

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama: United States Doing Everything to Protect Americans

By Paula Wolfson
VOA News

President Obama says those responsible for the attempted Christmas Day attack on an American airliner will be held to account. In his first public comments on the incident, Obama also outlined additional steps to improve air safety.

The president said many questions surround the attempted attack and that the search for answers is well under way. "A full investigation has been launched into this attempted act of terrorism. And we will not rest until we find all who were involved and hold them accountable," he said.

A Nigerian man, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, has been charged with trying to destroy the aircraft by igniting explosives as it was landing. The president noted that if he had succeeded, nearly 300 Americans onboard the plane would have died. "This was a serious reminder of the dangers that we face and the nature of those who threaten our homeland," he said.

The president's demeanor was serious as he faced reporters in Hawaii, where he is vacationing with his family. He talked about the steps that have been taken to improve airline safety since the attempted attack. And he sought to reassure the American people, saying that the government is doing all it can to keep the public safe and secure.

He said extra law enforcement officers will be put on many flights, and that the passenger screening process is being reviewed – including revising the computerized lists used to detect high-risk individuals.

The president added that he is conferring with his national security team. He spoke of their determination to deal with the terrorist threat. "We will continue to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us – whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia or anywhere where they are plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland," he said.

Obama urged Americans to be vigilant but confident as they travel during the current holiday season and throughout the coming year.

He noted that the would-be bomber on the Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit was thwarted by others onboard the plane. He called their actions quick and heroic.

Adaptation and the Copenhagen Accord

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

World leaders, delegates, media and protesters have gone from Copenhagen's Bella Center, but the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP-15) to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) did produce an outline that shows how the world might move forward on the problem of climate change.

The Copenhagen Accord – a first step toward creating a legally binding global treaty – was finalized in the early hours of December 19 by 28 heads of state representing key countries and groups of countries.

The document doesn't specify exactly how the world's developed and developing nations will keep the global average temperature from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) – the limit the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says might stave off the most disastrous effects – but it does provide support to help developing countries adapt to a changing environment.

"We recognize the critical impacts of climate change and the potential impacts of response measures on countries particularly vulnerable to its adverse effects," the accord read, "and stress the need to establish a comprehensive adaptation programme including international support."

Near-term support comes in the form of \$30 billion over three years from developed countries beginning in 2010. Funding to help nations adapt to climate change impacts will go first to the most vulnerable developing countries, including least-developed countries, small island developing states and Africa.

Over the longer term, developed countries committed to raise \$100 billion a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries. New multilateral funding for adaptation, the accord says, will be delivered through some kind of fund equally governed by developed and developing countries.

A large portion of funds should flow through the Copenhagen Green Climate Fund, a new initiative of the UNFCCC, to support projects, programs, policies and other activities in developing countries related to mitigation, adaptation, education and training, and technology development and transfer.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged that the fund be launched as soon as possible so it can start helping those in need and kick-start clean energy projects.

Near the end of 2010, when Mexico hosts the next round

of climate change negotiations during the 16th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, developing countries will have experience with the new funding and assistance and will be able to tell if the developed countries have done enough to help or need to do more.

USDA and Iraqi Farmers Team to Improve Agriculture

Fellowships strengthen farming practices in MENA region

By Carrie Loewenthal Massey

Special Correspondent

Washington — In Mada'in Qada, a region east of Baghdad in Baghdad province, a farmers' cooperative helps its more than 800 members cultivate their land using modern, sustainable agricultural techniques.

The Green Mada'in Association for Agricultural Development celebrated the completion of its first year of operations by opening a new office and warehouse space and holding its first board of directors meeting in December. The co-op provides low-interest credit lines to farmers to enable them to buy or rent equipment and supplies, like seeds and fertilizer. It also offers farmers free technical assistance and training.

A collaboration among the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Iraq Ministry of Agriculture and 47 Mada'in Qada agricultural associations, the co-op is part of the USDA's efforts under the umbrella of the U.S. provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq. USDA representatives worked with Iraqis to launch the cooperative in 2008, with an initial \$6 million in funding from the U.S. Department of State.

Additional financial support from the U.S. Commanders' Emergency Response Program and contributions from co-op members subsequently allowed for the installation of almost 600 drip-irrigation systems and more than 400 greenhouses. This expansion of the co-op raised farmers' confidence in the project's sustainability and resulted in increased membership, according to a USDA press release. The co-op continues to increase its enrollment by 10 percent each month.

In the future, if it obtains funding, the co-op would like to construct a poultry feed mill, cattle chutes, and a date-processing plant, USDA said. Already, however, the project has made a difference in the lives of the participating farmers.

"Members of the cooperative call it the Green Miracle in Mada'in Qada," said John Ellerman, a USDA adviser on the Provincial Reconstruction Team in South Baghdad.

In addition to work on the co-op, USDA agricultural advisers have partnered with other Iraqi communities to

expand agricultural development. In Istiqlaal Qada, located 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Baghdad, 200 women have completed training in poultry flock management and beekeeping. USDA organized the course, which was taught by a local veterinarian. Many of the women are widows, and all are members of a farm organization. Upon completion of the most recent course, the 75 graduates received 10 hens, one rooster and 110 pounds (50 kilograms) of fodder to start their own poultry farm.

To extend the growing season of certain crops in Ninewa province, USDA, the Iraqi Agricultural Ministry, the Ninewa General Directorate of Agriculture, and local farmers are partnering to construct greenhouses. USDA selects, by lottery, members of a local grass-roots farmers' aid group to receive greenhouses and agriculture training. Recipients, in return, pay a portion of their profits back to the organization to help fund more greenhouses for other members. The greenhouses will allow the farmers to grow tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, squash, eggplant and okra past their outdoor seasons.

EDUCATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS

Through fellowship programs that connect American universities and professionals to scientists and agricultural leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), USDA helps advance agricultural practices in the region.

The Norman E. Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellowship Program provides opportunities for training, collaborative research, and transfer of science and technology through exchanges for entry-level faculty and policymakers from MENA and other developing countries. The fellowship focuses on promoting food security and economic growth.

Borlaug fellows from Oman recently completed a food safety and quality management program with the University of Nebraska, in which they considered the whole "farm to fork" chain, including producers, processors, handlers, retailers, inspection agencies and consumers, according to a USDA report. Additionally, to help overcome sanitary and phytosanitary (pest- and pathogen-related) obstacles to trade, Bahraini fellows trained in the epidemiology of diseases of sheep and goats, animal identification, and bio security.

In Iraq, the Borlaug Fellowship aids in reconstruction efforts by fostering technical and scientific exchanges in water management. American institutions including Texas A&M University, University of Florida, Iowa State University, University of Nebraska, University of Minnesota, and Clemson University have trained 25 Iraqi scientists in areas ranging from irrigation and draining to

drought management to seed improvement.

USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service administers the Borlaug Fellowship in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

Similar to the Borlaug Fellowship, the USDA's Cochran Fellowship Program aims to train agriculture professionals from middle-income and emerging market economies to help increase agricultural productivity and strengthen trade. The Cochran Fellowship provides training of three weeks on average in the United States to senior and mid-level specialists and administrators working in a broad array of agriculture disciplines, from policy making to agribusiness development, to animal, plant and food science, to agricultural marketing.

In 2009, MENA countries participating in the Cochran Fellowship include Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia. Opportunities within the fellowship resemble a program in which government officials from the agricultural ministries of Algeria and Tunisia took part in 2008. Six representatives from the two countries attended a 10-day exchange at the Babcock Institute for International Dairy Research and Development, part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Participants toured a dairy processing plant and discussed meat quality standards, carcass handling and safety requirements, testing and related topics.

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