



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

U.S. Grants Assist Community Development

U.S. Embassy, Addis Ababa December 11, 2008: – U.S. Ambassador Donald Yamamoto emphasized the United States’s commitment to improving access to education for Ethiopia’s poorest children and supporting community-based development when he presented four new grants to community organizations under the Ambassador’s Special Self-Help Program (SSHP).



Ambassador Yamamoto and Archbishop Bitsue Abune Natnael signing the grant agreement for the small-scale dairy and beekeeping project that will benefit an orphanage run by the Assela Diocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

In a December 11, 2008, ceremony at the U.S. Embassy to present the

grants, Ambassador Yamamoto said, “These

projects will go a long

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Aid Agencies Join to Improve Effectiveness in Poor Countries

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — Poor countries receiving grants from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) will be able to get more impact from that aid under new agreements between MCC and other major aid agencies.

“We are enhancing our efforts by partnering with organizations that share our core belief that gener-

ating sustainable prosperity, development and growth can improve the lives of the poor,” MCC Chief Executive Officer John Danilovich wrote in a blog posted on MCC's Web site.

MCC's most recent agreement was with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Danilovich and Josette Sheeran, WFP



World Food Programme's Josette Sheeran, with a Millennium Challenge Corporation official, holds a cup from a school feeding program.

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way toward improving the quality of life for Ethiopians across the country. With the support of the American people, children in rural communities who, up to now, had only a remote chance at education will be able to go to school; a dairy and bee-keeping project will enable a faith-based organization to continue serving needy orphans; and – in an incentive-based approach -- families will gain access to clean drinking water in exchange for building pit latrines at their homesteads, thereby improving both the community's water and sanitation conditions."

Under the SSHP, U.S. Ambassadors in Africa fund community-based initiatives that might not otherwise meet the criteria for traditional development assistance.

Together, the four projects are worth USD 40,000 (about 400,000 Ethiopian Birr) and will reach more

than 5,300 Ethiopians in the country's three largest administrative regions – Oromia, Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. Grantees are selected from hundreds of proposals received by the Embassy and are required to meet rigorous standards. Projects funded under the Self-Help program must improve economic and social conditions at the community or village level, be community-initiated, show evidence of local support, and be self-sustaining.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Ambassador Yamamoto said, "On behalf of the American people, I am honored to support these Ethiopian

groups who are working to improve the lives of their communities. Grassroots programs like this are one important part of U.S. efforts



Addisu Abera is a child weaver who has been able to receive an education thanks to the efforts of Tsalke Education and Integrated Development Association, which received funding from Democracy and Human Rights Fund.

to strengthen bilateral economic relations, create jobs, and contribute to a more prosperous future for Ethiopians."♦

Aid Agencies Join to Improve Effectiveness in Poor . . .

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executive director, December 5 agreed that the two aid agencies would coordinate funding to stabilize domestic agricultural supplies and local markets in poor countries.

One potential area of collaboration will be linking MCC's funding for

agricultural development with WFP's Purchase for Progress program, in which the agency buys locally produced food from small farmers for distribution as food aid.

By providing a reliable market for smallholder farmers, cooperatives and small traders, WFP wants to increase producers' incomes and

give them a strong incentive to invest and increase production, the agency says.

Purchasing from small producers also can stimulate local economies, a principal MCC objective, Danilovich told America.gov.

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Aid Agencies Join to Improve Effectiveness in Poor . . .

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The partnership with MCC provides a new opportunity for WFP to link its humanitarian assistance with long-term solutions to hunger, Sheeran said when signing the agreement at MCC headquarters in Washington.

Danilovich and Sheeran also agreed to share ideas so they can be more effective in assisting host countries to reform their poverty reduction and food security policies to reflect best practices in achieving gender equality, according to MCC.

MCC investments in developing robust agricultural sectors aim to give rural families and businesses the capacity to provide for themselves and their communities today and to acquire greater capacity to face potential food crises in the future.

More productive agricultural sectors also will help ensure that the increasing number of people moving to urban areas have access to affordable, safe food, MCC says.

Also collaborating with MCC and WFP is the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), an international nonprofit established in 2006 with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In June, AGRA's head, former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Danilovich agreed to join to help African countries tackle poverty and hunger through sustainable improvements in the productivity and incomes of small-scale farmers and poor rural households.

The partnership approach between AGRA, WFP and MCC "prevents duplication of efforts, enhances the impact of each project activity and helps our partners attract investments in long-term growth," Danilovich wrote in his blog.

In November, MCC and the Agence Française de Development agreed to coordinate to make poverty reduction more effective in the developing world, beginning in African countries where both agencies are engaged — Burkina Faso, Benin, Morocco, Mali, Madagascar and Senegal. Agence Française de Development is France's finance agency focused on international development.

In October, MCC signed an agreement with Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to increase coordination in countries in which both work — including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Tanzania. The agencies will work to identify opportunities for private sector investment, especially in agribusiness, and in using microfinance to prepare for projects devoted to the climate and environment.

In February, MCC and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development agreed to increase on-the-ground cooperation in partner countries including Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia in education, water and sanitation, transportation and governance, especially related to transparency and anti-corruption.

Since 2004, MCC has obligated nearly \$6.3 billion in grants to 18 countries receiving MCC multiyear anti-poverty grants.

Press releases announcing MCC's agreements with WFP (<http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-120508-wfpmou.php>), the Agence Française de Development (<http://>



Women sort cowpeas at a farm cooperative in Mozambique that made a sale of the product to the World Food Programme.

www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-111808-mou.php), Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-101008-danishmou.php>), AGRA (<http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-061108-agramou.php>) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (<http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-021908-dfidmou.php>) are on the agency's Web site.

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

Presidential Message on Eid al-Adha, 2008

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 8, 2008

Eid al-Adha, 2008

I send greetings to Muslims around the world celebrating Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice.

Eid al-Adha commemorates Abraham's devotion to God, and it reminds us of God's mercy and provision for his people. Abraham's deep faith was tested when God

asked him to sacrifice his son. Although Abraham was set to faithfully obey, God provided an alternate sacrifice that spared his son. During this holiday, Muslims around the world honor Abraham's trust in God and celebrate God's love through acts of charity and joyous feasts with family, friends, and others in their community.

Our Nation is blessed by vibrant Muslim communities. On this holiday, all Americans celebrate our religious liberty, and we remember

that religious freedom belongs not to any one nation but to the world.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed holiday.

GEORGE W. BUSH

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

President and Mrs. Bush Host Children's Holiday Reception and Performance



President George W. Bush is smothered in little hands as he says goodbye to a group of children in attendance Monday, Dec. 8, 2008, for the Children's Holiday Reception and Performance at the White House. The President and Mrs. Laura Bush traditionally invite children to a White House celebration for the holidays, and this year, the audience included kids of active duty and reserve military service members from Russell Elementary at Quantico Marine Base, Dahlgren School at Dahlgren Navy Base and West Meade Elementary at Ft. Meade Army Base. White House photo by Eric Draper



President George W. Bush embraces a group of youngsters Monday, Dec. 8, 2008, as he welcomes children attending the Children's Holiday Reception and Performance at the White House. White House photo by Eric Draper

Habitat for Humanity: U.S. Volunteerism Addressing Global Poverty

By Leah Dow
Staff Writer

Washington — When Ivie Mynitti, a U.S. high school senior, traveled to Udon Thani, Thailand, in February 2008 as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity International, she wanted to have fun, travel, but also leave an effect on the local community.

“I think a lot of students notice that our planet is in trouble and we need to do something about it, whether it is helping people, animals or the environment,” Mynitti said. “I do think the work we did made a difference in the community; at least it made a difference to the family we built it for.”

Mynitti, like many other volunteers, built walls, mixed cement for floors and helped Habitat, an organization known for providing families in need with homes of their own, construct one of several houses in Udon Thani.

Growing numbers of U.S. volunteers are leaving their jobs and schools for a few weeks each year to help construct housing in disadvantaged communities worldwide, from the earthquake-damaged Kumsangir region of Tajikistan and the frozen lands of Siberia in Russia to Kyrgyzstan’s capital of Bishkek and the village of Nshavan, Armenia.

Habitat operates in 92 countries and has provided low-cost housing for more than 1.5 million people, the organization reports. Since its founding in 1976 by Alabama-born lawyer and businessman Millard

Fuller and his wife, Linda, Habitat for Humanity International has built and rehabilitated more than 300,000 houses, the most recent in November 2008 in Zacapa, Guatemala.

In 2007, Janine Zajac, then a 22-year-old student at the University of

my path in life because it made me realize that I could use my career as a means to help other people.”

It was physically demanding, Zajac told America.gov, but “Habitat showed me that there is so much more to do in this world than sit behind a computer traipsing around



The 31 volunteers consisted of Habitat for Humanity office staff, construction staff, AmeriCorps members, Board members, Women Build volunteers and several first time volunteers to a Habitat Build.

Michigan, traveled to Escuintla, Guatemala, where, as part of a Habitat project, she mixed concrete, chopped concrete blocks with machetes and constructed foundational supports.

The experience, she said, changed her life. “It opened my eyes to the benefits and importance of service, and, consequently, the trip shaped

on the Internet or sitting in front of a television and keeping up with pop culture.”

Participants say the hard work pales in comparison to the joy of being able to help a family have someplace to call home.

The need being addressed by Habi-

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Land Ownership Rights Linked to Helping World's Poor

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — Justine Rasoamanahirana inherited her family's plot of land in Madagascar from her parents but had no legal documentation proving her right to it. For years, the traditional, nontitled landowner saw her property become smaller and smaller as neighbors settled on it.

Then Rasoamanahirana heard about the government's new land reform program, supported by nearly \$38 million in assistance from the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Through the program, she obtained documentation that legalized her property claim.

Having secured her plot, Rasoamanahirana used the land as collateral to obtain a small loan to invest in a potato farm and build a small house that she rents to others. The income she earns is allowing her to provide for a better future for her family.

The worldwide link between secure, transferable land rights and poverty reduction is an issue that both MCC and the international nonprofit group Habitat for Humanity say deserves attention.

Lack of property rights by many of the world's poor is "the housing crisis that no one is talking about," said John Danilovich, MCC's chief executive, at a November 13 public forum co-hosted in Washington by MCC and Habitat for Humanity.

"Having a place to call home, or a piece of land to farm, or a place to start a business matters to the poor

and nonpoor alike," wrote Danilovich and Jonathan Reckford, Habitat's chief executive, in an article in the November 25 Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Land security can encourage business development, Danilovich and Reckford believe. "Farmers make more productive use of land they own, investing in improvements or higher-value crops and safeguarding it from environmental degradation," they wrote.

Habitat for Humanity recently released its Shelter Report 2008, a document highlighting the importance of land-tenure security and poverty reduction and the organization's long-standing goal of providing access to decent housing for all. That goes hand in hand with MCC's focus on helping countries promote effective property rights, Jolyne Sanjak, an MCC managing director, told America.gov.

According to Habitat's report, adults and children worldwide who are affected by disasters are vulnerable to barriers to land-tenure security. Such barriers include insufficient legal and regulatory systems, excessive land regulation, gender discrimination, corruption, inefficient or inadequate land registration systems and the disintegration of customary ownership practices.

MCC already has committed more than \$278 million to projects in poor countries that have identified

secure and efficient access to land as necessary to economic growth that reaches the poor.

IMPROVING PROPERTY RIGHTS

The countries are working with MCC to improve their legal frameworks, property registries and client service orientation, Danilovich says in a November 18 blog posted on MCC's Web site.

Mongolia is using \$23 million of its MCC grant to focus on improving property rights in lower-income set-



Justine Rasoamanahirana inherited her family's plot of land in Madagascar from her parents.

tlements and to urbanize areas where rural people have migrated over time. It will do this by privatizing and registering household land plots and by expanding access to mortgage finance.

In addition, just outside the areas where nomadic herders have begun to settle but still engage in raising livestock, the MCC will create a leasing system — a first for Mongolia — to provide incentives for better rangeland management to produce higher incomes, Sanjak said.

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Habitat for Humanity: U.S. Volunteerism Addressing Global . . .

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tat is huge. According to a 2005 report by the United Nations, nearly 32 percent of the world's population live in urban slums and 100 million people are homeless.

According to the local affiliate's Web site.

The organization also receives important support from the U.S. business community. Whirlpool Company, for example, donates thou-

tinues to rebuild dilapidated houses, as well as construct brand new homes in the region, local media interest and local government support is growing.

Partnerships with communities in Tajikistan, a country whose economy is still reeling from the effects of a long civil war that followed independence in 1991, have helped to build more than 303 houses since Habitat first became involved in 1999. The local government in Khujand, a city in the northern part of the country, donated land for more than 80 homes, and local donors provided \$37,000 for the project.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the southern coast of the United States in August 2005, Habitat was one of the first organizations to start rebuilding homes. Three years later, Habitat is still helping the recovery effort, building 52 homes a month in the areas most affected by Katrina.

"We have become small players in an exciting global effort to alleviate the curse of homelessness," says former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, one of Habitat's more famous volunteers, who takes time each year to help rebuild houses.

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



Thirty-four students from the interior design program at the University of Southern Mississippi have started to hammer, saw, paint, and clean their way toward their required volunteer hours, all while helping Hurricane Katrina victims through Habitat for Humanity. Students began construction Feb. 17, 2007 on a Annie Christie Street home in Hattiesburg. (Southern Miss Public Relations photo)

Although no official figures are available, a review of Web sites of local and regional groups suggests that U.S. volunteers for Habitat number in the tens of thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands, and come from places including college campuses, youth groups, religious institutions, corporations and sporting clubs. In New York alone, the number of volunteers annually exceeds 10,000, ac-

sands of ovens and refrigerators. The Home Depot Foundation provides building supplies. Employees from several large financial firms, such as Bank of America and Citicorp, have volunteered hundreds of thousands of hours.

In 2002, Habitat developed its first relationship in Russia with the construction of a house in the Buryatia Republic's capital city of Ulan-Ude in southern Siberia. As Habitat con-

Award to Burmese Cyberdissidents Highlights Problem of Censorship

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Journalists and cyberdissidents in Burma, Cuba and North Korea are recipients of awards that not only recognize individuals for their courage and dedication to free expression, but also call public attention to the dismal state of press freedom in their countries.

The United States welcomes recognition by Reporters sans frontières (RSF), or Reporters Without Borders, of Burmese bloggers Zarganar and Nay Phone Latt, dissident journalist Ricardo González Alfonso of Cuba, and the staff of North Korea's Radio Free NK, State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood told reporters December 5.

RSF is a Paris-based nongovernmental organization that advocates press freedom worldwide. It monitors threats to journalists and free speech and raises public awareness of press freedom.

U.S. officials "applaud the efforts to honor extraordinary individuals and institutions that are working hard to promote ... freedom and freedom of expression," Wood said, adding "we will continue to be at the forefront of promoting freedom of expression around the world."

BURMA'S CYBERDISSIDENTS

In Burma, citizens have attempted to use the Internet to post photos, videos, blogs and other material as a means of getting around the country's strict censorship system. (See "Burmese Writers Play Cat-and-Mouse Game with State Cen-

sors (<http://www.america.gov/st/freepress-english/2008/July/20080729142932esnamfuak0.5877649.html?CP.rss=true>).")

The country's military rulers have dramatically increased pressure on cyberjournalists, whose efforts provided some of the only publicly



Burmese comedian and blogger Zarganar is serving a 59-year prison sentence after speaking to foreign news media.

available information on the 2007 pro-democracy protests and the regime's crackdown on peaceful demonstrators. (See "Protest Images from Burma Showed Web Effectiveness and Frailty (<http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2007/November/20071031180159esnamfuak0.3400232.html>).")

Bloggers Zarganar and Nay Phone Latt were RSF's joint "cyberdissident" winners for 2008. Both have been incarcerated and sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their efforts to offer information that is critical of or differs from the official government view.

Zarganar, also a famous Burmese comedian and film director, was arrested in June after being interviewed by the BBC about the status of victims of Cyclone Nargis, which devastated parts of Burma in May. Zarganar had tried to distribute food to victims.

In November, he was sentenced by a special court to 45 years in prison for "disturbing public order"; authorities later added 14 years to the sentence.

Zarganar had kept a blog since August 2007, when pro-democracy activists and Buddhist monks began their protests for greater political freedom. His entries denounced the military junta's abuses and defended human rights.

Nay Phone Latt, who owns two Internet cafes in Rangoon, was arrested in January for possessing a video that had been banned by the junta. He had been blogging about the difficulties Burmese youth face in self-expression. The 28-year-old was sentenced by a special court in November to 20 years and six months in prison.

He was convicted of violating Burma's 1996 Computer Science Development Law, which prohibits accessing the Internet without official authorization. He was the first to be punished under a law that gives Burma's Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs the power to specify exactly what constitutes the lawful use of computers.

OTHER AWARDEES

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Maryland Children Use Their Skills to Help Children Worldwide

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — In their own small but meaningful ways, students at one Maryland elementary school are working to improve the lives of children worldwide and promote human rights.



A fundraising birthday card designed by a fourth-grade student

Nearly 130 students enrolled at the Forest Knolls Elementary School in Rockville, Maryland, participate in a program to raise awareness of and money for impoverished and exploited children. They are members of the O Ambassadors Club, a school-based program that is a joint endeavor of Oprah's Angel Network and Free The Children.

Television host Oprah Winfrey founded her Angel Network in 1997 to encourage viewers to join her in charitable efforts around the world.

Free The Children is a nonprofit organization designed to rescue children subjected to exploitive labor practices because their parents do not have the means to send them to school. It was founded in 1995 by Craig Kielburger, who was only 12 when he was deeply moved by a newspaper story about Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani youth sold into

bondage at age 5 to work in a rug factory. The teenage Masih was shot and killed for speaking out against this form of human slavery.

Kielburger enlisted his young classmates to begin working to help exploited children, and Free The Children has grown into the world's largest network of children helping children. More than 1 million children in 45 countries participate.

Free The Children has built more than 500 schools for disadvantaged children, and the Free The Children-Oprah's Angel Network partnership, which was launched in 2007, has built more than 55 schools in 12 countries.

REACHING OUT TO THE WORLD FROM ROCKVILLE

Almost one-fifth of the 565 students at Forest Knolls participate in some way in the O Ambassadors Club, making it one of the largest clubs in the Washington metropolitan area. Although only in its second year, the club is a success, partly due to the energy and enthusiasm of its coordinator, Susan Michal. Michal, a 20-year veteran teacher, has managed to weave science, journalism, reading and art into the activities of the club.

Most club members also participate in the school's Junior Press Corps, and the children use their skills in photography, graphics, fact-finding and writing to raise awareness about the plight of impoverished children.

Forest Knolls students prepared more than 100 illustrated posters with facts about hunger, health, education and sustainable develop-

ment needs. They plan to submit the posters to the headquarters of the O Ambassadors Club for possible publicity use. Some students wrote poems and storybooks to support the effort.

Addie, 10, told America.gov that her work with the club "makes me feel more fortunate ... makes me appreciate what I have."

Most students encounter the plight of the less fortunate through reading and their studies at school, but some told America.gov that they've seen poverty firsthand during travels with their parents to countries including Thailand, India, Nigeria and Ghana.

"Writing about poor children can show people they can find ways to find health care and get an education," 9-year-old Amicolé, who has been to Africa, told America.gov.

Euvgenia, 10, was born in Siberia and adopted by an American couple. She is struggling to learn to



At a Maryland elementary school, children help exploited children by designing and selling cards for Christmas and other occasions.

walk again after several surgeries. She told America.gov that learning about exploited children makes her

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Clean Technology Revolution Seen as Key to Climate Fix

By Cheryl Pellerin
Staff Writer

Washington — Nearly 11,000 people are meeting in Poznan, Poland, December 1–12, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference to discuss long-term cooperative action, including mechanisms to help developing countries lower greenhouse gas emissions and cope with the effects of climate change.

The two-week meeting is the 14th Conference of 192 parties (COP-14) to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the fourth meeting of 183 parties to the Kyoto Protocol.



Opening of the 14th Conference of the Parties in Poznan, Poland, December 1.

COP-14 comes halfway between COP-13, held December 3–15, 2007, in Bali, where negotiations were launched to strengthen international action on climate change, and COP-15, to be held November 30–December 11, 2009, when the negotiations are set to culminate in an international climate change agreement.

“The United States is fully committed to reaching agreement by 2009 to a post-2012 climate agreement

that is environmentally effective and economically sustainable,” Paula Dobriansky, under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, said during a December 3 telephone briefing in Washington.

“We expect that Poznan will highlight the importance of research and development in clean energy technologies to effectively address climate change,” she added. “We need nothing less than a clean technology revolution.”

Dobriansky heads the U.S. delegation in Poznan, along with Special Envoy to the UNFCCC Harlan Watson, who serves as alternate head of the delegation.

James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality and senior adviser to President Bush, will represent the United States at the ministerial portion of the conference December 11–12.

Delegation members include officials from the Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Treasury Department, the National Security Council, the White House Council on Environmental Quality and members of Congress and congressional staff.

PROGRESS IN PROZNAN

In 1994, the UNFCCC international treaty went into effect and representatives from 192 countries be-

gan to consider what could be done to reduce climate change and to cope with the inevitable temperature increases of global warming.

In 2005, an addition to the treaty — the Kyoto Protocol — went into force. To date, 183 parties to the treaty have ratified the protocol. Its major feature is that it sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 5 percent against 1990 levels over five years. The United States is not a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol.

The protocol’s first commitment period began in 2008 and ends in 2012. A strong multilateral framework must be in place by 2009 to ensure that there is no gap between the end of the Kyoto Protocol’s first commitment period in 2012 and the entry into force of a future regime.

In May 2007, President Bush announced an initiative to develop and contribute to a post-Kyoto framework on energy security and climate change by the end of 2008. This effort, the Major Economies Process on Energy Security and Climate Change, contributes to national, regional and international programs to address climate change. The group includes developed and developing nations. (See “Technology-based Policy on Climate Change Urged by Bush (<http://www.america.gov/st/env-english/2008/April/20080416190704mlenuhret0.1401941.html?CP.rss=true>).”)

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Decking the Halls of America's Most Famous Residence

By Meghan Loftus
Staff Writer

Washington — The holidays have arrived at the White House. First lady Laura Bush officially announced the decorative scheme for her eighth and final holiday season in the famous residence on December 3.

"This year we have a very appropriate theme. It's 'A Red, White and Blue Christmas,' which I think is perfect for our last year," said Mrs. Bush, whose husband will leave office in January. "A patriotic holiday — a way to celebrate our great country."

Americans have been clamoring for a theme incorporating the nation's emblematic colors since the beginning of the Bush presidency, Mrs. Bush told reporters in the East Room. "It gave us a chance to reuse a lot of red ornaments, because we had a lot of those, of course. We brought back some other decorations from Christmas past, just like everyone does."

Other decorations making a second appearance are the presidential homes that were part of the 2001 "Home for the Holidays" Christmas theme and last year's ornaments celebrating the national parks, which now hang on the president's tree in the Oval Office.

The Oval Office tree is one of 27, all from North Carolina, that grace



President George W. Bush and Mrs. Laura Bush pose for their 2008 holiday portrait Sunday, Dec. 7, 2008, in the Blue Room of the White House. White House photo by Eric Draper

the halls of the White House. The centerpiece of the trees, and arguably of the decorations, is the 5.6-meter-tall (18.5-foot) Fraser fir that sits majestically in the Blue Room. Framed by panoramic views of the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial, the tree is decorated with 369 ornaments made by artists from every state, ranging in age from 8 to 90, who were chosen by their members of Congress.

"We even have a jackalope from Texas," said Mrs. Bush, referring to

the fictional hybrid of an antelope and jackrabbit.

More than 90 volunteers helped hang 780 feet of garland and 232 wreaths. Pastry chef Bill Yosses and his staff worked for two months to construct a gingerbread replica of the North Portico of the White House from 350 pounds of white chocolate and 125 pounds of gingerbread.

Mrs. Bush expressed her appreciation to all the volunteers and staff members, including White House florist Nancy Clarke.

"No matter what idea you come up with, Nancy always says, 'Great!' and goes right to work," the first lady said. "And, as you can tell, these are not easy things to assemble or to put together or to build, and they always look great."

In the coming weeks, the White House will host 25 holiday receptions and seven holiday dinners, for which 700 gallons of eggnog and 22,000 cookies will be prepared. About 60,000 members of the public will be coming through the house. And someone will need to assist the first lady with the more than 1 million holiday cards, designed by T. Allen Lawson of Maine, that she will send out this season.

NEW BEGINNINGS

As this is her last holiday season in

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Clean Technology Revolution Seen as Key to Climate . . .

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In July, 17 leaders of the major economies held a summit in Toyako, Japan, to discuss reducing greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to negotiations under the UNFCCC and identifying actions to be taken.

A declaration issued July 9 by leaders from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, Indonesia, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States acknowledged that climate change, energy security and sustainable development are linked, recognized the leadership role of all major economies — developed and developing — in combating climate change and highlighted the contribution of the major economies meetings to the UNFCCC.

At COP-14 in Poznan, parties aim to do the following:

- agree on an action plan and work programs for the final year of negotiations;

- make progress on issues that will enhance implementation of the treaty and the Kyoto Protocol, including capacity building for developing countries, reducing emissions from deforestation, technology transfer and adaptation to climate change; and

- advance understanding and common views on a “shared vision” for a new climate change regime, as proposed at COP-13 in Bali.

TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

Reducing emissions from the energy sector and other industrial processes, capturing and storing greenhouse gases and monitoring and measuring levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere all depend on technology and technology advances and on transferring such technologies from countries that have the technology to countries that do not.

Under the UNFCCC, industrialized countries are urged to take steps to promote, facilitate and finance the transfer of, or access to, environmentally sound technologies and the knowledge to use them to developing countries.

In Bali, the parties directed an expert group on technology transfer to study technology financing options, among other topics.

The United States has increased its budget for technology research and development from about \$1.7 billion in 2001 to well in excess of \$4 billion, Connaughton said during the briefing.

“But on top of that,” he added, “the U.S. now has about \$67 billion in new loan authority and loan guarantee authority for low-carbon [dioxide] technologies. That is the most dramatic and the largest commitment to helping finance low-carbon technologies anywhere on earth.”

President Bush also committed \$2 billion over the next three years to create a new international clean energy technology fund to accelerate the deployment of all forms of cleaner, more efficient technologies in developing nations like India and China.



UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer arrives in a solar taxi to the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland, December 4.

“We are hoping to raise at least \$10 billion for that fund to support international projects,” Connaughton said, “and we hope that will be a topic of discussion in Poznan.”

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Award to Burmese Cyberdissidents Highlights Problem of . . .

(Continued from page 8)

RSF, which has been awarding annual prizes since 1992, said in a December 4 press release that its goal is to alert the public to “the wide range of violations of the right to be kept informed and to inform others, and to the need for a commitment to supporting press freedom.” Each winner receives a cash award of 2,500 euros (\$3,225).

Cuban journalist Ricardo González Alfonso was recognized as “journalist of the year.” RSF said his long career has included establishing a training program for independent journalists, most of whom must otherwise be self-taught in his country, and launching *De Cuba* newspaper, which focused on topics largely ignored by the government and official news media, such as racism in Cuba and grass-roots efforts to encourage democratic change.

González Alfonso is one of 26 dissident journalists arrested in March 2003 for trying to promote peaceful change. The Cuban government has accused him of having a collection of books with “subversive subject matter.” The 58-year-old is reportedly in poor health and living in inhumane conditions as he serves a 20-year sentence.



Reporters Without Borders wants its awards to inform the public about challenges to free expression worldwide.

The third prize, for members of a news media outlet, was awarded to Radio Free NK, North Korea’s first dissident radio station, which broadcasts shortwave programs into the country from South Korea. RSF says North Korea’s regime has threatened to suspend dialogue with South Korea several times unless the station is banned. The North Korean staff is often threatened; South Korean police uncovered a plot to kill Radio Free NK’s manager, Kim Seong-min.

According to RSF, most North Koreans have access to radios that can be tuned only to government radio stations, and police routinely check radio sets to make sure they have not been altered to receive other

broadcasts. However, Kim and his staff have been able to break through the government’s information monopoly thanks to standard radio sets entering the country from China.

More information about Reporters Without Borders (<http://www.rsf.org/>) and its 2008 awardees is available on its Web site.

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Decking the Halls of America's Most Famous . . .

(Continued from page 11)

the White House, Mrs. Bush reflected on the eight years she spent living at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. One of her favorite spots in the house, she said, is the Red Room, which she calls "dramatic."

But the history of the house is her favorite part. "I've loved having the chance to learn about everyone who's lived here before ... through the ways they decorated the house, or the furniture they left, or the stories we know about what happened in different rooms," she said. Mrs. Bush noted that the stately East Room has seen bill signings, balls and slain presidents lying in state, but the first presidential spouse who lived at the White House, first lady Abigail Adams, used to hang her laundry there.

"One thing that we take from the life stories of all the people that lived here before us — certainly, I look at the lives of the women who lived here before — is encouragement, really, about our country, and the way we've been able to face the challenges," she said, adding that "we'll be able to face any challenges that come again."

Mrs. Bush leaves the White House with mixed emotions. "I'm sad to leave all the people that I've liked so much and that I've had a chance to build a friendship with over the years that I've been here. I'm sad to leave this beautiful house," she said. "But on the other hand, in the United States, you know when

you're elected president you get four years, or eight if you're re-elected. And when the end of the eight years comes, you know it's time to move on."

Also see Arts (<http://amlife.america.gov/amlife/arts/index.html>).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs,



Sue Harman drives a horse-drawn carriage delivering the official White House Christmas tree Sunday, Nov. 30, 2008, to the North Portico of the White House. The Fraser Fir tree, from River Ridge Farms in Crumpler, N.C., will be on display in the Blue Room of the White House for the 2008 Christmas season. White House photo by Chris Greenberg

Mrs. Bush said she is looking forward to the "afterlife," as she calls it, when she and President Bush can lead a more normal life, even if it means she has to do the cooking next holiday season.

"There's a great tradition of transition in the United States," she said.

See "A Red, White and Blue Christmas (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/holiday/2008/>)" on the White House Web site.

U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov> ♦

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Maryland Children Use Their Skills to Help . . .

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sad but grateful for her own blessings. "I want to help people when I grow up," she said. "I want to be a nurse."

During the 2007–2008 school year, the students designed, produced and sold their own Valentine's Day cards to raise funds for school construction in impoverished areas of Asia.

That effort raised only \$150 but was successful enough for the children to expand their line of greeting cards for another round of fundraising sales. The children also are learning how to build a coalition through efforts to partner with the school's Student Government Association to find ways for even more effective fundraising efforts.

Third-grade student Erin told America.gov that she believes her work will help stop poverty among children the world over, but added: "I know it won't happen right away."

The important thing, of course, is that she and her fellow students are taking the first steps.

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Land Ownership Rights Linked to Helping . . .

(Continued from page 6)

In combination with a larger agriculture and irrigation project, Mali is using \$4.2 million in MCC assistance to allocate and title newly irrigated land parcels that will help family farmers and women gardeners grow enough food to increase household incomes. The traditional herding families that use the area to be irrigated will help maintain corridors in the area for use by their livestock, she said.

Lesotho's MCC grant includes \$20.5 million to support new land-rights legislation and registration of land rights in urban and semiurban areas. The funds also will be used to create a modern land-administration authority. The coun-

try's new land-rights law also emphasizes gender considerations.

MCC's grant to Mozambique provides for more effective implementation of the country's land law by registering land rights by households and investors, and by bolstering the capacity of national, provincial and local land offices to manage records.

See "Habitat for Humanity: U.S. Volunteerism Addressing Global Poverty (<http://www.america.gov/st/foraid-english/2008/December/20081203174008CLwoD4.969424e-02.html?CP.rss=true>)."

A press release on the MCC-Habitat for Humanity forum

(<http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases/documents/release-111308-habitat.php>) and a fact sheet on land tenure and rights (<http://www.mcc.gov/documents/factsheet-111208-land.pdf>) are available on MCC's Web site.

Shelter Report 2008 (http://www.habitat.org/gov/take_action/secure_tenure_report.aspx) is available on the Habitat for Humanity Web site.

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