

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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The Americas Move Forward on Clean Energy

New initiatives target energy cooperation, renewable energy, financing

By Cheryl Pellerin
Staff Writer

Washington — More than 30 energy ministers and delegates from 32 Western Hemisphere countries spent two days in Washington discussing collaborative approaches to a low-carbon future and new partnerships that will help address clean energy and energy security concerns in the region.

The Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) meeting was co-hosted April 15-16 by the U.S. departments of State and Energy, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States (OAS). Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton addressed participants and announced new initiatives April 15. U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu convened the meeting.

“We’ve had two days of very productive discussions,” Chu said April 16 as the meeting ended. “There’s widespread agreement that we need to move forward with a clean energy agenda for the Western Hemisphere. Together we reaffirmed the need to promote clean energy development and deployment, enhance energy security, and fight energy poverty through individual and collective actions among governments, the private sector and civil society.”

The meeting is the latest in a series of gatherings that began in April 2009 at the Fifth Summit of the Americas, held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. There, President Obama invited all countries of the Western Hemisphere to join in an energy and climate partnership. ECPA is a voluntary mechanism through which all Western Hemisphere governments may lead multicountry energy initiatives.

Five countries in the region — Brazil, Canada, the United States, Mexico and Venezuela — are among the 20 largest producers of world reserves of fossil fuels. Yet, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza said in an address to attendees, 40 million people there still have no access to electricity.

This, he said, “translates into inefficient sanitation, weak education systems and the inability to develop productive, income-generating activities.” He warned that problems caused by climate change would exacerbate the challenges.

GROWING COOPERATION

On April 15, Chu announced new projects that include efforts to advance electricity interconnections in the Caribbean, support biomass development in Colombia, promote earthquake-resistant energy infrastructure, and create an Energy Innovation Center at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to expand project development and financing.

“Dozens of countries from across the Americas have come together today to promote clean energy future for our hemisphere,” Secretary Chu said. “By expanding our cooperation and collaboration on key energy and climate issues, we will lay a foundation for broad-based economic growth while helping to protect our environment.”

The initiatives include:

- **Caribbean Electrical Grid Interconnection:** The Department of Energy will provide technical support, including hosting a workshop, to begin exploring the potential for a Caribbean-wide transmission system that would give the region access to electricity from renewable energy sources.
- **Innovation Center:** DOE and IDB will coordinate resources for regional projects and activities in the center. It is the latest in a series of Regional Clean Energy Centers throughout the hemisphere, including a Costa Rican Energy Efficiency Training Center, a Wind Center in Mexico, an Energy Efficiency Center in Peru, and a Renewable Energy Center in Chile.
- **Biomass Resources in Colombia:** Under its Low Carbon Communities of the Americas initiative, DOE announced a project to develop a technological plan for power generation through heating sugarcane and palm residues at very high temperatures.
- **Earthquake Preparedness:** In response to recent earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and Mexico that highlighted vulnerabilities to energy infrastructure, DOE will host an earthquake preparedness workshop, bringing together leaders in the region to hear from experts, including U.S. national laboratories, on hazard characterization, structural design standards, and advanced simulation capabilities for ground-motion estimation and structural response.
- **DOE and Argentina’s Ministry for Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services** signed a memorandum of understanding that promotes cooperation between DOE and the Argentine Energy Secretariat on clean-energy technologies.

BILATERAL OUTREACH

In connection with ECPA, Chu met with Canadian Minister of Natural Resources Christian Paradis and discussed energy issues that included investments in

energy efficiency and clean fossil fuels. Chu also met with Chilean Minister of Energy Ricardo Raineri Bernain to discuss earthquake reconstruction, renewable energy deployment and other clean-energy topics.

After the ECPA ministerial meeting, Chu and other senior U.S. government officials met with Venezuelan Minister of the People's Power for Energy Rafael Ramirez and other members of the Venezuelan delegation.

According to an April 16 statement from DOE, the United States appreciates the major commitments Venezuela has made to help the people of Haiti recover, including ensuring the continued operation of critical power plants there. The two countries agreed to restart dialogue on technical energy issues in the months ahead.

U.S.–South Africa Strategic Dialogue Launched

U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Donald Gips talks to America.gov

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — The formal launch of the U.S.–South Africa Strategic Dialogue is “hugely valuable” because it provides a comprehensive framework for the U.S.–South Africa bilateral relationship, covering a “huge spectrum of issues,” says the U.S. ambassador to South Africa, Donald H. Gips.

In an April 16 interview with *America.gov*, Gips said the strategic dialogue is an umbrella agreement that will act to “make sure we are getting the most value, both from the private sector initiatives, the government-to-government initiatives and the nongovernmental organization [NGO] initiatives that are going on in country.” All are brought together in the strategic dialogue, he said, into an overall strategy that maximizes the impact of each one.

The signing of the initiative — by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane — at an April 14 ceremony was a priority for both the United States and South Africa, Gips said, and shows how important it is to use the partnership to address global issues and regional stability on the continent.

Gips, who was in Washington to attend the signing, spoke to *America.gov* just before returning to South Africa. The U.S.–South Africa Strategic Dialogue was a direct outgrowth of talks between the secretary of state and the foreign minister during Secretary Clinton’s visit to South Africa in August 2009.

Gips said the current U.S.–South Africa Strategic Dialogue is similar to the U.S.–South Africa Bi-National

Commission, which existed during the Clinton administration, but is much more flexible. Flexibility is important, he said, because “some things can go faster, some things can be done at the Cabinet secretary level. Other things are going to be done down in the trenches [at the working level], where it is appropriate to get it done and really keep this as a living process that can take on new challenges without a lot of bureaucratic overlay.”

Gips called the meeting between South African President Jacob Zuma and President Obama earlier that same week, just prior to the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, “very significant.” President Obama met with President Zuma because “South Africa is a priority,” Gips stressed.

South Africa, Gips said, “is critical as an example of a country that is blazing a path and trying to create a multiracial democracy out of a situation that in almost any other context in the world would have led to significant bloodshed and destabilization. South Africa, in my mind, pulled off one of the great miracles of our time, and we want to help them complete that miracle by partnering with them as they tackle the remaining legacies that apartheid left behind — around education, health care, housing, etc.”

Gips said this strategic dialogue is taking place against the background of the World Cup coming to South Africa in June-July 2010. He termed the World Cup “a great opportunity to showcase the beauty of the country, the diversity of the people,” and added that more Americans have bought tickets for the World Cup than citizens of any other country outside of South Africa. For Gips, that illustrates two things about the United States: the deep connection Americans have with South Africa and the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants.

Americans are coming to the World Cup not just to root for the American team, but also to cheer for other national teams with connections to their own ethnic heritages. “That is an exciting part of who we are,” Gips said, and symbolic of America’s great cultural and ethnic diversity.

“Part of what I love about that is that is also true of South Africa: it is a mixing pot of people, and what makes it such a vibrant place — the diversity of its people. That,” he said, “is part of why there is such a great affinity between our two nations because we are both multiracial democracies that are dealing with some of the challenges that creates but, even more importantly, all the great opportunities and creativities that creates” as well.

Gips also commented on Zimbabwe, noting that the United States and South Africa share objectives on Zimbabwe that are “100 percent the same.”

“We want to see a prosperous, free, democratic

Zimbabwe. ... For South Africa, it is a real-life issue that impacts them every day. They have anywhere from 3 to 5 million Zimbabwean refugees in the country at any one time; it puts huge strains on their ability to provide services to all those people, so they are very concerned."

"We are constantly in conversation with them [the South Africans] about the right way to keep this process [supporting Zimbabwe's move to embrace democracy] moving forward, to speed this process up," Gips said. "We may not always agree on what are the right tactics for doing that, but it is a very healthy and constructive dialogue we are having and trying to find ways that we can work in concert to help the people of Zimbabwe achieve their own freedom and prosperity."

Reality TV Show Based on Iranian Americans Has Many Worried

Many Iranian Americans fear planned show would promote stereotypes

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — To hear many Iranian Americans tell it, this is not a story about a television show: It's about pride and shame, perception and reality, achievement and waste.

But it starts with a television show.

In *Jersey Shore*, eight single men and women in their 20s shared a house and worked in a T-shirt shop for a summer, with their exploits captured by the cameras. The reality show has been a great success for the MTV network but angered some Italian-American groups for its portrayal of young Italian Americans as people who care only about looking good, getting a tan, getting drunk and having sex.

Now the companies that created *Jersey Shore* are looking to duplicate their success with a *Persian Version* that captures a different superficial way of life: designer clothes, expensive sports cars and exclusive nightclubs. Instead of New Jersey, the beaches would be in California; and instead of Italian Americans, the real-life stars would be Iranian Americans.

Doron Ofir Casting and 495 Productions have sent out a call for potential cast members who are young, rich, beautiful and Persian. "Do you reign over the most exclusive spots in the city? Do you use your exotic appeal to get anything or anyone you desire?? Prove it!" the notice says.

The notice describes "a new Persian empire growing right here in LA" that is "ready to conquer the world all over again. It's a bad-ass new dynasty where exotic beauty and

wild style dominates the sexiest nightlife, exclusive venues and hottest beaches the modern world has to offer."

Payman Aminpour works in the entertainment business (for Walt Disney Studios) and said that when he saw the casting announcement, he recognized that *Persian Version* could be popular — and damaging.

Iranian Americans are a much smaller group than Italian Americans — 423,000 in the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimate, compared with 17.8 million — and not as familiar in most of the country. As a group, they are remarkably successful: The Census Bureau found that of Iranian Americans 25 or older, 58.5 percent have at least a bachelor's degree, more than double the national average of 27.4 percent. The median annual income of Iranian-American households was \$69,377, compared with \$52,175 for American households generally.

So some Iranian Americans have the means to live like the *Persian Version* casting call suggests. Aminpour says some do — but he doesn't want the stereotype of people driven by vanity and a desire for status to form the popular image of "a minority group that's still relatively small."

"When this show goes out to the world, when Middle America sees this, this will be their point of reference" about what Iranian Americans are like, Aminpour said. "This is under the 'reality' banner, and when people see it, they believe it."

So Aminpour, 40, struck out against the planned TV show: He set up a Facebook group to boycott it and any company that might sponsor it. He said he recognized that opposition to the program might help it by giving it publicity, but he decided the risk was worthwhile in hopes that the project could be stopped. The group collected more than 400 members in less than a week.

Roxanne Ramedani, 20, of Ontario, Canada, used her YouTube video blog, *Personal Persia*, to object to the planned TV show. In the video, Ramedani portrays a character with a high-pitched, singsong voice who embodies the stereotype and would love *Persian Version*: "Oh my God. I love everyone. My goal in life is to marry. I want to be rich and famous. Oh my God. I'm from Los Angeles. Call it Tehrangeles," she says.

And in her own voice, Ramedani says she fears that the television show would give viewers who don't know Persians the impression that they are shallow.

In an interview, Ramedani said the Iranian-American stereotype has some basis in reality: Although many Persian people are very humble and charitable, most also feel that they must present themselves well. "Persians

think they're celebrities. They have to always look their best," she said.

Donya Alinejad, a graduate student in anthropology who is studying the use of the Internet by second-generation Iranian Americans in Los Angeles, praised their reaction to news of the planned TV show. "Hot on the heels of the announcement came the angry, sarcastic, concerned, ridiculing responses from Iranian Americans. I secretly felt quite proud," she wrote in her blog.

"Across the board and unequivocally, my respondents assert that these shallow, club scene creatures create a harmful image of Iranian Americans in LA, one from which others take distance and with which they don't want to be associated," Alinejad wrote. "Some express their aversion much more strongly – I won't use their language. I would guess this show and the group it seeks to showcase uncover a sore spot amongst Iranian Americans because of the wider issues among Iranians in LA and the culture of consumerism and material wealth they have come to embody."

Doron Ofir, whose company is casting the show, said from Los Angeles that the reality of this reality show – "a docu-soap," as he called it, based on the cast members' real lives instead of a contrived situation such as the group house of *Jersey Shore* – will be more complex and less objectionable than its critics would imagine from the wording of the casting call.

"Everyone is influenced by the theory that this is going to be a train wreck," Ofir said.

"It's actually a family story," he said, which will follow four or five young adults and explore their interaction with their families as well as with one another. He said he expects it to show different attitudes among first-generation, second-generation and third-generation Iranian Americans.

"I just think that it's important for Americans to see what family values are shared across ethnic lines. ... If this was on PBS [the nonprofit Public Broadcasting Service] and it was called 'An American Family,' nobody would raise an eyebrow," Ofir said.

Ofir said the interest in *Persian Version* – which he called the show's working title, subject to change – has been "quite extraordinary." About 2,000 people have responded to the initial call for auditions, seeking to join the cast.

Ofir said a network has signed on to air the series, subject to casting. If all goes as planned, production will begin in July and last one to two months.

"Will there be concerns? You can't please everybody," he said.

Zid Zid Kids Builds Bridges Between Morocco and America

Moulay Essakalli combines business ethics and social values for success

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington – "We are trying to show aspects of Morocco in our work while also integrating our Western and American sense of design," Zid Zid Kids co-founder Moulay Essakalli told *America.gov* about his company.

Zid Zid Kids exemplifies the kind of entrepreneurial dynamism created when culture, social awareness and business are combined. Not only does the award-winning, Marrakech-based company produce environmentally conscious children's goods, it helps to empower young Moroccans.

Essakalli and his wife, Zid Zid Kids co-founder Julie Klear, use their artistic talents to make Moroccan-inspired children's products that include shoes, belts, masks, handbags, tables, pillows and ottomans.

"We basically looked at what we can do that is true to us while building bridges in constructive ways between Morocco and the United States, as well as with the rest of the world," Essakalli said.

The Obama administration has invited Essakalli to the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship in Washington April 26-27 to offer an example of how doing business and supporting the community can be complementary.

Zid Zid Kids products use recycled materials, and Essakalli said they are safe for children and the environment and make good business sense.

"It is a lot less expensive to go green, or at least work within certain values that support the environment at both the micro and macro levels," Essakalli said. For example, he said, recycled boxes for shipping and recycled cotton are cheaper than their new alternatives.

A portion of Zid Zid Kid's profits go to Education for All, an organization that builds dorms for Moroccan girls in rural areas so they can access education. The company also helps support the Darna Center, an organization that shelters and educates young men and women from the street.

Essakalli said his community consciousness stems from a combination of his religious upbringing and his time working for fundraising organizations in the United

States.

"I effectively was brought up in a Muslim country, and doing charity is the Fifth Pillar of the religion," Essakalli said. "On the other hand, I learned a great deal in America about supporting not-for-profit organizations.

"When you put the two together, it makes all the sense in the world to want to give back and be involved with your community," he said.

A high-end graphic designer who held jobs at Harvard University and at WGBH Public Broadcasting in Boston, Essakalli was fully integrated into American life. After he and Klear began a family, however, they felt something was missing.

"I would go back to Morocco every year or two and just manage the best way I could, and it wasn't too much of an issue," Essakalli said about his longing for home. "But after we got married and had our first baby, the Moroccan dimension became extremely present in our lives, and so we decided to integrate it professionally."

They planned at first to run their business from the United States, but decided it would be best to build it from Morocco. Supported by a small office staff, Essakalli and Klear create designs that are then incorporated into products made by up to 100 craftspeople in Marrakech.

The decision to build Zid Zid Kids in Morocco involved some challenges. "The biggest problem that we face here has been access to financing," Essakalli said. "The financing resources here are very conservative."

Trading at the international level presents another set of hurdles.

Essakalli said the cost of shipping a 20-foot container from Morocco to New York is higher than from China to New York. And recent changes in trade agreements between Morocco and the United States, his biggest market, led to higher export duties on his goods.

"This weighs on our bottom line, but at the same time I think we benefit from the fact our clientele is supportive of the type of products that we do," Essakalli said. The products "have authenticity, and stand behind values of ethical business, respect to the environment and the ecology."

Like many business leaders who will be attending the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, Essakalli said he is looking forward to the opportunity to make contacts and participate in events. On another level, he is excited about President Obama's approach to opening dialogue with Muslims worldwide.

"I am very happy to support President Obama's initiative to start working on enhancing the relationship between the U.S. and the Muslim world," Essakalli said. "To the extent that I can be an actor in supporting this initiative, it would be an honor."

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