



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

U.S. Secretary of State Congratulates Liberian President-Elect

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will continue to support Liberian efforts to build a

hotly contested election to become Africa's first elected woman president, is scheduled to take office on January 16, 2006.



Liberia's President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf meets with Secretary Rice.

(State Dept. photo)

Rice's statement was issued a day after she met with Johnson-Sirleaf to discuss the historic opportunity that the people of Liberia have to build a new society.

The secretary noted Johnson-Sirleaf's pledge to promote accountability and transparency and called on all factions in the country to come together for national reconciliation.

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leased a statement December 16 congratulating Liberian President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on her victory and affirming that "the United States just, democratic and prosperous country." Johnson-Sirleaf, who defeated former football superstar George Weah in a

President Bush Sends Greetings for a Blessed and Merry Christmas



President George W. Bush

President Bush offered greetings for a blessed and merry Christmas, in a White House message issued December 19.

Christmas, celebrated by most Christians on December 25, commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

"On Christmas, we pray for freedom, justice, and peace on Earth," Bush said. Acts of kindness toward the less fortunate fulfill the spirit of the Christmas season, he said.

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Collaboration Promotes Youth Empowerment

On Monday, December 19, Ambassador Vicki Huddleston joined Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Hassan Abdella to recognize an innovative new program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), that is working with vulnerable Ethiopian youth through a collaboration between Save the Children USA and The Coca-Cola Company. At the ceremony, 20 young people who have received training in small business and life skills received certificates. Also present at the ceremony were USAID Mission Director Bill Hammink and East Africa Bottling S.C. General manager Citos Reyes.



Ambassador Huddleston speaks at the ceremony

The program's participants will be able to practice their new income-generating skills by selling Coca-Cola products in carts donated by the Coca-Cola Company. This initiative is linked to Save the Children USA's Positive Change: Children Communities and Care (PC3) Project, which offers ongoing support through psycho-social, education, health and nutrition, and livelihood-development interventions.♦



Ambassador Huddleston and Minister Hassan congratulate a program participant



Program participants describe their activities to Ambassador Huddleston

U.S. Secretary of State Congratulates Liberian . . .

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Following is the text of Rice's statement:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Secretary
December 16, 2005

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE CONDOLEEZZA RICE

Meeting with Liberian President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

I congratulate Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on her election and look forward to working closely with her as she assumes office next month. The people of Liberia in a free and fair

election have made an historic choice and the United States will continue to support Liberian efforts to build a just, democratic, and prosperous country.

President-elect Johnson-Sirleaf's pledge to promote accountability and transparency will ensure that the country's resources will be successfully invested to secure its future. The culture of impunity must end now. The United States reaffirms its commitment to rebuild the security sector, implement the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program, and promote U.S. investment to create jobs for Liberia's youth.

The United States will work with all Liberians and urge them to work together to build a peaceful future. Toward that end, it is imperative that all factions accept the election results, avoid inciting violence, and come together for national reconciliation. I call on George Weah and his supporters to peacefully pursue their concerns through the courts. We applaud the Liberian people for their commitment to Liberian democracy.

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

President Bush Sends Greetings for a Blessed and . . .

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tion, see Holidays (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/holidays.html).

Following is the text of the statement:

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 19, 2005

Christmas 2005

'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' which means, God with us.
Matthew 1:23

More than 2,000 years ago, a virgin gave birth to a Son, and the God of heaven came to

Earth. Mankind had received its Savior, and to those who had dwelled in darkness, the light of hope had come. Each Christmas, we celebrate that first coming anew, and we rejoice in the knowledge that the God who came to Earth that night in Bethlehem is with us still and will remain with us forever.

Christmas is a season of hope and joy, a time to give thanks for the blessing of Christ's birth and for the blessings that surround us every day of the year. We have much to be thankful for in this country, and we have a responsibility to help those in need. Jesus calls us to help others, and acts of kindness toward the less fortunate fulfill the spirit of the Christmas season.

On Christmas, we pray for freedom, justice, and peace on Earth. We remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and for our freedom, and we ask for God's blessing on their loved ones. We ask God to watch over all of our men and women in uniform. Many are serving in distant lands, helping to advance the cause of freedom and peace. Our entire Nation is grateful to them and prays for their safe return.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed and merry Christmas.

GEORGE W. BUSH

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

Presidential Term Limits Seen as Key to Democracy in Africa

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Limiting the time a leader may serve in office -- called term limits -- is a good idea, not only for Africa, but for all democracies because it ensures a fresh approach to problems as well as an antidote to corruption, says former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen.

"Even our own country, the United States, set a limit of two terms, or eight years, for the presidency after FDR (Franklin D. Roosevelt) won his fourth presidential election in 1944," Cohen told Washington File in a December 19 interview.

Despite FDR being a great war-time leader, many people who had known no other president in their adult lives thought 16 years was too much for one political leader to serve in a democracy, Cohen said, adding, "They were probably right."

In emerging regions like Africa, term limits are especially important, the diplomat explained, because "they help consolidate democracy. It has become a symbol of a successful political transition -- the way to show that you can peacefully move from one democratic administration to another."

Presidential limits also are critical because they "guarantee change" in policy and the people who surround the leader, Cohen said. Not only are new ideas and reforms brought in by a new administration but a political turnover also makes it more difficult for corruption to become entrenched because officeholders will leave when a new leader is elected.

Noting that countries like Tanzania, Ghana and Benin have shown the way with regular presidential transitions, Cohen said, "It would be a shame if Nigeria and Uganda [where there are movements under way to extend legally presidential terms for incumbents] did not do the same."

Cohen has been an observer of political transformations in Africa for more than four decades. He capped a 38-year career in the Foreign Service as assistant secretary of state for Africa from 1989-1993. During that time he presided over negotiations that ended conflict in Ethiopia, resulting in the independence of Eritrea. He also headed the U.S. team that supported negotiations leading to an end to Mozambique's civil war in 1992, among other Africa-related diplomatic assignments.

His remarks on term limits underscored similar comments made by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer at a briefing, December 5 in Washington. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2005/Dec/08-749713.html>).

Asked about rumors that Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo wanted to run for a third term, necessitating a change to the constitution, Frazer said, "He hasn't said that he's running for a third term. But our view is very clear that term limits should be respected."

Frazer added, "It's extremely important in Africa to respect term limits because it allows for the grooming of new leadership, [and] it supports the rule of law." In contrast, "societies... countries

that have had... 20- to 30-year presidents... haven't developed.

"Having a regular turnover of power actually ingrains, it institutionalizes, a democratic process," the official emphasized. "And so it's extremely important for us, for the United States ... to push African heads of state to respect their term limits. And we certainly would have that message for President Obasanjo should he indicate an interest in running for a third term."

Commenting on reports that President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda also is interested in extending his presidency after 19 years in power, Frazer said, "We've stated it very clearly ... we have a lot of concerns about the road that Uganda is on."

She said, "We spoke out...very clearly about President Museveni's bid for a third term. We didn't like it" despite the fact that the Ugandan president is going about it constitutionally.

A recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) on the strategic importance of Africa to the United States concurred with Frazer's political assessment. It stated: "If Museveni supports a change to the constitution in order to continue his presidency for yet another term, after more than 20 years in power, it could indicate a step backward in the development of multiparty democracy, the processes of succession, and strong sustainable democratic institutions." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2005/Dec/08-416161.html>).

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U.S., U.N. Helping to Avert Famine in Southern Africa

By Bruce Greenberg
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Food supplies are going to the nations of southern Africa, thanks to the cooperative actions of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.N. World Food Program (UNWFP), according to USAID Assistant Administrator Michael Hess and UNWFP Deputy Director Jean Jacques Grasse.

The two officials, briefing reporters December 19 in Washington, delivered an upbeat appraisal of the effort.

"May of '05 through April of '06 was the [projected] famine period ... and it's good to look at that and get a perspective on how long it takes to react to these crises," said Hess. "But because of the good efforts of [UNWFP] and their planning, and planning by the Food for Peace folks in USAID, we were able to get the food there in a timely manner to avert a crisis this year."

According to Hess, USAID and UNWFP have been instrumental in averting a famine in Africa's southern region despite a number of variables. "This is a chronic situation in southern Africa," Hess said, "lots of complications there that have to do with climate conditions, but also chronic poverty and AIDS that is endemic in this part of the world, that leads to serious problems almost every year, [along with] famine."

Hess also said the two agencies have contributed an additional 68,000 metric tons of food supplies, bringing the overall total to 370,000 metric tons going to the region.

"We estimate there are 12.5 million people who are at risk during this crisis. ... There are 10 million alone in just Zimbabwe and Malawi. So if you can help that many people out and avert a crisis, it's a very good thing," Hess said. "It's ... the partnership that we have with WFP and their mechanisms that really make this happen," he added.

Grasse acknowledged that the United States is by far the "largest donor worldwide" to the effort.

But, he added, "we don't feed everybody. The program has some people it feeds; others are being taken care of by NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], and the U.S. has a very large program also with a number of important NGOs in the region. We will have to feed -- between now and March-April [2006], particularly -- about 9 million people."

Both Grasse and Hess stressed the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has hit the nations of southern Africa particularly hard, as a primary contributor to food shortages.

High mortality rates mean there are fewer people to feed, but also

fewer farmers to till, plant and grow food staples. "It tells us," he said, "that HIV/AIDS is still ... creating major havoc in these countries."

"It's not a crisis that is going to disappear in the coming two years, unfortunately," he said. "Even if the weather improves and they don't suffer from the type of drought that they have been suffering recently, it will take time before the HIV/AIDS pandemic does reverse itself to something more acceptable, as it has in some countries, like Uganda. But we are not yet there."

In response to a reporter's question about relief efforts in Zimbabwe, a country in spiraling political and economic disintegration, Grasse said his organization recently had signed a memo of understanding with President Robert Mugabe's government to allow unrestricted food distribution.

"We have good working relations with the [Mugabe] government, in the sense that they have agreed with us on how we can do ... distribution so that we know where the food goes and there is a clear agreement with the government that they won't interfere," he said.

"Now, if you want to understand what kind of problems we are having to cope with in that part of the world: you have life expectancy which at best is 42 years, and that's in Mozambique; at worst,

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Senegal's Democracy Helped by U.S. Diplomacy, Scholar Says

By Bruce Greenberg and Jim Fisher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writers

Washington -- The Senegalese elections of 2000 were a successful exercise in democracy, in part because of U.S. diplomatic efforts, says former U.S. Ambassador to Senegal Dane Smith.

Smith, who is now an adjunct professor at American University, spoke November 18 at the 48th annual meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA) in Washington. He examined the diplomatic role of the United States from 1996 to 1999 in promoting the establishment in Senegal of "a neutral mechanism to monitor and oversee Senegalese elections."

Smith said the historic victory of Abdoulaye Wade and his Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS) in a "fair and transparent" election in 2000 "illustrates the potential role an external power may be able to play, in combination with domestic factors, in promoting democracy."

Commenting on the pressure to reform the electoral process in Senegal after bad electoral outcomes in the 1990s, Smith said, "My mandate as U.S. ambassador to Senegal, when I arrived in August 1996, strongly emphasized promoting further democratization."

One of his first acts, he told an ASA panel, was "to organize a U.S. Mission Democracy Committee with representatives from the embassy, USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] and USIS

[U.S. Information Service]. After its organizational meetings, the committee convened in early December [1996] after the election



Dane Smith
Former U.S. Ambassador to Senegal

results were announced and after protests by the opposition."

The committee "reached a clear consensus that the regional elections marked a deterioration in electoral administration," Smith said.

Although the U.S. government had no formal recommendations, Smith said, he told Senegalese officials the government should create an independent electoral commission.

The U.S. government continued to nudge the Senegalese, he said, helped by a visit in March 1997

from first lady Hillary Clinton, who met with President Abdou Diouf, encouraging him "to seek consensus with the opposition on the electoral process."

Finally, in mid-August 1997, the government issued a statement announcing Diouf's proposal for a National Elections Observatory (ONEL) to monitor and supervise elections. It quickly was passed by the National Assembly and promulgated, Smith said.

While the ONEL was not an independent electoral commission, the former ambassador said he "viewed the new body as an important step forward and immediately wrote the president to congratulate him." The U.S. government also helped fund the new transparency effort through a \$200,000 grant from USAID.

Again using personal diplomacy as the first lady had done, President Clinton made a two-day visit to Senegal in April 1998, the final stop in a six-nation visit to Africa. In his April 1 meeting with Diouf at the presidential palace, Clinton expressed the hope for transparent elections.

In the May 1998 elections, ONEL played a positive role, reflected in the 1999 State Department human rights report, which said, "The ONEL significantly improved the level of transparency of the May 1998 ... elections, despite persistent flaws in the system."

The ONEL ensured a free and open process in the run-up to the 1998

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Africa Top Priority for Aid, Attention, U.N. Official Says

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations
Correspondent

United Nations -- Humanitarian operations in the Darfur region of Sudan are on the brink of collapse because of the increasing number of attacks on humanitarian workers and camps, the senior U.N. humanitarian relief official said December 19.

Briefing the Security Council on Africa, U.N. Humanitarian Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland highlighted three crises on the continent, emphasizing that "the biggest drama of our time is Africa, not the Middle East, not Europe" and urging the international community "to do more."

Egeland focused on Darfur; Uganda, the food crisis in Zimbabwe, southern Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is cutting off humanitarian access to local people and refugees.

Aid workers in Darfur are becoming increasingly desperate, Egeland said. The humanitarian operation that cares for 3 million people could "all end tomorrow. It is on the brink of collapse."

The humanitarian crisis is being

caused by an increasing number of attacks against humanitarian workers, no progress in peace talks and "outrageous political and military leaders" who increasingly fight each other, he said. With attacks from groups inside Sudan on Chadian villages, the problems of Darfur are spilling into neighboring countries, Egeland said.

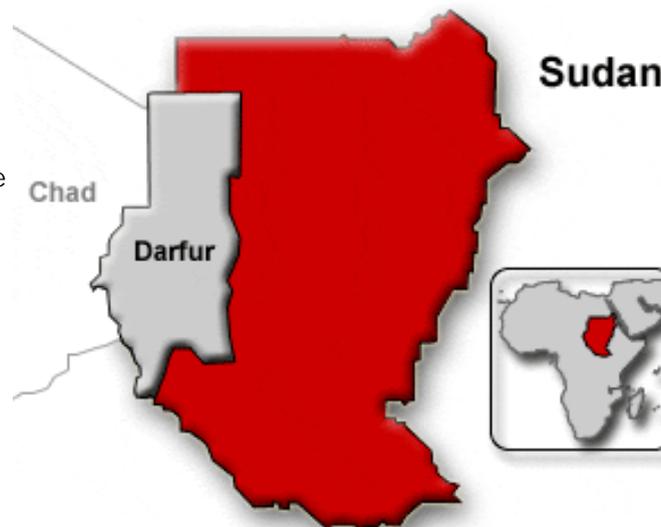
He suggested that a panel of experts be set up to investigate "how it can be that the little groups can create havoc in [the] region and are not stopped" and find out who is providing funding, weapons and other resources to the LRA.

One country that should be able to feed itself is Zimbabwe, Egeland also remarked.

"Instead, aid agencies expect to have to feed between 3 [million] and 5 million people in Zimbabwe in 2006."

For information on U.S. policy, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>) and Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/index.html>).

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The relief coordinator called the LRA's kidnapping of children and turning them into fighters as a "20-year-old moral outrage" which has spread from northern Uganda into southern Sudan and the DRC, and has paralyzed the humanitarian operations that are trying to help millions in the region.

"The way it is now, it cannot continue," Egeland said. "We need to have more action. We need to have it now."

Americans Celebrate Christmas in Diverse Ways

By Michael Jay Friedman
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Christmas, celebrated by most Christians on December 25, commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Americans, like many of the world's peoples, have developed their own Christmas traditions and observances, and these have changed greatly over time.

Today, most Americans blend religious and secular customs with their own family traditions. Thus, even though Christmas is for many Americans a religious occasion, the federal courts have upheld its status as a legal holiday. As one court reasoned, "by giving federal employees a paid vacation day on Christmas, the government is doing no more than recognizing the cultural significance of the holiday."

DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS

The early New England Puritans frowned on the often boisterous Christmas celebrations they witnessed in Britain. In 1659, the Massachusetts colony briefly criminalized observance of the day and Christmas remained a regular workday in much of New England and Pennsylvania. Other parts of British North America, however, celebrated with gusto, with costumed revelers passing door to door and receiving small gifts of food and drink.

The modern, more commercialized Christmas began to emerge in the 19th century with the new custom of purchasing gifts for young children. Seasonal "Christmas shopping" began to assume economic

importance.

Other Christmas traditions similarly began during the 19th century. Santa Claus -- derived from the Dutch Sinter Klaas and the German Saint Nicholas -- assumed the persona of a jolly dispenser of gifts and pilot of a reindeer-drawn sleigh through such works as the 1823 poem "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" and an 1863 Harper's Weekly portrait by the illustrator Thomas Nast. Many organizations, from the Salvation Army charitable organization to the Coca-Cola Company, since have employed Santa's image.

According to legend, Christmas trees date back to Martin Luther, the 16th century

German cleric whose critique of established Catholic Church practices precipitated the Protestant Reformation. According to legend, Luther bought home to his children and lit with candles a fir tree one Christmas Eve to remind them of the wonders of God's creation.

The custom spread to Britain and the United States in the 19th century. Today, many contemporary Americans either purchase a cut, fresh evergreen tree or a reusable aluminum and plastic model. Placed in the family living room, the Christmas tree is decorated with lights and various ornaments, typically small orbs depicting angels and other figures associated



with the holiday. In some families, Christmas gifts appear under the tree on the morning of December 25, deposited there by family members, or, as smaller children might believe, delivered by Santa Klaus after landing reindeer and sleigh on the roof and traversing the chimney -- all after the children are fast asleep!

Mass-produced Christmas cards began to appear in the last quarter of the 19th century. In 1996, Americans purchased and mailed an estimated 2.6 billion Christmas cards. These might depict religious scenes or else convey more secular, often humorous, messages. With the rise of the Internet, electronically transmitted "e-cards" are an increasingly popular option.

CONTEMPORARY OBSERVANCES

With Christmas shopping vitally important to some retailers, Christmas has expanded into a "season" of its own. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed moving the Thanksgiving holiday to extend the shopping period between that holiday and Christmas. Today, the day after Thanksgiving is known as "Black Friday." An important shopping day (some stores open hours before their normal time), it pushes some businesses into profitability, or "in the black," and can account for a substantial proportion of annual profits.

This extended Christmas season is about far more than shopping. For many Americans, it is a period of general good will and an occasion for charitable and volunteer work. To some extent, non-Christian holidays celebrated at roughly the

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Americans Celebrate Christmas in Diverse Ways

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same time of year -- most prominently the African-American Kwanzaa and the Jewish Hanukkah -- blend into a broader "holiday season."

Seasonal popular entertainment includes a number of perennial favorites. Popular telecasts of the motion pictures *A Miracle on 34th Street* (1945) and *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) have been joined in recent years by *A Christmas Story* (1983), based on the tales of the radio raconteur Jean Shepherd.

Christmas-themed animated programs often appear on television. Some, like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, date to the mid-1960s, and are enjoyed by today's children and their nostalgic parents alike.

An increasing number of radio stations now adjust their formats to feature Christmas music, sometimes exclusively, during the four



weeks to six weeks before the holiday. Live and recorded performances of such classical favorites as the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* and J.S. Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" peak during the weeks before Christmas.

The holiday's original religious meaning remains for many its most important element. Some congregations create manger scenes -- dioramas of the stable where Jesus was born, complete with figurines representing the infant Jesus and those present at his birth. Many churches hold well-attended Christmas Eve candlelight or midnight services. Some include a Mass of the Nativity or a dramatization of the birth of Jesus.

As with so many aspects of U.S. cultural life, Christmas in the United States reflects the values of a free and diverse people.

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

Senegal's Democracy Helped by U.S. Diplomacy, . . .

(Continued from page 6)

and 2000 elections, Smith said. "Diouf didn't like the pressure, but he responded to it in a creative way," he concluded.

However, the real test for ONEL came in the 2000 presidential elections, Smith said. In early 2000, "voting took place in an orderly way," and Wade eventually triumphed over Diouf in runoff elections.

In the end, "the character of Abdou Diouf was also decisive in the

smooth process" of power sharing, Smith pointed out. "Diouf had 19 years in power and was giving hints that he might follow the example of his mentor, Leopold Senghor, who resigned after his 20th year.

"Even though he apparently expected victory, he moved in a timely manner to accept the verdict of the system he had done so much to create and thereby gained the permanent respect of the rest of the democratic world," Smith concluded.

For information on U.S. policy in the region, see Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/>).

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

Online Dialogue Highlights U.S. Commitment to Women's Rights

Washington – Success for any country depends on the participation and contributions of all members of society, says Charlotte Ponticelli, the State Department's senior coordinator for international women's issues.

"The promotion of women's rights is inextricably linked to the broader aim of promoting the universal aspirations of freedom and democracy worldwide," Ponticelli said in a live webchat December 15.

Ponticelli participated in the online dialogue "Working for Women Worldwide: The U.S. Commitment" as the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP) continued its observance of Human Rights Week.

During the one-hour webchat, Ponticelli engaged participants on issues such as women's advancement in leadership positions, U.S. efforts to support women in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the challenge of promoting gender equality as a universal value.

Several participants asked how the United States could promote gender equality programs without appearing to seek to impose "western" values on others.

Ponticelli responded by stressing the importance of listening and learning from the women she meets each week, adding that: "We in the U.S. do not pretend we have all the answers ... We do not

seek ever to impose reform — that would never work."

Reforms and cultural change emerge from the grassroots and cannot be imposed by external forces, she said.



Charlotte Ponticelli
U.S. State Department's senior coordinator for international women's issues

The interactive format of the webchat allowed participants to engage in a dialogue with Ponticelli on the U.S. efforts to foster women's rights overseas, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other participants asked about the U.S. response to trafficking in persons and the role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting women worldwide.

Asked by a participant what she liked most about her job, Ponticelli

responded that "without a doubt, the best part of my job is the people I meet — the ... hard-working 'sisters' I have found all over the world."

Ponticelli recognized the courage of Iraqi women as they vote in free parliamentary elections and pointed out that "It is particularly fitting that we are having this dialogue as we observe Human Rights Week, for women's rights are human rights."

The full text (http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats/Webchat_Archive.html) of the webchat is available on the USINFO Web site.

Ponticelli's biography (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/19419.htm>) is available on the State Department Web site.

IIP conducts interactive Internet chats on a variety of topics. Additional information (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>) on those webchats is available on USINFO.

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

Bush Proposal for New Orleans Recovery Mounts to \$3 Billion

Washington – The Bush administration is advocating a \$1.5 billion federal commitment to rebuild the levees of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The funds would pay for repairing hurricane damage and for enhancing the city's protection against future storms.

"The levee system will be better and stronger than it ever has been in the history of New Orleans," said Donald Powell, the federal coordinator for Gulf Coast rebuilding, at a White House briefing December 15.

The administration already has committed \$1.6 billion to repair the levees in time for the beginning of the next hurricane season June 1, 2006, and to correct design flaws that were discovered after the levees

breached and flooded much of the low-lying city. That work already is under way, Powell said.

The additional spending proposed December 15 would take the levees to a higher standard, armoring them with concrete and stone and creating a better pumping system to remove water from the city during storms of the future.

"If a hurricane such as Katrina ever visited New Orleans again, I'm convinced that the work that the [Army] Corps [of Engineers] would be doing as I've described will pre-

vent any catastrophic flooding," Powell said.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin also attended the briefing, expressing support for the levee fortification.

"These levees will be as high as 17 feet [5.2 meters] in some ar-

ing back into the area," Powell said, adding that the safety of the city in the future is a major concern. "When will the levees be rebuilt, and how will they be rebuilt?"

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will lead the levee reconstruction

effort. Lieutenant General Carl Strock said the Bush administration proposal also dedicates \$250 million to the restoration and protection of the wetlands that lie between New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

"The reason those are so important is that if we can prevent the waters from surging into those canals, then we can reduce a lot of the stresses on that part of the levee system," said Strock.



People walk on a flooded road, after being evacuated by boat from more heavily flooded areas of New Orleans, Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina. August 30, 2005.

Photograph by James Nielsen/AFP/Getty Images

vent any catastrophic flooding," Nagin said. "These levees will be fortified with rock and concrete; we've never had that before."

Powell said that the levee fortification plan could act as a catalyst for other rebuilding in the battered city. Stronger, higher levees will help ease the fear that New Orleans could suffer another catastrophic flood, a fear that Powell said he found widespread among displaced city residents.

"Everything focused on the levees – jobs, housing, business mov-

Only in recent decades have environmental scientists come to recognize the critical role that wetlands play in protecting low-lying coastal areas from ocean surges.

For additional information on the storm and its aftermath, see Hurricane Recovery (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/hurricane_katrina.html).

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

Bush Says Iraqi Election a "Major Milestone" Toward Democracy

Washington -- President Bush welcomed Iraq's first election for a permanent government since the 2003 removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, saying the December 15 voter turnout was significant, and was not accompanied by a high level of violence.

At the White House, the president met with five Iraqi out-of-country voters who had cast their ballots

He also thanked the international community and U.S. Embassy personnel in Iraq for their work in facilitating the election.

The president assured Iraqi voters that the United States will complete its mission in Iraq, which he said is to help the country become able to sustain and defend itself, and to become a democracy that serves as an example to its

broader representation, 45 of the seats are reserved for political parties whose ethnic, religious or political support is spread over more than one of Iraq's 18 provinces, and one-third of the candidates in each party are women.

The full text (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051215-2.html>) of President Bush's remarks is available on the White House Web site.

At the White House press briefing, press secretary Scott McClellan said the election is "a historic day for the people of Iraq, the Middle East and the world," and "a historic day for the advance of freedom." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-eng-lish&y=2005&m=December&x=20051215162918xjsnommis0.1656458&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>.)

He said Sunni participation in the vote "appears to be large," and significantly higher than during the January election for the country's interim government.

McClellan said it would take time for the results to come in before a national government can be formed, noting that, "it takes a two-thirds vote of the assembly to choose the presidency council."

He also warned that in the coming days more terrorist attacks should be expected "to try to spread fear and chaos and violence." McClellan said such attacks "can only shake our will," and cannot defeat the process in and of themselves.♦



President George W. Bush is joined by Samir Sumaidaie, Iraq Ambassador to the United Nations, in the Oval Office Friday, Dec. 16, 2005. The Ambassador holds up his finger, dyed purple to signify his vote yesterday in his country's parliamentary elections. White House photo by Paul Morse

earlier in the day and expressed his pleasure at seeing Iraqis "accomplish this major milestone in the march to democracy."

Bush congratulated the Iraqi people for their courage in "defying the terrorists and refusing to be cowed into not voting," adding "I believe freedom is universal."

neighbors, and an ally in the War on Terror.

Approximately 15 million Iraqi citizens, at home and abroad, are eligible to vote in the election. At stake are all 275 seats in Iraq's Council of Representatives. Those who are elected will serve four-year terms and will choose the country's presidency council. To ensure

Iraqis in U.S. Cast Votes for Iraq's National Parliament

By Tanya Salseth Feau
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- An estimated 240,000 Iraqis living in the United States are eligible to vote in their country's landmark December 15 elections, and have the chance to participate -- albeit from a distance -- via absentee ballots.

Eight voting stations in California, Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee and Virginia opened at 9 a.m. local time December 13 to give Iraqi nationals the opportunity to participate in the election of the first



A Kurdish Iraqi celebrates after placing her ballot in the box after voting in McLean, Virginia Photo AP

fully constitutional government in their nation's history.

Iraqi expatriates have three days to cast absentee ballots in elections for the 275-member Iraq Council of Representatives, which will select the next prime minister and president of Iraq. More than 200 political parties, representing some 7,000 candidates, are on the ballot.

"While the U.S. government is not organizing this process," a December 12 State Department press re-

lease noted, "we support the enfranchisement of Iraqis in the United States."

Iraqi voters who came to the polling station in McLean, Virginia, December 13 said they were excited and hopeful about the elections. Many came dressed in their best suits; some had driven hundreds of miles to get there.

One voter sported a homemade hat made out of tiny Iraqi flags and held a sign reading "Yes, Freedom. No, Terrorists. Thanks USA." Others held up Iraqi flags or posters of their preferred candidates.

"Even if I had to walk 300 miles, I would come vote," said Goran Rahim, a 22-year-old Kurd who has been living in Reston, Virginia, since he left Iraq with his family six years ago.

"If the right people come to power, things are going to change," he said.

Rahim, who has been studying international politics and dreams of becoming a diplomat, sees possibilities in a new government for his home country.

"These past three years were years of change, but it's getting better," he said. "People have jobs now, they have freedom. They can say what they want.

"People believe their vote can change things."

Voters living in Iraq will go to the polls on December 15, under tight security.

Speaking about the Iraq elections to the Philadelphia World Affairs Council December 12, President Bush said: "Millions of Iraqis will put their lives on the line this Thursday in the name of liberty and democracy. And 160,000 of America's finest are putting their lives on the line so Iraqis can succeed. The American and Iraqi people share the same interests and the same enemies." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=December&x=20051212145609ndy-blehs6.379336e-02&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>).

To involve Iraqis living abroad in the electoral process, the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), an autonomous, non-partisan electoral entity made up of Iraqi nationals, set up voting stations in 15 countries.

The United States, Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Sweden, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates were all chosen by the transitional government of Iraq to host polling centers, based on their large concentrations of Iraqi expatriates.

For additional information on the elections, see Iraq's Political Process (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/iraq/political_process.html).

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U.N. Establishes Commission to Help Countries Recover from War

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations
Correspondent

United Nations -- The General Assembly and Security Council acted concurrently December 20 to establish a Peacebuilding Commission to help countries manage the difficult transition from war to peace. The creation of the new U.N. entity was mandated by world leaders during the U.N.'s 60th anniversary summit. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2005/Sep/16-395942.html>).

The resolutions establish the Peacebuilding Commission as an intergovernmental advisory board to marshal resources and advise on strategies to help nations keep from slipping back into war and chaos. The 31-nation commission will focus attention on reconstruction and institution-building efforts, support sustainable development strategies and improve coordination within and outside the United Nations.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said the United States was pleased to support the resolutions establishing the commission in the Security Council and the General Assembly.

"We must now turn our attention to seeing that the Peacebuilding Commission in fact now realizes its potential to make an important contribution to the work of the Security Council to build sustainable peace in the aftermath of immediate threats to international peace and security," Bolton said. The ambassador added that

"there's a difference between passing a resolution ... and making it work in reality. The hard part now begins and we're committed to try and do what we can to make it a successful advisory body for the Security Council."

HELPING COUNTRIES BUILD PEACE

The work of the United Nations to help countries build peace has intensified in recent years as the complexity and scope of post-



conflict challenges have increased. The U.N. has provided humanitarian assistance, linked longer-term reconstruction projects and recovery efforts, and, in some instances such as East Timor and Kosovo, administered territories until elections could be held. But the world organization, and especially the Security Council which is responsible for international peace and security, lacked a mechanism for overall strategy and coordination to help countries recovering from wars.

The commission will focus attention on reconstruction and institution building, improve coordination

within the U.N. system and with others providing assistance, work to ensure predictable funding and keep the international community engaged in the recovery effort. It also will bring together the U.N.'s broad experience in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, human rights and rule of law.

Calling the action historic, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the commission "must be a beginning, not an end."

"While many parts of the United Nations have been involved in the peacebuilding process, the system has lacked a dedicated entity to oversee the process, ensure its coherence or sustain it through the long haul," Annan said. "This resulted in fractured peacebuilding operations with no single forum for all the relevant actors to come together, share information, and develop a common strategy."

According to the resolutions, the new commission will become involved at the request of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the secretary-general, or member states on the verge of lapsing or relapsing into conflict.

COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

The Peacebuilding Commission will be composed of seven Security Council members, including the five permanent members -- China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States; seven members of ECOSOC elected from regional groups; five top contribu-

(Continued on page 21)

U.S. Challenges European Union Criticism on Food Aid Issues

By John Schaffer
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- U.S. officials have lashed out at the Europe Union (EU) for distorting food aid issues at global trade negotiations in Hong Kong, calling their position "irresponsible" and urging EU trade ministers to start negotiating broader global agricultural reform.

The food issue has become central to the trade negotiations, scheduled to conclude at the end of 2006, because many developing country food producers believe that government agricultural supports from industrial countries are preventing developing country farmers from competing in world markets.

The European Union has charged that the United States' practice of buying grain from U.S. farmers and giving it away as food aid amounts to a subsidy. U.S. officials say European food assistance has dropped significantly and to change the U.S. program would be to deprive starving people of much-needed food.

The bilateral dispute threatens to block further progress in the December 13-18 Hong Kong meeting, and nongovernmental organizations have raised concern that the disagreement could result in a decline in food and disaster assistance.

Andrew Natsios, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, briefed reporters December 14 in Hong Kong and called on the EU to get its facts straight.

"The fact of the matter is the European Union does some very good work in development, but in terms of food assistance, they are missing in action," he said.

Natsios explained that since 1995 EU food aid has plummeted from about 4 million metric tons annually to 1.5 million. That reduction either has been made up by the United States or has not been made up at all, he said. In contrast, U.S. food assistance, which accounts for nearly half of all emergency food aid donations in all emergencies around the world, has remained unchanged at about the 4 million ton level annually, he said.

Natsios disputed EU claims that U.S. food assistance is distorting global prices. In 2004, he said, "U.S. food aid accounted for less than 2 percent of U.S. agricultural trade. So it does not have any effect in global prices."

In contrast, he said, the EU practice of using cash to make purchases in regional markets does drive up prices, which has the potential to worsen a famine situation.

"It is in fact a very dangerous intervention in a famine to go in and buy food in the middle of an emergency, which is caused by a collapse of supply," Natsios said.

He said EU insistence that the United States move to 100 percent local purchase is "an irresponsible position. I wish the European Union would move away from that position for themselves from a humanitarian and developmental perspective, not from a trade perspective."

This insistence on a cash food aid system has blocked other progress at the Hong Kong meeting, U.S. officials say. And the key to breaking the current deadlock in the talks lies squarely on broader agriculture issues – domestic subsi-

dies, export competition and tariffs, they say.

The USAID administrator also called regrettable the EU decision not to involve its food aid experts in the trade negotiations.

"We don't think these kinds of situations, these sorts of negotiations, should be the place that life or death issues should be decided on assistance issues dealing with food aid, unless experts are at the table, and they are not," Natsios said.

As important as food aid is, liberalization of global trade on a broad range of issues in the current round of trade talks would do much more for the economic needs of developing countries, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Karan Bhatia said at the same briefing.

A transcript (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Transcripts/2005/December/Briefing_by_USAID_Administrator_Andrew_Natsios_Deputy_US_Trade_Representative_Karan_Bhatia,_WTO_Hong_Kong_Ministerial.html) of the briefing by Natsios and Bhatia can be accessed at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Web site.

For ongoing coverage of the WTO talks in Hong Kong, see WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/wto/wto_hong_kong.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>)♦

U.S. Aims To Double Aid to Poor Countries To Build Trade Capacity

By Bruce Odyssey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States plans to more than double its contributions to help least-developed countries build the capacity to engage in global trade, U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman has announced.

In a December 14 statement to the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in Hong Kong, Portman said the United States, already the top donor, would spend \$2.7 billion in grants per year by 2010 for trade capacity building, up from \$1.3 billion in 2005.

"As partners with developing countries, and particularly the least developed, we share the goal of reducing poverty and building their capacity for trade," Portman said.

As he pledged to get approval from the U.S. Congress to spend this money on trade capacity building, Portman added that even more important for developing countries is a WTO agreement on opening markets by lowering tariffs and cutting subsidies.

"Expanding markets, eliminating trade-distorting subsidies, is the core," he said. "And the aid for trade announced today is a complement to that, not a substitute for it."

Portman heads the U.S. delegation to the December 13-18 Hong Kong meeting where ministers from 149 member countries were struggling

to achieve some progress in the long-stalled WTO negotiations, formally called the Doha Development Agenda.

Later the same day Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Peter Allgeier told reporters in Hong Kong that the United States was continuing

quota-free treatment, importing countries will still need to protect their economies with safeguards against import surges, he said.

Also, he said, such special treatment might not be appropriate for a country that is already a highly competitive supplier of some product, especially if such treatment would hurt another poor country.

Allgeier cited evidence from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank demonstrating that the United States already has the most open economy among developed countries to imports of end products from the least-developed countries.

Accessible at the Office of the U.S.



US Trade Representative Rob Portman speaks at a press conference at the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Hong Kong, 14 December 2005. (AFP/File/Peter Parks)

to work with other countries at the WTO on issues related to duty-free, quota-free treatment for many imports from the least-developed countries.

Such special treatment would have to be part of a final Doha round agreement, not a separate deal, in order to get support in the U.S. Congress, he said. Considerable time is still needed anyway, he said, to figure out how to fit such special treatment in the WTO system.

Allgeier mentioned some other issues that need to be worked out. While offering duty-free,

Trade Representative (USTR) Web site are transcripts of Portman's address (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Transcripts/2005/December/US_Trade_Representative_Rob_Portman_-_Opening_Statement,_WTO_Plenary_Session,_Hong_Kong_Convention_Exhibition_Centre.html) and Allgeier's press conference (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Transcripts/2005/December/Briefing_by_Deputy_US_Trade_Representative_Peter_Allgeier_-_Core_Negotiation_Areas,_Hong_Kong_Convention_Exhibition_Centre.html)

(Continued on page 18)

U.S. Wants Government Wide Coordination to Aid Crisis States

Washington -- The newly announced presidential directive on foreign reconstruction and stabilization assistance will establish an entity analogous to the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, a State Department official says.

The directive envisages creation of "a joint operations capability across civilian agencies and with the military on issues related to conflict," says Ambassador Carlos Pascual, coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization at the State Department. "I think it's useful to draw the analogy to the Joint Staff and military where interoperability amongst services is absolutely crucial to achieve a U.S. government strategy within a given theater."

At a Washington news briefing December 14, Pascual said the presidential directive mandates creation of "an integrated capability among U.S. government departments and agencies for stabilization and reconstruction. It doesn't replace any given agency or its function," just as the Joint Chiefs of Staff have not replaced the branches of the U.S. military.

The office, which Pascual directs, has been in existence since the summer of 2004, but the presidential directive formally establishing it was signed on December 7 and announced December 14 by the White House. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=December&x=20051214155707adynned0.426037&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>.)

Pascual said that even though it is located within the State Department, the office is actually an interagency creation to which individual agencies commit personnel to accomplish the necessary coordination across the entire U.S. government.

Asked what was new in the presidential directive, Pascual said that it offers a clear mandate by saying the secretary of state has the responsibility to lead and coordinate an integrated U.S. government response.

Pascual said that although the focus of the presidential directive is internal to the functions of the U.S. government, its effect will be international.

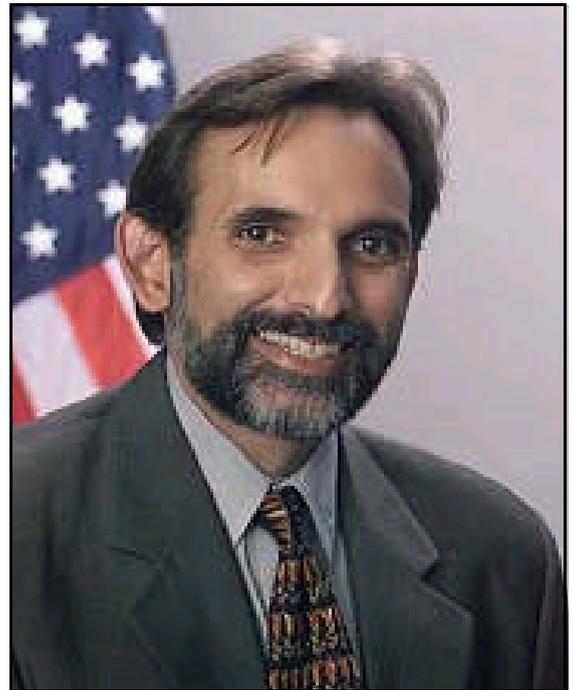
"This is not a mechanism to facilitate unilateral action on the part of the United States," Pascual said. A state recovering from conflict needs "massive international involvement and engagement, and resources, and skills, and capabilities and addressing security issues," he said.

His office will be responsible for creating an organized and strategically planned response as the U.S. contribution to the overall international response to a state in crisis.

As for concern by international humanitarian organizations that U.S. humanitarian assistance would be delivered as a package along with U.S. military involvement, Pascual

said the issue needs to be pursued actively.

He said terrorists have made the nongovernmental organization community's traditional neutrality and impartiality "meaningless, because if you're from the outside and you have values against what



Ambassador Carlos Pascual

those terrorist groups are actually trying to do, you're still unsafe. So what do you do?"

The transcript (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/58085.htm>) of Pascual's briefing is available on the State Department Web site.

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

WTO Success Depends on EU Farm Tariff Cuts, U.S. Official Says

Washington -- The chance of success for long-stalled World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations depends on the European Union (EU) changing its position on reducing agricultural tariffs, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns says.

Shortly after arriving back in Washington December 19, Johanns told reporters by Webcast about the grueling WTO ministerial meeting in Hong Kong that ended a few hours earlier.

While the ministers agreed to set a 2013 deadline for eliminating agricultural export subsidies, he said, they left the most difficult challenges for 2006, the year that the negotiations, formally called the Doha Development Agenda, are scheduled to conclude. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/Archive/2005/Dec/18-997695.html>).

"Hong Kong left the hard work for 2006," Johanns said. "Let's just be blunt about it."

The best deal many developing countries could get from the Doha round is more market access for

their goods, especially agricultural goods, he said.

The Doha negotiations have languished almost since they were launched in 2001, with an impasse over politically difficult agriculture issues blocking progress in most other areas.

Although the United States proposed in October sharp reduction in agricultural tariffs and eventual elimination of domestic support payments, the subsequent EU proposal offers little or no real additional market access, analyses show.

"We need movement by the European Union," Johanns said. "They really do hold the key to the future success of this round. We need to see them move forward in market access."

The Hong Kong ministers' declaration sets four bands of agricultural tariffs for negotiation, from highest to lowest, but sets no target for the magnitude of cuts. The United States had pressed for deep cuts, deepest at the highest level.

The declaration has no specific lan-

guage on limiting the number of sensitive products excluded from tariff cuts. The United States had pressed for a limit of 1 percent of products, as defined by the tariff schedule; the EU had sought 8 percent. The final text (http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min05_e/min05_18dec_e.htm) of the ministers' declaration can be accessed at the WTO Web site.

A press release (http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_10B?contentid=2005/12/0558.xml) about Johanns' meetings in Hong Kong with other countries' agriculture ministers can be accessed at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Web site.

For additional information on the WTO ministerial, see WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting (http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/wto/wto_hong_kong.html).

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U.S. Aims To Double Aid to Poor Countries To Build . . .

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n_Centre_T.html), a press release (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2005/December/US_Agrees_to_More_Than_Double_Contributions_to_Aid_for_Trade_by_2010_-_Already_the_Largest_Single

Country_Provider,_US_Will.html) on the aid proposal and a fact sheet (http://www.ustr.gov/assets/Document_Library/Fact_Sheets/2005/asset_upload_file553_8587.pdf).

For ongoing coverage of the WTO talks in Hong Kong, see WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting

(http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/wto/wto_hong_kong.html).

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First Beneficiaries Receive Help Under Bush Malaria Initiative

More than half a million Angolans will be the first recipients of assistance under President Bush's Malaria Initiative, the White House announced December 15.

The initiative, announced June 30, aims to reduce malaria deaths by 50 percent in targeted African countries by the end of 2010. The United States assumed responsibility for fighting malaria in 15 countries under the initiative, beginning with Angola, Tanzania and Uganda. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2005/Jul/01-739276.html>) and fact sheet (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=June&x=20050630164856sssille0.4888422&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html>).

Later in December, at least 130,000 children and pregnant women in Tanzania also will receive help in fighting malaria, which remains Africa's Number 1 killer disease.

The Bush anti-malaria initiative will provide indoor spraying in Angola and large-scale distribution of bednets in Tanzania.

For additional information, see U.S. Aid to Africa (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/aid_to_africa.html).

Following is the text of the White House announcement:

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 15, 2005

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

Beginning this week, more than 500,000 Angolans will benefit from indoor spraying to prevent malaria and be the first beneficiaries to receive assistance under the

three target countries, Angola, Tanzania, and Uganda. The U.S. Government, under USAID's leadership, is also extending this approach to its existing malaria programs and will continue to work with the international community to prevent loss of life due to malaria in Africa.

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President's Malaria Initiative. Large scale distribution of bednets begins later this month in Tanzania to protect at least 130,000 children and pregnant women from contracting the disease. Rapid implementation of the President's Initiative will reduce the terrible burden of malaria in the

U.S. Research Produces Plant-Grown Anthrax Vaccine

Research funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has produced a safe and effective way to make large quantities of vaccine for anthrax, a top bioterrorism threat.

According to a December 19 press release from the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, 360 million doses of anthrax vaccine could be grown inexpensively and safely with one acre [.4 hectare] of tobacco plants.

Mice immunized with a vaccine produced in a UCF laboratory through the genetic engineering of tobacco plants survived lethal doses of anthrax administered later by NIH researchers.

"Anthrax vaccine is very much in need, primarily because of bioterrorism concerns," said UCF professor Henry Daniell, whose laboratory produced the vaccine.

Current production of the vaccine involves an expensive fermentation process that can cause harmful side effects such as inflammation, flu-like symptoms and rashes. Fear of such side effects caused many U.S. military personnel to defy orders to receive inoculation starting in 1998, and the mandatory vaccination program subsequently was suspended.

Seeking a safer and more effective alternative, Daniell and colleagues injected the vaccine gene into tobacco cells, and grew the cells for several weeks.

Tests showed vaccine taken from the plants was just as potent as the one produced through fermentation but lacks the bacterial toxin that can cause harmful side effects.

Researchers then injected the vaccine into mice to immunize them against anthrax and sent the mice

to NIH labs, where they survived doses of anthrax several times stronger than the amounts to which humans have been exposed.

The next step for the anthrax vaccine would involve a company working with NIH to conduct clinical trials.

The work holds promise for treating other diseases, including diabetes and hepatitis, and improving vaccines for plague, cholera and other bioterrorism agents.♦

U.S., U.N. Helping to Avert Famine in Southern Africa

(Continued from page 5)

about 36 years, 34 years, 37 years in Zambia, Zimbabwe," Grasse added. "These numbers haven't been seen since the Middle Ages in Europe, where life expectancy is down to the 30s. It was, in countries like Zimbabwe, 60-something, I believe, only 10 years ago."

Hess acknowledged the cooperation of the international donor

community in helping to avert this year's crisis.

"Obviously, the crisis has been averted, so there is no crisis this year," he said. "And that's important because of the mobilization of other donors through the presidential initiative and the G8 [summit meeting of the Group of Eight industrialized nations] in the summertime. Other donors have stepped up. The fact that they have pledged money to WFP,

which has allowed them to buy food in the local markets and distribute it earlier, has averted a crisis. So you cannot call it a crisis now, and that's good."

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Presidential Term Limits Seen as . . .

(Continued from page 4)

Cohen also agreed that moves to alter constitutions to allow incumbents [sitting presidents] to extend their terms in office were counter-productive.

"First of all, it's very undemocratic to change the constitution to benefit the person in power," he explained. "If people want to get rid of the two-term limit, they should do it for the next president. The same goes for changing presidents' salaries. Not that long ago our president's salary was increased by Congress but the law went into effect for the next man in office, not the sitting president."

In Nigeria, Cohen said, "President Obasanjo has improved the democratic system, but he still has not done enough to end corruption and if he stays in [for another term] the

people around him, who have been benefiting from the continuation of vested interests in corruption, they will just continue.

"There must be a change [in Nigeria] now so someone new can come in and move the anti-corruption program forward" at a swifter pace, Cohen said.

For additional information on U.S. policy in the region, see Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/>).

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U.N. Establishes Commission to Help Countries Recover . . .

(Continued from page 14)

tors to U.N. budgets, funds, programs and agencies; and five top providers of military personnel and civilian police to the U.N. missions. The General Assembly will elect seven additional members giving special consideration to states that have experienced post-conflict recovery.

General Assembly President Jan Eliasson told reporters after the vote that about 50 percent of the conflicts in the past 20 years have recurred within five years of peace agreements.

"When the cameras disappear, the attention also disappears and five years later you pay an enormously heavy price and people pay a very heavy price. This is what we are trying to repair when we fill this institutional gap," Eliasson said.

The commission will "help bring an end to the pattern of conflicts erupting again simply because support for the healing process was not there when it was needed," he said.

For information on U.S. policy and activities at the United Nations, see The U.S. and United Nations Reform (<http://usinfo.state.gov/is/>

[international_security/UNGA_2005.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/international_security/UNGA_2005.html)).

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