



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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Conference on Domestic Violence Urges "Family Conversations: Let's Tell the Secrets"

Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) -- The Institute of Gender Studies of Addis Ababa University (AAU), in partnership with the United States Embassy and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, organized its first conference on domestic violence to celebrate the 2007 International Women's Day under the theme "Family Conversations: let's tell the secrets." The two-day conference

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DCM Janet Wilgus opens the conference flanked by the Honorable Woizero Gifti Abasya second from right, Dr. Natarajan, far right, Dr. Elaine Rocha, Institute of Gender Studies AAU, far left, and Pat Johnson U.S. Embassy Cultural Affairs Officer.

U.S. Military Training Program Benefits African Peacekeepers

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Africans make the best peacekeepers for Africa, and the United States has made a strong commitment to helping them hone their peacekeeping skills, says the coordi-



U.S. Army instructors train Ethiopian national defense students in Hurso, Ethiopia. Africans make the best peacekeepers for Africa, and the U.S. has made a strong commitment to helping them hone their peacekeeping skills, says the coordinator for a U.S.-managed military training program. (DoD)

nator for a U.S.-managed military training program.

"Our job is to help African countries enhance their capabilities to effectively take part in peacekeeping operations. And so far, the 19 African nations we've partnered with over the

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Conference on Domestic Violence Urges “Family Conversations: . . .

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opened March 22 in Addis Ababa by U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, Janet Wilgus, with a keynote address by The Honorable Woizero Gifti Abasiya, Chairman of the Women’s Affairs Standing Committee in the House of People’s Representatives.

The aim of the conference is to bring together students, specialists, journalists and activists in Addis Ababa to create a joint platform for action against domestic violence.

The conference will also serve to broaden and strengthen the national network of gender specialists, professionals and students interested in gender issues, so that they can more effectively fight against domestic violence and promote the implementation of policies to decrease the incidence of domestic violence in Ethiopian society. The event is also an opportunity to bring the research, analysis and policies relevant to this field to a broader public.

Distinguished guest speakers at the conference include The Hon. Woizero Netsanet Asfaw, Deputy Whip, House of People’s Representatives; Mangai Natarajan, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the City University of New York; Marren Akatsa-Bukachi, Executive Director of Eastern African Subregional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), Kampala, Uganda; Sosena Mulatu, Institute of Gender Studies, AAU; Maria Munir, Director, Tsotawi Tekat Tekelakay Maheber, and others. ♦



Conference Participants

U.S. Military Training Program Benefits African Peacekeepers . . .

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past 10 years tell us we've done a good job," says Chip Beck, who heads the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA) at the U.S. State Department.

ACOTA is unique, Beck said in a March 15 interview with USINFO, because it is a "true partnership, it trains trainers who in turn keep training their own troops in peacekeeping skills. Our job is really to work ourselves out of a [training] job."

The ultimate goal is to help the African Union (AU) create an effective standby peacekeeping force of 25,000 troops by 2010 that would replenish itself, he said. Troops from African nations currently account for one-third of the total 100,000 peacekeepers deployed worldwide.

ACOTA partners include: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Following their ACOTA training they became involved in peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan/Darfur, Somalia and Lebanon.

South African Ambassador Barbara Masekela alluded to ACOTA's value in a speech at Northwestern University in Illinois in October 2006 when she said, "I would like to recognize the support of the U.S. administration in our collective [AU] efforts to promote peace in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Cote d'Ivoire and other parts of

Africa."

Congress agrees that ACOTA is effective, and has consistently approved its budget since it first was established in 1997 to help African nations ensure stability after ceasefires and negotiations that led to peace.

"Our mission is one of positive engagement with African militaries to support the peacekeeping goals of the African Union," Beck said.

"ACOTA has already increased the skill and professionalism of 92,000 African troops and we are shooting for a total of 228,000 troops benefiting from ACOTA-learned skills by 2010."

Operating in close collaboration with the Defense Department's International Security Affairs Africa bureau, ACOTA contractors -- usually retired U.S. military personnel -- work with select groups of troops chosen by the host country, Beck explained.

The generally two-month training includes convoy escort, checkpoint and disarmament operations, weapons handling, management of refugees, negotiations and small-unit command skills. Command and staff training -- as well as exercises for battalion, brigade and multinational force headquarters personnel -- also are included.

ACOTA also furnishes nonweapons equipment, including uniforms, boots, generators, mine detectors, field medical equipment and water purification devices. HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention training also are stressed, Beck said.

"We pride ourselves on the fact that the ACOTA training is tailored to match an individual partner's needs and capabilities. There is no 'one fits all' template that we try to

force on our partner militaries," he said.

In 2006, the \$40 million for training troops under ACOTA was adequate, Beck said. But now, with more African peacekeepers being called for duty in Sudan and Somalia, ACOTA has asked for \$71 million for 2007.

"I think we have a very good shot at the target," the retired naval officer said. "We've got the support of Congress, the Africans and a good working collaboration between [the Department of Defense] and [the U.S. Department of] State -- a winning combination."

In January 2006, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer touched on the importance of the military partnership as she told a National Defense University forum on security in Africa, "The U.S. believes strongly in the ACOTA program."

She added, "Africans have demonstrated true dedication and resolve ... and it is vitally important that the United States continues ... to strengthen the capacity of Africans to carry out peace support operations."

ACOTA is an important part of President Bush's Global Peace Operations Initiative, which plans to use \$660 million to train and equip a force of 75,000 peacekeepers for duty around the world by 2010. For more information on U.S. policy, see Peace and Security (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/peace_security.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>) ♦

Additional Zimbabwe Sanctions Possible, State Department Says

By Stephen Kaufman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- In response to the Zimbabwean government's violent repression of its political opposition, the Bush administration is considering "additional measures" to its existing targeted sanctions, the State Department said March 14.

Deputy spokesman Tom Casey said the United States will be consulting with "other like-minded countries," including members of the European Union, on possible actions to take, and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry Lowenkron will be raising the issue March 15 in his consultations with the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Lowenkron will "see what we can do with our African Union partners to push the Zimbabwean government to allow for peaceful political participation from its citizens and from the opposition," Casey said.

Current U.S. sanctions, imposed in 2002 and 2003, have been "very specific and focused on individuals who have been associated with some of these repressive policies," he said.

"There's always other tools in the toolbox, though, and I certainly expect we'll look at those," he added.

The deputy spokesman said Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's remarks threatening a "heavy price" against the opposition are "in keeping" with his regime's continued intimidation and repression of the country's opposition.

Casey said members of Zimbabwe's political opposition, including Move-

ment for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai, plan to participate in the March 17 funeral of an individual who was killed in the government's March 11 attack on an opposition prayer meeting.

"We call on the government of Zimbabwe to refrain from any actions against that funeral and events surrounding it and to allow that to

and while in custody have been allowed to receive medical attention.

"Certainly we're glad to see these people getting medical treatment, but it still makes very clear the kinds of problems that Zimbabwe currently faces and the exact nature of the regime that we're dealing with," he said.



Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai (center) with supporters before the court house in Harare, Zimbabwe March 13. (AP Images)

move forward peacefully and without any further incidents of violence or intimidation," Casey said.

U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe Christopher Dell intends to meet with Tsvangirai, who is recuperating from injuries reportedly received while in police custody, "as soon as he is physically able to receive visitors."

Earlier, Casey said the United States was "most pleased" to see that Tsvangirai and some of the other individuals who had been severely beaten at the prayer meeting

Casey also said the Bush administration wants to see the U.N.'s Human Rights Council in Geneva address the issue, despite U.S. concerns that it lacks credibility because it is focused primarily on Israel.

"We think this would be certainly the kind of concern that a well-functioning and credible human rights council would want to address," he said.

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U.S. Pledges Help for Refugees in Chad, Central African Republic

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will continue to provide humanitarian support to help protect vulnerable civilians in Chad and the Central African Republic who have been affected by conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, a top State Department official said March 20.

A significant U.S. priority in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) is protecting refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and humanitarian workers, said James Swan, deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

Swan testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on African Affairs, which is examining the regional impact of the Darfur crisis.

"By now we are all aware of the tragedy unfolding in the Darfur region of Sudan," Subcommittee Chairman Russ Feingold said in prepared opening remarks. "The U.S. government and many other concerned states — acting alone as well as through the U.N. and African Union — have intervened with diplomatic, humanitarian, human rights and development assistance, efforts driven in large part by effective grassroots activism."

"We are seeing the brutal tactics of Darfur — and their tragic conse-

quences — transferred across the porous border into eastern Chad and the Central African Republic," he said.

Swan said that spillover violence from Darfur has caused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to cut staff by approximately 50 percent in Chad, "limiting the ability of NGOs to provide nonlifefaving support activities, such as education, in refugee camps and to IDPs."



Sudanese Darfur refugees are seen at the refugee camp of Gaga, Eastern Chad February 13. (AP Images)

The United Nations estimates that there are 230,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad, 20,000 Chadian refugees in Darfur and 50,000 CAR refugees in southern Chad. There are up to 110,000 IDPs in eastern Chad. Approximately 280,000 Central Africans are displaced, of whom 212,000 are IDPs, 20,000 are refugees in Cameroon and the remaining are refugees in southern Chad, according to Swan.

While Swan said "there is no irrefutable evidence that northeastern

CAR rebels enjoy support from the Sudanese government," he told the lawmakers, "There are reports that these rebels have operated out of, and been supplied through, Sudan ... fueling instability in CAR." In addition, Chadian rebels have traversed northern CAR to attack N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, from bases in Sudan and "may do so again in the future," he said.

U.S. funding for Chad for 2006 included the following amounts for countering the humanitarian disaster, Swan said:

\$4 million for emergency supplies, relief commodities, programs to address food insecurity, water and sanitation programs, income generation activities and nutrition assessments for Chadians affected by the presence of refugees and IDPs; and

\$23.8 million in emergency food assistance, in addition to the \$2.7 million in nonemergency food assistance, \$610,000 for humanitarian radio programs and \$45 million to support refugee and IDP camps and programs and to provide security for the refugee camps.

Humanitarian funding for CAR in that period, he said, included these amounts:

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Members of Parliament, Civil Society Exchange Ideas in Tanzania

Following Tanzania's general elections in 2005, the number of members of parliament (MPs) from mainland Tanzania increased from 295 to 323. Of those, 170 were new to parliament.

MPs must tackle such challenges as reducing poverty, conserving natural resources and reducing barriers to development, including gender inequality, corruption and HIV/AIDS. They also must fulfill their mandate of applying checks and balances to the executive branch and representing the needs of their constituents.

Civil society organizations can help MPs fulfill their duties by providing them with the technical expertise they need to take action.

With support from the U.S. Agency

for International Development (USAID), civil society organizations in Tanzania hosted a two-day informational event at the legislative capital of Dodoma so that elected representatives could become acquainted with their areas of expertise.

Organizations working on a variety of public policies and reforms placed their lobbying and advocacy agendas directly before those empowered to enact the nation's laws -- MPs and senior government officials.

Now when MPs want to learn more about the implications of a specific policy, they know where to turn for more information.

"A mutually beneficial relationship between civil society and parlia-

ment can enhance the efforts of both groups," said Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Anne Makinda.

"This opportunity for interaction is an important step towards cementing such a relationship," she said.

During the event MPs and civil society representatives also participated in radio interviews. Their messages on human rights, domestic violence and the rights of people with disabilities reached citizens in rural areas who have few opportunities to hear their leaders and civil society representatives address these important issues.

The relationship between MPs and civil society is still young in Tanzania, but now has a foundation on which to grow. ♦

U.S. Pledges Help for Refugees in Chad, . . .

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\$565,000 in emergency food assistance and \$350,000 for programs to respond to the International Committee of the Red Cross's 2006 appeal for conflict victims; and support for responsible forest management and good governance through the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). CAR receives approximately several hundred thousand dollars as part of the program.

On the security side, a partnership with Chad called the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership is working "to strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities and enhance cooperation among the region's security forces, but also to promote democratic governance as a means to discredit terrorist ideology," Swan said.

Military training programs in Chad and CAR, funded by the State Department, meant "to promote long-term institutional military reform" were funded in 2006 at \$342,000 for Chad and at \$105,000 for CAR, he said. ♦

Additional Zimbabwe Sanctions Possible, . . .

(Continued from page 4)

A senior State Department official said the United States wants the international community, including Zimbabwe's neighbors in the African Union, to do more to increase diplomatic pressure on the Mugabe regime.

The official cited the poor condition of Zimbabwe's economy, saying that under the Mugabe government the country has transformed from one of the region's larger food exporters into a major importer, "relying, in some cases, on international food contributions."

The United States is seeking ways to target the regime "without causing additional hardship to the people," and the official said that would likely mean looking at "ways to expand and broaden the kinds of targeted sanctions that we've already got in place." ♦

Iranian Americans Welcome Persian New Year March 20

By Howard Cincotta
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- Every culture celebrates the change in seasons in some fashion, but few are as ancient, colorful and full of symbolism as the traditional ceremonies for the beginning of the Persian New Year, or Nowrouz, marking the first day of spring.

For writer Firoozeh Dumas, author of *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*, "Nowrouz is all about hope. With the first day of spring, the New Year celebration represents rebirth and hope -- and we all cling to hope, now more than ever."

For cardiologist Rudy Rezzadeh, founder of the annual Persian Parade in New York City, "Nowrouz is a way for our children to celebrate and learn about their cultural background, just like so many other people in America have done."

The range and variety of Nowrouz celebrations reflect the richness and diversity of Persian culture in the United States, which includes the people of many nations and ethnic backgrounds that were once part of the greater Persian Empire. These Persian traditions and history encompass those who live in present-day Iran, of course, but also people from countries stretching from Albania through a great swath of Central Asia to India and Pakistan. Many of the traditions associated with Nowrouz reflect its ancient origins in the Zoroastrian faith as

far back as 5,000 years. But, as with other cultural traditions in the United States, Nowrouz has evolved to attract new generations to the rich heritage it represents. Shaida Johnston, a NASA scientist in Washington, fondly recalls the excitement of Nowrouz celebrations in Iran as a teenager, from the preparation of traditional foods and the wearing of brand-new clothes

Nowrouz celebration begins the evening of March 20.

An essential element of Nowrouz celebrations -- whether at home or at a banquet -- is the traditional Haft Seen, an elegant centerpiece or table setting of seven items beginning with the letter "S" in the Persian alphabet, representing creations and immortals of the ancient Persian tradition.



Nelly Sayaidi, of North Haven, Connecticut, walks down Madison Avenue during the Persian Day Parade in New York. (AP Images)

to visiting relatives who gave the children sweets and gold coins.

"It is one of my happiest memories," she said. Although Johnston no longer leaps bonfires -- another Nowrouz tradition -- she will prepare an elaborate Persian meal that her friends, most of whom are not Iranian, look forward to enjoying with her every year.

Food, as with many popular holidays, is central to Nowrouz celebrations throughout the country. The Iranian Association of Boston, Persia House of Portland State University in Oregon, the Iranian Cultural Center of New Mexico and the Iranian Cultural Center of Orange County in California all will be marking Nowrouz with banquets featuring traditional dishes, music and dancing. In the United States, the

Some of the common items are Sabzeh (wheat, barley or lentil sprouts, symbolizing rebirth), Samanu (sweet pudding or custard -- affluence), Senjed (fruit of the oleaster or lotus tree -- love), Seer (garlic -- health and medicine), Seeb (apples -- beauty and health), Somaq (sumac berries -- sunrise), Serkeh (vinegar -- age and patience), Sonbol (hyacinth -- spring) and Sekkeh (coins -- prosperity and wealth).

Many groups will be offering menus of cultural events to accompany the food. The Persian Center, based in Berkeley, California, for example, plans a bonfire-jumping event on a downtown street, a presentation by the Society of Iranian Professionals, film and art shows and talks on Iranian women in science and the latest archeological research under way in Iran. One popular feature for children this year is a new animated cartoon called *Babak & Friends -- A First Norooz*. Babak tells the story of a young Iranian boy who, as he adjusts to life in America, learns the rich history and culture of his background and how it contributes to the tapestry of American life. ♦

U.S. Audience Applauds Latest Film from Iranian Director Panahi

By Judy Aita
USINFO Staff Writer

New York -- The box-office line waiting for cancellations confirmed it. The Film Society of Lincoln Center's March 12 screening of famed Iranian director Jafar Panahi's film *Offside* was a sellout.

Inside the 268-seat Walter Reade Theater, the audience's response to the film and the questions to Columbia University professor Hamid Dabashi were further proof of the audience's interest in film, Iranian films and Iran in general.

Richard Pena, the Film Society's program director, said that one reason he chose the film was to give Americans an opportunity "to perhaps understand these people with whom we seem to have so many dealings and yet know so little about."

Offside debuted in the fall of 2006 at the society's prestigious New York Film Festival. Each year, the 17-day festival showcases the newest and most important works by directors from around the world.

Dabashi said film is "a singularly important" means of exposing Americans to a different vision of Iran.

Offside follows several young women disguised as boys as they try to sneak into a very important international football match for Iran. If Iran wins its match against Bahrain, it will go to the 2006 World Cup -- a feat that has eluded Iran's team for several years. Panahi filmed much of the movie with the actual Iran-Bahrain match ongoing in the background.

The girls' knowledge of the game and its star players as well as their need to be part of the cheering crowd is equal to that of the men and boys overwhelming the stadium. Religious declarations that make such matches off-limits to women fade in the spirit of the moment.



Iranian Director Jafar Panahi poses with his Silver Berlin Bear award for his film "Offside" in Berlin February 18. (AP Images)

Panahi -- who has said the film was inspired by his experiences in trying to gain admittance for himself and his daughter to a match in 2004 --

focuses on five young women who were caught and spent the game in a holding pen tantalizingly close to the action but dependent on a soldier giving them an unsatisfactory play-by-play of the match.

As in the football penalty for which the film is named, the girls -- as well as some of their guards -- are out of place.

Girls play football, too, on school playing fields and with women coaches, one of the characters in the film tells a soldier. When her school had a match against a team from another country, the opposing team's male coach had to phone in plays from outside the stadium.

Offside is, Dabashi said, "very much dedicated to the cause of liberty and the struggle of people."

"It is a celebration of the indomitable spirit of Iranian women in par-

ticular to defy tyranny, stand for their rights, and be at the forefront of the struggle of their nation for freedom and democracy," he said.

The script, by Panahi, is "in the great tradition we have in Iran of men who have joined their women colleagues throughout modern Iran in speaking on behalf of women's issues," Dabashi said.

"The privilege of Iranian men is not in the way of 'how wonderful is it that they are speaking on behalf of Iranian women,' but because the cause of Iranian women is the cause of Iranians. And the success and failure of the revolutions and uprising and so forth is only determined to the degree woman's rights are ascertained," he said.

Dabashi called *Offside* "the crowning achievement of Iranian cinema over the last two decades" that has become part and parcel of a body of spectacular presentations of Iranian social and political concerns by Iranian filmmakers.

He also discussed his new book, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, which analyzes key events, cultural trends and political development. He called it "a love letter to two countries that are very, very dear to me -- my homeland, Iran, and also to the United States where I live and where my children were born."

Dabashi comes from Ahvaz, Iran. He was educated in Iran before moving to the United States for post-graduate studies, eventually receiving a dual doctorate in sociology of culture and Islamic studies from the University of Pennsylvania. He is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York. ♦

International Players Set for U.S. Basketball's "March Madness"

By Tim Receveur
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Every March, 65 of the best teams across America compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Division I basketball tournament. The three-week event is commonly known as "March Madness" because of the frenzy the tournament ignites among sports fans and others.

The semifinal matches -- known popularly as the "Final Four" -- as well as the championship game are among the United States' most publicized sporting events. The 2007 Final Four will be played on March 31 and the final on April 2 in Atlanta.

In 2006, more than 70 million people watched the opening rounds of the NCAA tournament on television, according to CBS. The Internet version called "March Madness on Demand" generated 19 million video streams and drew 5 million visits in 2006, making it one of the largest live Internet events in history.

Increasingly, the NCAA tournament has an international connection.

There are a record 423 players from outside the United States on the 330 NCAA Division I men's basketball rosters in the 2006-2007 season, according to the NCAA. Approximately 70 of these players will take part in at least the first round of tournament play, which begins March 15. If they make it to the championship or even the Final Four, their home countries often take notice.

That happened in 2006 when the final games of the tournament were

broadcast in Cameroon so people could watch their countrymen Luc Richard Mbah a Moute and Alfred Aboya play for the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in the final game against the University of Florida. Florida won the game with the help of Joakim Noah, whose grandfather Zacharie



Wil Fameni drives for a basket during a game with Georgia State in Richmond, Virginia, on March 3. (VCU Photo/Scott Brown)

Noah is a Cameroonian football star and the father of tennis player Yannick Noah.

Cameroon, an African country normally associated with dominance in football (known in the United States as soccer), has contributed 25 players to Division I basketball this school year. The top exporters of U.S. college-bound players in Division I men's basketball are Canada with 74, Lithuania with 32 and Australia with 29, according to the NCAA.

At least two more outstanding players from Cameroon will play in the NCAA tournament this year -- Wil

Fameni, a junior forward, and Franck Ndongo, a freshman forward for Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, Virginia. Fameni and Ndongo guided the VCU basketball team to an impressive 27-6 record, and the team is now scheduled for a first round match-up against Duke University.

VCU hopes to have a run similar to that of George Mason University (GMU), in 2006, when it became the smallest school to make it to the Final Four since 1979. "Never before has a school [like GMU] with such little name recognition ascended so unexpectedly to the national stage," wrote Stefan Fatsis in The Wall Street Journal on March 30, 2006.

Fameni, who is fluent in French, English, Dutch and Féfé, an African dialect, said basketball is becoming more popular in Cameroon. However, he does not believe it ever will attain the status of his national sport, since Cameroon has one of the most successful football teams in the world.

"When I left Cameroon basketball didn't compare in status to football, but it is mostly because of a lack of resources," Fameni told USINFO. "People have a hard time buying shoes and other equipment." He and Ndongo said they want to rectify this when they get home.

The two plan to finish their education and return home to confront problems in Cameroon. "So many kids have the same dream to come to the U.S. -- play basketball and go to school," said Ndongo. "I want to go home after getting my degree [in finance], bring a positive message to my country, and encourage other kids to follow their dreams." ♦

Women's History Month

(begin fact sheet)

U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, D.C.
January 4, 2007

Facts for Features
Women's History Month: March
2007

National Women's History Month's roots go back to March 8, 1857, when women from New York City factories staged a protest over working conditions. International Women's Day was first observed in 1909, but it wasn't until 1981 that Congress established National Women's History Week during the second week of March. In 1987, Congress expanded the week to a month. Every year since, Congress has passed a resolution for Women's History Month, and the president has issued a proclamation.

152 million
The number of females in the United States as of Nov. 1, 2006. That exceeds the number of males (148 million). < http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/2005_nat_res.html >

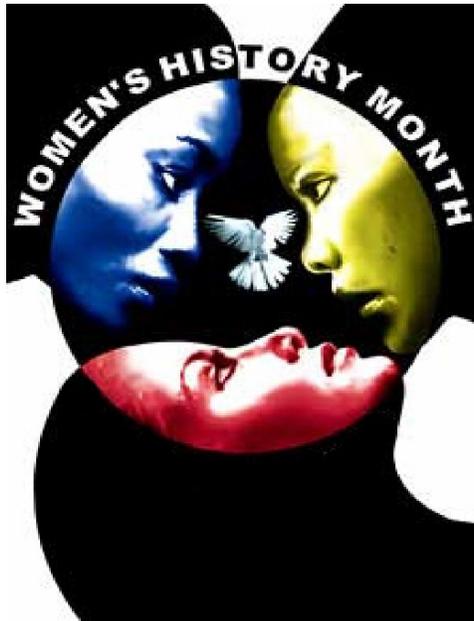
As of July 1, 2005, males outnumbered females in every five-year age group through the 35 to 39 age group. Starting with the 40 to 44 age group, women outnumbered men. At 85 and over, there were more than twice as many women as men. < <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2005-sa.html> >

Motherhood

82.5 million
Estimated number of mothers of all ages in the United States. (From

unpublished data.)

1.9
Average number of children that women 40 to 44 had given birth to as of 2004, down from 3.1 children in 1976, the year the Census Bureau began collecting such data. Likewise, the percentage of women in this age group who were mothers was 81 percent in 2004, down from 90 percent in 1976. < <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/fertility.html> >



Earnings

\$32,168
The median annual earnings of women 16 or older who worked year-round, full time, in 2005. Women earned 77 cents for every \$1 earned by men. (Source: American Community Survey at < http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html >)

91 cents
The amount women in the District of Columbia, who worked year-round, full time, earned for every

\$1 their male counterparts earned in 2005. Among all states or state equivalents, the district was where women were closest to earnings parity with men. Maryland and Connecticut were the only states where median earnings for women were above \$40,000, as was the District of Columbia. (Source: American Community Survey at < http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html >)

\$58,906
Median earnings of women working in computer and mathematical jobs, the highest for women among the 22 major occupational groups. Among these groups, community and social services was the only group where women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings were higher than 90 percent. (Source: American Community Survey at < http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/007419.html >)

Education

32%
Percent of women 25 to 29 who had attained a bachelor's degree or higher in 2005, which exceeded that of men in this age range (25 percent). Eighty-seven percent of women and 85 percent of men in this same age range had completed high school. < <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/007660.html> >

85.4%
Percent of women 25 or older who had completed high school as of 2005. High school graduation rates for women continued to exceed those of men (84.9 percent). < <http://www.census.gov/Press->

(Continued on page 11)

Women's History Month . . .

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[Release/www/releases/archives/education/007660.html](http://www.releases/archives/education/007660.html)>

26.1 million

Number of women 25 or older with a bachelor's degree or more education in 2005, more than double the number 20 years earlier. < <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/007660.html>>

27%

Percent of women 25 or older who had obtained a bachelor's degree as of 2005. This rate was up 10.5 percentage points from 20 years earlier. < <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/007660.html>>

870,000

The projected number of bachelor's degrees that will be awarded to women in the 2006-07 school year. Women also are projected to earn 369,000 master's degrees during this period. Women would, therefore, earn 58 percent of the bachelor's and 61 percent of the master's degrees awarded during this school year. (Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Projections of Education Statistics to 2015, at < <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006084>>)

Businesses

More than \$939 billion
Revenue for women-owned businesses in 2002, up 15 percent from 1997. There were 116,985 women-owned firms with receipts of \$1 million or more.

Nearly 6.5 million

The number of women-owned businesses in 2002, up 20 percent from 1997. (The increase was twice the

national average for all businesses.)
Women owned 28 percent of all non-farm businesses.

More than 7.1 million

Number of people employed by women-owned businesses. There were 7,231 women-owned firms with 100 or more employees, generating \$274 billion in gross receipts.

Nearly one in three women-owned firms operated in health care and social assistance, and other services such as personal services, and repair and maintenance. Women owned 72 percent of social assistance businesses and just over half of nursing and residential care facilities. Wholesale and retail trade accounted for 38.2 percent of women-owned business revenue.

43%

Rate of growth in the number of women-owned firms in Nevada between 1997 and 2002, which led the nation. Georgia (35 percent), Florida (29 percent) and New York (28 percent) followed.

Source for the statements in this section:

< <http://www.census.gov/prod/ec02/sb0200cswmnt.pdf>>

< <http://www.census.gov/prod/ec02/sb0200cscosumt.pdf>>

Voting

65%

Percentage of women citizens who reported voting in the 2004 presidential election, higher than the 62 percent of their male counterparts who cast a ballot. < <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/voting/004986.html>>

Jobs

59%

Percent of women 16 or older who participated in the labor force in 2005. This amounted to 69.3 million women. More than 35 million women in 2005 had worked year-round, full time, in the past 12 months. Men in this age range had a participation rate of 73 percent. (Sources: < <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat2.pdf>> and 2005 American Community Survey via American FactFinder.)

37%

Percent of women 16 or older who work in management, professional and related occupations, compared with 31 percent of men. (Source: 2005 American Community Survey via American FactFinder)

21.1 million

Number of female workers in educational services, health care and social assistance industries. More women work in this industry group than in any other. Within this industry group, 10.7 million work in the health care industry and 8 million in educational services. (Source: 2005 American Community Survey via American FactFinder)

Military

203,000

Total number of active duty women in the military, as of Sept. 30, 2005. Of that total, 35,000 women were officers, and 168,000 were enlisted.

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 500.)

15%

Proportion of members of the armed forces who were women, as of Sept. 30, 2005. In 1950, women comprised less than 2 percent.

(Continued on page 12)

Women's History Month . . .

(Continued from page 11)

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 500.)

1.7 million

The number of military veterans who are women.

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 508.)

Marriage

63 million

Number of married women (including those who are separated or have an absent spouse) in 2005. There are 55 million unmarried (widowed, divorced or never married) women. (Source: 2005 American Community Survey via American FactFinder)

17%

Percentage of married couples in which the wife earns at least \$5,000 more than the husband in 2005. Among 22 percent of married couples, the wife has more education than the husband.

< http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/families_households/006840.html>

5.6 million

Number of stay-at-home mothers nationwide in 2005, up from 4.4 million a decade earlier. < <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/shp1.pdf>>

Computers

84%

Proportion of women who used a computer at home in 2003, 2 percentage points higher than the corresponding proportion for men. This reverses the computer use "gender gap" exhibited during the 1980s

and 1990s. < <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/miscellaneous/005863.html>>

Sports and Recreation

2.9 million

Number of girls who participated in high school athletic programs in the 2004-05 school year. In the 1973-74 school year, only 1.3 million girls were members of a high school athletic team. (Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 1232.)

166,728

Number of women who participated in an NCAA sport in 2004-05.

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 1234.)

85%

Among those who purchased aerobic shoes in 2004, the proportion who were women. Women also comprised a majority (64 percent) of those who bought walking shoes.

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Table 1237.)

57%

Percentage of women who participated in gardening at least once in the past 12 months, compared with 37 percent of men. Women were also much more likely than men to have done charity work (32 percent versus 26 percent), attended arts and crafts fairs (39 percent versus 27 percent) and read literature (55 percent versus 38 percent).

(Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Tables 1221, 1222 and 1223.)

Following is a list of observances

typically covered by the Census Bureau's Facts for Features series:

African-American History Month (February)

Valentine's Day (Feb. 14)

Women's History Month (March)

Irish-American Heritage Month (March)/

St. Patrick's Day (March 17)

Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month (May)

Older Americans Month (May)

Mother's Day (May 13)

Father's Day (June 17)

The Fourth of July (July 4)

Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act (July 26)

Back to School (August)

Labor Day (Sept. 3)

Grandparents Day (Sept. 9)

Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)

Halloween (Oct. 31)

American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage

Month (November)

Veterans Day (Nov. 11)

Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 22)

The Holiday Season (December)

Editor's note: The preceding data were collected from a variety of sources and may be subject to sampling variability and other sources of error. Questions or comments should be directed to the Census Bureau's Public Information Office: telephone: (301) 763-3030; fax: (301) 763-3762; or e-mail: < pio@census.gov (mailto:pio@census.gov) > .

(end fact sheet)

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

Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues “Truly Bipartisan”

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Women in the U.S. Congress hold differing views, yet most work together in a bipartisan fashion as members of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues to promote better opportunities for women worldwide.

Caucus members draw attention to women's issues internationally by working to assist women's groups in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries and to increase funding for these groups. Members of the caucus were instrumental in the March 6 approval of a House resolution commemorating International Women's Day, which was March 8. The resolution "recognizes and honors the women in the United States and in other countries who have fought and continue to struggle for equality in the face of adversity."

"This is a historic time for the Congressional Women's Caucus," Congresswoman Lois Capps said in a March 6 press release announcing the organization's 30th anniversary. "Serving under the leadership of the first woman speaker with a record number of women members, the Women's Caucus is uniquely poised to have a greater voice than ever before in shaping the agenda of the Congress and the nation."

Capps, a Democrat from California, is co-chair of the caucus along with Cathy McMorris Rodgers, a Republican from Washington state. The female legislators "are helping to prove that woman can indeed accomplish anything," McMorris Rodgers said in the press release.

All 74 female members from the

House of Representatives (including three nonvoting delegates) are invited to participate in the caucus. While the Senate does not have a women's caucus, the 16 female senators often meet together informally. The 110th Congress has the most females ever in a U.S. Congress.

they come together to promote issues they find to be important to all women. Part of the bipartisan success is due to the fact that members understand that there are issues, such as abortion, on which they will be unlikely to agree. They choose to focus on the issues where common ground can be reached, Hall said.



Women's Caucus co-chair Lois Capps, Democrat from California, talks with children in New Orleans. (AP Images)

Caucus members are proud of their work to improve women's status globally, said Cindy Hall, president of Women's Policy Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides staff support for the caucus.

The caucus is unique because it is truly bipartisan, Hall said in an interview with USINFO. "I would be surprised if there is any similar group ... that includes more points of view, politically speaking," she said. While the women represent "every possible viewpoint," she added,

The caucus's goals for the 110th Congress include passing legislation to improve the prevention and treatment of heart disease in women, increase efforts to promote math and science education for girls and women, address sex trafficking and domestic violence worldwide and place more women's artwork in the Capitol.

The caucus "has made significant progress in the last 30 years by ad-

(Continued on page 21)

Turing Award Winner Sees New Day for Women Scientists, Engineers

By Jeffrey Thomas
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Globalization is expanding the opportunities available to the science and engineering work force, including women, especially in multinational companies such as IBM, Intel and Microsoft, says Frances Allen, the first female winner of computer science's prestigious Turing Award.

"Advances in computing, networks and information infrastructures have led to a globally connected capability whose power is just beginning to be used and understood," Allen told USINFO in a recent interview.

"The isolated scientist or engineer has access to data, information and expertise. Collaborations on problems and projects are being done by teams of people located around the world. The work product, whether it is a scientific breakthrough or a new widget, can become quickly accessible to anyone interested," Allen said.

"These new capabilities will, I believe, lead to new opportunities for women in science, computing and engineering," she said. With many people now working from home, "the change in the nature of the work pace and work schedules can ease the work/life balance issues that many people, especially women, face."

Allen, 75, is the first woman to win the \$100,000 Turing Award, which is named after Alan Turing, the British mathematician who is considered the father of computer science. The award has been given annually since 1966 but never before to a woman.



Turing Award winner Frances Allen is encouraging young women to consider scientific careers in private industry.

She received the award from the Association for Computing Machinery, an international scientific and educational organization, for innovations in high-speed computing.

Allen, who retired from IBM in 2002, is encouraging young women pursuing scientific careers to consider private industry as well as academia. "I do believe that industry offers women in science, computing and engineering many successful career opportunities and that these opportunities will rapidly increase," she said. "My optimism is based on watching the fundamental changes that companies are making to leverage advances in technologies."

"Outmoded institutional structures can't survive," she added, in reference to a recent National Academies of Science and Engineering report, *Beyond Bias and Barriers*,

which said that "outmoded institutional structures" hinder the access and advancement of women in academia.

In academia, the career track proceeds from an undergraduate degree in a scientific or engineering field to graduate school, and then through the process of achieving tenure. This could leave a woman no opportunity during her childbearing years for a family, confronting her with a stark choice that men generally do not face.

In private industry, however, "many people now work for companies from offices in their homes," said Allen.

The global reach of multinational companies also can lead to greater opportunities, Allen said. The companies have research laboratories in many countries, and "the careers of strong technical leaders and scientific experts in these companies often involve international interactions, responsibilities and assignments."

"Thomas Friedman's book *The World Is Flat* depicts the new capabilities that are leveling the technological playing field across countries," she said, but "will this leveling concept make a difference across cultures, ethnic groups and genders?" And will the gender-based inhibitors to women's success in science decrease around the globe?

Allen is optimistic: "I believe [these new technical capabilities] are already making a difference for women. I hope I am right and that what is happening now is just the beginning of a gender-neutral

(Continued on page 19)

Bush Sees Hopeful Signs on Fourth Anniversary of Iraq Mission

By David McKeeby
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – President Bush says he sees hopeful signs in the struggle to secure Iraq and urges continued support for the Iraqi people as they work to secure their country and build a democracy.

"The fight is difficult, but it can be won," Bush said. "It will be won if we have the courage and resolve to see it through."

Bush spoke from the White House in televised remarks March 19 urging continued support for the U.S. mission in Iraq, which began four years ago on March 19, 2003.

In the four years, Bush said, the Iraqi people brought Saddam Hussein to justice, produced a new constitution and voted in elections for leaders working to build a free society that respects the rule of law, provides security and is an ally in the international struggle against terrorism.

But Iraq's capital, Baghdad, remains the target of extremists attacking the government by instigating violence between the country's Shia and Sunni Muslim communities, he said.

"Until Baghdad's citizens feel secure in their own homes and neighborhoods, it will be difficult for Iraqis to make further progress toward political reconciliation or economic rebuilding – steps necessary for Iraq to build a democratic society," Bush said.

Earlier in the day, Bush met with his National Security Council, where he was briefed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice, outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad and coalition commander Army General David Petraeus on efforts to clear the capital of violent elements, hold neighborhoods with regular patrols and rebuild commu-



President George W. Bush delivers a state-ment Monday, March 19, 2007, on the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. (White House)

nities. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=March&x=20070318185141emohkcabhplar0.2805597>).)

The president also spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki via secure video conference, and he reiterated Washington's commitment to helping the Iraqi government bring violence under control.

Bush said the Baghdad security plan is in its initial stages and will take several months to complete, but pointed to "hopeful signs" of early

progress, including new security stations established throughout the city by Iraqi forces and their coalition allies, as well as a series of operations to rein in extremists.

But as 21,500 more coalition troops join Iraqi forces in Baghdad, Bush warned that Iraq's enemies would continue launching attacks against civilians in an effort to erode the people's faith in their government and hope for the future.

"We know we have a huge challenge," White House spokesman Tony Snow told reporters March 19, adding that al Qaeda's role in many of Baghdad's worst bombings means that progress in Iraq over the past four years also must be viewed in the context of the struggle against terrorism.

On the political front, Bush highlighted signs of progress toward political reconciliation, including approval of a law outlining the division of the country's oil revenues among its people; a \$41 billion budget that includes \$10 billion for reconstruction; and the recent visit by Maliki to Ramadi, Iraq, to reach out to local Sunni leaders.

"We have to remember that this is a very difficult process of taking a place that has lived under tyranny and violence for practically its entire history, and getting to the point that Iraqis can solve their problems through politics," Rice said in a March 19 interview on ABC's Good Morning America. "This is a new government that is committed now to a better life for its people."

In a second interview with NBC's Today Show, Rice said despite international concern about Washington's decision to lead a military coa-

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Efforts To Counter Nuclear Terrorism Grow in Size and Scope

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is working with more than 70 countries to secure and dispose of dangerous nuclear and radiological materials that could be used covertly by terrorists and state sponsors of terrorism in an attack or blackmail effort.

During a recent congressional hearing, Lieutenant General Michael Maples, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said al-Qaeda seeks to acquire nuclear weapons capability. Analysts do not believe they have achieved that goal yet, he said.

Threat analysts have considered the possibility that terrorists might put together a dirty bomb -- one dispersing radioactive materials with conventional explosives -- or that they might be able to build an improvised nuclear device using only a few kilotons of nuclear explosives.

"Prevention plays an important role in our nonproliferation strategy," says William Tobey, who is the second-in-command at the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration.

NNSA, in concert with several U.S. government departments, has stepped up activities counter nuclear terrorism. "We have intensified our efforts to keep material and nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists and other networks and states that sponsor them," says Tobey.

The strategy to detect and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons involves:



Lieutenant General Michael Maples, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, testifies before the US Senate Armed Services Committee on current and future worldwide threats to the national security of the US, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC..(AFP/Luke Frazza)

Preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons or special related materials;

Detering the threat;

Detecting, interdicting and disarming a device;

Identifying the source that created, acquired or tried to detonate it; and

Preparing for a catastrophic incident.

Steven Aoki, deputy under secretary of energy for counterterrorism, says that doing everything possible to keep nuclear materials from making their way to terrorists is the best means of prevention. That means eliminating vulnerable stockpiles of weapons-usable materials.

"Barriers to acquisition also provide an important element of deterrence," according Aoki. "If a terrorist believes that it will be extremely risky, or impossible to acquire weapons or materials, they may seek other avenues of attack."

Eliminating the possibility of nuclear acquisition involves:

Strengthening physical security over weapons and weapons-usable materials;

Assisting Russia in strengthening its security, control and accounting of nuclear weapons and materials;

Helping friends and allies secure weapons-usable nuclear material around the world and strengthen security at civil nuclear facilities; and

Taking steps to make it easier to interdict shipments of weapons-usable nuclear materials and related technologies.

NNSA has trained 350 officials from other countries on procedures to account for and control nuclear material and has trained more than 500 more every year since 2001 on physical protection measures for critical nuclear sites.

Additionally, the United States has helped remove more than 80 kilograms of highly enriched uranium from vulnerable sites to more secure ones.

The United States and Russia have been cooperating on a variety of projects to secure nuclear materials against theft or attack by terrorists especially where nuclear warheads are located. Deputy Energy Secre-

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Bush Sees Hopeful Signs on Fourth Anniversary of Iraq Mission . . .

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lition against Saddam Hussein four years ago, nations understand the importance of a stable Iraq, as seen in their support of the recent 13-nation regional conference on Iraqi security and the launch in 2006 of the U.N.-sponsored International Compact with Iraq. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061104133246attocnch0.6244013>).)

"People want us to succeed in Iraq because they understand that the cost of an Iraq that is not stable, the cost of an Iraq that becomes a

haven for terrorism, the cost of an Iraq that is not unified and cannot deal with troublesome neighbors would be an unacceptable cost for the entire region and therefore an unacceptable cost for the peace and security of the world," she said.

Bush's remarks (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/03/20070319.html>) and a related fact sheet (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/03/20070316-5.html>) are available from the White House Web site.

Transcripts of Rice's interviews with

Good Morning America (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/mar/81864.htm>), Today Show (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/mar/81865.htm>), and Early Show (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/mar/81879.htm>) are available on the State Department Web site.

For more information on U.S. policies, see Iraq Update (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/iraq.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>) ♦

Efforts To Counter Nuclear Terrorism Grow in Size and Scope . . .

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tary Clay Sell told the Carnegie Moscow Center on March 14, for example, that security upgrades such as barriers and sensors have been installed at 61 Russian military sites and there are plans to install two dozen more in the next two years.

By 2008, efforts to improve nuclear security through the U.S.-Russian Bratislava Initiatives will be near fruition, including safety at Russian naval and Strategic Rocket Forces sites and buildings. Additionally, hundreds of metric tons of nuclear material will be secured. (See related fact sheet (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/print/20050224-7.html>).)

But Sell said both countries need to proceed with an old agreement that

each would dispose of 34 metric tons of excess weapons-grade plutonium. So far, none has been eliminated.

ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT FOR WEAPONS SCIENTISTS OFFERED

Another important initiative is providing alternative employment for scientists with nuclear expertise.

Tobey told the United States Industry Coalition recently that even if it were possible to secure every kilogram of nuclear and radiological material, "the right kind of scientific expertise can be applied to generate more."

To prevent that, a project is under way to retrain Russian nuclear computer scientists in software applications to serve the hospitality industry and telemedicine. Another joint project has Russian scientists developing alternative epilepsy therapies.

Preventing Russian scientists from being "recruited by rogue states and terrorist organizations remains a priority," Tobey said. And now new engagement programs are under way to offer alternative employment to Libyan and Iraqi scientists with expertise in weapons of mass destruction.

For more information, see Arms Control and Non-Proliferation (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/arms_control.html) and Response to Terrorism (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/terrorism.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>) ♦

Actions Against Journalists Worldwide Draw International Concern

By Eric Green
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States, along with the global community, condemns actions taken against journalists in Bangladesh, the Gaza Strip and Egypt as well as the rising number of violent acts against female journalists worldwide.

Asked to comment on cases involving abuses of press freedom, State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey told reporters March 12 that "just a cursory review" of the department's human rights report reveals "a number of the challenges" for journalists in "various parts of the world trying to do their job." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=March&x=20070306141434hmnietua0.44445>)).

Casey said "when you look at the number of journalists who have suffered, either as a result of being kidnapped or suffered physical injuries or been killed in conflicts from around the world, it's pretty clear that it's a tough profession and it's one that puts people's lives often at risk."

Casey said the United States continues to be "very much concerned" about press freedom.

"We try and work in a number of countries to support development of a free press and to be able to help push forward cases and highlight cases where that doesn't occur," said Casey. The State Department, he added, also is focused on Internet freedom and cases involving bloggers in such countries as China and Egypt, where journalists are not "engaged in traditional media activi-

ties but are trying to freely express their views in a public forum."

HOUSE RESOLUTION ON BANGLADESHI JOURNALIST

On March 13, the U.S. House of Representatives approved overwhelmingly a resolution urging the

Kirk said in January 13 remarks on the House floor that a number of physical attacks have been committed against Choudhury for his work, including the bombing of Choudhury's newspaper offices on July 6, 2006. Kirk's resolution called on the Bangladesh government to "cease harassment" of Choudhury,



Bangladeshi journalists in 2006 protest against alleged police brutality during a cricket match in Dhaka. (AP Images)

government of Bangladesh to drop sedition charges against a Bangladeshi journalist. The House measure, approved by a vote of 409-1, noted that the sedition charges against the journalist, Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, are by Bangladesh law punishable by death. The resolution urged that the charges be dismissed.

The resolution's sponsor, Representative Mark Kirk of Illinois, said Choudhury is being harassed by the Bangladesh government for advocating religious tolerance. A U.S. House resolution expresses that legislative body's opinion on a particular issue.

"take steps" for his protection, and "hold accountable those responsible for attacks" against him.

Choudhury won an award in 2005 for his commitment to courageous journalism from PEN USA, a non-governmental organization that works to defend freedom of expression and resist censorship worldwide.

Kirk said intervention by the U.S. State Department helped get Choudhury released from a Bangladesh jail on bail in April 2005 after he had been incarcerated for 17 months without legal recourse.

(Continued on page 21)

State's Hughes Looks Forward to Working with New Islamic Group

By Jane Morse
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – U.S. Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes has welcomed the formation of the new Ambassadorial Washington Group of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

"We share an agenda to support the positive contributions and values of Muslim countries and citizens," she told participants at March 15 ceremonies launching the group in Washington. Hughes leads public diplomacy and public affairs efforts at the State Department and is a close adviser to President Bush.

Malaysia spearheaded the formation of the OIC group in the U.S. capital. Malaysian officials said that out of the 170 diplomatic representations in Washington, 56 are member or observer countries of the OIC.

According to OIC's Web site, the new group seeks to interact with members of the U.S. administration and other relevant entities on issues pertaining to Islam and the welfare of Muslims, and to carry out activities that "would further promote the image of Islam as a religion that is peace-loving, enlightened and progressive."

In her remarks, Hughes said: "As you pursue important efforts at the U.N. Human Rights Council to promote resolutions against the defamation of Islam," Hughes said, "I hope you might consider broadening those resolutions to include respect for all faiths and people's freedom to worship and express themselves as they choose."

Noting recent violent terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam, Hughes praised leaders such as

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu for speaking out against "violent extremists [who] only pervert religion when they bomb hospitals, universities, wedding parties, mosques, employment centers, even groups of children."

Hughes called on the OIC Washington Group to join U.S. efforts to combat "misperceptions fostered by extremists that there is a 'clash of the civilizations,' that the West is somehow in conflict with Islam."

"Islam," she said, "as a major world religion, is part of the West and an important part of America."

Hughes cited U.S. State Department efforts to promote mutual understanding, such as educational and cultural exchange programs that have involved nearly 39,000 people so far in 2006.

She also cited the U.S. program called "Citizen Dialogue," which sends delegations of American Muslims as citizen envoys to other countries. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2006/Jun/18-667196.html>.)

"These kinds of people-to-people programs are invaluable in challenging stereotypes and countering the misinformation that radical extremists put out to drive a wedge between our countries," Hughes said.

The OIC was established in response to an arson attack on August 21, 1969, in Jerusalem against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest shrine of Islam. The first OIC conference was held a month later in Rabat, Morocco. Among the aims of the OIC, which now has 57 member states, is to

protect Islam's holy places and build Islamic solidarity and promote Islamic interests. ♦

Turing Award Winner Sees New Day . . .

(Continued from page 14)

playing field where women can succeed as equals."

Asked about her experience mentoring younger women in computing and engineering, Allen said mentoring "is exceedingly important to the success of an individual and an organization."

"My mentoring style is quite informal, usually one-on-one and face-to-face," she said. "I mostly listen, ask questions, and, together, we arrive on an action plan if that is required. I also do a lot of advocacy for my protégées, especially women and those from other cultures who aren't very good at tooting their own horn."

She has learned a lot from being a mentor, Allen says, "particularly about cultural differences in handling situations."

She said she "can also become totally outraged when bias of any sort impacts someone."

Originally from New York state, Allen grew up on a farm and saw her career choices "as nursing or teaching," she said. "That was just fine" since her mother was a teacher, Allen added, but an eighth-grade math teacher inspired her interest in mathematics. "Most of us can think of a teacher who made a huge difference for us," she said. ♦

Administration Seeks To Spend More Food Aid on Non-U.S. Products

By Kathryn McConnell
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The Bush administration is proposing to increase the amount of U.S. food aid funds that could be used to purchase food that is available in regions experiencing an emergency.

The change would set aside for local or regional food purchases up to 25 percent of annual funds designated to assist people threatened by a food-security crisis, Mark Keenum, Department of Agriculture under secretary for farm and foreign services, told a Senate Appropriations subcommittee March 15.

The administration is requesting \$1.2 billion for the commodity program in fiscal year 2008, approximately \$80 million more than the enacted amount for fiscal year 2006.

"The change would provide the flexibility needed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. food-assistance efforts," Keenum told the subcommittee.

Food purchased in the United States normally can take four or more months to arrive at its destination while food purchased locally can reach beneficiaries within days or weeks, according to the proposed farm bill the administration submitted to Congress in January.

Speed can be crucial when an emergency occurs with little warning, such as natural disasters, interruptions in food deliveries, or after the end of hostilities when aid workers seek immediate access to populations in need, according to the proposal.

The current farm bill (the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, Public Law 107-171) expires at the end of 2007 crop-production year. For a new version of the bill



Sudanese workers bag peas provided by USAID for the conflict-affected people of Darfur. (USAID photo)

to become law, it must be passed by both the Senate and House of Representatives and signed by the president.

Keenum also said the United States wants to maintain flexibility in its food-aid programs and operate them in ways that do not disrupt local markets.

The administration's proposal has received mixed reactions.

It is supported by the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP), said James Morris, that agency's outgoing executive director.

Morris also told the subcommittee that the commodity food aid program needs additional funding to cope with increased numbers of people in need and higher commod-

ity and transportation costs. He added that WFP wants to be allowed to combine U.S. donated cash for food aid with donations from other sources.

WFP is the world's largest humanitarian relief organization. The United States provides almost half of the food aid distributed by WFP.

But Cynthia Brown, president of the U.S. Dry Bean Council, disagreed with the administration proposal. Testifying before the subcommittee, she said that U.S. taxpayer-supported aid should be used to purchase only U.S.-produced commodities and that the United States should "resist" transferring food aid resources to overseas purchases.

Walter Middleton, vice president of World Vision, agreed with Morris' view that the United States should increase its funding for food aid.

Appearing before the subcommittee, Middleton said the United States should devote more money also to long-term agricultural development programs to help countries avert hunger emergencies, he said.

World Vision is an implementing partner of U.S. and WFP food aid efforts.

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

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Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues "Truly Bi-partisan" . . .

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vancing issues that affect women and their families," said Vice Chair Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat from Illinois.

During the group's history, caucus members from both parties have worked together to create landmark legislation. This includes the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which grants employees up to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave for the birth of a child or the care of a child, spouse or parent who has a serious health condition, and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994, which provides safeguards for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

With only 15 members at its founding in 1977, the organization originally was called the Congresswomen's Caucus. In 1981, men

were invited to join, and more than 100 chose to do so. At that time, the name was changed to the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues.

In 1995, a law was passed prohibiting members from paying dues out of their office accounts, a step that forced most caucuses to stop employing staff of their own. As a result, the women's caucus eliminated its staff. Women's Policy Inc. now does the work of the caucus staff. Also in 1995, the caucus decided again to restrict membership to women. However, the members frequently work with their male counterparts to achieve their goals, Hall said.

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Actions Against Journalists Worldwide Draw International Concern . . .

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The legislator also cited a State Department human rights report on Bangladesh that said "attacks on journalists and newspapers, and government efforts to intimidate them, political party activists, and others, occurred frequently."

In a separate case, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said March 15 the United States was "disappointed" by an Egyptian appeals court's decision to uphold the four-year prison sentence given to an Egyptian blogger for expressing his views about the government of Egypt. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/internet_freedom.html).)

McCormack said the conviction in February of Abdel Karim Soliman was a "setback for human rights in Egypt." McCormack said the "role of freedom of expression is critical in a democratic and prosperous society and ... applies to everyone."

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

The Paris-based press advocacy group Reporters Without Borders called for the immediate release March 12 of British journalist, Alan Johnston, who was kidnapped by gunmen in the Gaza Strip.

Reporters Without Borders said Johnston, a correspondent for the British Broadcasting Company, was the second journalist kidnapped in Gaza since the begin-

ning of 2007.

The Paris group said 14 foreign journalists have been kidnapped in the Gaza Strip since 2005, although most of them were freed quickly without being hurt.

Reporters Without Borders also issued a March 6 statement on the increase in violence against women journalists worldwide.

"More and more women journalists are the victims of murder, arrest, threats or intimidation," said Reporters Without Borders. It said the "increase is due to the fact that more and more women are working as journalists, holding riskier jobs in the media and doing investigative reporting likely to upset someone." ♦