



# Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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## State Department Releases 2006 Reports on Human Rights Practices

By Michelle Austein  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States hopes that the State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices "will be a source of information for governments and societies everywhere and a source of inspiration for all who are still working for peaceful, democratic change around the globe," according to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice delivers remarks during the release of the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Tuesday, March 6, in Washington.

Rice, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry Lowenkron introduced the 2006 reports and discussed their findings during a State Department press

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## U.S. Ambassador Lays Cornerstone for new Blood Bank in Adama

Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) -- As part of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR, in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Health, Regional Health Bureaus, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, and the World Health Organization, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Don Yamamoto on Saturday, March 3, laid the corner-



Ambassador Yamamoto (r) laying the cornerstone for new Blood Bank in Adama.

stone for a new blood bank in Adama city.

The event in Adama marks the start of construction of sixteen blood banks throughout Ethiopia, an important component of a strategy that is being implemented by PEPFAR in partnership with the Ethiopian government, the Ethiopian Red Cross and the World Health Organiza-

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## State Department Releases 2006 Reports on Human Rights Practices . . .

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briefing March 6.

The reports, submitted annually to Congress as mandated by U.S. law, examine the status of human rights in 2006 in 196 countries and entities. The reports describe the performance of governments in putting into practice their international commitments on human rights.

With the release of this year's reports, Americans are "recommitting ourselves to stand with those courageous men and women who struggle for their freedom and their rights," Rice said. "And we are recommitting ourselves to call every government to account that still treats the basic rights of its citizens as options rather than, in President Bush's words, the non-negotiable demands of human dignity."

"Too often in the past year, we received painful reminders that human rights, though self-evident, are not self-enforcing and that mankind's desire to live in freedom, though universally deserved, is still not universally respected," Rice said. "Liberty and human rights require state institutions that function transparently and accountably, a vibrant civil society, an independent judiciary and legislature, a free media and security forces that can uphold the rule of law."

Although each country's report speaks for itself, broad patterns are discernable, Lowenkron said.

"Across the globe in 2006, men and women continued to press for their rights to be respected and their governments to be responsive, for their voices to be heard and their votes to count," Lowenkron said. Although many hard-won ad-

vances were made in human rights and democracy, progress in some countries lagged, he said.

For example, Egypt held its first-ever multiparty presidential election in 2005, but continues to imprison former presidential candidate Ayman Nour, according to the reports' introduction. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=December&x=20051224115656retnuhategdirb0.6396906> ).)

The reports found that both internal and cross-border conflicts threaten advancements in human rights, Lowenkron said. The reports' introduction cites cases in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Indonesia where violence or terrorism has undermined the democratic process or resulted in large displacements of people.

The reports also found that "as the worldwide push for greater personal and political freedom grows stronger, it is being met with increasing resistance from those who feel threatened by change," Lowenkron said.

Among those facing resistance are nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists, which "a disturbing number of countries passed or selectively applied laws and regulations" against, Lowenkron said. For example, a new law in Russia imposed stricter registration requirements for some NGOs, and in Belarus, tax inspections made it difficult for civil society organizations to operate. Journalists in Turkmenistan were prohibited from all contact with foreigners unless given specific exception. (See Freedom of the Press ([http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/rule\\_of\\_law/press\\_freedom.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/rule_of_law/press_freedom.html) ).)

The reports' introduction notes that countries in which power is concentrated in the hands of unaccountable rulers, whether totalitarian or authoritarian, continued to be the world's most systematic human rights violators. These countries include North Korea, Iran, Burma, Zimbabwe, Cuba, China, Belarus and Eritrea. The introduction also cites the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, for which it said the Sudanese government and government-backed janjaweed militia bear responsibility. At least 200,000 civilians have died and 2 million have been displaced by the fighting, the introduction said. (See Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html> ).)

For the first time, the reports include a section in each country's report regarding respect for freedom of speech on the Internet. The reports will include information on the extent to which Internet access is available to and used by citizens in each country, and provide information on whether governments inappropriately limit or block access to the Internet or censor Web sites, Dobriansky said. Additionally, the reports will examine the means by which Internet restrictions occur and the penalties incurred by those who exercise free speech via the Internet in restrictive countries. (See Internet Freedom ([http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/internet\\_freedom.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/internet_freedom.html) ).)

"Despite international commitments to freedom of expression, numerous governments around the world seek to block the Internet's transformational power and restrict the rights of their citizens to participate in the online exchange of information, ideas and ideals," Dobriansky said.

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## State Department Releases 2006 Reports on Human Rights Practices . . .

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In a number of countries, people are imprisoned for expressing their views online, she said.

"We will continue to defend Internet freedom, including by addressing Internet repression directly with the foreign governments involved and seeking to persuade foreign officials that restricting Internet freedom is contrary to their own interests and that of their countries," Dobriansky said. "The new information in this year's reports will make an important contribution."

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

A link to the full text of the 2006 Human Rights Reports as well as the report on Ethiopian is available on the U.S. Embassy website:

<http://ethiopia.usembassy.gov>

## US Ambassador Lays Cornerstone for new Blood Bank in Adama . . .

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tion to provide safe and adequate blood supplies, which will help combat HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases transmissible via blood transfusion (such as malaria). Blood transfusion is responsible for 5 – 10% of HIV transmissions in Africa. With the addition of the newly-constructed blood banks, this program will significantly improve the availability and safety of blood and blood products in Ethiopia.

To date, the U.S. government has provided 40 million Birr for this PEPFAR program through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). An additional 15 million Birr will be allocated for this effort in 2007. ♦



Ambassador Yamamoto making remarks at the ceremony

## U.S.-Africa Trade Act Seen as Key to African Economic Success

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Landmark legislation enacted seven years ago to enhance trade between the United States and Africa still holds the key to continued African growth and development, says Assistant U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Florizelle Liser.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has been "a clear success" for sub-Saharan African economies, Liser said at the opening of the Central Africa AGOA Regional Workshop, held in Douala, Cameroon, February 27-28. Imports into the United States under the trade act increased more than fivefold in the past five years, a clear spur to export-led growth in Africa, she told the audience.

Liser said the idea behind the AGOA/Douala workshop -- hosted jointly by the USTR and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) -- was "to expand AGOA's impact over more eligible countries and in more product areas."

Signed into law by President Clinton in May 2000, AGOA extends duty-free market access to 6,000 African products, including processed foods, furniture and home decor, as well as apparel, footwear and a wide range of manufactured goods. Two enhancements of the law, extending favorable trade benefits to African nations willing to reform their economies, were signed into law by President Bush in August 2002 and July 2004. Thirty-eight African nations are now eligible for AGOA's benefits.

Liser mentioned the region's "unique and highly prized products

-- whether specialty coffee from Rwanda, honey wine from the Republic of Congo, fruit juices from Cameroon, hardwood furniture from Gabon, fine handcrafts from Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo or spices and herbs from Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe." Liser told her listeners: "There is a market in the United States for all of these products and many more, and we want to help you to tap into it."



Rwandan basket weavers find a market for their wares in the United States. (File photo AP Images)

According to a USAID announcement, 150 representatives from AGOA-eligible countries in the region were invited to Douala "to network, share lessons learned and talk with industry specialists from the United States."

The Douala conference was the fourth in a series of U.S.-sponsored regional AGOA workshops held earlier in Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa.

In the important area of textiles, Liser cited apparel imports from Africa under AGOA, which jumped 251 percent since 2001 to more than \$1.3 billion.

Other AGOA success stories she mentioned included the following:

Cameroon's export of nearly \$1 million worth of goods other than oil to the United States in 2006, including rubber products, kola nuts, finished wood products and some food items.

Kenya's growing exports of fresh-cut roses, prepared pineapple, nuts, essential oils and apparel.

The Democratic Republic of Congo's export of \$2.6 million worth of refined copper, tungsten ores and ginseng.

Plywood exports worth \$200,000 from Gabon in 2005.

Rwanda's deal to export baskets to Macy's, one of the top American retail chains.

Acknowledging a decline in AGOA apparel imports in 2006, Liser said:

"There are signs that African apparel makers are making a comeback. Last week, I attended a major apparel show in Las Vegas and was impressed at how many buyers were making inquiries with African producers, including a Ugandan company that has begun to export T-shirts made of 100 percent organic Ugandan cotton."

To help African producers and traders take advantage of AGOA, Liser said, the United States provides "trade capacity-building assistance" for sub-Saharan Africa that exceeded \$1 billion over the past five years, including \$393 million in 2006 alone.

At the same time, USAID, through its four regional trade hubs on the continent, is "carrying out a wide array of activities to help African

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## Democracy, Economic Reform Bridge North-South Divide in Africa

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Unity of the African continent, favored for decades by political intellectuals like Kwame Nkrumah, might happen eventually -- not because of theories, but rather because of a common interest in political reform and economic integration, a panel of Africa experts said recently.

"A new era is dawning for Africa -- with itself and with new partners," Algerian Ambassador Amine Kherbi told a February 28 panel at Washington's Howard University on "Bridging the Divide Between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa."

Despite geographic and trade barriers imposed by Europeans, the new Africa will have freer trade, easier travel and more democracy, lessening "the trend toward marginalization in this era of globalization," said Kherbi, who began his 40-year diplomatic career specializing in sub-Saharan African affairs.

The discussion was sponsored by Howard University's Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center and the Africa Society of the National Summit on Africa. The Africa Society is a seven-year-old advocacy organization seeking closer ties between the United States and the continent.

Acknowledging the traditional divide between northern, mainly Muslim Maghreb states and the other 47 nations of mainly animist and Christian sub-Saharan Africa, Kherbi said, "We also have a horizontal as well as vertical divide."

This means it is sometimes more convenient to fly to Europe first in order to get from Tunisia to



Kwame Nkrumah

neighboring Morocco, he said. Even trade between Algeria and its neighbors is far less than that with Europe, despite the fact that European products need to be shipped by sea or air to reach the continent.

For Kherbi, the integration of Africa, economically and politically, is not a question of "if" but "when." Trade and travel barriers eventually will be overcome, he said, as integration occurs, driven by a public demand for prosperity that only open markets can deliver.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield agreed with Kherbi that on major issues like health, education and good governance, policy toward the continent should be "approached holistically." But on a day-to-day basis, she said, the State Department's Africa Bureau tends to focus on bilateral or country-to-country relations.

That said, she added: "We do not ignore regional relationships. We work very closely with the African Union [AU], in which the North African countries are equal members. The Africa Bureau also has strong working relationships with ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] IGAD [Intergovernmental Authority on Development] and SADC [Southern African Development Community]."

Certain U.S. policies are targeted toward sub-Saharan Africa, the American diplomat acknowledged.

For example, 12 out of 15 countries in President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are in Africa. In addition, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) currently grants 38 eligible sub-Saharan countries favorable trade benefits.

But northern African countries are covered by other initiatives like the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), she said. As with other programs, like those under the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), "there is no distinction between countries north or south of the Sahara."



Ambassador Amine Kherbi

Touching on security matters, Thomas-Greenfield said "the nations of sub-Saharan Africa are home to many Muslims -- along with Christians and animists. While we are aware of the issue of Islamic fundamentalism, most notably now in So-

malia, for the most part the Muslims of sub-Saharan Africa are conservative, not extremist or fundamentalist."

One result is crossborder cooperation with the United States on initiatives like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which has prevented large areas of desert from becoming safe havens for terrorist groups.

On the political side, Ghanaian Ambassador Kwame Bawuah-Edusei

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## U.S. Aid Agency Cites Mozambique Flood Response as Success

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The Mozambique government has responded to a devastating flood and cyclone with speed and efficiency that could serve as a model for the rest of Africa and the world, says Jay Knott, the mission director in Mozambique for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Speaking by phone March 1 from his office in Maputo, Mozambique, Knott, a 25-year aid veteran who previously has served in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, told USINFO that "the [Mozambique] government response to the natural disasters has been, by any measure, outstanding."

Knott said central regions in the country were flooded by torrential rains in the later part of 2006. Then, a cyclone hit the southern coast in February. But deaths from both disasters were kept to a minimum -- less than 100 -- due largely to the timely response and efficiency of Mozambican emergency operations, he said.

"Of course, here as with everywhere, including the United States, more work needs to be done to be prepared and educate people about how to protect themselves [in a natural disaster] but certainly Mozambique has come a long, long way and is a good model for other countries in the region and perhaps

elsewhere as well," he said.

To counter flooding in the interior the government opened 41 accommodation centers in four provinces located in the flood plain of the Zambezi River and 34,000 people have found shelter in them, the aid official said.



A family in Mozambique receives a mosquito bed net donated by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). (USAID photo)

USAID helped with an aircraft that disaster teams used to assess the flood-ravaged regions. The U.S. aid agency also sent 10,000 mosquito bed nets and 16,000 bottles of a water treatment chemical to the affected areas to help purify water.

But the bulk of transporting, feeding and sheltering many of the 114,000 people displaced by the flood was done by the Mozambican military and local civilian authorities, Knott said.

In the area of damage prevention, Knott said the years of U.S. investment in helping Mozambicans "build their capacity to manage the annual rains" paid off. The government

was able to fine-tune discharges from the Cahorra Bassa Dam, which mitigated widespread flood damage.

"A difference I've noticed from five years ago when I first arrived here," Knott said, is "a real empowerment and more professional attitude toward anticipating and responding to natural disasters."

"The Mozambique government's equivalent of our FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] is far improved in its ability to plan, manage resources, preposition both supplies and personnel in threatened areas," he said.

In addition, the Mozambicans "have done a lot of work educating populations; establishing early warning systems; giving people instructions about what to do in the case of an emergency -- in all of these things we've seen light years of improvement," Knott said.

Overall, U.S. humanitarian and development aid to Mozambique amounted to \$150 million in 2006 with \$200 million sought by the Bush administration for 2007.

In March 2006, USAID donated 12 ambulances and other medical equipment worth \$740,000 to the Mozambique Ministry of Health. The vehicles are equipped with radios that allow for instant communication with hospitals and clinics.

For more information on U.S. policies, see U.S. Aid to Africa ( [http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/aid\\_to\\_africa.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/aid_to_africa.html) ). ♦

## U.S. To Welcome Record Number of International Visitors in 2007

By Carrie Loewenthal  
USINFO Special Correspondent

International travel to the United States will break records in 2007, marking a complete post-9/11 tourism recovery, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez predicts.

Travel to the United States following September 11, 2001, dropped 17 percent from a record high of 51.2 million visitors in 2000. But the country hosted 51.1 million international visitors in 2006, which constituted a four percent increase over the number in 2005. Gutierrez said he expects the trend to continue, and anticipates a 21 percent increase in the number of travelers to the United States over the next five years.

"International travel to the United States continues to show growth over growth as it reaches near record highs in the number of international visitors to our country," Gutierrez said in a March 2 Commerce Department press release.

While the number of visitors from countries that are enrolled in the United States' Visa Waiver Program increased in 2006, Gutierrez said a significant portion of last year's increase can be attributed to visitors from countries whose citizens must still obtain visas to enter the United States. According to a Commerce Department fact sheet, travelers to the United States from both China and India increased 18 percent, and travelers from the Middle East increased five percent.

As part of its commitment to welcome travelers, the U.S. Department of State has been streamlining the visa application process, applied new technology, and added 570 consular positions worldwide in or-

der to shorten the time applicants must wait for visas to visit the United States. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=February&x=200702091422081CJsamohT0.3589899>) .)

from both India and Brazil will increase by 28 percent, over the next five years. South Korean and Japanese travelers are also expected to pay more visits to the United States, along with Western Europeans from the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy.



Passengers at the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport wait in line outside a check-in point. ( AP Images)

Canadian travelers currently make up the largest percentage of international visitors to the United States, and the number of people visiting from Canada increased by eight percent between 2005 and 2006 to reach 16 million. Mexicans make up the second largest group of international visitors, and a six percent increase translated into 13.4 million Mexican visitors in 2006.

Despite the influx of North American travelers, Gutierrez said he believes that future growth in U. S. tourism will come primarily from overseas visitors. The Commerce Department predicts the number of visitors from China will increase by 60 percent, while those coming

International travel is one of the United States' largest exports, exceeding agricultural goods and motor vehicles. The Commerce Department counts toward U.S. exports purchases of services and goods by international travelers, including expenditures on food, lodging, recreation and gifts while in the country. Travel receipts for 2006 broke records at \$107.4 billion, up five percent from 2005. ♦

## Immigrant Women Fuel Small Business Growth in the United States

By Elizabeth Kelleher  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Immigrant women are one of the fastest-growing segments of small business owners in the United States and can expect to be a sizeable portion of small business owners by 2017, according to Intuit Inc.'s Future of Small Business Report, co-authored by the Institute for the Future.



Asa Kalavade, raised from India co-founded the technology firm Tataru Systems Inc. (Photo Courtesy of Tataru Systems)

Asa Kalavade, raised in India, co-founded Tataru Systems Inc., a Massachusetts-based technology business that employs 65 people. Kalavade said in India she felt societal pressure to study something more “woman-friendly” than engineering. After earning a graduate engineering degree at University of California, Berkeley, she stayed in the United States to work at Bell Labs Research before setting off on her own.

Starting her own business was not easy. Kalavade estimates that from 1999 through 2001, some 40 venture capitalists turned her down when asked if they would exchange startup money for equity in the company.

She and her co-founder, a woman from China, did not give up, and, eventually, investors helped them start Tataru. Fairlie would say Kalavade is daring by nature. “To leave your own country and come at great cost to another country, that’s self-selecting” for entrepreneurial spirit, he said.

Today, Kalavade holds eight patents for wireless technologies. One of her patents is for technology that allows consumers to receive phone calls to their mobile phones on their computers. “I didn’t want to do pie-in-the-sky research,” she said.

Immigrant women are “prone to taking risks,” said Farhana Huq, of CEO Women, a San Francisco non-profit that helps low-income immigrant women start businesses. “They really just put themselves on the line.”

A good example is Guadalupe Chavez, who arrived from Mexico in 1997 and, after several years working at retail jobs, took a class at CEO Women. The students were asked to write a “practice” business plan. “In my case, it was a real one,” Chavez said. She had been putting money aside. Her brothers had told her she is a good cook. So, in July 2006, she opened a Mexican restaurant, La India Bonita, in Union City, California. Her classmates painted the place.

Chavez works seven days a week, but enjoys being able to bring her young son to work occasionally. According to King, “mompreneurs” get work-life balance by being their own bosses.



Former White House Pastry Chef Almaz Dama from Ethiopia is the owner of Dama Restaurant and Pastry, Arlington, Virginia (Photo Courtesy of Tadius Online)

Immigrant women have advantages in a global marketplace, the Intuit study says; language skills and relationships from home countries help them find suppliers and customers. USINFO contacted Kalavade in India, where she was on a business

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## Immigrant Women Fuel Small Business Growth in the United States . . .

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trip. When USINFO telephoned Fanta Nabay – who retails hand-dyed African cloth and handmade jewelry in California – she was on another call to Africa.

Nabay came to the United States in 2000, after rebels killed her parents in front of her and her siblings. She combines business with social purpose. Nabay got help from AnewAmerica, a business incubator in the San Francisco area, and she believes in passing along help. She sends African women money for the materials they need to make the goods she sells and then she sends them some of the profit. "I am a refugee; these [crafts] are made by refugees like me," she said.

Nabay asks her suppliers to make meals twice a month for children in an African orphanage.

Yan Liu came to the United States in 1997 after graduating from college in China and running her father's retail business in Shandong for two years. In 2002, she opened a jewelry store (Lireille) in Oakland, California. Her father locates gemstones and jade in China for her.

"In China, each region specializes in different products. Even within a city there are different districts specializing. You have to know those places. That's one of our advantages," Liu said.

Even though only two out of 10 of all small businesses succeed in their first year, immigrants might have an advantage, according to King.

"Immigrants are more attuned – often more than natives – to the opportunity in America," he said, "and women increasingly start businesses to avoid the corporate 'glass

ceiling.' These motivating factors lead to a higher rate of success."

Liu said, "I'm still starting, not successful yet, but I am happy with myself."

The full text ( <http://www.intuit.com/futureofsmallbusiness/> ) of the Future of Small Business Report is available on Intuit's Web site. The Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity ( <http://www.kauffman.org/items.cfm?itemID=704> ) is available on the Kauffman Foundation's Web site.

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

## Democracy, Economic Reform Bridge North-South Divide in Africa . . .

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said the good news is that "good governance and democracy are now universally acknowledged as the most rapid way to achieving progress."

Good governance and democracy require "more active participation of the private sector," which, he said, will lead to falling trade barriers, direct transportation links and reduced government bureaucracy.

A driving engine to that process, Kherbi said, is the economic plan called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This road map for prosperity, formulated by African heads of state, emphasizes private-sector-led growth in combination with lowered corruption and increased transparency in governance.

NEPAD's "peer review mechanism is accelerating the democratic process," the diplomat pointed out, and is "acting as a bridge toward inte-

grating all of Africa into the global economy."

While critical to Africa's future well-being, he added, democracy "is also vital to the security of the United States and should be looked on as a whole, especially concerning important issues like terrorism and economic development." ♦

# Volunteerism Is Integral Part of U.S. Culture

By Louise Fenner  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Volunteering is “built into the fabric of who we are,” says Desiree Sayle, director of the USA Freedom Corps, a White House initiative to expand community service throughout America.

Most Americans believe “that there is an obligation, because of the freedoms that we enjoy, to give something back,” said Sayle, who noted that more than 61 million Americans volunteered for charitable and national service organizations in 2006. This includes volunteering overseas through organizations such as the Peace Corps and Volunteers for Prosperity, she told USINFO February 27.

President Bush has called on Americans to dedicate at least two years over their lifetimes, or 4,000 hours, to serving their communities. In 2002, he created the USA Freedom Corps, a national clearinghouse that matches volunteers with charities worldwide and with national service programs such as AmeriCorps.

Volunteering continues at historically high levels despite minor fluctuations, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, which oversees AmeriCorps and other programs. Volunteers to the Peace Corps hit a record high in 2006, and more than 3.3 million college students engaged in volunteer activities in 2005, up 20 percent from 2002. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?>

p= washfile-  
english&y= 2006&m= November&x= 20  
061114131233jmhculaPO.1716577 ).)

Volunteerism has expanded since the terrorist attacks of September



President Bush visits with children at the Anthony Bowen YMCA. Volunteers assist with many of the YMCA's programs. (AP Images)

11, 2001, said Sayle. “The highest growth rate is for youth age 16-24, and we want to do more to encourage volunteer service within that population.”

More than 517,000 outstanding volunteers have been recognized with the President’s Volunteer Service Award, and Bush has met personally with more than 550 of the recipients around the country, she

said. “In a nutshell, the president takes volunteer service extremely seriously,” Sayle said.

Volunteerism is “a major cultural phenomenon in the U.S.,” said Arthur Brooks, associate professor of public administration and director of the nonprofit studies program at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Public Affairs.

About half of all Americans participate in volunteer activities each year, including those who volunteer informally in their communities as well as the 61 million who contribute their time directly to charitable and religious organizations, he told USINFO. In addition, roughly 75 percent of Americans donate money to charity each year.

Brooks participated in a special briefing for President Bush on volunteerism February 13 as part of a daylong celebration of the fifth anniversary of the USA Freedom Corps.

“The attitudes we have about the government and the fact that the U.S. is a very religious country ... keep our giving and volunteering very strong compared with other

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## Volunteerism Is Integral Part of U.S. Culture . . .

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countries," Brooks said. Many Americans believe that "responsibility for service starts with individuals and not with government," he said. Societies that rely more on the government for social services and are less religious have lower rates of volunteering and giving, he added. (See related article ( <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=February&x=200502181639511CJsamohT5.593508e-02> ).)

"If people stopped giving and volunteering, how much would the government pick up? Probably a lot, but that's not how we choose to govern ourselves in the U.S.," Brooks said.

The United States is stronger and more prosperous because of its tradition of volunteerism and giving, he said. "When people give, they actually see returns in their happiness and health, and they behave more effectively as citizens. This aggregates up to the community and the national level."

In addition to AmeriCorps, USA Freedom Corps seeks to strengthen participation in the Peace Corps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America, which helps schools incor-

porate community service requirements into their curricula. More and more high schools and colleges are requiring students to engage in community service, and at least 69 institutions are providing tuition aid, academic credit or other assistance to students who have served in AmeriCorps.

During the USA Freedom Corps fifth anniversary celebration February 13, Bush visited the YMCA Anthony Bowen in Washington, which was founded in 1853 as the first African-American YMCA in the United States. Volunteerism "has been an integral part of our country, and is today, and it needs to be in the future," he said.

Ed Fones, director of volunteer services at 18 YMCA locations in metropolitan Washington, said that about 3,500 people volunteer annually at the 18 branches in Washington, Virginia and Maryland. Volunteers fill many different needs, he said, such as mentoring, coaching, assisting with day care and serving on the board of directors.

"People seem to want to help and make a difference, and help people have a brighter future," Fones told USINFO several days after the president's visit. He said Bush watched children make robotic arms from recycled materials and perform

an "autopsy" on an old computer. Several mentors from technological professions were on hand to assist the kids and inspire them to consider careers in science.

"If you look at the history of the YMCA, volunteers have been crucial to us," Fones said.

Without volunteers assisting charities around the country, he added, "I just don't think federal, state or local governments could provide a lot of the resources and services that are out there now."

Additional information is available from the Corporation for National and Community Service ( <http://www.nationalservice.org/> ) and USA Freedom Corps ( <http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/> ).

For more information on U.S. society, see Volunteerism & Philanthropy ( [http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life\\_and\\_culture/volunteerism.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/volunteerism.html) ), "Government Encouragement of Volunteer Efforts ( <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0506/ijse/friedman.htm> )" and the eJournal A Nation of Volunteers ( <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0998/ijse/ijse0998.htm> ).

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

## U.S.-Africa Trade Act Seen as Key to African Economic Success . . .

*(Continued from page 4)*

countries make wider use of the opportunities available under AGOA," she added.

Most prominent among these efforts, Liser said, is President Bush's

African Global Competitiveness Initiative (AGCI).

Liser said the goal of AGCI, which will provide up to \$200 million over five years, is to promote the export competitiveness of sub-Saharan Africa by "improving the business

and regulatory environment, strengthening the knowledge and skills of African enterprises, increasing access to financial services for trade and investment and facilitating investments in infrastructure."

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## Secretary Rice Inaugurates International Women of Courage Award

By Jane Morse  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – In the first ceremony of its kind at the U.S. Department of State, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice March 7 paid tribute to 10 women from around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership. The honorees represented Afghanistan, Argentina, Indonesia, Iraq, Latvia, Maldives, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe.

At the awards presentations, Rice congratulated the women for their “dedication, commitment and passion.” She said their work is transforming societies and serving as an inspiration to the international community.

The awardees are Jennifer Louise Williams of Zimbabwe; Siti Musdah Mulia of Indonesia; Ilze Jaunalksne of Latvia; Samia al-Amoudi of Saudi Arabia; Mariya Ahmed Didi of Maldives; Susana Trimarco de Veron of Argentina; Mary Akrami of Afghanistan; Aziza Siddiqui of Afghanistan; Sundus Abbas of Iraq; and, Shatha Abdul Razzak Abbousi of Iraq.

They were selected from 82 women of courage who were nominated by U.S. embassies worldwide.

Acknowledging that the road to equal rights is a “long journey,” Rice thanked the awardees for combating attempts to dehumanize women. The secretary shared with the audience the wisdom on a T-shirt she was given by Kuwaiti women when they won the right to vote that said: “Half a democracy

is no democracy at all.”

Paula Dobriansky, under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, told USINFO that the concept for the International Women of Courage Award began with Rice and “her consistent and strong leadership on women’s issues.

Dobriansky said, “Women are often overlooked as agents of positive change and women’s rights often viewed as a ‘women’s issue.’ This award recognizes women who are leading change at home, in spite of great obstacles. It recognizes that women must be heard not just because they are the other half of the population but because they are a



Secretary of State Rice congratulates the first recipients of the new 'Women of Courage' Award. (Janine Sides/State Dept.)

“The secretary has often spoken about the courage of women throughout the world and the need to support their efforts,” Dobriansky said. “Accordingly, these awards reflect the secretary’s desire to highlight achievements by outstanding women globally with a focus on recognizing women on the ‘front lines.’”

fundamental building block for free, open, prosperous societies.”

According to Dobriansky, this year’s awardees are “an inspiration to all, men and women, who champion human rights.”

“These women,” she said, “have dedicated themselves to ensuring

*(Continued on page 21)*

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## State Department Issues “Encyclopedia on Human Rights Abuses”

By Michelle Austein  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – The State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices is an "encyclopedia on human rights abuses" for government leaders, embassy officials, activists and others monitoring human rights and can serve as a road map for improvements, a State Department official said March 2.

Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, senior director for strategic planning and external affairs for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, told US-INFO that the reports allow governments to see how the United States views each nation's human rights record.

Congress mandates the annual reports under a 1976 amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which requires the secretary of state to give Congress a report on the status of human rights in countries receiving U.S. security assistance. The upcoming reports examine the status of human rights in 2006 in 196 countries and entities and is expected to be given to Congress and then released to the public in the coming days.

The reports can promote dialogues with countries interested in discussing their human rights record, Bibbins Sedaca said. Countries have used the reports to improve dialogue with their civil society and in their own internal debates and discussions. The Millennium Challenge Account also can draw on information found in the reports when determining a country's eligibility for grants.

The reports review the status of internationally recognized individual, civil, political and worker rights as set forth in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A country's report might include information about the country's respect for human rights, trial procedures, treatment of political prisoners, respect for civil liberties such as freedom of speech, and election practices.



Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, senior director for strategic planning and external affairs for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

Information used in the reports is gathered throughout the year by State Department officials in Washington and at overseas posts. Embassies investigate the human rights situation in their countries by talking with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials and by reviewing media reports.

For the first time, the 2006 reports will include a section in each country's report regarding respect for

freedom of speech on the Internet. Although the growth of the Internet is a great trend for democratization, Bibbins Sedaca said, it has been paired with a trend of governments wanting to control the use of the Internet. The Internet threatens repressive governments because it threatens their control, she said. The more information people are getting from the Internet, the less governments can control the minds and information flow of their citizens, Bibbins Sedaca said. Now people can go online and read the human rights reports and see what activists are saying.

Additionally, the upcoming reports will have more coverage of the treatment of NGOs. As NGOs are becoming more capable of representing citizens' interests, governments are feeling more threatened and seeking to limit their operations, Bibbins Sedaca said. Governments are using a variety of methods to do this, ranging from arrest and imprisonment to administrative or regulatory tactics such as registration requirements or heavy taxations that make it burdensome for an NGO to do its work.

A report reviewing U.S. efforts to end human rights abuses worldwide is produced annually as well. Supporting Human Rights: The U.S. Record is expected to be released in about a month.

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

## United States Committed to Empowering Women Worldwide

By Judy Aita  
USINFO United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- Americans are committed to advancing the protection, welfare and empowerment of women both at home and worldwide, U.S. Ambassador Patricia Brister says.

The U.S. vision for women and girls "extends far beyond our own shores to encompass their well-being and advancement around the globe," Brister, the U.S. representative to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, said February 28. The United States funds a wide array of programs abroad to help girls, particularly those caught in conflicts or in great humanitarian need -- situations in which women and children are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

(PEPFAR) ensures that the programs it supports meet the unique needs of women and girls, including victims of sex trafficking, rape, abuse and exploitation, Brister said.

year to evaluate progress, identify challenges, set global standards, and formulate policies to promote the equality and advancement of women worldwide. The CSW's



Schoolgirls present a lesson in their classroom in Ecole Mani, Chad. (AP Images)

The United States supports several programs to counter gender-based violence, including a \$15 million initiative to combat violence against women in Darfur. The program involves humanitarian aid efforts as well as support for human rights, the ambassador said.

Since 2000, the United States has provided more than \$20 million to refugee programs to address gender-based violence. They focus on informing victims of their rights and means of redress, educating aid workers to identify and treat gender-based violence and preventing and responding to gender-based violence, she said.

The \$15 billion President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

PEPFAR is the only HIV/AIDS program that requires data on gender, a critical step to understanding the extent to which women and girls are getting life-saving help. It also includes strategies to fight sex trafficking and prostitution while still serving the victims, she said.

A separate education initiative will provide 550,000 primary and secondary education scholarships to girls in 40 African nations. With U.S. support, more than 5 million children, one-third of whom are female, now are attending school in Afghanistan, Brister said.

The 45-nation Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the U.N. policymaking body dedicated exclusively to women. It meets at U.N. headquarters for two weeks each

2007 session is focusing on girls' rights and how to end the discrimination and violence that girls face around the world.

As many as 55 million girls continue to be shut out of formal schooling, millions of school-aged girls work in domestic service and an estimated 40 percent of child soldiers are girls, according to the CSW. Of young people aged 15-25 living with HIV/AIDS globally, more than 60 percent are female.

"Most egregiously, violence against women and girls remains pervasive -- perpetrated by family members, strangers and agents of the state in all regions of the world, in the public and private sphere, in peacetime and during conflict," U.N. Deputy

*(Continued on page 21)*

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## Bush Cites Progress in Iraq

By David McKeeby  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Iraqis and coalition allies are making "gradual but important progress" in securing the country and building democracy, President Bush said March 6.

"The Iraqis are standing up for the democratic future that 12 million of them voted for," Bush said at the annual convention of the American Legion, the largest military veterans' organization in the United States, in Washington.

The struggle in Iraq, Bush said, is part of a larger regional conflict against the forces of extremism that, if left unchecked, would overthrow the moderate governments of the region and plot future attacks against the United States and its allies.

"The goal of the enemies in Iraq is power, and they're willing to kill themselves and innocent men, women and children to achieve that goal," he said. "People like these can't be satisfied by negotiations or diplomatic concessions."

For example, Bush said, when al-Qaida and Sunni extremists failed to stop the Iraqi people from holding successful democratic elections in 2005 to approve a constitution and elect a government, they struck back with attacks calculated to provoke reprisals from militant elements within Iraq's Shia majority, such as the February 2006 bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra.

"This changed the nature of the conflict in Iraq," Bush said. "We still face the threat from al-Qaida, but the sectarian violence was getting out of hand and threatened to destroy this young democracy before it had a chance to succeed."

Amid this devastating cycle of Shia-Sunni violence, nearly 120,000 Iraqis have joined their new army, thousands more have joined the police force and citizens across the country risk reprisals to help coalition and Iraqi authorities by providing tips about illegal activities, Bush said.



President Bush addresses the American Legion 47th National Conference, on March 6, 2007, in Washington, D.C.

Today, he said, Iraqi forces are stepping up to the challenge of stabilizing the capital, Baghdad, under a new strategy developed by U.S. and Iraqi authorities, Bush said. Three Iraqi army brigades have arrived to join 21,500 coalition reinforcements in establishing 40 security stations across the city from which they will direct joint 24-hour operations to root out Sunni and Shia extremist networks. The joint Iraqi-U.S. teams also will work with area residents to prevent extremists from coming back while continuing to train a new generation of soldiers

and police officers to protect the Iraqi people.

Since the arrival of the new coalition forces commander, U.S. General David Petraeus, troops have expanded their presence in Baghdad, detained hundreds of Sunni and Shia extremists and seized several large caches of weapons and bomb-making materials.

But Bush said the strategy is still in its early stages of implementation, and he predicted extremists would continue attacks in an effort to derail the stabilization plan.

Improving security in Baghdad will set the stage for continued political reconciliation among Iraq's leaders as they struggle to build democracy. On this front, Bush cited the Iraqi government's progress toward sharing energy revenues equitably and a new budget pledging \$10 billion toward reconstruction and investments in infrastructure across the country.

Bush said Iraq's future also will depend on continued support from the international community. To this end, he said, the United States supports Baghdad's plans to bring together Iraq's neighbors, the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference and others in a series of conferences to build political, economic and security support for the new Iraq.

These meetings, he said, will give nations a chance to join the United States in expressing support for Iraq's young democracy. They also will give Iraq's neighbors Iran and Syria, which actively support extremist groups, a chance to become constructive forces in Iraq's future, Bush said. ♦

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## U.S. House Approves New Review Process for Foreign Investment

By Andrzej Zwaniecki  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – The House of Representatives passed a bill to strengthen federal reviews of proposed foreign investment transactions in the United States and give Congress more oversight over the review process.

The chamber on February 28 approved unanimously a measure that would broaden the scope of deals subject to review by the inter-agency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) to include acquisitions in the homeland-security sector and critical infrastructure such as power plants, ports and toll roads. It would require a 45-day investigation to follow the initial 30-day review of any deal by companies controlled by foreign governments. It also would oblige the director of national intelligence to analyze any potential threats to national security posed by a foreign investment.

“This bill contains very tough provisions to protect national security, including the ability for CFIUS to reopen reviews when companies don’t comply with mitigation agreements designed to reduce security risks,” said Democrat Carolyn Maloney, who sponsored the measure.

However, lawmakers from both parties were quick to emphasize that the legislation was crafted carefully

to avoid discouraging foreign investment in the United States.

“The welcome mat for foreign investment must be out,” Representative Spencer Bachus, ranking Republican member of the Financial Services Committee, said.

The legislation would ensure that Congress is notified when investigations are completed and receives regular reports on agreements or conditions imposed by CFIUS.

Lawmakers have complained that the current law leaves them out of the review process. They attempted to revamp CFIUS in 2006 when the CFIUS approval of a management deal concerning six U.S. ports by a state-owned Dubai company caused an uproar. The House and Senate, however, failed to agree on a compromise measure after each chamber had passed a different version of the legislation. The adjournment of the 109th Congress ended work on those bills; the 110th Congress, which convened in January, had to introduce new bills to restart work on CFIUS legislation.

For the bill to become law, it must be passed by both chambers of Congress and signed by the president.

The White House expressed support for the House bill passed February 28 with some reservations. The Office of Management and Budget

said in a statement that one of the provisions it opposes would allow extension of the 45-day investigation for transactions involving foreign governments.

Major U.S. business groups, including the Organization for International Investment, an association of U.S. subsidiaries of foreign companies, welcomed the bill. They said it “strikes a critical balance between protecting national security and encouraging beneficial foreign investment.”

In 2005, foreign companies invested more than \$110 billion in the United States, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest U.S. business federation.

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

## Business Integrity Essential for Healthy Markets, U.S. Official Says

Washington – Protecting the freedom and integrity of businesses in the United States and around the world by fighting corruption and ensuring fair competition are among the top priorities of U.S. federal law enforcement, says U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.

“The interests of business are aligned with the interests of law enforcement: both want to create a free and fair marketplace,” Gonzales said at a March 1 meeting of the American Bar Association.

The attorney general outlined the U.S. Justice Department’s efforts to combat international corruption, corporate fraud, intellectual property (IP) crimes and other anti-competitive activities.

Growing global economic integration requires that the fight against illegal business practices have global scope, he said. That is why the U.S. Justice Department is actively involved in prosecuting violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA).

The act, adopted in 1977 and amended in 1998, forbids U.S. businesses to pay bribes to foreign officials to obtain business favors. It also applies to certain foreign issuers of securities and foreign firms and persons that make such payments while in the United States.

In February 2007, three subsidiaries of Vetco International Ltd., an international holding company, paid fines for illegal payments to Nigerian officials. In 2006, the Norwegian company Statoil was penalized for bribes paid in Iran, and the U.S. company Schnitzer Steel paid fines for making similar payments in

South Korea and China, Gonzales said.

But he said the Justice Department focuses not only focuses on enforcement but provides assistance to foreign law enforcement agen-



U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez speaks at a meeting of the American Bar Association's National Institute on White Collar Crime. (AP Photo/Denis Poroy)

cies and helps train foreign policemen, prosecutors and judges.

“I’ve seen what happens in countries where corruption and fraud are unchecked: capital flight, unemployment, breakdown in provision of basic services, and, sometimes, civil unrest,” the attorney general said, adding that comparable anti-corruption laws are essential for a thriving global economy.

Gonzales said the Justice Department has also increased its efforts to protect international property globally. It recently has obtained the extradition from Australia to the United States of Raymond Griffiths,

the leader of the Internet software piracy group DrinkOrDie, which has produced some \$50 million worth of pirated software, movies, games and music.

In the aftermath of some highly-visible corporate scandals, the U.S. Congress passed in 2002 the Sarbanes-Oxley Act that enhanced accounting and reporting standards as well as corporate board and management accountability in public companies and accounting firms. Some critics claim the new requirements are too constraining and burdensome, particularly for smaller companies.

But Gonzales said Sarbanes-Oxley has achieved positive results, including a 38 percent decrease in class action suits in 2006 involving securities issues. Class action suits are lawsuits filed on behalf of large numbers of complainants that have suffered a common wrong. He also said the Justice Department’s Corporate Fraud Task Force had obtained over 1,100 convictions between its establishment in 2002 and the end of 2006.

In December 2006, the Justice Department obtained the convictions on accounting fraud charges of four senior executives of Enterasys Networks, Inc., a provider of secure communication networks. It has also accepted guilty pleas for backdating stock options from two executives of Comverse Technology, Inc., a multimedia software provider, and from the general counsel of the recruiting firm Monster, Inc.

The department’s antitrust division recently prosecuted and fined four companies for fixing prices on computer memory products, and obtained a \$300 million fine -- the

*(Continued on page 18)*

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## Strong Property Rights Link to Economic Well-Being, Report Says

Washington -- Countries with strong, well-protected property rights are more likely to thrive economically than those with weak property protections, according to a new international report.

A positive correlation between a country's prosperity and the quality and enforcement of its laws in such areas as land titles, copyrights and patents was established by the first International Property Rights Index (IPRI), launched March 6 in Washington by the Property Rights Alliance (PRA) and its 37 global partners.

The PRA is a special project of the Americans for Tax Reform, a lobbying group.

Scott LaGanga, PRA executive director, said in a news release the report proves wrong those who claim that strict property protections prevent developing countries from unlocking their growth potential.

"Well-structured private property rights allow individuals and firms to

feel secure and provide them with an incentive to innovate and produce," he said.

IPRI ranked 70 countries on 11 factors related to physical property rights, intellectual property (IP) rights and legal and political environments.

Advanced industrialized economies from Western Europe received the highest ranking, with Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark as the top three. Nations from Africa, Latin America and Asia ranked lowest, with Ethiopia, Bolivia and Bangladesh at the bottom.

The report concluded that better-performing countries have, on average, a gross domestic product per capita that is more than eight times higher than that of the worst-performing countries.

European parliamentarian Syed Kamall, who participated in a panel on the report, said the index can help countries pinpoint problems related to property rights. Kamall is a member of the European Parliament representing the United Kingdom.

Another panelist, Chris Israel, U.S. coordinator for intellectual property enforcement, said the index also can be a useful tool for developed countries' policymakers. They can point to the linkage between property right protections and economic well-being as they try to persuade countries such as China, Russia and India to protect IP rights better, he said.

"You cannot make much progress by talking only about technical flaws or specific concerns," Israel said.

The IPRI report ( <http://internationalpropertyrightsindex.org/> ) can be viewed on the IPRI Web site.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Protecting Intellectual Property Rights ( [http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic\\_issues/intellectual\\_property.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/intellectual_property.html) ).

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

## Business Integrity Essential for Healthy Markets, U.S. Official Says . . .

(Continued from page 17)

second-largest antitrust fine in U.S. history -- against Samsung Electronics and its U.S. subsidiary in 2006.

According to a Justice Department press release, the antitrust division ended the year 2006 with its second-highest level of fines and 5,383 jail days for people responsible for price fixing, bid rigging, obstruction, fraud and other anticom-

petitive practices.

While standing by the laws, the Justice Department makes an effort not to deter normal risk-taking and innovation, Gonzales remarked. "[I]n this country one should never be considered a criminal for taking lawful chances," he said.

The attorney general said the interest of business and law enforce-

ment are essentially the same. "The markets want and reward reliability, integrity and transparency," he pointed out. "Investing, after all, is itself a measure of trust."

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

# Gender Equality Linked to Economic Growth, U.S. Official Says

By Kathryn McConnell  
USINFO Staff Writers

Washington – The United States says that countries seeking foreign assistance under the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) must provide new information about the effect of gender inequalities on their economies.

Gender inequality can be a significant constraint to economic growth and poverty reduction, Virginia Seitz, a top official with the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which administers the MCA, told USINFO.

To maximize the effect of its grants to developing countries, the MCC recently adopted a policy requiring countries applying for grants to include analyses of their existing legal and socio-cultural inequalities in their MCA project proposals.

Countries also are required to state how their proposed projects would correct gender inequalities that impede economic growth and poverty reduction.

Gender is defined as the social roles, behaviors and responsibilities assigned to women and men in a society, according to MCC.

Gender equality can be measured by such factors as girls' completion rates for primary school and women's political and social rights, said Francis McNaught, MCC vice president for congressional and public affairs, in a January public outreach meeting in Washington.

The new policy increasingly is being embraced by leaders of developing countries hoping to receive MCA

funding, Seitz, MCC director of social and gender assessment, said.

Many countries are shifting their development planning functions from their finance ministries to their social ministries and employing specialists in gender equality issues, she said.

In some cases, Seitz said, countries are altering their original proposals to highlight how women's issues would be addressed by their MCA-funded development project.

The three-year-old MCA provides development assistance to countries promoting economic freedom, investments in health care and education, and respect for rule of law. As part of its grant process, Seitz said, the MCC provides guidance to countries to ensure their projects are designed to address gender inequalities and do not constrain economic growth and poverty reduction.

MCC also is helping people in developing country judicial sectors understand the importance of women's rights to national economic growth and to increasing family incomes, she said.

## POLICY HAVING POSITIVE EFFECTS

One example of where the gender policy, adopted in December 2006, has affected a country's development plans is Lesotho, Seitz said. In 2005, the country submitted to MCC a five-year, \$362 million proposal for funds to improve health care and water infrastructures and to develop its private sector.

But MCC held back from approving the grant because Lesotho law categorized married women as "legal minors" with no rights to own property, Seitz said.

Following MCC's urging to give women equal rights, Lesotho's parliament enacted a law ending women's minority status, she said.

It was the first time U.S. foreign assistance had been conditioned on gender equality, MCC head John Danilovich said during a speech in January. The country awaits approval of its revived grant proposal, submitted in 2006.

Ghana's \$547 million compact, granted in 2006, included an initiative to provide women with credit and link women to a national payments system, reducing the need for rural women to keep large amounts of cash in their homes.

Burkina Faso, which received a \$12.9 million MCC "threshold" grant in 2005, developed a two-year project to build, equip and support more than 130 schools in areas with low enrollment rates for girls to encourage girls' enrollment and regular attendance in those schools.

Threshold grants are awarded to countries to help them make necessary policy and institutional changes in certain areas in which the country has performed poorly so it can qualify for a longer-term grant.

Burkina Faso's project includes an awareness-raising campaign involving parents and community leaders to fight against obstacles that keep girls from school, such as long walking distances between homes and schools, early and forced marriages, time-consuming household chores and lack of general interest in girls' education. ♦



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## Foundation Helps Prepare Youth for Rapidly Changing Job Market

By Kathryn McConnell  
USINFO Staff Writers

Washington -- Today's high-technology global economy requires that youth entering the job market have the training and life skills necessary to get and keep available jobs, says the chief executive officer of International Youth Foundation (IYF).

IYF is a Baltimore-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) at the center of an alliance focused on improving the employability of youth around the world.

The public and private sectors must work together to "invest in youth, so they arrive at adulthood healthy, prepared to be good citizens and prepared for today's workplace," IYF's William Reese told USINFO.

One IFY alliance helping young people gain critical technical and life skills is the "entra 21" program, operating in 18 countries in Latin American and the Caribbean. The alliance also involves the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Development Bank, several national and global corporations and local groups.

Life skills are those that help people maneuver through everyday life, improve their performance in school, find and maintain employment and contribute to their families and communities, IYF says.

In February, IYF received the Global Development Alliance excellence award from USAID in recognition of the success of entra 21.

The nearly \$30 million multiyear program established in 2001 pro-

vides one-year to three-year grants and technical expertise to local non-profit organizations. Those groups help youth gain access to computer skill training, internships and employment-placement services so they can get and keep a good job. So far, entra 21 has helped almost 20,000 young people ages 16-29, Reese said.



An instructor gives an Entra 21 participant computer training in Colombia. (International Youth Foundation)

"Most developing countries have a short window of opportunity to get this right before their record numbers of youth become middle-aged. ... This may be one of the profound decisions a developing country will ever make to banish poverty and galvanize its economy," said Emmanuel Jimenez, lead author of the World Bank's 2007 World Development Report.

Worldwide, young people make up nearly half of the world's unemployed, according to the bank.

"That's an economic and social disaster for countries," Reese said. "The best social program for a young person is a job."

Knowledge of how to use the "machinery of the 21st century" -- computers, personal digital devices and portable telephones -- is neces-

sary in a variety of industries and work environments, Reese said.

These include the hospitality and tourism industry, the world's largest employer of young people, as well as various office, warehouse, factory and agricultural settings where workers need to access information quickly, he said.

IYF's international network of nearly 50 companies and organizations works through various programs in nearly 70 countries to provide vocational training, health education and training in cultural tolerance, leadership, conflict resolution and decision making, according to the organization.

"I learned so much, not only how to use the computer ... but also how to write a resume and develop a career plan and feel confident about myself," said Romina Collman, an entra 21 participant in Argentina.

In Colombia, Jonathan Silva Bejarano said he learned from an IFY program to be more tolerant of others and open to new ideas. When faced with challenges, he said he now feels better equipped to identify options. "I've learned that nothing in life is free."

After training, Jonathan went on to an internship at a pharmaceutical cooperative where he applied the accounting and customer service computer skills he developed in the program so that he could earn a stable living for himself and his family.

Each year, the IYF network invests more than \$110 million to help young people around the world. ♦

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## Secretary Rice Inaugurates International Women of Courage Award . . .

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that women have a voice. When women are given tools to succeed, such as education and economic and political opportunities, they create stronger families and healthier, more vibrant communities, and directly and measurably increase economic development.

"Women's participation," Dobriansky said, "is fundamental to the growth of real democracy."

"Women's rights, like all human rights, are universal," she said. "They apply without exception, in every region and country across the globe."

"Secretary Rice," Dobriansky said, "has dedicated herself to leading positive transformation through diplomacy. She has played a critical role in establishing and pursuing the

president's freedom agenda, a key component of which is advancing equality and opportunities for women."

A transcript ( <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/mar/81518.htm> ) of remarks by Rice at the awards ceremony and a statement ( <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/mar/81497.htm> ) from her on International Women's Day are available on the State Department Web site.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Women in the Global Community ( [http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human\\_rights/women.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/women.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>)* ♦

## United States Committed to Empowering Women Worldwide . . .

*(Continued from page 14)*

Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro told the commission.

Migiro urged the commission to "take bold steps to improve the lives of girls everywhere."

The United States will be presenting two resolutions focusing on practices that are discriminatory, violent and deny girls "the very chance to live and give our societies all they have to offer," Brister said.

One resolution addresses forced and early marriages, calling attention to a practice that "diminishes choices for girls, shrinks the horizons of their futures, and too often subjects them to violence," Brister said. The second resolution fo-

cuses on prenatal sex selection and female infanticide.

Brister also described U.S. domestic programs that address gender-based violence.

In the United States, Brister reported, the Violence Against Women programs are receiving historically high levels of funding. They help communities expand prevention efforts, ensure the safety of victims and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

One special program of the U.S. Office of Violence Against Women is the President's Family Justice Center Initiative, which addresses domestic violence, she said.

Victims of domestic violence often

are forced to seek help in a fragmented system of separate agencies with uncoordinated services, Brister explained. To address that problem, sites have been set up to provide comprehensive services -- medical care, counseling, law enforcement assistance, faith-based and social services, employment and housing assistance -- to make a victim's search for help and justice much easier.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Women in the Global Community ( [http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human\\_rights/women.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/women.html) ).

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