



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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President Bush extends warm greetings to all Muslims celebrating Eid al-Adha

December 2007

I send holiday greetings to all Muslims celebrating Eid al-Adha.

During Eid al-Adha, Muslims around the world reflect on Abraham's unwavering faith and his trust in God when asked to sacrifice his son. These four days are a time for Muslims to honor Abraham's obedience by celebrating with family and friends and showing gratitude for the many blessings bestowed by God. This holiday also helps ensure the impor-



tant values of compassion and devotion are passed on to future generations.

America is a land of many beliefs, and our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens. The kindness, generosity, and goodwill displayed by

American Muslims during this special occasion and throughout the year have contributed to the strength and vitality of our Na-

tion. May all those observing Eid al-Adha find love and warmth during this joyous holiday.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a memorable celebration.

GEORGE W. BUSH ♦

Application Fees for U.S. Non-Immigrant Visas to Increase

Addis Ababa – U.S. Embassy: The United States Embassy in Addis Ababa announces an increase in the application fee charged for nonimmigrant visas. The new fee increase, which will go into effect January 1, 2008, is being implemented at all U.S. Embassies worldwide. The application fee

for a U.S. nonimmigrant visa will increase from \$100 USD to \$131 USD. This increase allows the U.S. Department of State to more fully recover the costs of processing nonimmigrant visas and of implementing new security enhancements to the visa application process.

Applicants who pay the prior \$100 USD application fee before January 1, 2008 will not need to pay any additional fee if they appear for a visa interview on or before January 31, 2008. Applicants who pay the \$100 USD application fee before January 1, 2008 but ap-

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Remarks by Ambassador Donald Yamamoto at the Ceremony to Swear-in Peace Corps Volunteers for Ethiopia

December 13, 2007

Peace Corps Worldwide Director Ron Tschetter and Regional Director for Africa Henry McKoy, and to the 42 volunteers here before us who now join the illustrious ranks of more than 187,000 other volunteers who have dared to take up the call of service in more than 139 countries since 1961, we are grateful for your commitment, we honor your sacrifices, and commend you for your service. After a ten year absence, the return of Peace Corps to Ethiopia, the cradle of humanity, is a momentous occasion of historic significance. It is our contribution to Ethiopia's year-long millennium celebration. We look forward to coordinating activities

with other volunteer groups from Japan, China, Korea, the UK and other countries to help meet our shared goals and objectives with the people of Ethiopia.

You, the volunteers, are now members of

a select group of more than 2,900 other volunteers who have served here and have gone on to distinguish themselves in so many endeavors to make this world a better



eration who will struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself. Where ever each of you volunteers serve in Ethiopia, you will stand as a model not only of the United States and what it means to be an American, but as a shining light of the values that all of us hold in common and which binds us together in the community of man. Those values of human dignity and rights, justice, and democracy define who we are and what we stand for. You have an awesome responsibility, for much will be expected of you and much more will be asked of you. But each volunteer stands in good company, a rich tradition, a distinguished history, and a name that marks you as the very best --

members of the Peace Corps.



*Top: Ambassador Yamamoto making remarks
Bottom: Peace Corps volunteers listening to the Ambassador's remarks*

We are proud of you, and it is fitting that you are here in Ethiopia, with its rich history, traditions and culture. It is a perfect partnership, one which together will make our two countries, our two peoples better off and united in our shared endeavor to create a better tomorrow,

place and to continue to serve others.

President Kennedy spoke of the passing of the torch to a new gen-

eration, a more peaceful and prosperous place for future generations. ♦

Embassy Contributes to Addis Ababa Journalism School's "Photojournalism" Week

On Monday, December 17, the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Counselor, Michael McClellan, gave a lecture on news photography and basic composition to journalism graduate students at Addis Ababa University. The students, who are "cross-training" to enhance their capability with all kinds of media – print, photo and broadcast – were focusing this week on news photography.

Mr. McClellan, an experienced photographer, covered the basics of composition in Photojournalism. "The photo," he said, "is especially important in drawing the

viewer's interest to the story. While the photo cannot normally convey the 'facts' of the story, it can convey the emotional impact and how it affects people. The text of the story will carry the statistics and other factual information needed to understand an event or a trend, but the photo can make people react when they see how real people are affected."

He also talked about the power of images and, in particular, news photography, to change public opinion and raise awareness. To illustrate the point, Mr. McClellan engaged the class in a discussion of famous

American news photos from the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movement, as well as how photos from the Ethiopian famine in 1984 affected public opinion worldwide.

The students raised thought-provoking questions about photography and news techniques, as well as about media ethics. Their practice interviews with Mr. McClellan after his lecture showed that a new generation of quality journalists are on the rise at AAU. ♦

Application Fees for U.S. Non-Immigrant Visas to Increase . . .

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appear for visa interviews after January 31, 2008 will be required to pay an additional \$31 USD surcharge before they can interview. Applicants may pay the additional \$31 USD surcharge either at the U.S. Embassy Consular Section or at the Bank of Abyssinia (Ourael, Arada or Raguel branch). Applicants who pay the surcharge should bring receipts for both the initial application fee and for the surcharge when they arrive for their interview at the U.S. Embassy.

The increase in the nonimmigrant visa application fee reflects the U.S. Department of State's obliga-

tion by law to recover the actual cost of processing non-immigrant visas through the collection of the fee. Because of new security-related costs, new information technology systems, and inflation, the actual cost of processing a non-immigrant visa is higher than the current \$100 fee. The Department of State has been absorbing the additional cost of visa processing for several years. An integral part of this fee increase reflects the costs associated with collecting 10 fingerprints from each applicant, and additional costs related to processing the fingerprints. The non-immigrant visa application fee was last increased in 2002.

For additional information about how to apply for a nonimmigrant visa, visit the U.S. Embassy's website at: http://addisababa.usembassy.gov/how_to_apply_for_niv.html ♦

United States, Nigeria Renew Ties

By Charles W. Corey
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- After a White House meeting with Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, President Bush praised the Nigerian leader for being "committed to democracy and rule of law."

Bush described Yar'Adua as "very articulate in his desire to make sure that the people of Nigeria understand that their government will be fair and transparent, and will be a government of the people."

The two presidents met in the Oval Office December 13, in what both described as a "good visit."

The visit marked a renewal of close ties between the two countries.

The U.S.-Nigeria relationship has been less close than in past years because of problems surrounding Nigeria's recent presidential election. "There was a pause in our close relationship," according to U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Todd J. Moss, because the elections of April 2007, which brought Yar'Adua into office, were "deeply flawed." Their conduct, he said, "gave us some serious pause as to how close we could be. We expressed our concerns with the Nigerians ... and we set some very clear

expectations. I am happy to say that, so far, those expectations have been met." Following the two presidents' meeting, Bush said they talked about the importance of social justice issues and education. "The president is committed to seeing to it that compulsory education is followed through on in his coun-

commitment," Bush announced, "because we believe it's in our interests to help you if you so desire. It's in our interests from a security perspective; it's in our interests from a moral perspective."

Yar'Adua said he briefed Bush "on the situation in Nigeria ... efforts to anchor democracy on the rule of law; to help a credible electoral process; and to ensure that the principles of justice, equity will guide the conduct of affairs in Nigeria -- transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption."

President Bush, he said, has pledged support from the people of the United States to help Nigeria ensure that it continues to embrace



President George W. Bush shakes hands with President Umaru Yar'Adua of Nigeria, as he welcomes him to the Oval Office Thursday, Dec. 13, 2007, at the White House.

try throughout the country, and I admire that. And we want to help you," he said. Bush also pledged help on HIV/AIDS and malaria and praised the Nigerian leader for being "strongly committed to helping the Nigerian families affected by these diseases get treatment and help."

Yar'Adua, Bush said, understands that "there needs to be a comprehensive program of prevention, distribution of anti-retrovirals and then a capacity to help the orphans who have been left behind as a result of this terrible disease ... through what we call PEPFAR [the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief]. ... I'm going to the United States Congress and ask them to double our

democracy, the rule of law, zero tolerance for corruption and development of a free-market economy through economic reforms that have been implemented over the last eight years.

Yar'Adua said his country has found great friendship and assistance from the government and people of the United States. "We are very grateful for this expression of support, confidence and trust," he said. He added that they also discussed security issues -- including security within Nigeria, within the Niger Delta region and within the Gulf of Guinea -- and peace and security issues on the African continent. ♦

American Muslims Travel to Mecca for Annual Pilgrimage

By Carolee Walker
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Young American Muslims, many professionals in their 20s, are traveling to the Middle East to perform the Hajj, according to travel industry experts in the United States.

This is a new trend, said Rita Zawaideh, a tour operator based in Seattle who specializes in educational travel to Jordan and other parts of the Middle East. Although Zawaideh handles airline reservations for her clients performing the Hajj, she refers land packages to Muslim tour operators in the United States. "You need to be Muslim to understand the many aspects of booking this kind of trip," Zawaideh said.

The Hajj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, which all able Muslims are expected to perform at least once in their lifetime. Because the journey is expensive and the logistics can be complicated, traditionally many Muslims wait until they are married and their children are grown to perform the ritual.

For American Muslims, however, it makes sense to make the journey when they are still young because they have the economic means and flexibility that may be more difficult to muster as they become married and need to balance their professional and family lives, said American documentary filmmaker Anisa Mehdi.



Muslims pray on a rocky hill near Mecca during the annual Hajj.
(© AP Images)

Mehdi is an Emmy Award-winning journalist whose National Geographic film *Inside Mecca* follows three Muslims from very different backgrounds as they embark on the five-day quest for salvation.

All Muslims have to factor the Hajj into their long-term plans because the trip may cost several thousand dollars, Mehdi said. Depending on a person's economic situation, people may need to save money up to 10 years before they are able to afford

the trip, she said.

"The Hajj is an arduous undertaking that requires physical strength, endurance and stamina," Mehdi said. "Traditionally, older people do it because there is great motivation to complete the transcendental journey, but it is easier for people in good health and strong."

Logistical reasons require countries to impose quotas on visas during the Hajj, so people also need to be flexible in their plans.

Nearly 1.4 million pilgrims already have arrived in Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj, which this year begins on or around December 18, depending on moon sightings, and lasts for five days, according to the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington. In 2006, more than

15,000 Americans were among the 2.5 million people making the annual pilgrimage, according to the embassy.

American mosques offer instructions for the Hajj, using PowerPoint presentations to explain the ritual steps of the pilgrimage and the requirements for making a successful Hajj.

Today, people usually spend between two weeks and three weeks

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Interfaith Festival Joins Muslim, Jewish, Christian Communities

By Carolee Walker
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Religion is not a part of the conversation among her friends at school, but treating each other with respect is, says Jessica, 14, at an interfaith dinner organized by Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders.

"I believe in God, but I am not a member of any particular church," the teenager said at the December 16 dinner outside Washington in Frederick, Maryland. She attended the event with a friend and his family, who are Jewish.

"It's all good," her friend, Sam, 14, said. "Younger people are open to new ideas and diverse communities."

More than 250 members of the Jewish, Islamic and Christian communities in Frederick shared a meal together at the second annual Hanukah, Christmas and Hajj Festival. Dinner was served potluck style -- families contributed their favorite dishes of the season and placed them side by side with those of their neighbors on long banquet tables. There was something for everyone -- from green bean casserole and homemade saffron bread to matzoh ball soup, keema kabob and vegetable pilaf.

Latifa Boutaleb came with her husband, Tewfik, an engineer in Frederick, and their three young children. She placed her pineapple upside-down cake on a table next to apple pie and crême brûlée custard. The couple emigrated from Algeria to the United States in 1999.

"I came [to the interfaith festival] to meet people in my community," said Latifa Boutaleb. Her husband attended the first interfaith dinner in 2006 and said he would not miss this year's event. The Boutalebs worship at the Islamic Society of Frederick, and Tewfik Boutaleb performed Hajj in 2006. The Hajj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, which all able Muslims are expected to perform at least once in their lifetime.



Spiritual leaders Rabbi Dan Sikowitz, Imam Yahya Hendi and Reverend Gerald Hanberry offer blessings for the meal. (State Dept. photo)

"It is beautiful to be here with all the children playing together," Tewfik Boutaleb said. His son, Mohamed, 7, was spinning a dreidel, the traditional top played during the eight-day Jewish festival of Hanukah, with Nourjannah, 9, the daughter of Imam Yahya Hendi of the Islamic Society of Frederick.

"There are some people all over the world who misunderstand religions," Nourjannah said. "Maybe if we bring them all together, they can see there is another side to

their religions."

Nourjannah, who told USINFO she wants to be a "speaker of peace who travels around the world" when she grows up, said she is glad she lives in America where "everybody can practice their faith." Nourjannah said her room at home has piles of books about different religions, and she enjoys reading about and listening to other people's stories. Both Nourjannah and Mohamed were paying close attention when representatives from the Jewish, Islamic and Christian communities gave presentations explaining stories and rituals of Hanukah, Christmas and Hajj.

Sadia Fayyaz, 17, said she hopes to be a teacher some day so she can encourage young people "to talk through" religious debates. Sadia's parents live in Pakistan; she lives in Frederick with her sister and brother-in-law and their four children. "A lot of my friends at school are Jewish," Sadia told USINFO. "We are always questioning each other."

Sadia said there is much diversity at her secondary school, which has designated a special room for Muslim students to pray during the day. Her father has performed Hajj, said Sadia, who hopes to make the pilgrimage herself soon.

Hendi and fellow Frederick spiritual leaders Rabbi Dan Sikowitz of Congregation Kol Ami and the Reverend Gerald Hanberry of Glade United Church of Christ offered blessings before the meal. Hendi explained that although Eid-ul-Adha, which

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American Muslims Travel to Mecca . . .

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making the journey, Mehdi said. "Back in the days when people didn't fly on airplanes, they would spend the better part of a year walking to Mecca or taking a boat or riding in a caravan."

The culmination of the Hajj, which occurs on the eighth to the 12th day of Dhu'l-Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic calendar, takes place outside the city of Mecca. Mehdi said Muslims visit Mecca throughout the year, but the only time that Hajj takes place is during the last month of the year.

As elsewhere in the world, American Muslims not going on Hajj often



Nadia Bazy is greeted by her family at the Detroit airport after performing the Hajj in 2006. (© AP Images)

mark the days leading up to the pilgrimage with acts of generosity. In the state of Maryland, for exam-

ple, the Montgomery County Muslim Council distributes food baskets to needy families and toys to children before Christmas. The council also coordinates with the county to donate hundreds of kilograms of meat to the needy in December.

For more information, see Muslim Life in America. (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/>)

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Interfaith Festival Joins Muslim, Jewish, Christian Communities . . .

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marks the end of Hajj, is celebrated by pilgrims making the annual journey to Mecca, it also is celebrated by Muslims elsewhere, including in the United States.

"It is important to come together to find out how much we share in our humanness," said Miriam Klements who was seated at the same table as the Boutalebs. "What we do to get to know each other at the human, family and community level is really important." Klements is a member of Frederick Interfaith, a sponsor of the event.

The interfaith festival also was sponsored by the Islamic Society of

Frederick, Glade United Church of Christ, United Church of Frederick, St. Katherine Drexel Roman Catholic Church, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Frederick, Beth Sholom Congregation and Congregation Kol Ami of Frederick.

Rukhsana Rahman and Cathy Olson used the evening to catch up. The two have become friends since they began "sharing" an Iraqi teenager who came to the Frederick area as an exchange student. Olsen hosted him in the summer; Rahman got him for the school year.

"I would like to be part of the peace-building process," Janet Borison, a member of the Glade United Church of Christ, told USINFO,

"and I want to support whatever my community is doing to advance that process." Borison attended the dinner with her husband and three children. Her son Ian, 17, said "religion doesn't have much to do with who I associate with." Ian's brother, Adam, 6, told USINFO that he learned about Hanukah and Hajj in primary school.

"We all have things to sacrifice for the glory of God, for example, time and money," said Hendi. "By bringing peace and justice, we all have something to contribute."

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

In Presidential Election, Americans Might Be Looking for Change

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Recent polls show that Americans split their support among many presidential candidates. However, these same polls indicate there is one thing on which many Americans agree: It is time for a change.

A CBS News/New York Times poll released December 10 found that 71 percent of Americans think their country is on the wrong track. Approval ratings for both the president and

Congress continue to be low. The poll also showed that a majority of Americans think the economy is worsening.

These factors indicate that Americans are looking for a leader who can change the direction in which the country is heading, said NBC News Political Director Chuck Todd. Todd spoke with journalists at the Foreign Press Center in Washington December 10.

Voters "desperately want change," Todd said. "People are upset; they are worried about America's role in the world."

According to Todd, when Americans say they want change, they

generally mean they are looking for a different style of leadership and governing. It does not necessarily mean they want policies to change drastically.

Americans still are interested in leaders with political experience, and even the candidates who campaign on their ability to bring new

paign, first-term Illinois Senator Barack Obama has said he seeks to bring change to Washington, while New York Senator and former first lady Hillary Clinton has been emphasizing her experience.

Obama's focus on change is evident on the campaign trail. This past weekend, at campaign events be-



Barack Obama campaigns with Oprah Winfrey. Obama has been emphasizing that he wants to bring change to America. (© AP Images)

ideas to the table have to prove that they have enough experience -- particularly on foreign affairs, Todd said.

When voters think about a candidate's experience, Todd said, they think of that person as "commander in chief, world leader, leader of the free world."

This desire for change might explain the recent rise of two candidates who do not have much national political experience -- Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mike Huckabee.

OBAMA'S MESSAGE OF CHANGE

Since the beginning of his cam-

fore thousands of people with talk show host Oprah Winfrey, signs reading "change we can believe in" adorned the stages.

Clinton has been "changing her message quite frequently over the last three or four weeks," Todd said. A new campaign ad now emphasizes that electing Hillary Clinton would bring "a new beginning."

"She is desperately trying to get some of that change energy that Obama has been basically locking up," Todd said.

A relative newcomer to the political scene, Obama has to show that he has the experience to lead. "If

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U.S. Still Top Financial Contributor to Humanitarian Mine Action

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Casualties from land mines worldwide have dropped from around 26,000 a year four years ago to a little more than 3,000 a year today, counting both land mines and other target-activated explosives.

In the past decade the trade in land mines also has dropped precipitously, as has the laying of new mines. While this has occurred, mines continue to be destroyed or safely removed, and millions of stockpiled mines have been destroyed. All of these developments have had a great impact, which is reflected in the dramatic reduction of land mine casualties.

The United States long has been the largest financial contributor to humanitarian mine action -- a broad category that covers clearance, funding for prosthetics, training of mine removers, mine risk education and research and development for better mine removal equipment and techniques. Since 1993, the United States has provided more than \$1.2 billion -- or a third of all monetary contributions -- to some 50 countries that are, or were, affected by persistent land mines and explosive remnants of war.

Richard Kidd, director of the State Department's office for clearing land mines and destroying at-risk conventional weapons, says the

U.S. investment, along with the contributions of other donors and efforts by affected nations themselves, "has increased national capacity and dramatically improved mine action efficiency, effectiveness and safety in mine-affected countries."



Nicaraguan Army mine remover works with his mine-sniffing dog on a training mission. (State Dept.)

Mine impact surveys, better information systems and more sophisticated mine clearing efforts now ensure that "mine clearance is safer and more productive than it was 10 years ago," Kidd said. He recently told the BBC that absent the U.S. investment, there would be a third more minefields poised to endanger farmers, children and livestock.

Nicaragua is forecast to be the next

country to become free of the humanitarian impact of mines ("impact-free") in 2008. It will join others that already achieved that status, including Costa Rica, Djibouti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Kosovo, Macedonia, Namibia and Suriname.

"Impact-free" means that those land mines that pose a high or medium threat to the ability of people to safely live normal lives have been cleared. It does not mean that every single land mine, for example, has been removed from the remotest section of the jungle in Costa Rica or from uninhabited parts of Djibouti's desert. But it does indicate that these two countries and others like them are devoting time and money to other even more pressing problems now, and, Kidd says, "they have the national capacity to deal with any remaining explosives."

The State Department also partners with more than 60 nongovernmental organizations and citizen groups to broaden awareness of the global land mine problem and engage civil society in helping to tackle it. Above and beyond the U.S. government's mine action contributions, millions of dollars from private U.S. citizens flow annually through public-private partnerships like Roots of Peace, which funds the return of land -- now cleared of mines -- to productive use: vineyards in Croatia, fruit orchards in Afghanistan and rice pad-

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U.S. Still Top Financial Contributor to Humanitarian Mine Action . . .

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dies in Cambodia.

The department also funded a new searchable CD/DVD published by Virginia's James Madison University, designed to help those injured by land mines overcome their disability through low-end technology. The Adaptive Technology Catalog: Tools for Survivors of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War offers more than 600 simple, inexpensive, off-the-shelf or easily adapted pieces of household, auto, farm and carpentry equipment for use by victims seeking physical or economic independence in a post-conflict setting.

ACHIEVING MILESTONES

Although the United States did not sign the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel land mines for military reasons, it is committed to eliminating the humanitarian risks posed by all anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. The U.S. military needs to be able to use land mines - in special circumstances -- for troop protection.

That, however, should not obscure these pertinent milestones:

In 1992, the United States banned the export of all U.S. anti-personnel mines.

In 1999, the United States removed the last remaining permanent U.S. minefield around its Guantanamo Bay naval base.

In 1999, the United States ratified the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons -- otherwise known as the

world's first land mine treaty (CCW) -- which addresses both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines and also bans booby-traps.

In 2004, the United States committed never to use persistent ("long-lived") mines after 2010, vowing instead, if necessary, to use only self-destructing and self-deactivating mines that cease to be threatening within hours or days of cessation of combat.

In 2006, the United States signed on to the declaration of the third review conference for the CCW, stating that it would not do the following:

-- use anti-vehicle mines outside perimeter-marked areas unless they were detectable;

-- use such mines outside perimeter marked areas unless they were self-destructing or self-neutralizing; and

-- transfer anti-vehicle mines unless they met these criteria, and then, would transfer them only to countries adhering to this policy.

Kidd says the United States is pursuing practical measures to reduce the threat of all categories of land

mines and all explosive remnants of war because it is right to do so. But the United States will not support programs that have set out to clear every last mine in an affected country

because of prohibitive costs, the need to address even more pressing humanitarian problems and the minimal to nonexistent threat that some remote mines still pose.

However, the United States does support finding and clearing those mines and unexploded ordnance that address a nation's most pressing needs first. For example, about 80 percent of the world's land mine casualties have been caused by some 20 percent of the world's mined areas. U.S. officials argue that "resources should be

allocated in proportion to the threat."

Kidd says fixing the problem -- based solely on a specific weapon or munition -- is useful only to a point and actually may turn out to "be detrimental to common goals" if the fix results in a diversion or misallocation of resources away from larger problems such as disease or hunger.

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



State Department official Jendayi Frazer helps the British mine removal group HALO Trust destroy a land mine in Angola. (State Dept.)

Third U.S.-China Economic Dialogue Ends with Multiple Agreements

By Robin Yeager
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- From product safety to financial sector reform, energy and the environment, tensions between two of the world's largest economies make frequent headlines. The United States and China have a complex relationship -- increasingly connected, occasionally at odds.

Managing that relationship and addressing the wide array of related issues requires the top-level, multi-faceted approach found in the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED), which held its third meeting December 12-13 near Beijing.

The Strategic Economic Dialogue is a Cabinet-level forum for articulating long-term economic objectives while managing short-term challenges to the relationship. The SED was created by Presidents George W. Bush and Hu Jintao in September 2006.

For this round, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson led the U.S. team of six Cabinet officials and agency heads in discussions with China Vice Premier Wu Yi and a delegation of 13 ministers and agency heads.

The meeting resulted in a number of agreements. Issues addressed by those agreements include those related to food and feed products -- in particular, trade in meat, poultry and egg products and the safety of drugs and medical devices.

The parties agreed on environmental management related to imports and exports and addressed regulatory standards for alcohol and tobacco products. These advances build on three previous agreements

on consumer products signed in recent months covering toys, fireworks, lighters, electrical products, motor vehicles and pesticides.

As a result of this SED round, U.S. companies will have new opportunities to finance and expand sales in China. In addition, China will com-

The parties pledged that, over the next 10 years, they will address energy efficiency and security as well as climate change -- including technological innovation and implementation and sustainability of natural resources. Specific steps related to these issues include developing low-sulfur fuels and biofu-



A session of the recent U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue, held in Washington, D.C., May 23-27, 2007.

plete a study on policies governing foreign participation in banking and equities sectors by the end of 2008, paving the way for greater participation by U.S. companies. Chinese mutual funds will be able to invest in U.S. companies, benefiting both countries.

The delegations also agreed on further implementation of previous SED commitments, including those on securities and foreign investment in China's domestic stock market. They pledged to work on transparency in trade regulations and procedures, including their respective World Trade Organization and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation obligations, and licenses.

els, eliminating barriers to trade in environmental goods and services and cooperating on strategic oil stocks. The two parties also reached agreements addressing water quality, timber logging and emissions trading.

Encouragement of innovation will play a major role in accomplishing the ambitious goals, especially on environmental factors, the parties agreed, and policies should do so while protecting intellectual property. They agreed the dialogue, on this and other topics, should continue and expand at all levels.

The fourth SED will be held in Washington in June 2008. ♦

U.N. Climate Change Plan Seen as First Step

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The climate change mitigation plan adopted by a U.N. conference in Bali, Indonesia, is "a good set of elements...on mitigation, adaptation, technology and finance to guide important considerations," lead U.S. negotiator Paula Dobriansky says, adding it is a first step "in beginning an important discussion about how to achieve a truly global solution."

"We've listened very closely to many of our colleagues here during these two weeks, but especially to what has been said in this hall today," Dobriansky told the delegates earlier. "We will go forward and join consensus." The American delegation was sharply criticized for its stance during negotiations. Dobriansky is under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs.

Two contentious weeks of climate change negotiations among nearly 190 nations on the Indonesian island of Bali delivered a "Bali Roadmap," but the path is not as clearly marked as some at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference would like.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the road map is "a pivotal first step toward an agreement that can address the threat of climate change, the defining challenge of our time." His statement came

after the action plan was adopted December 15, a day after talks were slated to end.

"This is the beginning, not the end," he told the Associated Press, predicting, "We will have to engage in more complex, long and difficult negotiations."



U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gives a speech at the UN Climate Change Conference (Reuters Photo)

A last-minute compromise, the Bali Action Plan sketches ways to negotiate the path ahead.

White House press secretary Dana Perino expressed "serious concerns" about aspects of the plan, saying "climate change cannot be adequately addressed through commitments for emissions cuts by developed countries alone. Major developing economies must likewise act." She added, "[N]egotiations must clearly differentiate among developing countries in terms of the size of their economies." Parties must "negotiate commitments consistent with their national circumstances."

The Bali Action Plan states "deep cuts in global emissions will be required to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention," and emphasizes "the urgency to address climate change" underscored by the Nobel prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The 2007 panel report, which drew on international research by hundreds of scientists, determined global warming is unequivocal and more rapid than expected, making prompt action essential.

The Bali plan is "a shared vision for long-term cooperative action," with a global goal for emissions reductions, without specific numeric guidelines. These were left out in response to adamant U.S. opposition to including a suggestion of a 25 percent to 40 percent reduction from 1990 levels of heat trapping carbon dioxide emissions by 2020. Canada, Japan and Russia also argued against it.

The plan allows for common but differentiated responsibilities, appropriate to national circumstances, which are "measurable, reportable and verifiable."

Incentives are to be offered to encourage developing countries to curb destructive practices such as deforestation, a problem in South America and Southeast Asia.

Technological and financial support to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the irreversible

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Businesses Show Growing Interest in Social Responsibility

By Eric Green
USINFO Staff Writer

Miami -- Companies that go beyond the "bottom line" in making profits and work to improve society at large, a practice known as corporate social responsibility (CSR), can achieve this result in different ways.

Speaking at a CSR panel discussion at the December 3-5 Miami Conference on the Caribbean Basin, Patricia Canessa de Rivera explained how her firm, the Chevron Corporation, aims to better society with a global safety program to decrease the number of fatalities and injuries worldwide due to road crashes.

Canessa, based in El Salvador as Chevron's policy, government and public affairs manager for Central America, told USINFO that her company is involved in the CSR matter of preventing road crashes because it promotes public safety.

Road crashes are a growing global problem, said Canessa. If no "significant interventions" are made to tackle the problem by 2020, she said, road traffic accidents will rank as Number 3 in causing deaths and injuries worldwide, as compared to its 1990 ranking of Number 9. Citing figures from the World Health Organization, Canessa said road crashes cost the world an estimated \$518 billion per year.

Canessa said Chevron's Arrive Alive program, created in 2004, partners with local governments, nongovernmental organizations and private



Oprah Winfrey and students open the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa on January 2. (© AP Images)

sector companies to define the road safety issues in a specific country and develop an action plan to address the problem.

Canessa said Arrive Alive operates in South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria and Guatemala and is starting a program in El Salvador, with plans to expand in 2008 to Panama and the Dominican Republic.

Road safety is a "huge issue" in Central America and the Caribbean, where traffic laws are often outdated or local authorities may lack the equipment to enforce the laws, said Canessa.

Addressing the issue involves changing driver behavior on the roads and creating awareness by nations of the need to adopt road safety action plans, she said.

The U.S. government is also work-

ing worldwide to raise awareness and promote education about road safety. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development works in East and Central Africa to promote community participation on road safety, which includes educational brochures in French and English. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=March&x=20070321111143ajesrom0.6692926>).)

CSR FOR SMALLER COMPANIES

Graco Paredes, CSR manager for the international tobacco group British American Tobacco, with headquarters in London, told USINFO that many big companies and organizations are at least familiar with, if not already practicing social responsibility.

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Businesses Show Growing Interest in Social Responsibility . . .

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The challenge now, said Paredes, who is based in Costa Rica, is to get new smaller and medium-size companies to understand the idea as well, even as they have other priorities in "trying to make ends meet."

Paredes, who moderated the CSR discussion at the Miami conference, said the practice is often misunderstood. Many people, he said, mistakenly confuse CSR with philanthropy. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=August&x=200708071138371XEneerG0.5274622>).)

CSR is not about "giving away money or donations," said Paredes, but rather about promoting development while protecting the interests of consumers and the natural environment.

Jacqueline Coke-Lloyd from the Jamaican Employers Federation said at the Miami panel discussion that CSR is essential for companies, no matter their size or location. CSR, she said, should be a "business-led response" that involves reshaping companies' "strategic relationships, operations, marketing strategies and corporate culture."

Coke-Lloyd said CSR initiatives for smaller companies in Jamaica are

community-based, involved with the creation of a "healthy" workplace, "a fair distribution of wealth and protection of the environment."

Another panelist, Donna E. Chung, presented CSR as a development issue, saying the private sector, especially small- and medium-size enterprises, plays an "integral role in the economic growth of developing countries."

Chung, a trade and labor compliance adviser in the Washington office of the Sandler, Travis and Rosenberg international trade and business firm, explained during her presentation how a Haitian apparel manufacturer's adoption of CSR measures paid off for his company. Production cycle time was shortened, and the owner was rewarded with happier workers in his factory, Chung said.

Roy Thomasson, founder of the Young Americas Business Trust, said changing the term "corporate social responsibility" might make it better understood.

"The social part [of the term] can stay, [but] the responsibility part sounds like we're trying to pass everything off to the businesses to be responsible for the community. I don't think that's quite the idea," said Thomasson, whose group, affiliated with the Organization of American States, promotes entrepreneurship for young people.

In a jocular comment that drew laughs from those in the packed conference room, Thomasson said that perhaps the new term should be "Caribbean social responsibility," adding that another possibility is "business and social action."

The point, said Thomasson, is that the term "corporate" suggests that CSR "is good for Chevron or Exxon [Mobil Corporation], but that it has nothing to do" with smaller enterprises.

"We have to find a definition that works," he said, emphasizing that CSR has to be part of a company's "core business policy" that "benefits the community."

In the end, said Thomasson, CSR is "about people, whether they are customers or buyers," or employers or employees.

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

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In Presidential Election, Americans Might Be Looking for . . .

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[Obama] can prove just enough experience," Todd predicted, "then he's going to be the Democratic nominee."

If Clinton does not win the nomination, "she will be another in a long line of candidates who have lost change-versus-experience arguments," Todd said. This is especially the case among Democrats, whose most recent presidents were candidates representing change -- including Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter and John F. Kennedy.

HUCKABEE'S ANTI-WASHINGTON APPROACH

Democrats are especially eager for change, but Republicans are seeking this as well, Todd said.

The CBS News/New York Times poll indicates that Republicans still favor a candidate with experience over one with new ideas, but Todd said

many Republicans are also interested in seeing the country take a new direction. This might be one of the reasons that relatively unknown Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee has gone from a long-shot candidate to near the top of the polls in the past two months.

"None of the other candidates are impressing the Republicans," Todd said, "so [Huckabee] is serving as a 'none of the above'" choice. Todd noted that other Republican candidates have spent much of their time on the campaign trail proving that they share some of the same traditional Republican values that President Bush holds.

Meanwhile, Huckabee has been campaigning as an anti-Washington candidate, Todd said. "When you look at the [Republican] candidates, the only one that is even coming close to tapping into the change atmosphere that is inside the Republican Party as well as Mike Huckabee," he said. ♦

U.N. Climate Change Plan Seen as First Step . . .

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effects of climate change in developing countries are also in the action plan. The parties agreed that the process should start "without delay."

The Bali plan aims to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. Since the protocol was first implemented, alarming scientific data have given urgency to reduction of climate-altering activities. The recommendation for emissions reduction of 25 percent to 40 percent by 2020 -- halved by 2050 -- came from the 2007 IPCC report.

"It would have been nice to have had those goals included more explicitly," Dan Howells, deputy di-

rector for climate at the National Environmental Trust, an independent, Washington-based advocacy group, said. The Bali plan includes a footnote reference to the IPCC recommendation.

Engagement of countries in negotiations for a new framework was "a big step," he said. The commitment to curb deforestation and having the IPCC report as "the frame for the way discussion will go over the next two years" are positive outcomes, he added.

With increased discussion of climate change among candidates campaigning for the White House in 2008, Howells said, "I would be optimistic that a change in the administration might help move things forward as far as the U.S.

being involved in the negotiations and taking more of a leadership role."

He added that environmental groups hope "the U.S. will play a constructive role over the next two years in the deliberations and we can solve the problem of climate change."

The parties to the UNFCCC conference have committed to meet as often as "necessary and feasible" to negotiate more specific measures by the end of 2009.

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