

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton: Release of Cuban Political Prisoners a Positive Sign	1
U.S. and Angola Sign Strategic Partnership Dialogue Agreement.....	1
An Indonesian Bid for America's Sweet Tooth.....	2
African Immigrant Believes in the Power of Education.....	3

Secretary Clinton: Release of Cuban Political Prisoners a Positive Sign

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States welcomes the announcement that Cuba will release 52 political dissidents who have been imprisoned since 2003, describing the move as “a positive sign.”

Speaking with Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh at the State Department July 8, Clinton said the apparent agreement between Cuban authorities and the Roman Catholic Church that led to the announcement is encouraging.

“We welcome this. We think that’s a positive sign. It’s something that is overdue but nevertheless very welcome,” she said.

According to press reports, the Cuban government agreed to release the prisoners after mediation by Cuba’s Roman Catholic Cardinal Jaime Ortega. The 52 prisoners are reportedly the last among a group of 75 who were jailed during a 2003 government crackdown against the political opposition.

The move follows the death in February of dissident Orlando Zapata, who had been on a hunger strike in prison, and the continued hunger strike by Guillermo Fariñas, who has been protesting Cuba’s imprisonment of political activists.

Spanish diplomatic sources told reporters that Spain will accept all 52 of the prisoners, with five arriving immediately and the rest to follow in three or four months. Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos is in Cuba on a visit that he said is in support of the Vatican’s mediation efforts with the Cuban government.

Clinton said in her remarks that she had spoken with Moratinos late on July 7.

In its latest Human Rights Report, released March 11, the State Department criticized Cuba as “a totalitarian state that does not tolerate opposition to official policy” and said there were at least 194 political prisoners, as well as up to 5,000 people who had been convicted of potential “dangerousness” without being charged with any specific crime.

President Obama called for “an end to the repression, for the immediate, unconditional release of all political prisoners in Cuba, and for respect for the basic rights of

the Cuban people” in a March 24 statement.

The president said he desires “a new era in relations” between Cuba and the United States and remains “committed to supporting the simple desire of the Cuban people to freely determine their future and to enjoy the rights and freedoms that define the Americas, and that should be universal to all human beings.”

U.S. and Angola Sign Strategic Partnership Dialogue Agreement

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – The United States and Angola have signed the U.S.-Angola Strategic Partnership Dialogue, which formalizes increased bilateral partnerships in energy, security, trade and democracy promotion. The agreement also paves the way for expanded cooperation in agriculture and strengthening democratic institutions.

At the July 8 signing ceremony at the State Department with Angolan Foreign Minister Assunção Afonso dos Anjos, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the dialogue “represents a new chapter in the relationship between Angola and the United States, and reflects the many ties that already connect our nations.”

Although the ceremony marked the official launch of the dialogue, “work has already begun,” Clinton said.

Following her August 2009 visit to Angola, a bilateral group on energy cooperation met in November 2009 to outline shared U.S. and Angolan objectives in developing Angola’s oil and gas reserves, promoting greater transparency in its oil sector and developing renewable energy sources, the secretary said.

Clinton said that in April, the U.S.-Angola Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Council met for the first time to discuss how to expand bilateral trade beyond the oil sector.

The two countries also have started a working group on security cooperation that has discussed Angola’s growing role in African regional security, the country’s work against human trafficking, joint efforts to improve air and maritime safety, and the destruction of excess munitions, she said, and an air services agreement signed in April paves the way “for increased commerce and air travel” between the United States and Angola.

“I expect we will cooperate in other priorities, including agriculture and food security, transportation and strengthening institutional capacity,” she added. “We will work together based on mutual respect and mutual responsibility and we will expand and strengthen our

relationship as we did when I visited last August on a new collaboration to fight HIV and AIDS as well as a new public-private partnership to support Angola's farmers."

The secretary said she looks forward to working with Angolans to build "a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Angola" in the months and years ahead.

Foreign Minister dos Anjos said that in the short period since Clinton's visit, the two countries have managed to focus on a wide variety of topics that cover "all areas of activity between our countries."

This is possible, he said, only when there is a shared commitment, political will on the part of both heads of state, and "two peoples that really want to consolidate their relationship."

There is a shared interest in solving Angola's problems, and the United States and Angola "are reading from the absolute same page," he said.

Dos Anjos echoed President Obama's July 2009 speech in Ghana, saying that through "proactive and dynamic actions taken together" in mutual respect, the two countries can develop real cooperation and friendship, and Angola will develop its capability to be self-reliant.

"We're going to take advantage of the experience and the capabilities and the capacities of a country as great as the United States to develop our own knowledge, to develop our own technology, to improve the education and health of our population," he said. By improving its infrastructure and development, Angola will be in a position to provide assistance to other less-developed countries, he said.

An Indonesian Bid for America's Sweet Tooth

A family-owned company tries to reach a hungry market

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

New York — For candy makers like the Lim family, the United States is potentially the sweetest of markets, but they have to figure out how to take a bite of it.

Wung Lim said his parents started their business about 30 years ago, first distributing and then manufacturing candy in Jakarta, Indonesia. He said Indonesians enjoy sweets: "Even adults like to eat lollipops on a daily basis." The company, Internusa Food, provides the kinds of brightly colored confections Indonesians like.

Although he grew up with Indonesian candy, Lim also has gained a fair idea of how Americans satisfy their sweet tooth. He arrived in the United States as a student about 20 years ago, and he lives in Chicago, where he

works as a software engineer.

Lim took some time off from his regular work in late June to help the family company at the Fancy Food Show in New York, where sellers from around the globe met with U.S. buyers and distributors who decide what Americans will see on grocery store shelves and what chefs have available for their restaurant menus. He stood alongside his sister Lim Gek Ngo in a booth at the end of a row of Indonesian companies in New York's vast Javits Convention Center — she providing the greater knowledge of the company and he providing the greater fluency in English.

The company has been exporting for years: to South Asia and East Asia, most recently including Japan, and to parts of Africa. "This is our first attempt to enter the U.S. market, and I just happened to be here, so I can enjoy and help out," Wung Lim said.

He knows that chocolate, a relative rarity for Indonesians, is a staple for Americans. He expressed doubts that the small foil-wrapped cakes popular in Indonesia and on display at the Internusa booth will find eager buyers in the United States, if only because they are unlike other products on U.S. snack-food shelves.

Lim said he had greater hopes for some of the candy, because of its eye-catching colors and because of its quality. The Indonesian candies, he said, use pure cane sugar instead of corn syrup, which has fallen into disfavor among advocates of healthy eating — not that sugar is classified as a health food.

With lower production costs in Indonesia, the Lims also can compete on price. Wung Lim said one of the brighter prospects for U.S. sales in his company's candy line, a light-up lollipop, could sell for about 25 cents in the United States.

Other Indonesian candy producers have already been selling in the United States, but only to reach the Asian immigrant community, Lim said. "We are trying to change that and target everybody."

The reception among food distributors and buyers for store chains has been favorable, he said. But the real test of success will be whether any of them place orders for the Lim family's candy.

The twice-yearly Fancy Food Shows — usually in New York in summer and San Francisco in winter — have been North America's largest specialty food and beverage marketplace since 1955. The National Association for the Specialty Food Trade events attract more than 40,000 people from more than 80 countries to see 260,000 innovative food products, including confections, cheese,

coffee, snacks, spices, ethnic, natural, organic and more.

African Immigrant Believes in the Power of Education

Visionary from Ghana aims to improve educational opportunities in Africa

By Steve Holgate

Special Correspondent

Portland, Oregon – It's a common belief that immigrants to a new land burn their bridges behind them and begin entirely new lives, but the reality is that many build bridges rather than burn them, bringing together their new homes and their old ones in ways that enrich both countries.

One such man is Peter Okantey, who is reaching back from the United States to support education in his former land, Ghana. He knows the importance of education and how it can transform a country.

After graduating from secondary school in 1994, Okantey lacked the financial resources to enroll in university and instead attended a three-year teacher training program. That experience prompted Okantey to reflect on the limited educational opportunities in Ghana and resolve to expand them.

Okantey went to work for an American nonprofit organization called World Education and met a young American named Beth. They were married in 2004 and moved to Portland, Oregon, where Okantey enrolled in a local university.

His experience there was a revelation.

"I was amazed and moved by the educational system that I saw, and by the way I was treated," he says. "My professors respected me as a student. They were ready to listen to me and hear what I had to say. I was given the opportunity to think and apply what I had learned." He contrasted this to education in Ghana, with its emphasis on rote learning.

Okantey also was struck by what he calls "sacrificial leadership" in the United States.

"People in the United States are willing to sacrifice what they have for the advancement of their society and individuals," Okantey said. He saw the broad variety of private charitable organizations providing disaster relief, aiding the homeless, funding medical research or giving financial support to university students.

Okantey noticed another thing about American society. "What fascinated me was the investment in higher education. America is driven by human capital. Schools are designed to train people to become good at what they

do. They train them to think critically and analytically."

He began to correlate his thoughts on higher education with opportunities he saw in the United States. "I realized," he said, "that I had the opportunity to sacrifice myself to bring higher education to Africa. I became convinced that the hope for Africa is embedded in higher education."

His vision is to create new educational opportunities for Africans in schools modeled on those in America.

In 2008, Okantey established the Naa Amerley Palm Education Foundation (NAPE Foundation), named after his mother, to provide educational opportunities for the people of Ghana. He started by awarding scholarships to needy students to study in Ghana, then he searched for an American university that could offer an online degree to students in Ghana.

PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Bee Jai Repp, director of the extended campus program for Portland State University (PSU), was intrigued by Okantey's idea of providing Ghanaian students with an American-style education and saw a connection with her mission to "take education to the student, instead of the student coming to Portland."

For more than two years, Repp and Okantey worked to design a program to serve students in Ghana. Questions of how to recognize and credit Ghanaian classes, identify potential students and fold them into a degree program were among the issues they faced. Finally, in 2009, Repp and Okantey received PSU's approval to proceed.

In February 2010, they traveled to Accra, the capital of Ghana, where they visited elementary and middle schools, offering the possibility of an online degree to teachers at those schools.

During the trip, Repp had to make adjustments in her presentation: Her accent was difficult for Ghanaians to understand, she spoke too quickly, and common educational terms had different meanings to Americans and Ghanaians.

But, despite the barriers, the pair succeeded beyond their expectations. They attracted interest from more than 350 potential students, found desks, computers and a facility to house their program, and hired someone to help students with basic online tasks.

To enhance their chances for success, they are taking things slowly. Entering students can enroll fully in the degree program only after passing an online writing course. One student, a church pastor, began his studies in

the spring; two more students began this summer.

Cost remains the biggest barrier to participation. To help overcome this, Portland State is allowing students to take as few as one or two courses at a time, and take up to three months to pay tuition costs. NAPE Foundation also is providing financial assistance. Through private donations and fundraising activities, NAPE Foundation has provided more than \$25,000 in financial aid.

“It hasn’t been easy at all,” said Okantey, who quit his regular job and now works full time on NAPE Foundation.

Okantey’s long-term goal is to establish in Ghana a four-year, American-style university attuned to African viewpoints and needs. He is seeking donors to help him raise \$800,000 in startup funding for that effort. He intends to name the university, like NAPE Foundation, after his mother, who “told me I could make it when everyone said I couldn’t.”

Peter Okantey’s mother will not see the dream realized. She died the week he began the paperwork to establish NAPE Foundation. But her leadership prepared her son to succeed, to build bridges rather than burn them, to provide new opportunities for Africans and to enrich America’s relationship with Africa.

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