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Weekly Special Report

Produced by the Public Affairs Section

Haile Gebreselassie Stars in Television Program to Reach Orphans and Vulnerable Children

On Monday, September 10, Olympic Gold Medalist Haile Gebreselassie joined USAID Mission Director Glenn Anders and Save the Children's Country Director Margaret Schuler for a screening of the Ethiopian children's television show *Tsehai Loves Learning* with messages focused to and about children impacted by HIV/AIDS. The first episode, entitled "Tsenat" and part of a four-part series, introduces a new puppet whose mother has died of HIV/AIDS. Messages in the show – targeting children from 3 to 6 years old – focus on understanding

Haile Gebreselassie (center) sitting among the invited children at the screening of the television show.

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Millennium Challenge Corporation Awards Tanzania $698 Million

MCC Board of Directors Approves $698 Million Poverty Reduction Grant for Tanzania

Washington, D.C.—The Millennium Challenge Corporation's Board of Directors approved a five-year, $698 million Millennium Challenge Compact with the United Republic of Tanzania that seeks to reduce poverty, stimulate economic growth, and increase household incomes through targeted infrastructure investments in transport, energy, and water.

"This agreement is a testament to Tanzanians' commitment to building a better life for themselves and their children," said MCC CEO Ambassador John Danilovich. "MCC congratulates the people of Tanzania for developing a comprehensive program designed to address Tanzania's key constraints to economic growth—an inadequate transportation network, insufficient and unreliable supply of energy, and a shortage of clean and safe water. Chosen by Tanzanians, the investments to improve the transport, energy, and water sectors will provide a catalyst to reduce poverty and spur economic growth."

MCC assistance used to rehabilitate Tanzanian roads will help connect road users and communities with markets, schools, health clinics, and promote the expansion of economic opportunities by reducing transport costs. Investments

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Millennium Challenge Corporation Awards Tanzania . . .

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in reliable energy are vital for private sector activities and to provide Tanzanians with social services such as education and healthcare. The Compact also funds water infrastructure improvements that will increase access to potable water and will mitigate the incidence of water-related disease, burdensome healthcare costs, and decreased workforce productivity.

Ambassador Danilovich added, "Through this Millennium Challenge grant, the American people proudly support Tanzania's efforts to reduce poverty and improve the lives of its citizens. I commend President Kikwete for his leadership and support throughout the development of this Compact."

It is estimated that the program will benefit approximately 4.8 million Tanzanians either directly or indirectly upon project completion.

Compact signature is contingent on fiscal year 2008 funds.

Since its inception in 2004, MCC has approved Compacts totaling over $5.5 billion with 16 partner countries: Madagascar, Cape Verde, Honduras, Nicaragua, Georgia, Armenia, Vanuatu, Benin, Ghana, Mali, El Salvador, Mozambique, Lesotho, Morocco, Mongolia, and Tanzania.

September 18, 2007
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Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a United States government corporation designed to work with some of the poorest countries in the world, is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people that promote economic growth and elimination of extreme poverty.

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

Haile Gebreselassie Stars in Television Program to Reach Orphans and . . .

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emotions, supporting your friend when they are sad, and using imagination as a way to express your emotions.

According to Gebreselassie, who guest starred in the episode "Eat Right and Exercise," "I want children to know that they can be who and what they want to be." Gebreselassie continued, "When I was approached about participating in today's event as well as the television show I had my doubts. But it was my own children – who knew *Tsehai Loves Learning* – who encouraged me to renew my career in acting!" Gebreselassie invited the crowd in the packed cinema to join him to help fight HIV/AIDS and to help provide care and support for the children of Ethiopia, adding, "Ethiopia should be known for its famous runners, its wonderful history, fabulous people, and delicious food -- not the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS."

Calling Gebreselassie "the most famous man in Ethiopia," Glenn Anders, USAID Mission Director, thanked the athlete and child advocate for sharing his talents and message with the children about the importance of exercise and eating healthy and nutritious food. Anders encouraged partners and parents in the room to take time to watch the special episodes with the children in their life.

A recent report of the Ministry of Health and the Federal HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office – HAPCO – estimate that this year

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U.S. Increases Funding To Protect Mountain Gorillas of Congo

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
September 17, 2007

MEDIA NOTE

U.S. Support to Virunga National Park and Mountain Gorillas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development are making available $496,000 of new funds to support the park rangers and endangered wildlife of the Virunga National Park in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. This area is home to scores of unique species, including the mountain gorilla, which have declined due to the region's ongoing armed conflict, poaching, demographic pressures and habitat disturbance.

This support directly addresses threats to biodiversity and illegal poaching in and around the Virunga National Park through cross-border wildlife monitoring, rehabilitation of ranger posts, the provision of equipment and training for rangers. This support to park wardens will improve their capacity to carry out effective wildlife conservation activities and further law enforcement, information exchange and cooperation with regional authorities.

"Our efforts are focused on conserving and protecting the habitat of these magnificent animals. The survival of the mountain gorillas of Virunga is severely threatened by the tragic events in the region, and we will continue to devote whatever resources we can to protect the gorillas and other threatened species there," said Oceans, Environment, and Science Assistant Secretary of State Claudia A. McMurray.

Virunga mountain gorilla

We have supported conservation in the Virunga National Park since 2003 through the U.S. Agency for International Development's Central African Regional Program for the Environment and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). For further information on CBFP please visit http://www.sdp.gov/sdp/initiative/congo/

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

Haile Gebreselassie Stars in Television Program to Reach Orphans and . . .

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there are more than five million four hundred thousand orphans in Ethiopia -- over half a million of these children are impacted by HIV/AIDS.

To address the issues of orphan and vulnerable children in Ethiopia, the U.S. government funded "Positive Change: Children Communities and Care (PC3)" – a project that aims to reach more than half a million orphaned and other vulnerable children and their families over a five year period. Six international NGOs and over 32 local NGOs are partnering with over 486 community-based organizations to provide comprehensive care and support services to orphans and vulnerable children and their families.

The *Tsehai Loves Learning* episodes, produced by Whizkids Workshop, were made possible with a partnership with Save the Children/US, with funding from the Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The first of the *Tsehai* series was broadcast on September 16 and will run through November.♦

Pooling Resources Helps Ugandan Farmers Increase Production, Sales

This is sixth in a series of articles on U.S. food aid and agricultural assistance for vulnerable populations around the world.

Washington – Just five years ago Charles Mpaulo and other small-scale farmers in the extremely poor Buyamba area of Uganda faced a bleak future. They produced too little rice, maize, coffee and other crops to interest major buyers, and product quality was so poor they could not have sold it even if yields had increased.

In 2003 the U.S.-funded five-year Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Program (APEP) offered Mpaulo and other farmers in Uganda a chance to change their lives by helping them increase production, improve crop quality and market their products.

APEP relies on producer organizations, or cooperatives, as the most effective way of moving farm production toward commercially competitive agriculture.

However, the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), which runs the producer group project for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), faced a "heavy dose of skepticism" when its agents broached to the farmers the idea of pooling their resources, says Mike Mailloux, the NCBA program manager in Uganda.

"In the past they had a very bad experience with farmer groups," he told USINFO.

So NCBA first approached the buyers and input suppliers to identify specific market opportunities and then told farmers what requirements they needed to meet to use those opportunities.

Although some farmers remained skeptical, 240 signed on and formed 12 producer groups in 2003. NCBA trainers helped them develop business plans and taught them basic organizational, financial and management skills as well as quality control and farming techniques. APEP established demonstration sites where farmers could learn about crop management and improved production technologies.

Uganda farmers

In the first year, the producer groups earned a premium on sales of approximately 20 percent by marketing higher-quality, trade-ready crops in bulk. When the news spread, interest in the cooperatives exploded, Mailloux said.

Some producer groups have joined forces to form larger organizations called depot committees. The volume of crop marketed at this level provides the economies of scale, which make partnerships with buyers even more profitable for both sides.

"Strong links to viable buyers who are in Uganda for the long run help ensure that the work started by USAID will continue after the program and technical assistance has ended," Mailloux told NCBA.

As of March, there were more than 3,400 producer groups and 203 depot committees -- 70,000 members in total, according to NCBA.

In Buyamba, farmers who had organized themselves into 13 groups established one of the first depot committees in the country. Mpaulo, who became the Buyamba depot manager, said that his depot committee has emerged as a "pillar of hope" in a short time.

Farmers working within producer groups have generated up to 28 percent higher revenue than individual farmers.

Mailloux said that most producer groups are still in their infancy and face many challenges. But the first stage was a success by any measure, he said. In the first half of 2006 alone, those farmers sold almost 100 times more coffee, cotton and other crops than in all of 2004, far exceeding original projections. The increase in the value of those sales was even greater.

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Early Primaries and Caucuses Shape Presidential Hopefuls' Odds

By Stuart Gorin
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- State primary elections and caucuses held early in the race to determine the Republican and Democratic candidates for president of the United States give an indication of how candidates will do throughout the campaign season.

Caucuses gauge support for presidential candidates through local meetings of party members, while primary elections gauge support through statewide direct voting. The events determine which candidates will receive a state's votes for the Republican and Democratic nominations at the political parties' national conventions held later in the year.

Historically, the Iowa caucus in the Midwest and the New Hampshire primary in New England, held in January of each four-year presidential election cycle, have been the first two events in the race for each party's nomination.

The 2008 schedule is unsettled, however, because several states -- including Florida and Michigan -- have announced plans to break party rules by holding their events earlier in the year, hoping to claim greater influence in the nomination process.

Throughout the nation, voters pay attention to the campaigns and results in Iowa and New Hampshire to assess candidates' behavior, reaction under pressure, statesman qualities and physical stamina. Strong showings in the early states can give candidates momentum, carrying them on to additional victories. Candidates with poor showings usually drop out of the race. Because Iowa and New Hampshire are small states, candidates campaign there on a personal level, meeting and greeting individual voters, and media attention is focused on those states. Advocates for keeping the two states at the head of the race say this personal contact is a better test of candidate skills than later events in larger states, where candidates depend on less personal strategies such as advertising, speeches and rallies.

Pre-event media coverage in Iowa and New Hampshire also includes media expectations for individual candidates, and that has become almost as important as the actual results. If a candidate meets or exceeds the media's expectations, even a second- or third-place finish can bring that candidate increased publicity and campaign donations.

COMPETING PRIORITIES

For 2008, the Commission on Presidential Nomination Timing and Scheduling recommended adding several caucuses ahead of the New Hampshire primary. The Democratic National Committee approved the recommendations and decreed that Nevada in the West, and South Carolina in the South, would be the next stops on the campaign trail, helping spread out the early voting to all parts of the nation.

The Democrats said that if any other state defies the official schedule and votes before February 5, 2008, it will lose its votes at the party's national convention. The Republican National Committee is considering similar action. Iowa and New Hampshire then announced they reserve the right to reschedule their contests, possibly even as early as December 2007 if other states challenge their first-in-the-nation status.

The New Hampshire State Legislature passed a law in 1977 stating that its primary must be the first in the nation, seven days before any other "similar contest." As a result of other states' actions, beginning in the 1990s, New Hampshire started to move its date earlier and earlier each elections cycle.

Some object to the disproportionate influence Iowa and New Hampshire have in the nomination process because they are sparsely populated and less racially diverse than the country as a whole. The new schedule should address some of those concerns. Nevada, for example, has more Hispanic-American citizens than the national average, and South Carolina has a large African-American population.

According to the National Association of Secretaries of State, the campaign calendar begins with the Iowa caucuses on January 14, 2008, and ends with the Montana and South Dakota primaries on June 3, 2008. But with 21 states considering or scheduling their

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Presidential Message on Ramadan

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
September 12, 2007

Presidential Message: Ramadan, 2007
September 7, 2007

I send greetings to Muslims observing Ramadan in America and around the world.

Ramadan, the holiest days of the Islamic faith, begins with the first light of dawn and commemorates the revelation of the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammad. During the days of fasting, prayer, and worship, Muslims reflect and remember their dependence on God. Ramadan is also an occasion for Muslims to strengthen family and community ties and share God's gifts with those in need.

America is a land of many faiths, and our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens. May the holy days of Ramadan remind us all to seek a culture of compassion and serve others in charity.

Laura and I send our best wishes. Ramadan Mubarak.

GEORGE W. BUSH

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

Muslims Find Spiritual Home at Midwestern Mosque

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Ames, Iowa -- A modest building with a blue dome, the Darul Arqum Islamic Center nestles in a quiet neighborhood not far from the State University of Iowa in Ames. The mosque serves members of the local Muslim community, including international students.

Saleem Baig, vice chairman of the mosque, said there are about 500 Muslims in Ames. The center has about 120 permanent members. The congregation outgrew the original mosque, located in a house, and fundraising began.

The new mosque was built and opened in November 2001. Just two months after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the timing was delicate, but the mosque doors were opened to the local community.

"Close to 2,000 people showed up," Baig said, and interest continues. "We invite people and we have open house. A lot of people show up. Some of them are curious."

Although there was initial resistance from a few neighbors worried about increased traffic, the Ames community supported the mosque building project. The city council voted in favor of it, and the chief of police even spoke at Friday prayers.

"He assured us there would be no trouble: 'If there is any problem, you call us,'" Baig recalls him saying. Baig and other members of the Ames mosque spoke to USINFO in August.

Interfaith dialogue is integral to the center's activity. Civil engineering consultant Waddah Akili, a longtime member of the mosque, said he attends Ames Interfaith Council meetings "to bridge the gap if there are gaps to be bridged and to try to understand each other's position." The monthly meetings draw many denominations. "We try first to get to know each other before we try to tackle any specific issues," Akili says.

A guest speaker at Darul Arqum Friday prayers, Imam of the Islamic Center of Des Moines Ibrahim Dremali, described a four-day course on Islam he gives at different Iowa churches to encourage understanding and dialogue. "We speak, all the religions together. To be honest with you, my main job is to build

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Muslims Find Spiritual Home at Midwestern Mosque

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the bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims."

POLITICS AND COMMUNITY

Pakistani Salman Maqsood is interested in American politics. "Most of us, where we come from, the society is so-called democratic, but the culture is not that democratic. So people really don't know what democracy is, what is raising your issues and taking them ... all the way up to the head of state or [to] your local representatives."

Dremali, who has lived in the United States for 20 years, said since that September 11, 2001, "the Muslim community has become more involved" in politics.

Maqsood thinks "people realized after [September 11] that they had to have a voice, they had to let people know what their religion is, who we are; we are not terrorists."

Maqsood believes his personal faith has benefited from living in America. Unlike in Pakistan, there is no call to prayer five times a day from mosques everywhere. "You have to set your alarm, things like that, so you don't miss it. Over there, no one ever came and asked me 'why do you pray ... why do you fast?'" he said. "Now I have to research sometimes and find out the answers so if someone asks me, I can at least tell them what my beliefs are, what is the reason behind it."

All those interviewed believed Muslims are accepted in Iowa, and misunderstandings usually are ironed out by conversations.

"If I want to practice my religion as Muslim, I can do it in America," says Nermin Sabry, principal of the mosque's school. Parents concerned about teaching children Muslim ideals send them to weekend classes in Arabic, the Quran and Islamic values. Sabry says many American and Muslim values are the same. "We raise our children to be honest, not to lie, to be good," but there are some different concepts about dress and behavior.

Darul Arqum Islamic Center in Ames, Iowa.
(Courtesy Darul Arqum Islamic Center)

Her daughter, Heba, a student at the university who wears hijab, said peers accept her different standards: "For example, a school dance. I just don't feel very comfortable with it, and I explain it to people and they are generally accepting and they say 'ok if that's what you want, that's fine.'" When she competed on the high school track team, the track association gave her permission to observe her Islamic dress code at meets.

Marjan, an Iranian doctor researching cancer therapies, says she and her friends believe that "Americans, they behave very much like the real Muslims should behave ... their manners and their behavior are what Islam has suggested to us," except some who "do wrong things." Citing values such as honesty, respect and tolerance, she adds, "Most Americans, they are really practicing Islam, the real Islam."

Beth Sermin, one of several American converts in the congregation, performs interfaith outreach. "People realize that tolerance is the best way, so that everybody can live together in peace," she said.

More information (http://www.arqum.org/index.cfm) on the mosque is available on its Web site.

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

Muslim Students Observe Ramadan Away from Home

By Carolee Walker
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Maher Ali, 19, is a freshman at Georgetown University in Washington, and it is the first time he is observing Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of reflection and fasting, on his own.

Ali has been at Georgetown for only two weeks, and he knows few students and even fewer Muslims at school. He is away from his home in Bahrain and the support of his parents, siblings and community. Yet on the first day of Ramadan, which began on September 13, Ali observed the fast.

"It was a long day," Ali told USINFO at the festive iftar (the evening meal at which the fast is broken) at Georgetown on September 13. Ali had not meant to, but he slept through suhoor, the early morning meal Muslims are permitted to eat before sunrise.

During the month of Ramadan, which this year ends on October 13, Muslims refrain from eating or drinking during daylight hours and break their fast at nightly iftars at sunset.

Imam Yahya Hendi, Georgetown's Muslim chaplain for the past eight years, told USINFO that the initial days of Ramadan are the most difficult for the 450 Muslim students on campus. For the younger students, who are used to the food cooked by their mothers and the support of their siblings, the early days require some adjustment, especially if their non-Muslim roommates know little about Ramadan.

"Georgetown makes Muslims feel at home," Hendi said. His wife, Siron, and the couple's young children joined Hendi at the first iftar. "I encourage my husband to break fast with the students," Siron said. "I want him to be the guardian of these children who are away from their families."

Much of the food at the iftar on September 13 was provided by the Muslim Students Association and the Pakistani Students Association,

Hamilton College student, Abdelwahab Abdelghany, of Brooklyn, 19, right, prays in his dormitory room . Behind Abdelghany is his roommate, Alex Hinton, 19, left, and friend, Kumar Bhardwaj, 19.

but Siron contributed large pans of kabsa (rice dishes) prepared according to her secret recipe. "It has my own twist," Siron smiled. Siron, too, wants to offer comfort to students observing Ramadan for the first time away from home.

IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

Georgetown is the nation's oldest Catholic Jesuit university. Today, the school welcomes a religiously diverse student body and accommodates the observances of the many faiths practiced on campus, Hendi said. For example, residential dining halls open early for suhoor during Ramadan.

Lydia Habhab, 22, a student at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, established a Ramadan routine away from her home in Dearborn, Michigan. Habhab woke up early for suhoor and stayed up until around 3 p.m. She napped until 5 p.m. and then joined a study group until the iftar. She plans to use the treadmill to fight her hunger. "Exercise will keep my endorphins up," she told USINFO.

Muslim students in America are part of a new wave of "all-Americans," said Adnan Hassan, a senior adviser at the World Bank who attended the Georgetown iftar. According to Hendi, 90 percent of Georgetown's Muslim students are American born and because of the lack of family influence, the observance on campus becomes more personal. "These young students are all-American in their focus on fitness and athletics and social connections, but they are devout in their faith and responsible in their personal commitments," Hassan said.

PART OF THE AMERICAN FABRIC

Hassan overheard a Georgetown freshman from Florida wonder whether she should support the Georgetown basketball team or the team from the University of Florida. "These students are balancing multiple identities and feeling confident," Hassan said. "When they come to the iftar, they get comfort from like-minded people -- but at the same time, they know they are part of the larger fabric of society."

Third-year medical resident Chadi Ibrahim said that although the fast can be physically demanding, it

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Muslim Seema Matin To Discuss How Americans Observe Ramadan

Seema Martin
(Photo courtesy of Seema Matin)

As Muslims around the globe observe Ramadan, a month of fasting, prayer and contemplation, please join American Muslim Seema Matin on September 26 at 10 a.m. EDT (1400 GMT) for a discussion of Muslim life in America and how Muslims and non-Muslims mark Ramadan.

Matin, who chooses to wear the hijab, works as a public diplomacy officer for the U.S. Department of State, where she focuses on Muslim outreach efforts and other projects to counter ideological support for terrorism. She first joined the department as a foreign service specialist in January 2002, with her first assignment at the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. During this tour, she was the first female to serve as the U.S. ambassador's representative to the biannual Kaba Washing Ceremony, one of the most prestigious diplomatic functions in Saudi Arabia.

If you would like to participate in this webchat, please sign up on the USINFO Webchat registration page (http://webchat.state.gov/?tid=unsecure.register). Please tell us your preferred screen name; use of full names is not required.

If you have participated in one of our previous webchats, use the same e-mail. (You no longer need to enter a password.) You may submit questions in advance.

We accept questions and comments in advance of, and at any time during, the program. You may also e-mail (mailto:usinfowebchat@state.gov) questions without registering.

The transcript of this webchat will be available on USINFO's Webchat Station (http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html), where information about upcoming webchats is also available.

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U.S. Will Help Iraq Defeat Those Who Threaten Its Future

Washington -- President Bush outlined his vision for a way forward in Iraq during a televised address to the American people on September 13.

"This ally has placed its trust in the United States. And tonight, our moral and strategic imperatives are one: We must help Iraq defeat those who threaten its future – and also threaten ours," the president said.

Achieving security for the Iraqi population and enabling Iraqi forces to maintain that security is the foundation of the U.S. strategy in Iraq, Bush said. He cited security as the foundation on which progress in other areas will be based.
In addition, he said, "our success in meeting these objectives now allows us to begin bringing some of our troops home." This step, according to the president, will allow Americans who have disagreed about U.S. engagement in Iraq to come together after years of difficult debate.

President George W. Bush concludes his address to the nation from the Oval Office Thursday evening, Sept. 13, 2007. " White House photo by Eric Draper

"This vision for a reduced American presence also has the support of Iraqi leaders from all

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U.S. Condemnation of the Assassination of Iraqi Tribal Leader

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
September 13, 2007

Statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Today, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Bezia al-Rishawi, a courageous Iraqi leader committed to defeating extremism and improving the lives of the Iraqi people, was brutally murdered, along with several other innocent Iraqi citizens, near his farm in al-Anbar Province. Sheikh Sattar headed the Abu Risha tribe after the assassination of his father by al-Qaeda in 2004, and founded Sahawat al-Anbar, or Awakening Council, an alliance of 42 tribes pledged to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq.

President Bush, center left, shakes hands with Sheik Abdul-Sattar Abu Risha, an Iraqi tribal leader, during a meeting with tribal leaders at Al-Asad Airbase in Anbar province, Iraq, Monday, Sept. 3, 2007. The most prominent figure in a revolt of Sunni sheiks against al-Qaida in Iraq, Abu Risha was killed Thursday Sept. 13, 2007, in an explosion near his home in Anbar province, Iraqi police said. (Charles Dharapak/AP Photo)

I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family and to the loved ones of those killed and injured. This act of terrorism can only be seen as an attempt to silence and intimidate those who are determined to build a peaceful, unified, and stable Iraq. The United States condemns such criminal acts and stands with the people of al-Anbar Province who have shown a firm determination to work against al-Qaeda and other extremists who seek to harm the Iraqi people and destabilize the country.

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

Pooling Resources Helps Ugandan Farmers Increase Production, . . .

(Continued from page 4)

In Buyamba, the depot committee established a save-and-credit association, giving its members and shareholders access to credit.

"Now they can take care of the farming needs, give medical care to children and solve other household emergencies," Mpaulo said. "This is manna from heaven."

Additional information (http://www.apepuganda.org/index.htm) about APEP is available on the program's Web site.

For more information about U.S. efforts to combat malnutrition and hunger worldwide, see the eJournal USA U.S. Food Aid: Reducing World Hunger (http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/ites/0907/ijee/ijee0907.htm).

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

Statement on Iraqi Benchmark Assessment Report to Congress

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
September 14, 2007

STATEMENT BY PRESS SECRETARY TONY SNOW

Ambassador Crocker testified on September 10th that, "the cumulative trajectory of political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq is upwards, although the slope of the line is not steep."

U.S. Press Secretary Tony Snow

Today's report indicates additional progress has occurred since the initial report of July 2007 and reflects that the Iraqis have made satisfactory progress since January 2007 on nine benchmarks, including on de-Ba'athification reform which in the July report was assessed as unsatisfactory. In addition, while the current report assesses seven benchmarks as not satisfactory, this includes four benchmarks with progress on some aspects while not on others. In both the July report and today's assessment, two benchmarks are not rated because the necessary preconditions are not yet present.

Broad context is necessary for assessing the performance of the Iraqi government with respect to the 18 benchmarks. We continue to encourage Iraqi leaders to achieve established benchmarks, since we believe that those efforts will contribute over time to Iraq's stability, to its ability to provide for its own security, and to the international effort to counter violent extremism.

While key national legislation has not yet passed, the objectives of such laws are in some ways already being achieved. Significant oil revenues are being distributed by the central government to the provinces in an equitable manner; provincial governors and councils are making decisions on budget expenditures and providing essential services; and immunity is being granted to many former insurgents, who in turn are being recruited to join legitimate security institutions.

These are precisely the "effects" the benchmarks were intended to produce, even if the formal benchmarks themselves have not been met. In the coming months, our strategy will increasingly focus on helping the Iraqis knit together this new "bottom-up" progress with the "top-down" political process.

Our efforts in Iraq extend far beyond these benchmarks, as the recent testimony of Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus explained in more detail. We continue to work with the Iraqis to establish the strategic environment in which security and meaningful reconciliation can develop and take root -- in ways not easily measured by these benchmarks.

The President has directed General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to provide a fresh assessment to the American people and to the Congress in March 2008 on the situation in Iraq and any adjustments that may be needed to our strategy based on changing conditions.

[The Benchmark Assessment Report is now available in HTML (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070914.html) and PDF (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070914.pdf) formats on the White House website.]

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U.S. Will Help Iraq Defeat Those Who Threaten Its . . .

(Continued from page 9)

communities," Bush said, but added that they understand the value of an enduring relationship between the United States and Iraq and that "their success will require U.S. political, economic, and security engagement that extends beyond my presidency."

To accompany the military success, as reported to Congress by General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker on September 10 and 11, President Bush called on the Iraqi government to "bring the same determination to achieving reconciliation."

The president, citing progress at the local level toward reconciliation, said, "The key now is to link this progress in the provinces to progress" at the national level. "This is an enormous undertaking after more than three decades of tyranny and division," Bush said. Although acknowledging that the Iraqi government "has not met its own legislative benchmarks," the president nonetheless credited it with progress in passing a budget and establishing a mechanism for sharing oil revenues with the provinces.

Bush called on the American people, regardless of political affiliation, to recognize "America has a vital interest in preventing chaos and providing hope in the Middle East." That interest extends to defeating al-Qaida, countering the nuclear ambitions of Iran, helping the Afghan government and working for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

"Let us come together on a policy of strength in the Middle East," the president urged the U.S. Congress and asked its support for the recommendations and requested troop levels presented by General Petraeus.

"Some say the gains we are making in Iraq come too late. They are mistaken," Bush said. "It is never too late to advance freedom."

For additional information, see the full text of the president's speech.

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Standing with Mrs. Laura Bush, President George W. Bush addresses military support organizations Tuesday, Sept. 18, 2007, on the South Lawn. "Laura and I welcome the families who have got a loved one overseas, whether it be in Iraq or Afghanistan, fighting these extremists and terrorists," said President Bush. "The best way to honor your loved one is to make sure that he or she has the full support of the United States government as you accomplish the mission that we have set." White House photo by David Bohrer

Secretary Rice on Ninth Annual Report on International Religious Freedom

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
September 14, 2007

REMARKS

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
on the U.S. Department of State's
Annual Report
on International Religious Freedom

September 14, 2007
Washington, D.C.

(12:32 p.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. Today, I have transmitted to Congress the 9th Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. We hope that this report, which is also available on the Department's website, will continue to serve as a resource for all in the United States and in the international community who share our concerns about religious freedom. We also hope that it will serve to encourage those whose plight is documented in this report and whose right to believe, practice and worship freely is denied by their governments.

It is fitting that this week also marks the congruence of two major religious faiths. All around the world and here in the United States, Muslims are observing the month of Ramadan and Jews are observing Rosh Hashanah. By continuing the American tradition of worshiping freely and respectfully, American Jews and American Muslims are strengthening the freedom and pluralism that defines for us what it means to be an American.

Religious liberty is deeply rooted in our principles and history as a nation, and it is our belief in this universal human right that leads us into the world to support all who want to secure this right in this lives and in their countries.

Dr. Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Secretary of State

Freedom of religion is also integral to our efforts to combat the ideology of hatred and religious intolerance that fuels global terrorism. This past Tuesday was the sixth anniversary of the September 11th attacks. As we reflect on the tragedy of that day, we are reminded of the true importance of this report and we reaffirm our commitment to help us shed light on all countries where citizens are subjected to government censorship, hate crimes, discrimination and violence for their thoughts and beliefs.

With this year's Report on International Religious Freedom, the State Department is helping to advance President Bush's vision of a world that is growing in freedom and peace. Through our bilateral relationships, our work in international forums, and our many ongoing discussions on this issue with people across the globe, the United States will continue working to promote religious freedom, to nurture tolerance and to build a more peaceful world for people of all faiths.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Ambassador Hanford, who will provide details about the report. Thank you.

The full report is available on the State Department Web site at http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/.

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Deputy Secretary Negroponte on U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue

U.S. Department of State
John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State
Joint Press Conference
Islamabad, Pakistan
September 12, 2007

[U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue]

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I am extremely pleased to be here in Pakistan again. Your country is both a close friend and a long-standing reliable ally of the United States. Today's second round of the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue has been very useful. The continuing discussion between our two countries highlights the commitment both our nations have made to a wide-ranging, substantive, and long-term bilateral relationship.

Our relationship with Pakistan and the Pakistani people is very important. Pakistan has long been a strong U.S. ally, but now more than ever, Pakistan stands as an important and pivotal nation in the world. Pakistan is a large, moderate Muslim nation with a diverse population in a very critical region. It serves as the gateway, the crossroads, to both Central and South Asia. Pakistan's continued progress and development are vital not only for its own people, but also for the stability of the region, the United States, and the rest of the world.

We welcome Pakistan's leadership as a voice of moderation and reason in the Islamic world. Your nation remains a valuable ally in the war on terror. The United States recognizes the tremendous sacrifices the people of Pakistan have made in this struggle. We stand with all of those Pakistanis who have been wounded or who have lost loved ones, and we hold a special place of honor for those who sacrificed their lives in protecting not only Pakistanis but also the entire world from acts of terrorism. Facing these challenges strengthens our mutual resolve against terrorism and extremism. Pakistan's efforts against extremism are a matter of record. We welcome and look forward to working with Pakistan in the new three-pronged strategy in the Tribal areas. Promoting security, dialogue, and development is a truly visionary approach. This holistic solution is a comprehensive and positive path towards resolving the issues in the Tribal Areas. The United States recognizes this. We have pledged $750 million to support Pakistan's plan.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, left, meets Pakistan's President Gen. Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad, Pakistan, Thursday, Sept 13, 2007. AP photo

The United States continues to stand in partnership with Pakistanis as they build on their nation's many strengths. Our relationship with the Pakistani people goes far beyond security and counterterrorism. Our long-term programs, such as USAID's five-year $100 million Education Assistance Program, seek to ensure Pakistan's own efforts to build a democratically and economically vibrant country. Pakistanis are working to improve their nation in many other areas, including health, energy, technology, and democracy.

Our continued Strategic Dialogue and our long-term assistance programs in Pakistan exemplify the forward-looking, broad and deep nature of our bilateral relationship.

The United States appreciates and fully understands Pakistan's commitment to peace and stability in

(Continued on page 15)

U.S. Gives $24 Million to Refugee Assistance Fund

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
September 12, 2007

MEDIA NOTE

New Funding Announced: U.S. Contributes $24 Million for Relief of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Middle East and Sri Lanka

Using the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) Fund, the President has made $24 million available for use in several large-scale relief efforts for refugees and internally displaced persons, including $12 million for Iraq-related humanitarian programs, $10 million to assist Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and $2 million for conflict victims and refugees from Sri Lanka. Funding details are:

An additional $9 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/ United Nations Children's Fund (UNHCR/UNICEF) joint education appeal for Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. This new contribution is in addition to the $30 million contribution announced in late August, and will be used to support the enrollment of an additional 150,000 Iraqi children in the region.

$2 million to support critical health and education-related activities of non-governmental organizations in Jordan and Syria.

$1 million to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for an anti-trafficking in persons program in Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. The IOM program will assist government and NGO efforts in this area, and seed a "return fund" for victims of trafficking who wish to return home.

$10 million to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to help Palestinian refugees who have been displaced from Lebanon's Nahr al-Bared camp. The funding will also help their host families, both Lebanese and Palestinian, specifically in the areas of temporary shelter, water and sanitation services, health care, and education. In addition, to assist the Lebanese communities surrounding the Nahr al-Bared, the United States will immediately provide $100,000 for urgent humanitarian needs and also review ongoing bilateral assistance in northern Lebanon to provide additional long term resources.

$2 million to support the work of UNHCR and non-governmental organizations protecting and assisting Sri Lankan internally displaced persons and refugees in India. Programs will provide protection, emergency shelter, non-food relief items, water and sanitation, camp management, reception services for new arrivals, and special projects designed to make returning home a viable long-term proposition.

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Deputy Secretary Negroponte on U.S.-Pakistan Strategic . . .

(Continued from page 14)

Afghanistan. Results from the recent peace jirga were very promising. We appreciate your nation's constructive role.

We realize there are many challenges ahead: be it fighting terrorism, expanding literacy, or spreading economic prosperity. We came here today to face those challenges head-on in our continued Strategic Dialogue. The only way to achieve long-lasting peace, stability, and development is by thinking strategically and by exchanging ideas through frank and regular discussions. By doing this, the United States and Pakistan actively reaffirm our broad-based bilateral relationship. We will continue to meet regularly. We will seek further opportunities to enhance this dialogue.

At this critical juncture in history, Pakistan has the opportunity to forge ahead as a vibrant, moderate, successful, and democratic Muslim nation. We stand ready to assist you whenever you may call upon us.

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Many Modern Conflicts Are Food Wars, Say Experts

By David McKeeby
USINFO Staff Writer

This is the fourth in a series of articles on U.S. food aid programs and agricultural assistance for vulnerable populations around the world.

Washington -- Throughout history, hunger has been both a cause and effect of war. For this reason, according to anthropologist Ellen Messer and political scientist Marc Cohen, most modern conflicts should be viewed as "food wars," a concept that poses unique challenges for the United States as the world's leading provider of food assistance.

"Food does have this enormous moral weight in our society, and rightly so," Messer told USINFO in a recent interview. "Sharing food is part of the history of our way of life. Making sure that all have enough to eat is certainly part of all the religious traditions that make up America."

In exploring the link between persistent hunger and armed conflict, Messer, a professor at Brandeis University, and Cohen, a researcher for the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute, have published a series of articles in recent years exploring famines, poverty and the distribution of food resources within communities. From their research, they have developed their concept of "food wars," the practice of warring parties fighting for control of food supplies to reward their supporters and punish their enemies.

In a 2003 study, they found that more than 56 million people living in 27 countries face "food insecurity," such as supply disruptions, shortages and malnutrition due to conflicts -– an average of 20 percent -- but noted that the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization has found country-specific levels as high as 25 percent in Sudan, 43 percent in Tanzania and 49 percent in Haiti, and at 70 percent or higher in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

"We took this as a starting point for looking at a food wars concept, where conflict is one of the chief causes of hunger. We looked at the many ways that conflict interferes with food security," Messer explained, such as its effect on family income and its destruction of farms, markets, schools and health clinics. They also looked at the role of food insecurity in perpetuating conflict.

Today's most significant food wars, Cohen told USINFO, can be found in Sudan's Darfur region; in the greater Horn of Africa region, which encompasses conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and in the disruptions to families displaced by ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Food security remains a challenge for families driven from their homes by fighting in Colombia, he added, as well as in several post-conflict countries, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Tajikistan, with serious implications for those nations' futures.

BREAKING THE LINK BETWEEN HUNGER AND CONFLICT

To break the link between hunger and conflict, Messer said, aid efforts must operate simultaneously on two separate tracks: reducing food insecurity by addressing shortages with emergency food aid, while increasing food security by helping area residents to more effectively raise their own crops and strengthen the region's economy in ways that could reduce the likelihood of future conflicts.

"Food can be used as a hook to build other capacities," Messer said, "health programs, income generation programs and education programs, which is another very important way food is used."

By ensuring basic food security, food aid can promote stability and help communities resist renewed calls for militant violence or recruitment by terrorists, who exploit community grievances to justify attacks, according to Messer and Cohen.

Following the 2004 South Asian tsunami, said Cohen, joint relief efforts by government forces and insurgents in Indonesia's Aceh led to a peace agreement in 2005, evidence of how food aid can bring combatants together. But food security is only one variable in the equation, he acknowledged, looking across the Bay of Bengal to Sri Lanka, where hostilities resumed after a brief pause.

"A food security effort can be important in stimulating a peace process," Cohen said, "but it's obviously not sufficient to make it happen." Peace-building requires a holistic approach that integrates a variety of aid programs in post-conflict societies.

Food aid plays a particularly impor-

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Bin Laden's Image Declining Among Muslims, Hughes Says

The following op-ed by Karen Hughes, under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, first appeared in The Washington Post September 17, 2007. It is in the public domain; there are no republication restrictions.

Sinking in the Polls
By Karen P. Hughes

The video reappearance of Osama bin Laden is a reminder that extremists with murderous methods continue to threaten innocent people worldwide. His emergence after three years of hiding also provides an opportunity to take stock of how differently the world now views the terrorist leader -- and that view is turning darker than bin Laden's newly dyed beard.

People in America and many other Western nations have expressed strong disapproval of bin Laden and al-Qaeda since the Sept. 11 attacks. What's new is the dramatic decline in his standing in majority-Muslim countries. Polls in the two nations that have suffered some of the worst of al-Qaeda's violence -- Afghanistan and Iraq -- show that more than 90 percent of those populations have unfavorable views of al-Qaeda and of bin Laden himself.

Pollsters say that it is difficult to find 90 percent agreement that apple pie is American -- yet polling in Turkey two years ago found that 90 percent of citizens believe the al-Qaeda bombings in London, Istanbul, Madrid and Egypt were unjust and unfair; 86 percent thought that there was no excuse for condoning the Sept. 11 attacks; and 75 percent said bin Laden does not represent Muslims.

Support for terrorist tactics has fallen in seven of the eight predominantly Muslim countries polled as part of the Pew Global Attitudes Project since 2002; in most cases, those declines have been dramatic. Five years ago in Lebanon, 74 percent of the population thought suicide bombing could sometimes be justified. Today it's 34 percent -- still too high, but a stark reversal. Similar declines in support have occurred in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia and Jordan.

Perhaps most significant, Muslim populations are increasingly rejecting bin Laden's attempts to pervert their faith. WorldPublicOpinion.org found in April that large majorities in Egypt (88 percent), Indonesia (65 percent) and Morocco (66 percent) agree: "Groups that use violence against civilians, such as Al Qaida, are violating the principles of Islam. Islam opposes the use of such violence." These shifts in attitude are beginning to show up in actions. Sunni leaders in Iraq's Anbar province are working with coalition forces against al-Qaeda because, as one local leader said to journalists, all the terrorists bring is chaos -- "killing people, stealing goats, everything, you name it." After recent terrorist attacks in Algeria, protesters shouted: "Terrorists are not Muslims" and "no to terrorism; don't touch my Algeria."

While it is good that many Muslims are recognizing that terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda are a common threat, many polls show that much remains to be done to improve foreign perceptions of the United States. The drop in support for violent extremists presents an opportunity to expand our efforts to nurture common interests with people overseas and work with them to counter al-Qaeda's attempts to radicalize young people.

Osama bin Laden

Al-Qaeda's growing Internet propaganda activities glorify violence and seek to exploit local grievances, from political oppression to a lack of economic opportunities. In contrast, America's public diplomacy programs are engaging young people constructively, through English-language teaching, educational exchanges, music and sports diplomacy.

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Many Modern Conflicts Are Food Wars, . . .

(Continued from page 16)

tant role in the tenuous first months after the end of a conflict, Cohen said, as displaced families and former combatants return home to await the first new harvests.

"That's clearly a place where food aid is an appropriate kind of intervention," he said. "It's all the more important that it be linked to demining, perhaps agrarian reform, and rebuilding the infrastructure."

As the world's largest donor of humanitarian food aid, the United States plays an important role, he said, but it must do more through its partnerships with the United Nations and nongovernmental aid organizations to integrate emergency food aid into conflict resolution.

"If food activities, that is, building food security where it has been destroyed through conflict, is going to go forward, there has to be security, and this is the conundrum that so many of these post-conflict reconstruction reconciliation projects run into," said Messer.

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Bin Laden's Image Declining Among Muslims, . . .

(Continued from page 17)

This summer, we partnered with local governments in predominantly Muslim countries to host programs to teach young people English and leadership and citizenship skills. It was the first time many of these youths had met an American. Evaluations show they left with much more positive views of our country.

This year, we will teach English to thousands of young people in more than 40 majority-Muslim countries. I met with a group in Morocco, in the same neighborhood that produced the Casablanca suicide bombers of 2003. When I asked one young man what difference learning English had made in his life, he told me: "I have a job, and none of my friends do." That young man also has hope -- a reason to live rather than to kill himself and others in a suicide bombing.

Thanks to strong bipartisan support from Congress, we are expanding our education and exchange programs as well as bringing "key influencers" such as Muslim journalists and clerics here to experience America for themselves.

These kinds of programs are invaluable in challenging stereotypes and countering the misinformation that radical extremists put out to drive a wedge between our cultures and countries.

Osama bin Laden's recent tape was a reminder that al-Qaeda offers only destruction and death. Al-Qaeda terrorists murder those who don't agree with them -- including Muslims. Their attacks on mosques, shrines and even wedding celebrations confirm that they don't care about innocent Muslims. As one woman in Algeria put it, "They are criminals who want to sabotage the country." That's a message bin Laden's words don't convey, but his actions do. Six years after Sept. 11, good and decent people of many faiths and cultures are increasingly rejecting his brutal methods.

(The writer is undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.)

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Global Financial Firm Bets on Green Power

By Howard Cincotta
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- How does a financial services organization -- even one that is the world's largest -- address the challenge of climate change and greenhouse gases in a major way when it does not operate a single industrial or transportation company?

In the case of Citi (formerly Citigroup), with some 200 million customer accounts and business activities in roughly 100 countries, the answer is a complex, ambitious program to direct $50 billion over the next decade into “green" investments, alternative energy and new technologies.

The program, said Citi Chief Executive Officer Charles Prince, "is not a wish list, but a realistic, achievable plan that serves a critical global need -- and responds to an emerging investment opportunity."

Initiatives such as Citi's are critical components in the partnership of governments, the private sector, volunteer organizations and local communities to reduce greenhouse gases. This challenge will be the focus of a conference called the Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change, to be hosted by President Bush in Washington September 27-28. (See fact sheet (http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/fs/2007/90067.htm).)

Citi seeks to reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming through a variety of "green" strategies that harness market-based forces and investments for clients that can run a profit while helping solve perhaps the chief environmental issue of this generation.

"Citi understands how profoundly climate change will transform the economy, and they are pioneering opportunities for the capital markets to meet the climate challenge," says Eileen Claussen, president of the nonprofit, independent Pew Center on Global Climate Change.

REDUCING CITI'S FOOTPRINT

Citi's 10-year program is as multifaceted as the company itself. As much as $10 billion will be devoted to reducing Citi's own environmental "footprint," primarily through measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions from its extensive real estate holdings some 10 percent from 2005 levels by the year 2011. This is an undertaking encompassing 14,500 offices and facilities around the world.

In Frankfurt, Germany, for example, Citi is constructing a data center that will be one of the most energy- and resource-efficient of its kind. "The new center will be our largest outside the United States," says Citi official Sue Harnett, "but you won't know that from our electrical bill."

By contrast to conventional buildings of similar size, the Frankfurt center, scheduled to open in March 2008, will use 25 percent less electricity -- equivalent to the power for 3,000 homes for a year -- emit 11,000 fewer tons of carbon dioxide, and save 40 million liters of water annually.

ENERGY INVESTMENTS

Over the next decade, Citi plans to invest more than $30 billion in clean and alternative energy through subsidiaries such as Sustainable Development Investments and Citi Alternative Investments.

These programs range from "renewables" like wind, solar and geothermal energy to new technologies, such as highly efficient, combustion engines and hydrogen fuel cells. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/ites/0706/ijee/eckhart.htm).)

One such company is Suzion, a wind turbine manufacturer in India. Another is Loreto Bay, a 5,000-home development in Baja, Mexico, that is one of the largest sustainable resort communities in North America.

CitiMortgage has partnered with Japan's Sharp Electronics, the world's largest maker of solar cells, to offer loans and lines of credit for homeowners to install solar electric systems. Citi also recently introduced an energy-efficient mortgage and a promotion for hybrid auto financing. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/ites/0706/ijee/homebuilders.htm).)

CARBON FINANCE

Any successful effort to lower discharges of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will have to rely, in part, on allowing market forces to provide incentives to achieve national and international climate goals.

One such mechanism, which Citi actively is pursuing, is that of global carbon markets, also known as emissions trading. The basic concept is straightforward: establish an overall cap on the discharge of a specific gas, then allow companies and other emitters to buy and sell emission units among themselves while maintaining, or even gradually lowering, the overall ceiling.
Such emission markets already have

(Continued on page 21)

Solar Cookers, Efficient Stoves Help Rural Families Worldwide

By Cheryl Pellerin
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The use of technologies that combine solar power and energy efficiency is helping a growing segment of the more than 3 billion people in the developing world who burn traditional biomass fuels -- including wood and animal dung -- indoors for cooking and heating.

The current cooking practice, according to the World Health Organization, traps high levels of pollutants in the living area and causes 1.6 million premature deaths every year, mainly among women and children.

It also ravages trees, brush and other ground cover, promoting erosion and flooding in many areas that already are vulnerable to such occurrences.

"If this is the last tree in the whole country," Patricia McArdle told USINFO, referring to a photograph from Afghanistan, "and that lady has to cook dinner, she will cut that tree down and take it home. That's why we have to work with governments to implement these policies locally and promote the use of solar cooking."

But it is an integrated approach, added McArdle, with "solar cooking when the sun is shining, combined with energy-efficient cooking methods for nighttime and cloudy days." McArdle is a former State Department Foreign Service officer and now a board member with Solar Cookers International in California and Solar Household Energy in Washington.

COOKING WITH THE SUN

The three most common solar cookers are heat-trap boxes, curved concentrators (parabolics) and panel cookers. Hundreds of variations exist, instructions for making them are freely available on the Internet, and there are many manufacturers.

Box cookers, the most common around the world, cook at moderate to high temperatures and can heat several pots at once. There are several hundred thousand in India alone, according to the Solar Cookers International Web site.

Parabolic cookers focus sunlight into a single point and cook fast at high temperatures. They need frequent adjustment and supervision for safe operation. Several hundred thousand exist, mainly in China. They are especially useful for large-scale institutional cooking.

Panel cookers have elements of box and parabolic cookers. They are simple and relatively inexpensive to buy or produce. Solar Cookers International's "CooKit," designed by a physicist, is the most widely used combination cooker.

To keep food warm or extend cooking time, people can use an insulated basket. Solar cookers also can be used to dry foods, heat water and pasteurize water for drinking.

Combining solar cookers, insulated baskets and energy-efficient cook stoves "can reduce your use of fuel by about 85 percent," said McArdle, who has met with officials from a range of U.S. government agencies to seek funding for solar cooking projects worldwide.

Small nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits, and larger organizations like Rotary International and the German/international cooperation enterprise GTZ are helping spread the word about the technology.

ROCKET STOVE

Recently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Partnership for Clean Indoor Air approved grants for five organizations, including Bolivia-based CEDESOL Foundation, which stands for Center for Development with Solar Energy.

Solar cookers

The grant, CEDESOL Executive Director David Whitfield told USINFO, is for a scale-up project involving a uniquely designed wood-burning device called a rocket stove that "has been certified to be at least 42 percent efficient," does not pollute the environment, and gets about 95 percent of all the harmful gas particles out of the living space.

"This is significant, Whitfield said, "because many chimney stoves just get smoke out of the kitchen."

Thanks to the EPA funding,

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Global Financial Firm Bets on Green . . .

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worked successfully in the United States to limit acid-rain pollutants like nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide. Emissions trading now is being employed to limit the potent greenhouse gas methane as well. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=August&x=20070823152734lcnirellep0.9353449).)

Citi, which already has an emissions trading office in London, recently concluded an innovative deal between the British airline EasyJet and a hydropower producer in Ecuador that allows EasyJet passengers to offset emissions from their travel.

Global markets for greenhouse gases are just beginning to emerge, notably in Europe, according to Citi, which predicts that a similar market will appear shortly in the state of California (the world's sixth-largest economy).

As a result, Citi reports that the global carbon market is growing exponentially -- from $337 million in 2004 to $12 billion in 2005, and nearly $30 billion at the start of 2007.

In other words, Citi believes that the growing carbon market could offer both profits for investors and major greenhouse gas reductions for the world.

For more information, see the publication USA Energy Needs, Clean Development and Climate Change Partnerships in Action (http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/or/2006/75337.htm) and Climate Change and Clean Energy (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/climate_change.html).

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Solar Cookers, Efficient Stoves Help Rural Families . . .

(Continued from page 20)

CEDESOL "will be able to purchase industrialization equipment and will receive consultations by research institutes to improve our process of producing our improved wood stove," Whitfield said. "Our goal is to deliver 20,000 stoves by mid-2009."

CEDESOL will build and sell the stoves to customers in Bolivia. GTZ is paying a $26 subsidy, he added, that helps make the stoves more affordable. GTZ is also part of a program to eradicate smoke in 100,000 homes in rural Bolivia.

A big part of making a success of the integrated cooking system -- efficient stoves, solar cookers and extended cooking devices -- is helping users develop the habit of using the new system.

First, Whitfield said, people must be able to buy the systems, "but unless there is some kind of marketing practice, the technology will not continue to exist."

McArdle agrees that there are issues with solar cookers.

"Technology transfer -- you've got to get the local leaders involved," she said. "In many cases, unless it's a real disaster situation, you want people to purchase [the equipment], so you have to have a microfinancing component."

But the benefits -- to households, businesses, governments, humanitarian and development organizations and environmental programs -- outweigh the issues.

"I see very positive growth in the industry," Whitfield said. "The people are more sophisticated, the equipment is better, and I believe it's time, from an ecological and an economical standpoint, that we start focusing on disseminating this type of technology."

More information about Solar Household Energy (http://www.she-inc.org/), Solar Cookers International (http://www.solarcookers.org/) and CEDESOL (http://www.cedesol.org/) is available on the organizations' Web sites.

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New Agricultural Technologies May Bring Another Green Revolution

By Kathryn McConnell
USINFO Staff Writer

This is the fifth in a series of articles on U.S. food aid and agricultural assistance for vulnerable populations around the world.

Washington -- Scientists from the United States and other nations want to create another "green revolution," particularly in Africa, that would help poor countries better meet their own food needs and the demands of export markets.

Within governmental, university and private-sector partnerships, researchers are working on new agricultural technologies that can help poor countries end food scarcity and malnutrition. Among these innovations are improved crop varieties, more effective fertilizers, new livestock vaccines and new food-processing techniques.

At the U.S.-supported International Fertilizer and Development Center (IFDC) in Alabama, chemist Amit Roy works with scientists from many countries to develop a fertilizer that can be absorbed by soil easily and help farmers take full advantage of improved seed varieties on nitrogen-deficient farmland. Because the new fertilizer is more efficient than traditional ones, farmers can use less of it, reducing their costs and residue runoff, Roy told USINFO.

U.S. university researchers have been working on projects that range from crops with special qualities to technologies for transporting produce.

At Purdue University in Indiana, Bruce Hameker and his international colleagues want to develop a more digestible variety of sorghum, allowing consumers to absorb better the grain's protein. Sorghum is a primary crop in the dry Sahel area and a secondary crop in other African nations. It also is a choice food for people who cannot digest the gluten found in wheat, he said.

Philip Nelson, another Purdue researcher, developed technologies that allow the large-scale storage and long-distance transportation of acidic fruit and vegetable products. Those technologies have helped increase people's access to food around the world, he said. Nelson is the 2007 World Food Prize recipient. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=June&x=20070618165621AKllennoCcM0.1270716).)

Lloyd Rooney at Texas A&M University is helping sorghum and millet farmers and processors in Africa provide debris-free, milled grains to urban consumers. Urban residents like the easy-cooking cereals that can be eaten alone or combined with other foods for more balanced nutrition.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), with 100 locations in the United States and other countries, provides another venue for research efforts that can benefit developing countries.

At the ARS center in North Dakota, scientists are trying to make cassava, a staple food for millions of Africans, higher yielding and more resistant to pests and disease. At other centers, researchers develop varieties of bacterial- and viral-resistant dry beans and collaborate with Kenya's agricultural research institute and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center on identifying wheat resistance to stem rust, a disease found in eastern Africa.

Other ARS projects include developing a variety of wheat that can grow in soils containing high amounts of growth-restricting aluminum and creating rice that is resistant to a damaging fungus. Intensive cultivation of rice has caused stronger strains of the fungus to appear in parts of Asia.

In addition, U.S. scientists have been working on projects designed to help ranchers. One result of their work is a promising vaccine to protect cattle, swine and goats from foot-and-mouth disease. The disease, found throughout the world, rarely transmits to humans but can cause severe losses in meat and milk production.

Many international agricultural scientists, who work at U.S. universities and research centers, have been trained in the United States and other countries through programs supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development and USDA.

The United States also is a member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which supports 15 research centers located around the world.

More about U.S. efforts to combat malnutrition and hunger worldwide will be available in the upcoming eJournal USA U.S. Food Aid: Reducing World Hunger.

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Early Primaries and Caucuses Shape Presidential . . .

(Continued from page 5)

events on February 5 and others threatening to move up their events, the association says all dates are subject to change.

HISTORY OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY SYSTEM

Presidential primaries originated in the United States at the turn of the 20th century as an outgrowth of the Progressive Movement. Reformers fighting corruption at that time objected to links between political bosses and big business. Primaries became part of their reform effort to return the government to the people.

Florida enacted the first presidential primary law in 1901, giving party officials the option of holding an election to choose national convention delegates, but there was no provision for placing the names of presidential candidates on the ballot.

Oregon became the first state to hold a preferential primary vote for president in 1910, and by 1912, a dozen states had enacted presidential primary laws.

Over the years, that number increased, with 17 states holding primaries in 1968 and 30 in 1976. By 2000, and again this cycle, the number will be 41 states, with the rest having caucuses.

For more information, see U.S. Elections (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html).

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Muslim Students Observe Ramadan Away from . . .

(Continued from page 8)

makes him feel vibrant and healthy, and allows him to let go of the many day-to-day anxieties that would usually preoccupy him and, instead, focus on the most important tasks.

This is how it should be, Hendi said, because the point of the monthlong fasting is to encourage Muslims to reflect on their lives and their devotion and to share the feelings of others -- what it means to be poor, to be hungry. “Ramadan is about control -- controlling one’s hunger and one’s anger,” Hendi said.

Ibrahim makes sure he does not miss the pre-fasting morning meal, even if he gets up to have only a glass of water. "I pay attention mostly to water to avoid dehydration and [I] avoid coffee as much as possible after breaking the fast," Ibrahim said. Usually when Ibrahim wakes early for prayer, he goes back to sleep before heading to his work at the hospital. During Ramadan, however, he sometimes remains awake and finds that when he does, he is more productive.

Other students told USINFO they have a similar goal during Ramadan: To do everything better -- to be better members of the larger community and to feel better about themselves.

“If I don’t feel better about myself after Ramadan, then I’m in trouble,” said Farasi Moktader, 27, a financial analyst in Washington, who was invited to the Georgetown iftar by a former student.

Natalie Stewart, 21, who “leans toward Buddhism,” observed the Ramadan fast in support of her Muslim roommate. “Fasting can apply to many faiths -- it’s a good way to slow down the routine,” she said.

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