of the charges to have merit.

Beth Gaudio, of the National Federation of Independent Business, said much of the burden for small businesses today comes from state laws. The federal law's accommodation requirement applies to companies with 15 or more employees, but some state laws apply to firms of two. "It falls on the bookkeeper or the owner's spouse to figure out what needs to be done," Gaudio said.

It can be argued that compliance with the law is good for business, too: 87 percent of consumers prefer to patronize companies that hire people with disabilities, according to a January 2006 survey by the University of Massachusetts. In addition, workers with disabilities could help relieve a labor shortage. In the next eight years, 36 million Americans will be eligible to retire

and leave the workforce. Census Bureau reports indicate that nearly half of the 33 million working-age people with disabilities were unemployed as of 2000.

"The ADA ... was an important beginning, but in no way an end," said Tom Ridge, the chairman of the board of the National Organization on Disability and former governor of Pennsylvania. Businesses have policies to comply with the ADA, but need to step up recruitment, Ridge's organization believes.

The Department of Labor encourages disability-friendly companies with annual awards, and Diversity-Inc magazine recently published its first list of "top 10 companies for people with disabilities."

Five thousand businesses have formed chapters of a U.S. Business Leadership Network in 32 states to foster hiring people with disabilities. Through that network, the Booz Allen internship program that attracted Sacha Klein expanded in 2003 to include dozens of other companies and in 2006 to locate internships beyond Washington and New York.

The Cincinnati Children's Hospital recently decided to imitate a year-long mentorship program that Sun-Trust's banks offer to students with developmental disabilities. Executives from the national drugstore chain CVS Corporation met with the Labor Department's Ray Grizzard in October 2006 to discuss plans to introduce people with disabilities to pharmacy occupations. The Marriott Foundation for People With Disabilities, established by the founder of Marriott International, the hotel operator/franchisor, has formed links with several companies to train and place high school graduates with

disabilities in jobs.

Small companies are taking the leap, too. Seven of the 20 employees at Michigan manufacturer A&F Wood Products have disabilities. The company has rebuilt workstations, provided job coaches and special software, reconfigured telephones, and adjusted work schedules.

Companies hiring workers with disabilities do it for business reasons. They say they gain valuable employees who, often because of their disabilities, are skilled at planning ahead or communicating creatively.

Klein said he has learned a lot at Booz Allen about teamwork and communication. But early on, he himself shared communication tips with colleagues. He asked them to speak one at a time at meetings and to look at him, not at his sign-language interpreter, when speaking to him. "They learn fast once you educate them a little bit," he said.

Many technical careers once were inaccessible to the blind, but new tools, such as this tactile map, allow students with disabilities to pursue careers in science, computer technology, and engineering.

(end byliner)

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

U.S. Midterm Elections Increase Women's Congressional Clout

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The election of at least 71 women to the U.S. House of Representatives -- a few more might be added when still-contested races are settled -- and 16 to the U.S. Senate in the 2006 midterm election sets a new record for women in the U.S. Congress. This display of women's growing political power also made history by elevating the first woman to the third most important post in the U.S. government.

Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California and the current House minority leader, was confirmed by the Democratic Caucus November 16 as speaker of the House for the 110th Congress, which will convene in January 2007.

She will be second in line for the presidency of the United States. According to U.S. law, should the president be rendered unable to serve, the vice president takes control. Should the president and the vice president both be unable to perform their duties, the speaker of the House assumes the presidency.

"We've had our differences in our party. We've come together," Pelosi said after her selection, asserting future party "unity for a new direction for our country."

Pelosi has been a unifying force in the Democratic Party, bringing members together on key issues and votes. Known for her ability to organize and her tenacity in pursuing issues, she has mobilized legislators to block major Republican initiatives, such as the administration's Social Security proposals. She voted against the Iraq war, but later voted to fund it.

She will hold the highest office in the 435-seat House of Representatives, the legislative body that reflects the wishes of the American people on a regional basis. The speaker of the House has tremendous political influence, sets the legislative agenda, refers bills to committee for consideration and appoints officers of that chamber.

Pelosi is a trailblazer for women in politics. Representative for the



House minority leader Nancy Pelosi was confirmed on November 16 as speaker of the House.

Eighth District in San Francisco since 1987, she was voted leader of the House Democrats in 2002, the first woman to hold that position. Before that, she directed her party's legislative strategy as Democratic whip. Pelosi grew up with politics. Both her father and brother served as mayors of Baltimore.

With Pelosi at the helm, it is likely that more women will move up to important leadership roles in the House. More women also are expected to assume critical posts in the Senate, such as chairing influential committees.

CURRENT U.S. POLITICAL CLIMATE BENEFITTED WOMEN IN MIDTERMS

Barbara Palmer, affiliate faculty member of the Women in Politics Institute at American University, told USINFO that the current political climate helped women overcome the "incumbency effect," which limits opportunity in a male-dominated Congress. "We don't have a parliamentary system and parties have very little control over who runs, and that's what makes us so different than everybody else. It's very difficult to get any turn-over," Palmer said.

But voter dissatisfaction with congressional performance over issues of ineffectuality and corruption caused a shake-up in 2006.

"Any corruption is a big issue. Women are perceived as being less corrupt. It doesn't matter if it's true or not, but that's how they are perceived," Palmer said. "Women are not perceived as part of the old-boy network."

Women also bring different priorities to the table. In 2006, the concerns of the electorate corresponded to those of women candidates: health care, education, a higher minimum wage and a resolution of the war in Iraq. This benefited women, bringing them a much larger-than-average increase in seats.

Women work hard in Congress. "The women senators are ... a force. We hold powerful leadership and committee positions, and work in coalition to get things done with civility and respect. We believe that every issue is a women's issue," Maryland Democratic Senator Bar-

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Chinese Intellectual Property Theft Could Spur U.S. Protectionism

By Andrzej Zwanecki
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Widespread theft of intellectual property in China can undermine support in the United States for expanding trade between the two countries, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez says.

Gutierrez said that some Americans are "anxiously" cautious about the growing U.S. economic relationship with China. But others point to trade and financial flow imbalances between the two countries to justify their protectionist initiatives, he said.

The commerce secretary spoke on the issue November 14 at an intellectual property (IP) round table discussion in Beijing and November 15 at the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, China.

U.S. critics of China's policies blame the huge U.S. trade deficit in goods with that country on what they perceive as Chinese unwillingness to crack down hard on IP pirates and counterfeiters.

In September, the U.S. deficit with China in trade in goods rose to \$23 billion from \$18 billion in January, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The cumulative deficit for the first nine months of 2006 reached \$166 billion and, according to experts, is likely to exceed for the entire year the \$202 billion recorded in 2005.

Even if some of the fears related to the deficit are misguided, Gutierrez said, China can do more to help address other concerns.

Several bills with bipartisan support currently pending in the U.S. Congress would punish China economi-

cally for what the legislative sponsors view as that government's manipulation of its currency for trade advantage. Theft of U.S. intellectual property also has prompted congressional critics to call for action against China.

However, many newly elected Democratic legislators are considered moderates, and Gutierrez said the Bush administration is encouraged by initial signs that the new Congress, which will convene in January 2007, is willing to work with it



U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez answers a question during a press conference Wednesday Nov. 15, 2006 in Shanghai, China.

Gutierrez said the results of the U.S. November midterm elections in which Democrats gained a majority in both chambers "foretell what may be greater challenges to those in the U.S. who believe in the value of open markets."

Democrats generally have been perceived by the media and congressional observers as less friendly toward free trade than Republicans. On several occasions, Democrats have succeeded in slowing approval of bilateral free trade agreements by insisting on inclusion of strong labor and environmental protections.

on a "positive trade agenda." Nevertheless, he said, specific action is needed to address protectionist sentiments in both countries.

"We can't disprove the critics with rhetoric," he said. "We need results."

Gutierrez said China has made progress in several areas of intellectual property rights protection, such as moving against counterfeiters of pharmaceuticals; court actions to protect trademarks and patents; and revocations of business licenses for piracy of audiovisual products.

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International Effort Needed To Combat Trade in Counterfeit Goods

By Nadine Siak
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- International cooperation is required to deal with intellectual property piracy as the trade in counterfeit goods is growing, U.S. government officials say.

The influx of counterfeit goods into the United States is a growing problem, said Daniel Baldwin, an assistant commissioner at U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

According to the Commerce Department, seizures of fake and counterfeit goods at U.S. borders have doubled since 2001. Baldwin told a business group that his agency has made 14,500 seizures so far in 2006, which is 80 percent more than its 2005 total.

The United States alone cannot effectively address this problem because it is not feasible to inspect each of the 25 million shipments of goods arriving in the United States each year, he said.

Baldwin said the "first and foremost" component of the U.S. approach to combating intellectual property piracy is to work with international trade partners such as the members of the Group of Eight countries, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and the European Union (EU).

Baldwin and another official, Stephen Jacobs, deputy assistant secretary of commerce, spoke November 13 at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest U.S. business lobbying group.

Jacobs said the administration has set a as a key goal "reaching out to our international trading partners to try and develop a coalition of countries who are willing to target the practices of organized piracy."

At the 2005 U.S.-EU Summit, both sides agreed to work together to fight global piracy and counterfeit-

Jacobs said that the issue is not "just a matter of overpaid Hollywood stars and singers."

According to Interpol, World Customs Organization and International Chamber of Commerce estimates, roughly 7 percent to 8 percent of world trade every year is in counterfeit goods.



Even the production of buttons, tags and other labels used on counterfeit goods is big business.

ing, and subsequently have begun implementing an action plan to promote strong and effective border enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) through customs cooperation. In addition, at their second informal economic ministerial meeting in Washington November 9, EU and U.S. officials announced they would also focus on helping China, India and the rest of the developing world fight counterfeiting and piracy.

"This is not a U.S. problem -- it is a problem around the world," Baldwin said, adding that IPR-infringing goods hurt businesses and consumers everywhere.

For more information on U.S. policy, see Protecting Intellectual Property Rights (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/intellectual_property.html).

More information (<http://www.stopfakes.gov/>) also is available on a U.S. Department of Commerce Web site on targeting organized piracy.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Counterfeit Drugs Seen as Growing Problem

By Judy Aita
USINFO Staff Writer

New York -- Counterfeit goods threaten security, economic growth and public safety worldwide, U.S. and private industry officials warn. Of increasing concern, they say, is the flood of counterfeit medicines into the marketplace.

Trade in counterfeit and fake goods, officially referred to as intellectual property piracy, "negatively impacts our society through the loss of profits, jobs, revenue and poses risks to the community in both consumer safety through the sale of unsafe products and through the presence of criminal organizations responsible for the sale and distribution of those products," says Salvatore Delesandro, deputy special agent in charge of the New York office of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

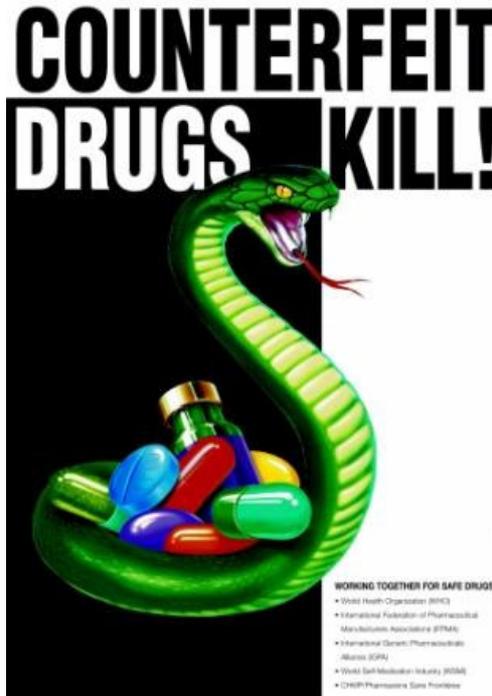
"Fakes" most often bring to mind designer handbags and brand-name foot apparel, but modern-day pirates counterfeit everything from life-saving drugs to cell phone batteries, from auto parts to computers, many posing serious threats to the health and safety of buyers.

Counterfeiting costs \$500 billion globally and an estimated \$300 billion in the United States annually, Delesandro said November 14 at a seminar organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to call attention to the problem. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061115134934lnkais0.4053766>).)

But the cost of counterfeiting goes beyond money, says John Theriault,

vice president of global security for Pfizer Pharmaceutical Company, the largest drug manufacturer in the world.

"The very first issue with counterfeit drugs is that they pose a serious threat to patient health and



safety. It is a very serious health issue," Theriault said. In the beginning, the most counterfeited medicines were the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra and malaria medicines, but now other drugs such as heart and cancer medicines, cholesterol-lowering products, flu vaccines and contraceptives are being counterfeited.

"The explosion of counterfeit medicines into the global marketplace ... is a problem that is a lot bigger and a lot more expensive than people realize," Theriault said. It is not a problem unique to Pfizer, but one that affects every ethical, legitimate, research-based pharmaceutical company.

The situation became so serious that in 1998, Pfizer set up its own security unit to begin tracing and documenting the scope of the problem.

Counterfeit medicine is a "shadow industry" that has grown up because there is so much money involved, Theriault said. "We have found counterfeit versions of Pfizer medicine in 65 countries."

The World Health Organization estimates global sales of counterfeit medicines at \$35 billion to \$40 billion a year. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that counterfeits make up more than 10 percent of the global medicines market and are present in both industrialized and developing countries, with up to 25 percent of the medicines consumed in poor countries being fake.

In 2004, about 10.5 million units of counterfeit Pfizer products were seized globally and the company expects that about 10 million units will be seized this year.

SERIOUS THREAT TO PATIENTS' LIVES

The problem ranges from drugs that contain the same active pharmaceutical ingredients but are produced in unregulated conditions to those containing lethal ingredients. Many are produced by criminals with sophisticated equipment capable of duplicating near-perfect copies of the authentic packaging.

The problem has been "exacerbated in the extreme by the Internet," Theriault added. The anonymity and massive communication capability offered by the Internet is a prescrip-

(Continued on page 12)

Counterfeit Drugs Seen as Growing Problem . . .

(Continued from page 11)

tion for disaster where medicines are concerned, he said.

"We've had reports of counterfeit products with high levels of heavy metal, with arsenic, with nickel," Theriault said. "We've seen counterfeit product coming out of Latin America that actually contained boric acid, highway paint and floor polish. The product looked very nice. ... The contents were disastrous."

Citing another example, he said Canadian officials are investigating five deaths that may be related to fake Norvasc, a blood pressure medication.

Pfizer's strategy, Theriault said, "is to try to convince governments to deal harshly with people who are

engaged in manufacturing and selling counterfeit goods. We work with regulatory agencies and local law enforcement."

"This is a trade issue among countries, it is an issue that developing countries have as much interest in as mature markets," he said.

"Private industry has a huge stake in this, but private industry cannot solve the problem alone.

"Arrests show that we are making progress and governments are beginning to take this problem a little more seriously. In 2004, there were 369 arrests, about the same in 2005 and over 400 so far in 2006 worldwide," he said.

China and India are often referred to as the epicenters of the counterfeit medicine trade, but the biggest counterfeit case in the United

States was in 2003, when more than 18 million tablets of the cholesterol-lowering drug Lipitor, the world's largest-selling medicine, were recalled from the U.S. market. Those tablets were produced in Costa Rica, Theriault said.

For more information, see Protecting Intellectual Property Rights (http://usinfo.getusinfo.com/ei/economic_issues/intellectual_property.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Chinese Intellectual Property Theft Could Spur U.S. Protectionism . . .

(Continued from page 9)

He identified other problem areas, however, which he said should be addressed in the "very near term." He cited as particularly urgent lowering the criminal threshold for prosecuting commercial piracy and counterfeiting, expanding market access for audiovisual products, and sharing internationally data that allows tracing pirated discs to their source.

"It's time for us to demonstrate that the real strength of our relationship is our ability to solve difficult problems and create even more opportunity for growth and innovation within our economies," Gutierrez said.

He said the best way to fight protectionism is to ensure that U.S. businesses have fair access to the Chinese market.

The commerce secretary said his Chinese hosts, who included China's premier, Wen Jiabao, have agreed with him that they must work to close the bilateral trade gap by expanding U.S. exports, not by restricting Chinese imports.

Gutierrez said U.S. companies would like to see broader access in markets, such as for motion pictures, beef, medical devices, financial services, telecommunications and retail sales.

More than two dozen U.S. executives hoping to initiate or expand business in China have accompanied the commerce secretary on his November 13-16 trip to the country.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Protecting Intellectual Property Rights (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/intellectual_property.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

APEC Leaders Embrace President Bush's Vision

The White House summarized the 2006 the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' meeting in a fact sheet issued November 19.

The full text (http://www.apec2006.vn/uploads/doc/1163921984_46.pdf) of the leaders' declaration is available on the APEC Vietnam 2006 Web site.

(begin fact sheet)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Hanoi, Vietnam)
November 19, 2006

Fact Sheet: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2006

"America has helped contribute to the modern and confident Asia we see today – a region where people's incomes and opportunities are rising, where businesses compete in a global economy, and where citizens know that a world growing in trade is a world expanding in opportunity. In this new century, America will remain engaged in Asia, because our interests depend on the expansion of freedom and opportunity in this region."

– President George W. Bush, Remarks At National Singapore University, 11/16/06

At The 14th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting In Hanoi, Vietnam, President Bush Presented A Vision Of APEC As An Organization That Can:

Create opportunities for sustainable growth through trade liberalization;

Prevent threats to sustainable growth by securing travel, transport, and trade, by fighting against terrorism, and by preventing pan-

demetic disease; and

Build societies for sustainable growth by stemming corruption and promoting good governance.



President Bush with other APEC leaders at the end of the 2006 conference.

The Leaders Of APEC's 21 Member Economies Embraced The President's Vision And Took Important Steps To Realize It. President Bush and the other APEC leaders:

Issued a challenge to their counterparts within and outside of APEC to secure a breakthrough in the Doha Round of World Trade Organization negotiations and conclude an ambitious agreement;

Decided to explore a trans-Pacific, region-wide Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific as a long-term goal;

Took steps to improve the quality and consistency of the free trade agreements already being negotiated in the Asia-Pacific region;

Confirmed their determination to

defeat terrorism, halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), promote energy security and clean energy technology, fight corruption and foster good

governance; and

Expressed strong concern for North Korea's October 9 nuclear test, stressed the need for UN Member States to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which calls for sanctions against North Korea, and called for North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks ready to carry out the denuclearization pledges made in the September 2005 Joint Statement.

Results Of The 2006 APEC Leaders' Meeting

Advancing Global Trade Negotiations: President Bush and the APEC leaders reaffirmed their commitment to achieving an ambitious Doha Round result and signaled their intention to be personally engaged in

(Continued on page 14)

APEC Leaders Embrace President Bush's Vision . . .

(Continued from page 13)

securing a breakthrough in the talks. APEC Leaders sent the message that they are all ready to move beyond current positions to break the deadlock and urged leaders from other regions to be similarly bold and match the APEC leaders' commitments.

Launching The Vision Of A Trans-Pacific Free Trade Area: President Bush called for a bold strategy for trans-Pacific trade liberalization at APEC this year. The other APEC leaders responded with characteristic courage, and they charged officials with exploring possible ways to achieve a region-wide Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific. The officials will report back to the leaders at their Sydney meeting in September 2007.

Improving The Quality Of Free Trade Arrangements: Following President Bush's lead, the APEC leaders agreed on key elements for six model free trade agreement (FTA) chapters, in order to promote high standards for FTAs in the region.

Facilitating Trade: The APEC leaders declared success in meeting their target of reducing trade transaction costs in the region by 5 percent between 2001 and 2006 and agreed to a framework for achieving another 5 percent reduction by 2010.

Protecting Intellectual Property Rights: President Bush and the APEC leaders endorsed two new Model Guidelines under the APEC Anti-Counterfeiting and Piracy Initiative. The Model Guidelines will help APEC economies secure supply chains against counterfeit and pirated goods and inform citizens about the importance of Intellectual

Property Rights protection and enforcement. The leaders also embraced the principle that government offices must block copyright infringement on their computer networks, including over the Internet.

Countering Threats And Enhancing Security In The Asia-Pacific Region: President Bush and APEC leaders stated their strong opposition to trafficking in weapons of mass destruction and highlighted the need to prevent proliferators from abusing legitimate financial systems. President Bush took the lead in encouraging all members to extend the mandate of APEC's Counter-Terrorism Task Force, implement the APEC Framework for Secure Trade, commit to undertaking Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) Vulnerability Assessments at international airports, and join the United States, Australia and New Zealand in a Regional Movement Alert System, which detects the use of lost and stolen passports. The APEC leaders welcomed new U.S.-led APEC initiatives to improve aviation security controls and to protect our food supply systems from deliberate contamination.

Improving Health Preparedness: President Bush and the other APEC leaders fully endorsed APEC's Action Plan on the Prevention and Response to Avian and Influenza Pandemics. They committed themselves to timely and complete reporting of both human and avian influenza cases and expressed support for the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza.

Promoting Good Governance And Fighting Corruption: President Bush is leading APEC in stemming corruption in the Asia-Pacific region. APEC leaders agreed to implement the principles of the UN Convention

Against Corruption on a priority basis. President Bush and the other leaders also highlighted the significant impact that public-private partnerships can have in achieving more transparent and more honest forms of governance, strengthening market integrity, and ensuring that all communities have the opportunity to share the benefits generated by trade liberalization and economic growth.

Tackling Energy Supply And Environmental Challenges: President Bush and the APEC leaders discussed the challenges posed by sustained high oil prices, noting that effective responses require a range of supply and demand side measures. The leaders welcomed the work of the APEC Biofuels Task Force and pledged to strengthen their joint efforts to develop and make use of clean energy technologies.

Promoting Regional Business Travel: President Bush announced that the United States will recognize the APEC Business Travel Card, which will allow card holders to receive expedited processing in immigration lines at U.S. international airports.

Making APEC Stronger: President Bush and the other leaders welcomed plans for the strengthening of the APEC Secretariat and the streamlining of APEC operations. In recognition of APEC's role as the premier economic forum in the Asia-Pacific, President Bush announced that the United States would commit to doubling our support of APEC activities to roughly \$5 million per year, starting in 2007.

(end fact sheet) ♦

Nations Need to Step Up Biological Weapons Treaty Enforcement

By Jacqui Porth
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Failure to comply with an international treaty banning biological weapons poses a direct threat to world peace and security, says U.S. Assistant Secretary of State John Rood.

Rood, addressing the opening session of a three-week conference in Geneva that is reviewing the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), said the international community should root out those who would violate or undermine the treaty.

He told delegates November 20 that the United States is anxious to discuss measures to combat the biological weapons threat, reinforce and strengthen the treaty and bring all countries into the convention.

It would be irresponsible to take steps to strengthen the treaty structure "yet turn a blind eye to problems with the foundation itself," he said.

Rood, who heads the State Department's International Security and Nonproliferation Bureau, expressed concern about the activities of North Korea, Iran and Syria because of their lack of compliance with other international obligations and their known support for terrorist groups.

U.S. officials believe Iran might have a biological weapons program and North Korea might have a biological warfare capability -- both situations that would be in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention. Syria, which has signed but not ratified the treaty, also has prompted U.S. concerns because

Damascus might have conducted research and development for an offensive biological weapons program, Rood said.

UNITED STATES URGES MORE COUNTRIES TO JOIN BIOWEAPONS CONVENTION

Rood, at a later press conference, singled out Egypt as another country that stands outside the treaty



In Baghdad, tanks used for producing chemical and biological agents were rendered inoperative by UN weapons inspectors.

framework. With 155 members of the BWC, he said, "there is room for significant growth." As a model, he suggested that the success of the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, with 180 members, should be emulated.

Rood said noncompliance with the BWC is best dealt with directly. The international community must be vigilant and steadfast, he said, "and root out violators that undermine the integrity of the convention." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=August&x=20050831152017adynned0.5312616&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

Besides promoting an action plan at the review conference that would seek universal adherence to the BWC, the United States also is looking for members to implement practical measures on a national basis to prevent trade that could be used to produce such banned weapons, and to ensure that treaty violators are pursued by effective law enforcement.

Rood said the United States remains fully committed to the convention banning the development, production and acquisition of biological agents or toxins. Even on the first day of the conference, he said, the U.S. delegation already had received positive feedback regarding its proposal to concentrate on four areas for further work: disease surveillance, better biosecurity for material and technology that could be misused, implementation of national enforcement legislation and better oversight to prevent misuse of related research.

"We want nations to live up to their obligations," Rood said, and to find ways to improve the performance of the decades-old treaty.

Rood said U.S. delegates are focusing on pursuing a positive agenda as an article-by-article review of the treaty proceeds, and they hope other delegates will not be drawn into divisive debates that have slowed progress at past conferences. The BWC is reviewed every five years.

The full text (<http://www.state.gov/t/ac/trt/4718.htm>) of the Biological Weapons Convention is available on the State Department's Web site. ♦

State Official Calls for Flexible Telecommunications Policies

By Mary Specht
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Governments need to have stable, yet flexible, telecommunications policies that can adapt to fast-changing technology, according to David Gross, U.S. coordinator for international communications and information policy at the Department of State.

"If you look at where investment is flowing, that's an indication of where there are transparent, stable, predictable rules" governing the telecommunications industry, Gross said in a USINFO interview November 9.

Gross also said it is important to crack down on intellectual property piracy and preserve digital copyrights, as well as prevent counterfeiting and fraud online. He said it is up to the U.S. Congress to decide if it will enact legislation to prevent corporations from aiding in censorship.

In February, Representative Christopher Smith, the chairman of the House International Relations Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, introduced the Global Online Freedom Act (H.R. 4780). According to Smith, the act would establish U.S. policy regarding the free flow of information on the Internet, minimum corporate standards and "the right of redress for individuals who are persecuted by repressive regimes in violation of this act."

The bill is intended to "ensure that American companies operating in repressive regimes have the support of their government as they strive to respect the universal rights of freedom of speech and press," Smith said in a Wall Street Journal

article a few weeks after introducing the measure. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2006/Mar/20-510258.html>).)

The act would require the U.S. president annually to designate any nation whose government has systematically restricted Internet freedom during the previous year as an "Internet-Restricting Country," and establish an Office of Global Internet Freedom within the State Department to report to Congress on its assessment on the state of freedom of electronic information in every foreign country.

H.R. 4780 currently is under review in the full House International Relations Committee and in the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

Debate over Internet censorship heated up at the inaugural Internet Governance Forum in Athens, Greece, when Chinese delegates claimed their government does not censor Web sites and representatives of major Internet service firms faced accusations of complicity in China's monitoring activities.

The U.N.-sponsored conference, which took place October 30-November 2, promoted the importance of a regulatory and legal environment conducive to investment in telecommunications, preservation of intellectual property rights and support of freedom of speech on the Internet.

"We are working with many to address the important issue of freedom of expression, an issue about which President Bush, Secretary Rice and other senior government officials feel very strongly," said

Gross, who headed the U.S. delegation.

Another issue discussed at the conference was navigation in multiple languages. Currently, the Internet system may confuse characters that look similar in English and other languages with different alphabets, leading users to the wrong Web sites. However, experts soon may be able to overcome the technical challenges of making the Internet truly compatible with non-English languages.

Gross said he was struck by how productive the conference was, bringing together more than 12,000 members of governments, nongovernmental organizations, businesses and academics in a conversation.

"All these disparate groups engaged in a dialogue with each other in a way that was just wonderful," he said. "I was very impressed by how positive the spirit was and how productive people who were there thought it was."

Gross was a guest on a USINFO webchat in 2005. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2005/Nov/03-962047.html>).) USINFO also held a series of webchats (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>) with technology experts Seymour Papert (http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/USINFO/Products/Webchats/papert_14_nov_2006.html),

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Religious Architecture Celebrates Pluralism in the United States

By Lauren Monsen
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – The United States is home to adherents of practically every religious faith, and the multiplicity of churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other shrines across the nation is a testament to the principle of religious freedom that enjoys broad protection under the U.S. Constitution. Some, like one recently reopened after painstaking restoration, also stand witness to the nation's history as outstanding examples of architecture.

Two hundred years after its cornerstone was laid in 1806, the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore remains one of the most important examples of architecture as an expression of religious pluralism in the United States. The elegant façade of the basilica mirrors the hopes and ambitions of a fledgling nation that was seeking to establish itself politically and culturally, said Mark Potter, executive director of the Basilica of the Assumption Historic Trust, in a November broadcast interview commemorating the reopening of the cathedral after a \$32 million renovation.

Officially called the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first Catholic cathedral built in the United States after the American Revolution of 1775-1783 was designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, architect of the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

The basilica's exterior -- fronted by a Greek portico and flanked by Ionic columns -- serves as a reminder of the classical ideals that inspired the young republic and as a beacon of the religious freedom that enabled

Catholics to practice their faith openly in their new country. U.S. tolerance and pluralism had attracted many Catholic immigrants who were persecuted in their native England, so it is not surprising that



In Tempe, Arizona, a more traditional mosque with dome and minaret. (Courtesy Omar Khalidi)

the first U.S. Catholic bishop, John Carroll, selected Latrobe's classically proportioned design for the basilica rather than the Gothic style then popular in Europe.

The light-filled interior of the Baltimore basilica is a striking contrast to the cavernous recesses of many Gothic cathedrals. According to Potter, Thomas Jefferson -- U.S. president from 1801-1809 and an architectural enthusiast -- urged Latrobe to include skylights in the basilica's dome. Although the skylights admit natural light into the cathedral, the source of the light is not visible because the skylights are hidden within the dome.

The enigmatic quality of the mysterious light, or *lumari mysteria*, appeals to worshipers and tourists alike, Potter said. The basilica's central role in the history of the Catholic Church in North America and its masterful architecture make it a popular destination for domestic and foreign visitors, he added.

MOSQUES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS REFLECT UNITED STATES' DIVERSITY

More than 1,200 mosques and Islamic centers are scattered across the United States. Widely admired for its Middle Eastern-inspired design, the Islamic Center of Washington, the first mosque to be built in the nation's capital, was dedicated in 1957 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. While serving as a place of devotion for Muslims in the Washington area, the Islamic Center, boasting a spectacular 49-meter minaret, welcomes non-Muslims to enjoy its architecture and to study in its library.

Elsewhere in the United States, the architecture of other religious structures offers clues about the development of faith communities throughout the nation.

Built in 1759-1763 by Peter Harrison, the pre-eminent architect of the U.S. Colonial era, the Touro Synagogue reflects a Georgian influence and the Palladian Revival style. An unembellished simplicity of line, combined with formal symmetry and grand scale, gives the structure an imposing presence.

The establishment of the synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, bore witness to the presence of a small but thriving Jewish community in 18th century New England, and in 1790,

(Continued on page 19)

Military Academies Help Muslims Face Mecca

By Elizabeth Kelleher
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Military academies in the United States increasingly are making special accommodations for Muslims students so they can practice their religion.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, the oldest training ground for future officers, opened a spacious prayer hall with a minbar, a pulpit where the imam delivers sermons, facing Mecca. The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, appointed its first Muslim chaplain. The Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, for the first time hosted a large celebration of Eid-al-Fitr. All of this happened in fall 2006.

Though the number of Muslim cadets or midshipmen at the military academies is small – less than 1 percent of each institution’s total student enrollment – efforts to help Muslims observe their faith are important, academy representatives said.

The Pentagon says active and reserve-duty military populations represent more than 100 religions. Military academies in the United States, which operate as universities with classes taught by both civilian professors and military instructors, train students who become officers in the U.S. uniformed services. Muslim students of these academies soon will lead religiously diverse forces and be expected to exhibit tolerance toward the religious practices of other soldiers, airmen and sailors.

When West Point began to plan a new interfaith building recently, Imam Asadullah Burgos, who conducts Friday prayers, saw an oppor-

tunity: He asked for a prayer room. He got one twice the size of the basement office in which Muslim cadets had been praying. The new space has wall-to-wall carpeting, a new library and prayer rugs that can be taken to the field. Architects “sat down with compasses,” Burgos said, to figure qibla -- the direction of Mecca.

According to John Voll, a professor at the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, this attention by the service academies makes sense because Muslims are becoming more visible in the public arena. “It is almost a matter of equity,” he said. “We are reaching the point where there are at least as many Muslims in the country as there are Jews.” He points to a recently formed networking organization of Muslim Capitol Hill staff members and to the election of the first Muslim representative to Congress. The academies do well to open the door for this population too, Voll said. Even if there are few Muslims at the academies now, recruits will be more interested in attending an institution where they know they can join a group to worship.

The Air Force Academy, where the first Muslim chaplain was commissioned in August, holds a service for Muslims each Friday and tries to schedule other activities around it. The academy provides small refrigerators to Muslims’ dormitory rooms during Ramadan, to allow the students to eat before sunrise and after sunset.

The academy’s calendar outlines all religious holidays, instructs teachers about their significance, and excuses Muslims from their duties during holiday celebrations or visits

to a mosque.

The U.S. Naval Academy estimates it has a dozen Muslim midshipmen. A few years ago, they were provided a prayer room in Bancroft Hall, a centrally located dormitory. The Navy’s senior Muslim chaplain reviewed its suitability before the room was put into service.

Chaplain Irving Elson, a rabbi liaison to Muslim midshipmen, said that during Ramadan Muslims could skip what would otherwise have been mandatory meals and have a special table at which to eat before sunrise and after sunset. “This year, we did something very unique and hosted a celebration of the festival of Eid for Muslim midshipmen,” he said. The event was attended by 70 people.

Due to the small number of Muslim cadets – three – at the Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut, chaplains there are establishing contacts with a mosque in the local community for the cadets to attend, according to spokesman Ryan Doss.

At West Point recently, Muslim cadets invited high-ranking officers to observe them in prayer and then to break the daily Ramadan fast with them. They thanked the “big bosses,” Burgos said, for their help in setting up the prayer room. “It is good for people to learn about Islam,” he said, to see for themselves what kind of people Muslims are.

Burgos already is thinking about Muslims’ future at West Point: “Maybe we’ll build a mosque,” he said. “That would be really great. If I can get fundraisers, I’m ready to go.” ♦

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**U.S. Midterm Elections Increase Women's
Congressional Clout . . .**

(Continued from page 8)

bara A. Mikulski said at her recent bipartisan Senate Women Power Workshop. She began the workshops in 1992 to prepare new women senators for their demanding jobs.

According to Rutgers University Center for American Women and Politics, more women ran for office in 2006 than ever before. "If you look at the 40 most competitive races in the country, women were running in almost half of them," Palmer said. "Women candidates were a big part of the Democrats having as big a margin as they did in the House."

The message to women, Palmer says, is "Individuals can make a difference. If you feel passionate about something, your voice needs to be

heard." Women can succeed, she said. "They can have a tremendous impact on elections and policy."

For more information on U.S. policy, see Women in the Global Community (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/women.html) and 2006 Midterm Elections (<http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Religious Architecture Celebrates Pluralism in the United States . . .

(Continued from page 17)

President George Washington wrote to the congregation, saying that "happily, the government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." In 1946, by an act of Congress, U.S. President Harry Truman designated the Touro Synagogue a national historic site, the first religious structure to receive such recognition.

The Salt Lake Temple, built by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) in Salt Lake City, was built over a 40-year span from 1853 to 1893 by Mormon pioneers. Today, the granite temple, topped by six majestic spires, is a landmark in Utah's capital city. The fortress-like architecture signals both the devotion of the peo-

ple who built it and their mastery of an inhospitable desert environment.

The iconic Ranchos Church -- officially, the Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico -- also is situated in the desert, yet its aspect is entirely different from Utah's Salt Lake Temple. Founded in 1710 by Spanish missionaries and completed in 1815, the Ranchos Church is a sculptural edifice that rises from the ground like an organic element, blending seamlessly with the landscape. Created from indigenous building materials of adobe and wood, the church often is described as a stellar example of Franciscan Old World architectural ideals combined with New World building techniques.

Immortalized in the canvases of American painter Georgia O'Keefe, the Ranchos Church remains a magnet for artists and photographers, and a symbol of the merging of cultural traditions -- Hispanic and American Indian -- that continue to play a vital role in shaping the United States.

Surrounded by lush Japanese gardens with resident peacocks and large koi fish ponds, the Byodo-In Temple -- a nondenominational Buddhist temple on the island of Oahu in Hawaii -- is a replica of Japan's ancient Byodoin Temple. A richly ornamented pagoda covered in gold and lacquer, the Hawaiian temple is visited by worshipers from around the world because it welcomes people of all faiths to participate in its rituals. ♦