AFRICA NEWS REPORT

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AEF501 03/17/2006

Representative Pelosi Praises Bush for Forthright Stand on Darfur

(Congresswoman comments on genocide after leading delegation to Sudan) (690)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- House of Representatives Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Democrat of California) has praised the Bush administration for its stand against genocide in Darfur while criticizing the Sudanese government for its continued support of the Jingaweit militias, which are responsible for violence that she says has killed almost 200,000 people in the past three years.

The congresswoman made her comments at a March 17 press conference sponsored by the Center for National Policy (CNP), a Washington policy research organization. She gave an account of the bipartisan congressional delegation she led to Sudan in February, declaring, "The situation in Darfur is a humanitarian disaster that challenges the conscience of the world."

Pelosi has not been shy in criticizing Bush administration foreign policy in the past -- for example, the intervention in Iraq. In contrast, she said of Sudan: "While we were in Sudan, back at home President Bush reaffirmed that this is indeed 'genocide'" taking place in Darfur.

Members of Pelosi's delegation met with Bush March 16 at the White House "to thank him for his leadership and report on our trip," she said.

During that meeting, Pelosi said, "we strongly endorsed the appointment of a U.S. special envoy to Sudan," who "would signal that bringing peace and stability to Sudan is a priority for the United States."

Pelosi also credited Bush for backing his words with financial support for Darfur, adding, "Yesterday, we were pleased to announce that the House [of Representatives] approved the president's $439 million for additional assistance for Darfur.

"But more will be needed, and the United States' example should encourage other nations to donate," the lawmaker told her audience.

UNITED STATES LARGEST DONOR TO SUDAN

The United States has been the single largest donor to Sudan and Darfur while facilitating the Comprehensive Peace Accord, which brought an end to the nation's 20-year-long war between North and South. The United States also has provided billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance and funding for peacekeeping operations in the last two years.

Regarding the Khartoum government, Pelosi said its continued backing of the Jingaweit militias came up during a meeting between the delegation and Vice President Ali Osman Taha. "After persistent and diplomatic questioning by Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Vice President Taha finally admitted that the government of Sudan had supported the Jingaweit in the past," the minority leader said.

At one point Taha tried to turn the tables on the delegation, Pelosi said. He demanded: "The Sudanese people want to know -- why are you so interested in our domestic affairs? I know the Americans are a free-thinking people, but maybe your free thinking does not create a clear understanding of the facts in my country."

The answer, Pelosi said, is that "genocide is not the domestic affair of any nation -- it concerns the world."

Tim Roemer, former congressman and now CNP president, said at the press conference: "The scale of the tragedy in Darfur is difficult to comprehend. ... Well over 200,000 people" have been killed, and it continues, "due to the actions of evil men" such as the Jingaweit and those who support them.

Roemer -- along with Olympic speedskating champion Joey Cheek, who made headlines recently when he donated $25,000 to benefit children in Darfur -- promoted a gathering in Washington called "SAVE DARFUR: Rally to Stop Genocide," set for April 30. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=February&x=20060214180254IHecuoR0.3129999&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html).)

Cheek said, "President Bush has taken the morally correct action by asking Congress to provide emergency supplemental funding to fortify the badly undermanned and underfunded African Union peacekeeping forces, but it's going to take more than money to solve this crisis."

The Olympic athlete added: "As compassionate Americans we all have a moral responsibility to publicly speak out and tell our leaders of both [political] parties that genocide is unacceptable any time, any place. The Rally to Stop Genocide is a rare opportunity for all of us to join together and deliver that unequivocal message."

For more information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.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)

AEF403 03/16/2006

Sudan, U.N. Create National Authority To Rid Country of Mines

(Mine Action Authority to include representatives from North and South) (490)

The United States commended Sudan and the U.N. Development Program March 15 for establishing a National Mine Action Authority to oversee humanitarian mine action programs, including assistance to areas most afflicted by unexploded ordnance.

A State Department media note called the authority's creation "a most positive development" and lauded Sudan for establishing high-level civilian control of its mine action programs "to better coordinate land mine clearance, mine risk education and mine survivors' assistance among all relevant government ministries."

Following is the text of the media note:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesman

March 15, 2006

MEDIA NOTE

Sudan Opens National Mine Action Authority

The United States commends Sudan and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for jointly establishing a National Mine Action Authority that will oversee humanitarian mine action programs throughout the country and seek to rationally direct mine action assistance to areas where persistent landmines and unexploded ordnance pose the greatest threat.

Since 2002, the United States, which remains the largest donor to humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts in Sudan having contributed over $1 billion to date, has invested over $6 million in humanitarian mine action in Sudan. This mine action assistance is an integral part of the United States' steadfast efforts to promote peace, security and reconciliation throughout Sudan. In this regard, the creation of the National Mine Action Authority consisting of a National Mine Action Committee, General

Secretariat, National Mine Action Center (based in Khartoum), and a Regional Mine Action Center in Southern Sudan (based in Juba), is a most positive development. Also noteworthy is the fact that the National Mine Action Committee includes representatives of the Government of National Unity and of the Government of Southern Sudan.

This progress is in line with the U.S. Department of State's philosophy that mine affected countries should, ideally, establish high-level civilian control of their mine action programs in order to better coordinate landmine clearance, mine risk education and mine survivors assistance among all relevant government ministries, enabling more effective outcomes and creating conditions that encourage international donor support.

Notable among the achievements of U.S. humanitarian mine action assistance to Sudan was the deployment of the U.S. Department of State's unique Quick Reaction Demining Force in 2002 that cleared landmines and unexploded ordnance in the Nuba Mountains in order to hasten the safe return of internally displaced Sudanese to their lands there.

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs currently provides mine action assistance to 21 countries, including Sudan. To learn more about this Office's mine action and small arms/light weapons abatement activities around the world, visit http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra. To learn about the full scope of United States assistance to Sudan, visit http://www.state.gov/p/af/ci/su.

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

AEF103 03/13/2006

U.S. Praises African Union's Support for U.N. Operation in Darfur

(United States working with U.N. Security Council for peacekeeping mission) (550)

The United States applauds the African Union's decision to support the transition of peacekeeping operations in the Darfur region of Sudan to a United Nations peacekeeping operation, the State Department announced in a March 10 statement.

Although the African Union Mission in Sudan has provided "initial stabilization and reduced large-scale organized violence", the United States is continuing to work with the U.S. Security Council for the authorization of a U.N. peacekeeping mission, the statement said. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/02-490764.html).)

"The United States will work with our international partners to strengthen and support the African Union peacekeeping mission in the interim period," according to the statement.

Recent discussions by Deputy Secretary Robert B. Zoellick in Europe with Sudan and African Union mediators cited "huge challenges" facing the world community while Darfur remains in crisis. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/11-729776.html).)

"President Bush has made resolving the Darfur crisis a top priority, and the United States has been working hard with all parties to promote peace, security and reconciliation," the State Department said.

For additional information on U.S. policy, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html) and Partnership for a Better Life (http://usinfo.state.gov/partnerships/index.html).

Following is the text of the statement:

U.S. Department of State
Office of the Spokesman
Tom Casey, Acting Spokesman
Washington, DC
March 10, 2006

Transition of African Union Mission in Sudan to United Nations Operation

The United States is pleased that the African Union decided today (March 10) to support a transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in Darfur. The members of the African Union's Peace and Security Council have recognized the urgent need to improve security for the suffering people of Darfur, and we applaud their decision.

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has been a success, providing initial stabilization and reducing large-scale organized violence. The United States will now work in the United Nations Security Council to push for authorization of a United Nations peacekeeping mission as soon as possible, with African troops at its core and under African leadership. We will simultaneously work closely with Sudan's Government of National Unity and our African and European partners to energize the African Union-mediated Darfur peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria. There is no time to waste. People are suffering and dying in Darfur, while millions are at risk as the security situation deteriorates.

President Bush has made resolving the Darfur crisis a top priority, and the United States has been working hard with all parties to promote peace, security and reconciliation. The United States supports and is committed to assisting in the transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation within the framework of partnership between the African Union and the United Nations as soon as possible. Discussions held by Deputy Secretary Robert B. Zoellick this week in Europe with many of the parties and the African Union mediators highlighted the opportunity to make significant progress in the Abuja peace talks in the near future.

As the United States works to authorize and deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur, we will work with our international partners to strengthen and support the African Union peacekeeping mission in the interim period.

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

AEF502 03/17/2006

Sirleaf Election "Critical Milestone" for Liberia, U.S. Envoy Says

(Ambassador Bolton welcomes efforts to bring Charles Taylor to justice) (820)

Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, received some encouraging words March 17 from U.S. Representative to the United Nations John Bolton.

The Liberian president, who is on an official working visit to the United States, addressed the U.N. Security Council the same day. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/16-667601.html).)

Bolton said the United States is "encouraged with signs that Liberia is on the path of recovery and reform. ... If committed to a reformist path, Liberia can feel confident that the international community will be there to help.

"For our part," Bolton continued, "the United States pledges our support to assist with Liberia's reconstruction."

Speaking of Sirleaf's address to a joint session of Congress March 16, Bolton said: "Our congressmen were greatly impressed. They gave her a standing ovation. I only regret that in our more solemn and restrained practices in the Security Council, that we cannot do the same for her here today." (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/16-300883.html).)

He said all are impressed with Sirleaf's courage and determination in tackling Liberia's challenges, especially in such areas as economic and civil service reform. Bolton described her election in November 2005 as "a critical milestone on Liberia's road to recovery." (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2005/Dec/01-100513.html).)

Bolton said he was encouraged to see that Sirleaf and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo were discussing bringing to justice former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who faces multiple charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Following is the text of Bolton's statement:

United States Mission to the United Nations
Office of Press and Public Diplomacy
USUN Press Release
March 17, 2006

Statement by Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the Situation in Liberia, in the Security Council, March 17, 2006

Mr. President,

We warmly welcome President Johnson Sirleaf to New York and to the United States. We also join others in thanking her for coming here and addressing the Security Council.

For some years now, we, together with the international community, have paid very careful attention to the challenges of restoring peace and stability in Liberia. Given the severity of its troubles, we have monitored events in Liberia with concern and apprehension. We have also done so with hope and anticipation that Liberia would prove to be the model of a nation beset with overwhelming problems that can and will recover. Liberia's problems remain enormous. No question. But we are encouraged with signs that Liberia is on the path of recovery and reform. All of us want to be a part of that success story. If committed to a reformist path, Liberia can feel confident that the international community will be there to help. For our part, the United States pledges our support to assist with Liberia's reconstruction.

The elections which took place in Liberia last fall seem likely to be marked by history as a critical milestone on this road to recovery. We congratulate President Johnson Sirleaf on her victory. In her short time in office, we are impressed with the courage and determination she has already shown in addressing Liberia's challenges, especially in such areas as economic and civil service reform.

On Wednesday, President Sirleaf addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress. Our Congressmen were greatly impressed. They gave her a standing ovation. I only regret that in our more solemn and restrained practices in the Security Council, that we cannot do the same for her here today. By all accounts, it was her expressed commitment to create a better future for Liberia which so inspired her audience in the U.S. Congress. The United States shares that hope. We encourage the President to do all she can to sustain Liberia's forward momentum of recent months. We are confident that the President's government will engage in sound financial management and full transparency that are essential to spur this momentum.

We also commend President Sirleaf s commitment to reforming the diamond and timber sectors. We look forward to the day that Liberia fulfills the requirements for the lifting of sanctions. As many know, the U.S. is assisting Liberia's efforts to reconstruct its forest sector on a transparent and sustainable basis. We applaud President Sirleaf's adoption of an Executive Order canceling existing forest concessions and establishing a Forest Reform Monitoring Committee. We hope our optimism is warranted that remaining reforms will be in place so that timber sanctions can be lifted as soon as possible.

Finally, we were encouraged to see reports that President Sirleaf and Nigerian President Obasanjo are discussing the issue of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who faces multiple charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. We support the efforts of President Sirleaf, President Obasanjo, and other African leaders to bring Charles Taylor to justice.

Thank you.

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

AEF401 03/16/2006

Liberian President Sirleaf To Meet with Bush at White House

(Africa's first elected woman president on first official visit to United States) (340)

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf will meet with President Bush at the White House March 21, the White House press secretary announced March 16.

Sirleaf took office January 16 at a ceremony in Liberia's capital of Monrovia attended by U.S. first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The Liberian president is now on an official working visit to the United States that also will take her to New York and other major U.S. cities.

On March 15, Sirleaf met with Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer and later addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress. She is the second African head of state -- the other being former South African President Nelson Mandela -- to address the Congress in the last decade.

Sirleaf is scheduled to meet with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan March 17 in New York and after that to address the U.N. Security Council.

The Liberian leader is on her first official visit to the United States since her inauguration as the first elected female head of state in Africa. Her election in November 2005 marked the end of a two-year transition in Liberia following 14 years of brutal conflict.

Following is the text of the White House announcement:

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
March 16, 2006

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY
Visit by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
of the Republic of Liberia

President Bush will welcome President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Republic of Liberia to the White House on March 21, 2006. The visit will be an opportunity for the President to congratulate President Sirleaf on becoming Africa's first woman to be elected Head of State. The two leaders will discuss continuing cooperation in the areas of reconstruction, education, HIV/AIDS, trade, asset recovery and security sector reform, and democratic reform, as well as the need to bring Charles Taylor to justice.

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

AEF402 03/16/2006

Liberian President Sirleaf Addresses Joint Session of Congress

(Hopes Liberia will become "brilliant beacon" of what liberty can achieve) (3750)

Addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress March 15, Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said her people and Americans share history and values and asked for U.S. support in helping Liberia "become a brilliant beacon, an example to Africa and the world of what love of liberty can achieve."

Liberia, founded by freed American slaves, became the first independent republic in Africa, she said, with its constitution and laws based upon those of the United States.

"It was the leadership of the 108th Congress, more than two years ago, that paved the way for a United Nations force that secured our peace and guaranteed free and fair elections," she told the full chamber of Congress in a speech that was interrupted 33 times by applause.

"It was your $445 million addition to a supplemental appropriations bill that attracted additional commitments from international donors. With those funds, we have laid the foundation for a durable peace, not only in Liberia, but in the whole West African subregion," Sirleaf said, thanking the 109th Congress for its efforts in recent weeks to meet Liberia's developing needs.

Sirleaf listed the efforts she has made to make changes in her country, saying: "With few resources beyond the will of my people ... we have made a strong beginning. During my first few weeks in office, by curbing corruption we have increased government revenue by 21 percent.

"We have canceled noncompliant forestry concessions and fraudulent contracts; required senior government appointees to declare financial assets; implemented cash management practices to ensure fiscal discipline and sharpen efficiency; met the basic requirements for eligibility under the U.S. general system of preferences and initial Ex-Im Bank support; restored good relationships with bilateral and multilateral partners; commenced the process leading to an IMF-supported staff monitoring program; accelerated implementation of the Governance Economic Management Plan, the GMAP; and launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the abuses of war."

The people of Liberia "have already rolled up their sleeves, despite overwhelming obstacles, confident that their work will be rewarded, confident in the hope and promise of the future," Sirleaf concluded.

Following is the transcript of Sirleaf's address, as printed in the Congressional Record:

The United States Congress

Congressional Record: March 15, 2006 (House)

Pages H996-H998

ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

President JOHNSON SIRLEAF. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of the United States Congress, and distinguished guests, I am deeply touched by the honor bestowed on my small but proud West African Republic of Liberia and on myself by inviting me to address this body of representatives of the people of the great United States of America.

By this invitation, you have paid one of the greatest tributes there is to all those who laid down their lives for my country to be free and democratic. I can only say a big thank you.

The people of Liberia and the people of the United States are bound together by history and by values. We share a deep and abiding belief in the power of freedom, of faith, and of finding virtue in work for the common good.

The national motto of Liberia, founded, as you know, by freed American slaves, is: "The love of liberty brought us here." We became the first independent republic in Africa. Our capital, Monrovia, is named for your President, James Monroe. Our flag is a star in a blue field and red and white stripes. Its one star makes us the ``lone star state" in Africa. Our constitution and our laws were based upon yours.

The U.S. dollar was long our legal tender and still is used alongside the Liberian dollar today.

But our ties greatly exceed the historical connection. I stand before you today as the first woman elected to lead an African nation, thanks to the grace of almighty God; thanks to the courage of the Liberian people, who chose their future over fear; thanks to the people of West Africa and of Africa generally, who continued to give hope to my people. Thanks also to President Bush whose strong resolve and public condemnation and appropriate action forced a tyrant into exile; and thanks to you, the Members of this august body, who spurred the international effort that brought blessed peace to our nation.

It was the leadership of the 108th Congress, more than 2 years ago, that paved the way for a United Nations force that secured our peace and guaranteed free and fair elections. It was your $445 million addition to a supplemental appropriations bill that attracted additional commitments from international donors. With those funds, we have laid the foundation for a durable peace, not only in Liberia, but in the whole West African subregion. Special appreciation goes to the 109th Congress, those of you in this room, for the effort in recent weeks to meet Liberia's developing needs.

Honorable ladies and gentlemen of this Congress, I want to thank you.

The Liberian people have sent me here to thank you for your vision. Our triumph over evil is also your triumph. Our special relationship with the United States brought us benefits long before the autumn of 2003. Thousands of our people, including myself, have been educated in American missionary schools and gone on to higher training in this country. You have generously welcomed tens of thousands of our people as they fled war and persecution.

I was among them. In 1985, after challenging the military regime's failure to register my political party, I was put in jail with several university students who also challenged military rule. This House came to our rescue with a resolution threatening to cut off aid to the country unless all political prisoners were freed. Months later, I was put in jail again, this time in a cell with 15 men. All of them were executed a few hours later. Only the intervention of a single soldier spared me from rape. Through the grace of almighty God and the mercy of others, I escaped and found refuge here, in Washington, D.C.

But long before that, our country and I benefited from Liberia's special relationship with the United States. My family exemplifies the economic and social divide that has torn our nation. Unlike many privileged Liberians, I can claim no American lineage. Three of my grandparents were indigenous Liberians; the fourth was a German who married a rural market woman. That grandfather was forced to leave the country when Liberia, in loyalty to the United States, declared war on Germany in 1914.

Both of my grandmothers were farmers and village traders. They could not read or write any language, as more than three-quarters of our people still cannot today; but they worked hard, they loved their country, they loved their families, and they believed in education.

They inspired me then, and their memory motivates me now to serve my people, to sacrifice for the world and honestly serve humanity. I could not, I will not, I cannot betray their trust.

My parents were sent at a young age to Monrovia, where it was common for elite families to take in children from the countryside to perform domestic chores. They endured humiliations and indignities, but my mother was fortunate to be adopted by a kind woman, and both my parents were able through this system to go to school, a rarity at that time for poor people. My father even became the first native Liberian in the Liberian national legislature.

I was not born with the expectation of a university education from Harvard or being a World Bank officer or an Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations. When I was a small girl in the countryside, swimming and fishing with twine made from palm trees, no one would have picked me out as the future president of our country. I graduated from the College of West Africa, a United Methodist high school. I waited tables to support my studies in the United States, college in Wisconsin and graduate school in Massachusetts. I went on to enjoy the benefits and advantages of a world-class education.

So my feet are in two worlds, the world of poor rural women with no respite from hardship, and the world of accomplished Liberian professionals, for whom the United States is a second and beloved home. I draw strength from both.

But most of our people have not been as fortunate as I was. Always poor and underdeveloped, Liberia is only now emerging from two decades of turmoil that destroyed everything we managed to build in a century and a half of independence. The costs of our conflict run wide and deep, manifested in varied ways: mismanagement, corruption, bad governance, massive looting of public treasury and assets. Unlike the tsunami in Asia and Katrina here in your own country, where the destruction and human casualty were caused by nature, we participated in or stood silently by in our own self-destruction. Our country agonized with your citizens and the victims and families of these natural tragedies and our country also agonized with itself over the effects of a senseless civil war.

In the campaign months, I traveled to every corner of our country. I trudged through mud in high boots, where roads did not exist or had deteriorated past repair. I surveyed ruined hospitals and collapsed clinics. I held meetings by candlelight, because there is no electricity anywhere, including the capital, except from private generators. I was forced to drink water from creeks and unsanitized wells, all of which made me vulnerable to the diseases from which so many of my people die daily.

I came face to face with the human devastation of war, which killed a quarter of a million of our 3 million people and displaced most of the rest. Hundreds of thousands escaped across borders. More, who could not, fled into the bush, constantly running from one militia or another, often surviving by eating rodents and wild plants that made them sick and even killed them.

Our precious children died of malaria, parasites and malnourishments. Our boys, full of potential, were forced to be child soldiers, to kill or be killed. Our girls, capable of being anything they could imagine, were made into sex slaves, gang-raped by men with guns, made mothers while they still were children themselves.

But listening to the hopes and dreams of our people, I recall the words of a Mozambican poet who said, "Our dream has the size of freedom." My people, like your people, believe deeply in freedom; and in their dreams, they reach for the heavens.

I represent those dreams. I represent their hope and their aspirations. I ran for President because I am determined to see good governance in Liberia in my lifetime. But I also ran because I am the mother of four, and I wanted to see our children smile and play again.

Already, I am seeing those smiles. For even after everything they have endured, the people of Liberia have faith in new beginnings. They are counting on me and my administration to create the conditions that will guarantee the realization of their dreams. We must not betray their trust. All the children I meet, when I ask what they want most, say, ``I want to learn." ``I want to go to school." ``I want an education." We must not betray their trust.

Young adults, who have been called our lost generation, do not consider themselves lost. They, too, aspire to learn and to serve their families and their communities. We must not betray their trust.

Women, my strong constituency, tell me that they want the same chances that men have. They want to be literate. They want their work recognized. They want protection against rape. They want clean water that won't sicken and kill their children. We must not betray their trust.

Former soldiers tell me they are tired of war. They do not want to have to fight or run again. They want training. They want jobs. If they carry guns, they want to do so in defense of peace and security, not war and pillage. We must not betray their trust.

Entrepreneurs who have returned from abroad with all their resources, risking everything to invest in their country's future, tell me they want a fair and transparent regulatory environment. They want honesty and accountability from their government. We must not betray their trust.

Farming families who fled the fighting for shelter in neighboring countries or found themselves displaced from their communities want a fresh start. They want to return home. They want seeds. They want farm implements. They want roads to get their goods to market. We must not betray their trust.

I have many promises to keep. As I won elections through a free and peaceful process, I must preserve freedom and keep the peace. As I campaigned against corruption, I must lead a government that curbs it.

As I was elected with the massive vote of women, I must assure that their needs are met.

We are not oblivious to the enormity of the challenges we face. Few countries have been as decimated as ours. In the chaos of war, our HIV rates have quadrupled. Our children are still dying of curable diseases, tuberculosis, dysentery, measles, and malaria. Schools lack books, equipment, teachers, and buildings. The telecommunications age has passed us by. We have a $3.5 billion external debt, lent in large measure to some of my predecessors who were known to be irresponsible, unaccountable, unrepresentative, and corrupt. The reality that we have lost our international creditworthiness bars us from further loans, although now we would use them wisely.

Our abundant natural resources have been diverted by criminal conspiracies for private gain. International sanctions, imposed for the best of reasons, still prevent us from exporting our raw materials.

Roads have disappeared and bridges have been bombed or washed away. We know that trouble could once again breed outside our borders. The physical and spiritual scars of war are deep indeed.

So with everything to be done, what must we do first? We must do everything we can to consolidate the peace that so much was paid to secure, and we must work to heal the wounds of war. We must create an emergency public works program to put the

whole nation to work and give families an income through the rebuilding of critical infrastructure, strengthening security and attracting investment. We must rehabilitate the core of an electricity grid to high-priority areas and institutions and visibly demonstrate to the people that government can provide necessary services.

We must bring home more of our refugees and resettle the displaced. We must give them the tools to start anew, and encourage more of our skilled expatriates, who have the knowledge and the experience to build our economy, to return home. For those unable to come home, we must appeal to you to grant them continuing protective status, and residency where appropriate, to put them in a condition to contribute to their country's reform and development.

We must complete the demobilization of former combatants and restructure our army, police and security services. We must create legal systems that preserve the rule of law, applied to all without fear or favor.

We must revive educational facilities, including our few universities. We must provide essential agricultural extension services to help us feed ourselves again, developing the science and technology skills to ensure that we prosper in a modern global economy. We must create an efficient and transparent tax system to ensure the flow of government revenues and create a hospitable investment climate.

With few resources beyond the will of my people, I want you to know, we have made a strong beginning. During my first few weeks in office, by curbing corruption we have increased government revenue by 21 percent. We have canceled noncompliant forestry concessions and fraudulent contracts; required senior government appointees to declare financial assets; implemented cash management practices to ensure fiscal discipline and sharpen efficiency; met the basic requirements for eligibility under the U.S. general system of preferences and initial Ex-Im Bank support; restored good relationships with bilateral and multilateral partners; commenced the process leading to an IMF-supported staff monitoring program; accelerated implementation of the Governance Economic Management Plan, the GMAP; and launched a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the abuses of war.

But while we seek national unity and reconciliation, we must not sacrifice justice. I respect the lifesaving role that our West African neighbors, particularly Nigeria, played at no small cost to them in accepting to host Mr. Charles Taylor. Liberians are deeply grateful.

But I say here, as I have said before, Liberia has little option but to see that justice is done in accordance with the requirements of the United Nations and the broad international community.

I know that my government must go beyond these strong beginnings, must do much more than we have done so far, and we must do it quickly.

Our people's courage and patience are formidable, but their expectations are high. And their needs are urgent. This does not mean that we want big government. We cannot afford it, and we believe that government should not attempt to do what civil society and business can do better. The people of Liberia know that government cannot save the country. Only their own strength, their determination, their creativity, resilience and their faith can do that.

But they have the right to expect the essentials that only a government can provide. They have the right to a government that is honest and that respects the sanctity of human life. They need and they deserve an economic environment in which their efforts can succeed.

They need infrastructure, and they need security. Above all, they need peace.

That is the task of my administration. To meet that challenge, to do what is right, I ask for the continuing support of this Congress and the American people.

Honorable ladies and gentlemen, my appeal comes with the recognition of all that you have already done. In addition to the financial assistance to disarm our fighters and feed and house our displaced, the artful diplomacy of the United States was central to ending our long conflict. We thank you with all our hearts.

As small and impoverished as we are, we cherish the friendship we have had with you. During the Second World War, we stood together, even if only symbolically, to fight Nazi expansionism and tyranny. At the request of President Roosevelt, we planted rubber trees after the Japanese seized the Indonesian supply. When U.S. law prohibited sending ships to a Europe at war, we agreed to establish a shipping registry to help transport American goods. During the Cold War, we hosted a submarine tracking center, an intelligence listening post, and one of the largest Voice of America transmitters in the world.

Again, we ask that we continue working together, but we do not ask for patronage. We do not want to continue in dependency. The benefits of your assistance must be mutual.

Honorable Members of Congress, much is at stake for all of us. Liberia at war brought misery and crimes against humanity to its neighbors, a toll that is beyond calculation. A peaceful, prosperous Liberia can contribute to democracy, stability, and development in West Africa and beyond.

Nine times--nine times--in the past 15 years, the United States has been forced to evacuate official Americans and their dependents from our country, at enormous cost to your taxpayers. Monrovia, I am told, is the most evacuated U.S. embassy in the world. I am determined that you will not need to rescue your people from our shores for a 10th time. You contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to a U.N. peacekeeping force in Liberia. A fraction of this will be required to support a peaceful and stable Liberia.

Honorable Members of this great Congress, think with me about this. What is the return on an investment that trains young combatants for life, rather than death? What is the yield when our young men can exchange their guns for jobs? What is the savings in food aid when our people can feed themselves again? What is the profit from educating our girls to be scientists and doctors? What is the dividend when our dependence ends, and we become true partners rather than supplicants?

Honorable Members, we know that there is no quick fix for the reconstruction of our country; but Liberians, young and old, share their government's commitment to work, to be honest, to unite, to reconcile, and to rebuild. A nation so well endowed, so blessed by God with natural resources should not be poor. Starting from a small base, as we do, we have rubber and timber and diamonds and gold and iron ore.

Our fields are fertile. Our water supply is plentiful. Our sunshine is warm and welcoming. With your prayers and with your help, we will demonstrate that democracy can work, even under the most challenging conditions. We will honor the suffering of our people, and Liberia will become a brilliant beacon, an example to Africa and to the world of what the love of liberty can achieve. We will strive to be America's success story in Africa, demonstrating the potential in the transformation from war to peace; demonstrating the will to join in the global fight against terrorism; demonstrating that democracy can prevail, demonstrating that prosperity can be achieved.

The people of Liberia have already rolled up their sleeves, despite overwhelming obstacles, confident that their work will be rewarded, confident in the hope and promise of the future.

The women of Liberia and the women of Africa, some in the marketplaces and some in the high levels of government, have already shared their trust and their confidence in my ability to succeed and ensure that the doors of competitive politics and professionalism will be opened even wider for them.

Honorable Members, I will succeed. I will not betray their trust. I will make them proud. I will make you proud in the difference which one woman with abiding faith in God can make.

God bless you.

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AEF503 03/17/2006

OPIC Loan Will Help Establish Property Record System in Kenya

(U.S. business will use funds to improve tax collection in town of Malindi) (510)

By Helen I. Rouce

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The coastal Kenyan town of Malindi soon could be collecting more property taxes to pay for better public services and spur economic development thanks to a loan to a U.S. small business announced March 14 by the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC).

The $840,000 loan will go to a subsidiary of Geosurvey International LLC of Horse Creek, Wyoming, to establish a property record system for the Municipal Council of Malindi, a growing tourist hub located about two hours north of Mombasa, Kenya, on the Indian Ocean.

Malindi's land information system will be made up primarily of a database that registers ownership, survey descriptions and legal descriptions of individual properties.

"Malindi is a rapidly-growing tourist center in Kenya, whose ongoing development requires dependable public services," said OPIC President Robert Mosbacher Jr. in announcing the loan.

"Implementation of the land information system will contribute to the process of property formalization in Kenya, resulting in better tax collection and, ultimately, the issuance of municipal bonds for infrastructure and other social projects," Mosbacher said.

He added that the project, which is the first of its kind in Kenya, has many developmental benefits and could serve as a model for other municipalities throughout the country.

The OPIC loan will be used to build the land information system, train staff and develop the database for future tax collections. It also will fund the creation of a platform to collect existing tax arrears more efficiently.

The project involves mapping properties that currently are not defined in the land records, and scanning existing land records into the system. New property records then will be cross-indexed to the valuation, assessment and tax collection records to ensure that taxes are properly assessed and collected.

Like many Kenyan municipalities, Malindi fails to collect a substantial proportion of its property-related taxes, which are needed to fund community services. Implementation of the land information system -- along with the application of good management practices, sound financial control and replacement of out-of-date records -- potentially could increase municipal tax collection threefold to fivefold.

OPIC, established as a U.S. government agency in 1971, helps U.S. businesses invest overseas, fosters economic development in new and emerging markets, complements the private sector in managing risks associated with foreign direct investment and supports U.S. foreign policy.

The corporation charges market-based fees for its products and thus is self-sustaining, with no net cost to U.S. taxpayers. The agency's political risk insurance and financing help U.S. businesses of all sizes invest in more than 150 emerging markets and developing nations worldwide.

Over its 33-year history, OPIC has supported $164 billion worth of investments that have helped developing countries generate more than 732,000 host-country jobs and $13 billion in host-government revenues.

OPIC projects also have generated $69 billion in U.S. exports and supported more than 264,000 American jobs.

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

AEF504 03/17/2006

USAID Provides Additional Food Aid to Kenya

(United States has provided more than $32 million in food aid to Kenya in 2006) (320)

Washington -- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide $16 million in emergency food assistance through the World Food Program to drought-stricken Kenya.

USAID's contribution will provide 22,090 metric tons (MT) of whole and processed food grains, peas and vegetable oil, which will reach as many as 3.5 million struggling farmers and herders, the agency said March 16.

With this recent additional assistance, USAID's response to the drought in Kenya in 2006 has been more than $32 million, including 45,000 MT of emergency food aid.

A USAID press release states that the current pastoral drought crisis in the Greater Horn of Africa, which includes Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti, is particularly serious for approximately 7 million farmers and herders found in an arid region that connects northeastern Kenya, southern Somalia and southern Ethiopia.

USAID said that with the most recent rain failure, herders have lost tens of thousands of goats, sheep, cattle and even camels. Entire communities have been displaced from their homes and normal herding areas in search of food and water, and malnutrition is surpassing crisis levels. Rainfall is predicted to be lower than the annual average in the coming months.

Since January, USAID has contributed more than $130 million in emergency drought relief, including 200,000 MT of emergency food assistance, to meet urgent needs in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

USAID said it will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary.

The agency's Food for Peace program, which celebrated 50 years of service in 2004, has brought nourishment to more than 3 billion people in 150 countries. The agency itself has provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 40 years.

More information (http://www.usaid.gov/) about the agency and its programs is available on the USAID Web site.

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AEF404 03/16/2006

"Wired" Imam of Mali Connects to Outside World with U.S. Help

(United States' Leland Initiative builds global Internet connectivity in Africa) (720)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Imam Almamy Korobara is reaching out beyond his remote corner of Mali to connect with millions of Muslims and religious leaders worldwide using the web of linked computers called the Internet, thanks to information technology donated by the U.S. government.

Korobara is imam of the Grand Mosque of Djenné, one of Africa's oldest towns. His reputation as an influential religious and spiritual leader now is being spread worldwide after the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) recently provided him with a computer and one year of Internet service.

As "one of the most important Muslims in one of Africa's most important Islamic cities," the cleric can now communicate with religious leaders not only in Africa, but worldwide, according to a document provided by USAID.

The Malian cleric and the Internet are a natural fit because of his enthusiastic support for U.S.-government-funded programs aimed at spurring development in Mali, in part through innovative technology programs aimed at connecting sub-Saharan Africa to global information infrastructures like the Internet.

USAID said the imam worked closely with two U.S. ambassadors, "advocating using new technologies to bridge Djenné's information gap," and truly deserves the new sobriquet he has earned as "The Wired Imam" of Mali.

For example, he backed the establishment of a local community radio station and learning center in Djenné-Jeno and is busy using his computer to promote Djenné's historic and cultural past, which dates to 250 B.C.

According to USAID, after Korobara learned to use the computer and access the Internet, he said: "I used to think the Internet was just for people working in offices, but now I realize it is also useful for religious leaders and their communities. I can find information for the Friday prayers and I can help others understand what's going on in the world."

Such understanding is coming to thousands of other Africans who have taken advantage of USAID's Leland Initiative, which for the past 10 years has worked to connect 20 African nations to the Internet.

PROGRAM BRINGING BENEFITS OF INTERNET TO AFRICA

The program -- named for U.S. Representative Mickey Leland (Democrat of Texas), who was killed in a plane crash in 1989 while on a humanitarian mission to Ethiopia -- is a multimillion-dollar effort to bring the benefits of the global information revolution to sub-Saharan Africa.

According to USAID's Leland Initiative Web site, "Africa needs access to the powerful information and communications tools of the Internet in order to obtain the resources and efficiency essential for sustainable development."

The Internet is a good tool, it adds, because it is a "low-cost pathway that allows information to be more accessible, transferable and manageable; ready access to information is becoming the catalyst that transforms economic and social structures around the world and supports fast-paced sustainable development."

After an African nation expresses an interest in the initiative, Leland Initiative officials survey telecom policies to see if commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) already exist in the country or, if not, whether an enabling environment exists for their creation.

The Leland Initiative will help establish the ISPs, whose goal is to provide high-speed, affordable gateway access to the Internet -- which will connect users to billions of pieces of information from universities, libraries and countless databases worldwide.

Even though the initiative does not provide computer or communications equipment to the ISPs, it works with host-country officials and the private sector "to promote Internet-friendly policies oriented towards affordable, cost-based tariffing, nondiscriminating access to the information available on the Internet and the delivery of retail ISP services by the private sector."

In Mali, the initiative helped make an Internet gateway operational, and five commercial ISPs have been connected. USAID also has been busy working with partners to train people who, in turn, can familiarize others with Internet use.

Throughout Africa, the Leland Initiative "will work with the USAID mission and its partners to grow a user base of competent, dynamic individuals and institutions capable of applying the powerful tools of the Internet to the challenge of sustainable development," USAID concluded.

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AEF301 03/15/2006

Women from South African AIDS Support Group Speak in Washington

(Members of mothers2mothers invited to United States by Laura Bush) (880)

By Bruce Greenberg

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- HIV-infected mothers from South Africa told their stories March 13 to a capacity audience gathered in their honor at Georgetown University in Washington.

The women, part of the South African AIDS support group mothers2mothers (m2m), had been invited to the United States by first lady Laura Bush, who hosted them at the White House earlier in the day. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/13-93477.html).)

Their visit was a follow-up to the first lady's visit to HIV and AIDS centers in South Africa in 2005.

At the Georgetown program, the mothers spoke about the services their group offers to pregnant women and new mothers who are dealing with HIV infections. They were part of a panel that also included Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. government's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator-designate Randall Tobias spoke earlier on the same program.

Mothers2mothers member Patty Thomas began her remarks in a measured and calm voice that took on urgency as she spoke personally about her own experience.

"I am HIV-positive -- and this virus can make you self-destructive," she declared, referring to the stigma of infection

that made her recede further and further into her own private "closet."

"My fears [of having the virus], which was the product of a first sexual experience, were further compounded by fears of social rejection," she added.

But it is possible -- with a positive mind-set and the support of others -- to go on after a diagnosis of HIV infection, she said, adding: "I am very grateful for this [mothers2mothers] program. Because of its structure we can conquer our fears, and because of this platform and structure we can conquer our doubts ... we can deliver this positive message. And with the people we help, we can give them hope. And it is this kind of hope that keeps us going."

Several other mothers2mothers members spoke, all saying that although HIV-infected, they have gained new strength and dignity through their involvement with the m2m program.

The women, who are either facilitators or mentors in the program, also spoke of the difficulty of revealing their HIV status to family and friends.

Gloria Neanywa, an m2m volunteer, recounted the difficulty she had in counseling a young mother who had been instructed to formula-feed her infant rather than breastfeed, to avoid transmitting HIV to her child.

The young woman's mother could not understand why she was doing this, which forced the daughter to confess her HIV status. Later, the clinic was able to educate the mother about the dangers of viral transmission from mother to infant through breastfeeding, and in time the mother accepted her daughter's condition.

AFRICAN WOMEN BEAR BRUNT OF HIV BURDEN

In closing remarks, Dr. Wolfgang Rennert, an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Georgetown University Hospital, said that Africa is the only continent where approximately 60 percent of the HIV-infected population is female.

The reasons, he said, are economic and cultural. African women "are subjected to social norms that keep them dependent on their menfolk, and they are subjected to economic constraints that prevent them from owning property," Rennert said.

In addition, he said, "Women have a lesser say in their sexual destinies due to cultural norms that compel certain [risky] sexual behaviors, especially on the part of men."

"In South Africa, Zambia or Zimbabwe," Rennert said, "women between 15 and 24 years of age are three to six times more likely to get infected with HIV than men are. They are more likely to have been forced to have sex before their 16th birthday and more likely to drop out of school. And they are often subjected to cultural norms that define them through their ability to bear children."

"Women often carry 90 percent of the burden of HIV, being caregivers to sick relatives, and 75 percent of households in South Africa who have an HIV-infected family member are run by women," he said.

But with treatments for HIV and AIDS now available, Rennert said, there is great progress in offering options to HIV-infected people, particularly with the help of programs like President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

What also is needed in addition to educational programs and drug treatment, he said, is the kind of peer-to-peer support that programs like mothers2mothers provide.

M2m, a nonprofit project of the Mothers Programmes of South Africa, is a community-based HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment support group for HIV-positive pregnant women and new mothers. It educates and mentors women to prevent mother-to-child viral transmission from breastfeeding, ensures adherence to medical treatment, empowers mothers to improve their health and the health of their babies and combats the onus of HIV within families and communities.

M2m is located in five provinces of South Africa, as well as in Ethiopia and Botswana. Additional information (http://www.m2mafrica.org/) is available on the organization's Web site.

For more information on U.S. programs and efforts to combat the disease, see HIV/AIDS (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/hiv_aids.html).

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AEF302 03/15/2006

U.S. Imam's Message of Self-Reliance Has Lasting Effect in Malawi

(Visit prompted local Muslims set up business school within mosque) (620)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The visit to Malawi of a prominent American imam has had lasting effects on the educational infrastructure of the developing southern African nation.

Following a series of sermons delivered by Imam Darryl Wainwright emphasizing self-reliance, Malawi's Muslim community decided to establish a business school at a mosque, using volunteer teachers. Wainwright toured the nation as part of the State Department's worldwide outreach program to Muslims.

According to a document provided by the U.S. Embassy in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, the self-help project was inspired by the American imam's preaching after Juma'ah prayers at a mosque in the capital in October 2005.

The imam gave "an inspirational message that focused on the importance of education, hard work and self-reliance for Muslims," the embassy reported. When the congregation then asked him for money to start a school, Wainwright "encouraged them to look first to their own resources rather than waiting for outside assistance."

The American imam cited the example of his own mosque in Baltimore, which started a school completely on its own, employing volunteer teachers.

The group of young Muslim professionals in Lilongwe who took up Wainwright's suggestion began with one course, business accounting, and within a month the initial class of five students had grown to 50.

The school's new principal, after contacting the U.S. Embassy to thank Wainwright for his help, said he hoped the school would help train Muslims who, in turn, could improve the social and economic welfare of Lilongwe's Muslim community.

The principal said his school could serve as a model for other mosques in Malawi, emphasizing: "We attribute all this to Imam Wainwright's visit."

UNITED STATES REACHES OUT TO MUSLIMS WORLDWIDE

In addition to the program that sponsors Americans traveling and lecturing abroad, the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program brings foreign religious and secular leaders to the United States to experience American culture firsthand.

U.S. outreach to Muslim communities also includes

programs like "Shared Futures," which has distributed thousands of school kits to Muslim students in Africa as well as Muslim communities in Asia and the Middle East.

Local U.S. embassies also have used their funds to help refurbish mosques and restore ancient Islamic manuscripts.

Muslim outreach has been an important task as well for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in areas other than Africa. Starting in 2003, for example, the agency established the Islam Working Group to provide advice and guidance to development experts working in Muslim communities in Europe and Central Asia. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=January&x=20050107163457mbgrebneerg1.202029e-02&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html).)

USAID currently is operating programs aimed at building democracy and civil societies in 10 predominantly Muslim countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

President Bush established the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 to promote democratic change through programs aimed at education and women's empowerment in Muslim communities. The program has had special success with entrepreneurial training of women in North Africa and the Middle East.

In 2005, MEPI organized the first-ever Business Women's Summit in Tunis, Tunisia. Two hundred women from 16 Middle Eastern and African countries attended, along with eight businesswomen from America. The result was the creation of a new Middle East and North Africa Business Women's Network. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2005/May/26-534098.html).)

On the political level, MEPI's work with election-monitoring groups was credited with increasing the transparency of Lebanon's historic elections in 2005 and with providing support to more than 2,000 monitors in Egypt's first multicandidate election.

For additional information, see Middle East Partnership Initiative (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/me_partnership_initiative.html).

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AEF102 03/13/2006

Congressional Human Rights Caucus Examines Northern Uganda

(U.S. Agency for International Development helping Uganda resolve situation) (630)

By Bruce Greenberg

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- A 20-year-old fractious conflict centered in Northern Uganda that has displaced 1.7 million people is receiving renewed attention from the United States, United Nations and other international organizations.

What the United States and other world bodies can or cannot do to help resolve this crisis, which has resulted in close to 30,000 child abductees and set the scene for heinous forms of torture and murder, was discussed at a March 9 event sponsored by the Congressional Human Rights Caucus.

Representatives from the U.S. Department of State, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as UNIFCEF, the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and the International Rescue Committee attended the event.

Carol Thompson, deputy assistant secretary for Africa at the State Department, emphasized that Uganda which supporting the United States in Iraq and the global struggle against international terrorism, is one of America's closest economic and strategic partners in sub-Saharan Africa. Referring to the major rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by its messianic and iconic leader, Joseph Kony, as a "cult-like organization," Thompson said there have been problems with the Ugandan government's efforts in neutralizing the LRA, and mediating a final peace settlement.

She said that the United States has urged the government of Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni to broker a peace agreement with the rebels through the U.S.-sponsored Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI). She also said the United States has been assisting the Ugandan government with both these peace efforts and with military and logistical assistance to the Ugandan Peoples' Defense Force.

The United States is committed to settling the conflict, while at the same time offering humanitarian and economic assistance to the victims, many of whom presently reside in displaced persons camps, she said.

HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS TIED TO SECURITY, ECONOMIC ISSUES

Michael Hess, the assistant administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, at USAID reminded everyone that humanitarian and protection issues cannot be addressed in isolation.

"USAID is integrating its programs so as to offer long-term assistance in the health, education and economic growth sectors in order to build a solid foundation for the reintegration and eventual return of those displaced persons." Hess said that as of 2005, USAID had contributed close to $74 million dollars toward those efforts.

His agency, he said, has several objectives: to increase access to central services in order to reduce the mortality levels of camp residents mostly due to malnutrition, malaria, cholera and dysentery; to provide safe access to water to increase security levels in and around the camps; and to help with providing access to tillable land so as to encourage economic assistance and income generation among returnees.

"USAID has funded seed and small plants projects called 'gardens in a bag' to make people less dependent on outside food provisions. As a result," he said, "these refugees are now producing up to 40 percent of their daily food needs."

Ultimately USAID programs should provide incentives for these displaced persons to return to their home communities, he said. "And finally we are working to advance the peace and reconciliation process through the NUPI, and by providing assistance to former [LRA] soldiers who are [in many instances] returning to the villages that they have previously attacked. We work with the government of Uganda and with other international assistance organizations, as well," he added.

However, he cautioned everyone that only reconciliation between the Acholi people of the north and former members of the LRA can bring about lasting peace in that region.

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

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AEF201 03/14/2006

First Lady Announces Pediatric HIV/AIDS Initiative

(Laura Bush hosts South African mothers' group at White House) (710)

By Charles W. Corey

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- A new public-private partnership for pediatric AIDS treatment, part of President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), was announced March 13 by first lady Laura Bush at a White House gathering she hosted for a group of South African mothers.

The first lady told the mothers, who are engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS, that the United States, multilateral organizations and pharmaceutical companies have agreed to contribute more and greater resources to the cause of fighting pediatric HIV/AIDS. (See fact sheet (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060313133137lcnirellep0.5991632&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html).)

"Members of this alliance will identify scientific obstacles to treatment for children," she said. "They'll take practical steps to give parents and lay people simpler and safer anti-retroviral medicines to use for children. They will share best practices in science and medicine and they'll develop systems to speed up the review, the approval, the manufacturing and the availability of pediatric anti-retroviral drugs."

The visit by the mothers' group to the White House was a follow-up to the first lady's visit to HIV and AIDS centers in South Africa in 2005.

A transcript (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060313-2.html) of Laura Bush's remarks is available on the White House Web site.

COOPERATION NEEDED TO MEET CHALLENGE OF AIDS, TOBIAS SAYS

U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and USAID Administrator-designate Randall Tobias discussed the new partnership initiative later that day at a Georgetown University Forum that honored the Cape Town mothers.

Speaking of the new initiative, Tobias said, "It will take all of us working together to meet the range of daunting challenges that HIV and AIDS poses for families around the world."

Tobias reminded the audience, which included Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, that HIV/AIDS continues to exact a "horrific toll on our world."

Saying that people never must lose sight of the death toll caused by HIV/AIDS, he noted the "growing number of positive developments around the world today" with respect to the virus.

He saluted the South African mothers' group for representing a "growing reality" of leadership against HIV/AIDS at the grassroots level, saying the leadership coming from women "is a development that our nation is indeed very proud to support."

Tobias praised the mothers' group as one of many PEPFAR partners with "deep roots" in their own communities, making them "uniquely qualified to meet the needs of their people."

There are many challenges involved in responding to global HIV/AIDS, he said, and cited pediatric treatment as among

the toughest challenges. For that reason, he said, it is an "absolute necessity" to bring together leaders to work through the issues.

Tobias said preventing the tragedy of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is one of PEPFAR's highest priorities. "Mother-to-child transmission is now an exceedingly rare event here in the United States, and we are working toward the day when that can be said of South Africa and other developing nations," he told his audience.

In the first two years of the President's Emergency Plan, he said, the United States has supported its partners in South Africa and other countries in reaching more than 3.2 million pregnant women with services to prevent mother-to-child transmission. "We estimate that these interventions have prevented at least 47,000 infant infections to date," he said.

Until pediatric AIDS transmission is eliminated worldwide, he said, it is crucial to make anti-retroviral treatment available to every child infected.

The United States, according to Tobias, estimates that at least 7 percent of those who received treatment at PEPFAR-supported sites in the past year were children.

"I think that makes clear that there are many, many more children that we need to reach. There are so many challenges involved in responding to global HIV/AIDS," he said.

Tobias said his message to the mothers is that "the American people are proud to be your partners and we will continue to stand by you in the days ahead."

The PEPFAR program is a five-year, $15 billion global initiative to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

For additional information, see President Bush's HIV/AIDS Initiatives (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/HIV_AIDS/hiv_aids_initiative.html).

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AEF304 03/15/2006

More Effective Medicine for Preventing Blindness Identified

(National Eye Institute reports success in trichiasis recurrence) (310)

Washington -- An easier, more affordable means of treating an eye ailment that causes blindness in millions has been identified through research conducted by the National Eye Institute (NEI) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Trachoma is an eye infection that is the leading preventable cause of blindness in the world. It causes trichiasis, a condition in which the eyelid turns inward, and eyelashes rub against the eye, resulting in corneal scarring and loss of vision.

Trachoma is spread through contact with insects, clothing, linens or other household items that might harbor the bacteria. It occurs in poor, overcrowded communities lacking clean water, decent sanitation or health care.

Trichiasis can be treated with a simple surgical repair of the eyelid, according to a March 13 NEI press release, but infection often sets in after the surgery, causing a recurrence of the condition.

A clinical trial was conducted in Wolayta Zone, Ethiopia, to test the use of the drug azithromycin after the eyelid surgery. It was administered in a single oral dose instead of the usual follow-on treatment, a six-week regimen of antibiotic ointment.

"In this study, by administering a single dose of azithromycin after eyelid surgery, we were able to reduce recurrence of trichiasis by 33 percent," said study chairman Sheila K. West of the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. "This finding has major implications for improving the outcome following surgery."

Worldwide, 11 million people develop trichiasis every year, so the NIH says the study will have an important influence in reducing the occurrence of blindness.

The full text (http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/mar2006/nei-13.htm) of the NEI announcement is available on the National Institutes of Health Web site.

See U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, for additional information (http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/trachoma_t.htm) on trachoma.

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AEF305 03/15/2006

U.S. Will Work with New U.N. Human Rights Council

(General Assembly approves new human rights body) (720)

By Judy Aita

Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- The United States will support efforts to strengthen a new Human Rights Council, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton says, but maintains the General Assembly missed an historic opportunity to create a human rights agency in the United Nations to help those most in need.

"We had a historic opportunity to create a primary human rights organ in the U.N. poised to help those most in need and offer a hand to governments to build what the [U.N.] Charter calls 'fundamental freedoms,'" Bolton said.

The United States refused to join in a consensus on a resolution that created the new Human Rights Council.

"Absent strong mechanisms for maintaining credible membership, the United States could not join consensus on this resolution," Bolton said calling for a vote. "We did not have sufficient confidence in this text to be able to say that the [Human Rights Council] would be better than its predecessor."

The United States, which was in the forefront of support for U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call in 2005 to abolish the discredited Commission on Human Rights and replace it with a strong new body, found itself at odds with a majority of U.N. members on the compromise text negotiated by General Assembly President Jan Eliasson because the resolution did not set membership standards that would have excluded human rights abusers such as Cuba, Sudan, Iran, Zimbabwe, Belarus and Burma as members. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2006/Feb/28-548054.html).)

After months of negotiations and efforts by the United States to reopen the text, the General Assembly established the new Human Rights Council March 15 by a vote of 170 to 4 with 3 abstentions. The United States, joined by Israel, the Marshall Islands and Palau, voted against the resolution; Venezuela, Belarus and Iran abstained.

In the wake of the vote, Bolton affirmed that "the United States will work cooperatively with other member states to make the council as strong and effective as it can be. We will be supportive of efforts to strengthen the council and look forward to a serious review of the council's structure and work."

In addition, the United States will continue "to support all U.N. institutions that advance democracy, and human rights

remains a high priority, as does our commitment to ongoing reform efforts throughout the U.N. system," he said.

Many nations, including Canada and members of the European Union, also wanted a stronger resolution but feared new negotiations could scuttle the entire effort.

NEW COUNCIL SCHEDULED TO MEET IN JUNE

Under the resolution, the Commission on Human Rights, which opened its annual session March 13 in Geneva, will be abolished on June 16; the first meeting of the Human Rights Council will convene three days later. Elections for the council's first members will be held on May 9.

The new council, also based in Geneva, has a mandate to address all violations of human rights and to promote universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. A subsidiary of the General Assembly, it will meet regularly, scheduling no fewer than three 10-week sessions annually, and can hold special sessions if needed. The assembly will review the council's status within five years.

The council's 47 members will be apportioned by regional distribution. Representatives will be elected to three-year terms by a majority of the General Assembly, which must take into account each candidate's human rights record.

Every new member must undergo a human rights review, and no country can serve more than two consecutive terms. A sitting member that commits gross human rights violations can be suspended by a two-thirds vote of the assembly.

Calling development, peace and security, and human rights, the "pillars of the United Nations," Eliasson said that the assembly now must move on to address development and secretariat and management reform as called for by world leaders at the U.N. 60th Anniversary Summit. In December 2005, the assembly created a Peacebuilding Commission. (See related article (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2005/Dec/21-694826.html).)

The full text (http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/06_051.htm) of Bolton's prepared remarks is available on the Web site of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

For additional information, see United States and U.N. Reform (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

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AEF306 03/15/2006

Extremist Groups Subvert Peaceful Purposes of Islam, Rice Says

(Secretary urges cooperation among governments to contain terrorist threat) (550)

Washington -- Extremist groups subvert the peaceful purposes and doctrines of Islam, posing a threat to innocent people around the world, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said during in an interview broadcast on Indonesia's RCTI Television.

Speaking in Jakarta March 15, Rice said Indonesians have felt the threat of radical Islamist organizations directly via bombings that took place on the island of Bali in October 2002 and in its capital city, Jakarta, in August 2003 and September 2004.

Asked how far the U.S. government would go to neutralize such organizations, the secretary responded, "I think we all have to be united in making certain that these terrorists cannot take innocent life. But the way that we do that is through cooperation with governments around the world that also want to fight terrorism which is why the United States has such a strong counterterrorism program and such strong counterterrorism work with the Government of Indonesia." (See Response to Terrorism (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/terrorism.html).)

Rice called her visit to Indonesia "extraordinary."

"My primary goal for being here is to talk about the tremendous partnership that Indonesia and the United States are developing, about Indonesia's extraordinary march to democracy," she said.

Rice rejected suggestions that her visit was connected to a deal between Indonesia's state-run oil and gas company PT Pertamina and U.S. multinational oil corporation ExxonMobil. The two companies agreed March 13 to form a joint operating organization to manage the Cepu oil block, located on the border between the provinces of East Java and Central Java. The block includes several oil fields and is estimated to contain reserves of around 600 million barrels of crude oil and 51 billion cubic meters (1.7 trillion cubic feet) of natural gas.

"This is a private matter," she said. "The United States isn't involved in the investment decisions of its companies."

Noting that the deal was complete before she arrived in Indonesia, Rice said she thought it showed that "Indonesia is open for private investment."

HAMAS, MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Asked about U.S. policy toward Hamas as the ruling government in the Palestinian territories, Rice said the United States agrees with the other three members of the Quartet -- the United Nations, the European Union and Russia -- that oversees negotiations on the road map peace process. The consensus, she said, is that "you can't have a peace process if one party is not committed to peace and continues to use violence. And so our appeal would be to any Palestinian government that they accept those responsibilities of governing."

Rice said that although the United States has declared Hamas a terrorist organization, if it were to make "a strategic choice and renounce violence and recognize the right of Israel to exist" they would find an international community ready to support a Palestinian government devoted to peace.

After completing her visit to Indonesia, Rice will travel to Australia to participate in trilateral security talks with Australia and Japan.

See also "Indonesia an Example of Tolerance and Moderation, Rice Says (http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060314170617ASesuarK0.5504114&t=livefeeds/wf-latest.html)," and "Rice Lauds Indonesia's 'Vibrant Democracy,' Work in Aceh Province (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2006/Mar/14-747262.html)."

The transcript (http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/63135.htm) of Rice's interview is available on the State Department Web site.

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AEF101 03/13/2006

U.S. Embassy Outreach Helps Africans Tackle Social Challenges

(Assistant Secretary Frazer's proactive approach energizes programs) (840)

By Jim FIsher-Thompson

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- From helping pygmies in Gabon, to hosting basketball tournaments in Madagascar, to sponsoring HIV/AIDS discussions in mosques in Cote d'Ivoire, U.S. embassies are reaching out with renewed vigor to help Africans deal with pressing social challenges at the local level.

That energy was spurred, in part, by recently appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, who told a congressional hearing in 2005 that she would empower U.S. diplomats to go out into the countryside -- to implement development programs with grassroots African partners.

Frazer herself set the example for this proactive approach with a number of whirlwind trips to the continent after assuming office in 2005. She met openly with leaders of various factions in Sudan in an effort to kick-start stalled negotiations and celebrated with Liberians at the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female head of state.

The U.S. official's open approach was duplicated most recently by one of the newest members of her staff -- Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa Bobby Pittman -- during a recent trip to Zambia and South Africa.

According to a document provided by the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, Pittman made a big hit in a roundtable discussion with three senior foreign affairs journalists in South Africa.

Pittman displayed a "keen interest in the South African economy," the U.S. Embassy said, adding he impressed journalists with his knowledge on topics ranging from the Zimbabwe crisis and U.S. policy toward the country to restraints to U.S. investment in southern Africa and U.S. support for emerging mortgage markets in Zambia and South Africa.

OUTREACH EFFORTS IN GABON

Another proponent of the hands-on grassroots approach to development is U.S. Ambassador to Gabon R. Barrie Walkley, a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Somalia from 1967 to 1969, who later joined the Foreign Service.

In Gabon, Walkley oversees an innovative self-help program for pygmies living in the remote rain forest cluster of villages called Imbong. According to an embassy document, in 2005 the Ambassadors Special Self-help Fund "provided the Pygmies of Imbong the opportunity to improve their lives by increasing their agricultural production."

Recently, Walkley and his staff members traveled to the provincial capital of Makokou and then an additional 180 kilometers for four hours on a dirt road to Imbong to check on the project. There, the team finalized the delivery of machetes, axes and cooking pots to facilitate large-scale manioc cultivation and production.

According to the embassy, "the Pygmies have already put donated material to use and are now selling or exchanging excess production in neighboring villages."

BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATIONS IN MADAGASCAR

The challenges of youth and social development have not been neglected by U.S. diplomats in Africa. In Madagascar, the U.S. Embassy celebrated Black History month in America by sponsoring an "HIV/AIDS Awareness Basketball Tournament" among 35 high schools in the Antananarivo area.

The sports effort in Madagascar featured both boys' and girls' teams in a program put together by Ambassador James McGee and local Malagasy education officials.

At the finals on February 22, 5,000 students attended as well as teachers, five government ministers and the Mayor of Antananarivo. The Ministry of Defense provided the referees with the participation of 11 other Malagasy institutions, including the fire department, police, 25 peer educators, 100 local Scouts and cheerleading squads from high schools.

According to the Malagasy media, this reaching out to youth through sports was a "staggering success" unexpected by even old Africa hands who worked in the U.S. mission.

BACKPACKS IN CHAD, VIDEOS IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Outreach to Muslims worldwide is of particular importance to the U.S. government whose "Shared Futures" program now provides backpacks, pencils, pens, atlases and other educational materials to Muslim/Arabic schools.

In Africa, the U.S. Embassy in Chad recently handed out over 5,000 of the educational kits. In Abeche Ambassador Marc Wall helped distribute 1,000 backpacks noting the Shared Futures project "aims to improve ties and set down a base for increased friendship through promoting a better understanding of the people of the United States."

Grand Imam of Chad Hassan Hissein Abakar accepted the donation saying, "History will record this event and keep it for coming generations."

In Cote d'Ivoire, the U.S. Embassy carried the fight against HIV/AIDS out into the countryside with a video road show that featured filmed presentations as well as discussions by experts from the ministry of health on AIDS prevention and treatment.

According to the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan, the traveling health exhibition reached thousands of Ivorian "blazing new paths for outreach on the frontlines of HIV/AIDS." Among its highlights was the first ever discussion of AIDs in the Grand Mosque of Yamoussoukro, an event that "ushered in a new openness for the country's Muslim communities on HIV/AIDS."

For more information on U.S. policy, see Africa (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/).

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AEF505 03/17/2006

U.S. House Passes Bill with Extra $4.3 Billion in Foreign Aid

(Foreign aid is part of emergency appropriations to cover war costs) (510)

By Elizabeth Kelleher

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington - The U.S. House of Representatives voted March 16 to approve a supplemental appropriations bill that includes additional funds for U.S. allies and foreign humanitarian relief.

President Bush, saying he "applauds" the House action, urged the Senate to "act promptly to pass legislation providing for these critical funds."

The House bill would allocate a total of $92 billion to pay for war costs, the reconstruction of U.S. areas devastated by hurricanes in 2005 and foreign aid, including assistance for Sudan and other parts of Africa. The measure would pay for expenses that have emerged since the time Congress passed its regular spending bills for the fiscal year ending September 30.

Of the total amount, roughly $4 billion is earmarked for foreign assistance.

The majority of that money would be spent in Iraq -- $1.6 billion for stabilization and local governance projects and $1.1 billion for U.S. diplomatic operations there. The bill also would provide $350 million for emergency, international food-assistance.

An amendment, which was adopted by the House in a close vote, would increase funding for peacekeeping operations in Darfur by $50 million. This would be in addition to $253 million that the bill already allocated for peacekeeping missions in Sudan.

The bill would provide $50 million for economic assistance to Liberia and roughly the same amount for migration assistance, mostly targeted to help refugees in Sudan, Liberia and Afghanistan.

In addition, the measure would allocate $56 million toward promotion of democracy in Iran, only two-thirds of the amount requested by the administration.

The House did not approve the bulk of the administration's request for Afghanistan because, according to the Appropriations Committee, that country is not cooperating fully with U.S. efforts to stop the planting of poppy, from which heroin is derived.

Beyond foreign aid, the spending bill would put $19 billion toward disaster assistance for U.S. areas hit by hurricanes in 2005 and $68 billion toward war costs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The White House's Office of Management and Budget released a statement March 15 opposing the elimination of some war-related funds the administration had requested. For instance, the bill would cut in half the amount requested for building police facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan and reduce the amounts that would go toward support of Iraqi military forces or toward building urban-bypass roads in Iraq.

A provision would withhold money that previously had been approved to support the Palestinian Authority unless Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice certifies that the Palestinian Authority meets certain conditions, including official recognition of Israel.

The bill passed the House easily, by a vote of 348-71. The Senate plans to consider its version in April. Once any differences in the two spending bills are ironed out, both chambers have to approve a final version before the president can sign it into law. That likely would happen by the end of May.

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AEF410 03/16/2006

Women's Empowerment a Cornerstone of U.S. Policy, Official Says

(Ponticelli says democracy thrives when women are full partners in society) (430)

By Lauren Monsen

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- President Bush has made women's empowerment "a key element of U.S. foreign policy" because "no society can prosper when women, who represent half the population, are marginalized," says Charlotte Ponticelli, senior coordinator for international women's issues at the U.S. Department of State.

On a March 16 State Department webchat, Ponticelli said that expanding women's rights is integral to the broader goals of advancing freedom, democracy, prosperity, and human rights in every society."

She also recapped U.S. efforts to promote women's participation in troubled parts of the world like Belarus.

"We are doing all we can to support free and fair elections and to strengthen civil society. We will continue to spotlight abuses and to encourage the full and active participation of women at this historic time," Ponticelli said.

In the United States, the outlook for women has changed considerably during the course of her own career, said Ponticelli. "I was talking to a colleague just this week and commenting that 20 years ago, if you were attending a high-level meeting in the State Department, you might have seen only one other woman at the table," she recalled. "Today, women are in high-level positions just about everywhere you go."

Women's empowerment is necessary even in countries where women claim to be content with limited rights, Ponticelli said, adding, "The first and most important tools for strengthening women's political voice are knowledge, skills, and awareness of their basic human rights."

The recent election victories -- and inaugurations -- of women presidents in Liberia and Chile offer evidence that women are assuming ever-greater roles in society, Ponticelli said. "New leaders such as Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia are having a tremendous impact not just in their own countries and regions, but around the world," she said.

Ponticelli also took issue with the suggestion that female officials in developing countries are appointed primarily to create a false sense of inclusion, saying that "increasingly, new and emerging women leaders are making it clear that they are serious about their role and do not want to be perceived as 'window dressing.'"

Even though their numbers are still too low, women leaders "also realize that quality is more important than quantity in terms of the strength of their political voice," she added.

The transcript (http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Mar/16-383506.html) of the webchat is available on USINFO's Webchat Station (http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html).

For additional information, see National Women's History Month (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity/women_in_the_us/national_womens_history_month.html).

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AEF411 03/16/2006

Schoolchildren Worldwide To Observe the Night Sky for Science

(U.S.-funded project will help map light pollution around the world) (460)

Washington - Schoolchildren around the world will gaze skyward after dark March 22-29, looking for specific constellations and then sharing their observations through the Internet.

The initiative, called GLOBE at Night, could help scientists map light pollution around the world, according to a March 14 press release from the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Colorado.

Participants in the worldwide campaign will observe and record the magnitude of visible stars as a way to measure light pollution in given locations. The project has a goal of 5000 observations.

GLOBE at Night is a special project of the GLOBE Program (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment), a worldwide science and education program funded by NASA and the U.S. National Science Foundation and supported by the U.S. Department of State.

Students from more than 17,000 schools in 109 countries have participated in GLOBE, reporting more than 14 million environmental observations, thanks to the efforts of 109 countries and 129 U.S. partners. This will be the first GLOBE activity to engage students in astronomy.

"The observations made during GLOBE at Night will help students and scientists together assess how the quality of the night sky varies around the world," said GLOBE Education Director Sandra Henderson.

The observations, she added, "will also help us better understand how outdoor lighting that's not well designed can waste energy and block our view of the stars."

Light pollution is a growing problem for astronomical observing programs around the world. According to the International Dark-Sky Association, a large percentage of outdoor lighting is directed skyward, contaminating the night sky and wasting billions of dollars in electricity per year.

Teachers, students and parents will work together on GLOBE at Night, said Project Coordinator Kirsten Meymaris.

GLOBE at Night was inspired in part by a similar project carried out in Arizona and Chile by the National Optical Astronomy Observatory and the Centro de Apoyo a la Didactica de la Astronomia, which cosponsor GLOBE at Night.

By having students in many places search for the same constellations, such as Orion, GLOBE at Night will allow the students to compare what they see with what others see, giving them a sense of how light pollution can vary from place to place. The young observers also will learn more about the economic and geographic factors that control light pollution in their communities and around the world.

The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research and Colorado State University manage the GLOBE program.

More information (http://www.globe.gov/GaN/) about GLOBE at Night is available on the project's Web site.

The press release (http://www.ucar.edu/news/releases/2006/globe.shtml) is available at the NCAR Web site.

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AEF105 03/13/2006

Webchats To Explore Developments in the World of Jazz

(Broadcast personalities field audience questions during Jazz Appreciation Month) (340)

April is Jazz Appreciation Month in the United States, and an occasion to explore the history of and current developments in the world of jazz. Created by African-Americans as a fusion of West African musical traits with European and folk elements and subsequently enriched by contributions from across the globe, jazz remains among America's prized contributions to world culture.

Two webchats with leading jazz scholars and broadcast personalities will afford audiences prime opportunities to discuss the world of jazz. On April 3 at 11:00 a.m. EST (1500 GMT), Becca Pulliam, producer of such National Public Radio broadcasts as Jazz Set with Dee Dee Bridgewater and the annual Toast of the Nation New Year's Eve national broadcast will field questions on "Jazz in the New Millennium," and other jazz-related topics.

On April 20 at 11:00 a.m. EST (1500 GMT), Sheila Anderson, host of the Late Night Jazz broadcast on station WBGO-FM in Newark, New Jersey, and www.wbgo.org (http://www.wbgo.org/), that station's Web site, and the author of Quotable Musician: From Bach to Tupac (2003) and How to Grow As A Musician: What all Musicians Must Know To Succeed (2005), will chat on "Jazz on the Radio: Playing Music for the Masses,"and related topics.

These online dialogues will be hosted by the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs. To ask a question or make a comment during the webchat, please register at usinfowebchat@state.gov (mailto:usinfowebchat@state.gov).

If you already have participated in one of our previous discussions, there is no need to register again. Simply use the same user name and password. We neither require nor encourage the use of full names. Participants can ask questions during the webchat or in advance. You may also submit questions ahead of time to usinfowebchat@state.gov (mailto:usinfowebchat@state.gov).

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

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