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U.S. Pledges \$48.6 Million in Assistance to Kyrgyzstan

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has pledged \$48.6 million to help Kyrgyzstan as it meets challenges posed by recent ethnic violence and political upheaval. The Obama administration joined other international donors in Bishkek in pledging a total of \$1.1 billion for the Central Asian nation.

U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters July 27 that the U.S. contribution “will go towards funding community-defined projects, small infrastructure projects, addressing food shortages, strengthening democratic processes and institutions, assistance for internally displaced people, help with supplies such as fertilizers, fuel and other things that contribute to the fall harvest in the Kyrgyz Republic, additional shelter and resettlement assistance, and other such support.”

According to a July 27 State Department fact sheet, \$21 million is slated for immediate expenditure by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on community improvement and stabilization projects, including small-scale construction, assistance to improve Kyrgyz government operations, and employment opportunities and skills training directed at disenfranchised populations.

The fact sheet said \$10 million will address food shortages by providing cash vouchers and supporting local and regional procurement to meet urgent needs. The United States will also spend \$6.1 million in USAID grants to nongovernmental organizations to support internally displaced persons through protection activities, water and sanitation projects, humanitarian communications and other assistance. U.S.-funded projects to strengthen Kyrgyz democratic processes and institutions, human rights and civil society will receive \$5.1 million, the fact sheet said.

The Obama administration also pledged support for humanitarian projects being undertaken in Kyrgyzstan by the International Committee for the Red Cross/Red Crescent, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the U.N. Children’s Fund and the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The fact sheet said the \$1.1 billion pledged at the donors conference includes \$47 million in separate U.S. assistance to Kyrgyzstan for the 2010 fiscal year and \$42 million that the Obama administration has requested for the 2011 fiscal year. It also said U.S. humanitarian assistance that came in response to ethnic violence, valued at \$4.1

million, was in addition to its July 27 pledge.

Violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan killed an estimated 350 people and displaced around 400,000 in June. The violence occurred after a populist uprising overthrew former President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April and installed a provisional government headed by Roza Otunbayeva.

Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake said the security situation in the country “has since generally stabilized, though tensions still remain in the south,” and virtually all of the 100,000 refugees who had fled to neighboring Uzbekistan have returned to Kyrgyzstan.

Blake told the U.S. Helsinki Commission in Washington July 27 that psychological pressure, monetary incentives, threats of loss of citizenship, concern for family members who stayed behind, and participation in the country’s June 27 constitutional referendum all may have been factors in the rapid repatriation of the refugees.

“Most of the estimated 75,000 persons who remain displaced in Kyrgyzstan and those who returned from Uzbekistan currently reside with host families; others are squatting in abandoned buildings or camping on the sites of their destroyed homes,” Blake said.

He added that many ethnic Uzbek businesses in the south remain closed, and some Uzbeks are unable to return to work. There are also fears of disenfranchisement due to reports that the Kyrgyz government intends to expropriate property in destroyed Uzbek neighborhoods, he said.

The United States is focused on providing humanitarian assistance to those who were displaced by the violence. “We need to make sure that people have the ability to return to their homes, to have shelter for the winter, to help schools reopen, and to meet the near-term needs,” Blake said.

Second, he said, security needs to be boosted to prevent future violence. He welcomed the decision by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to deploy an initial 52 police officers for four months as an advisory group to support Kyrgyz government efforts to reduce tensions and restore public order.

“A third step to ensure reconciliation is that the local Kyrgyzstani law enforcement and judicial institutions must be reliable and credible and have the trust of the people,” Blake said, recounting reports of human and civil rights abuses by local police. “The United States is prepared to work with the government of Kyrgyzstan to

deal with the challenges of strengthening the professionalization and accountability of the police," he said.

The assistant secretary also called for a "systematic and credible inquiry" into what caused the ethnic violence and welcomed President Otunbayeva's decision to establish a national commission of investigation, as well as her decision to include international diplomats in the process.

Blake said democracy promotion is also an important priority. The Obama administration is supporting the October parliamentary elections through a variety of projects, including training election officials, support for election outreach, media training and monitoring, dispute-resolution training and voter education.

"The United States has a strong commitment to Kyrgyzstan," Blake said. "While we recognize that the situation remains very fragile and that there are real risks, we remain very hopeful that with the goodwill and sustained efforts of all, including the United States and the international community, the people of Kyrgyzstan can chart out for themselves a more hopeful, democratic and stable future."

AGOA Forum Highlights "New Strategies for a Changing World"

African women entrepreneurs, agribusiness on AGOA agenda
By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington – The ninth annual United States–Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum, better known as the AGOA Forum, includes two new elements this year. When its ministerial session opens in Washington August 2, the forum will host a delegation of 34 African women entrepreneurs and convene a segment of the conference on agribusiness in Kansas City, Missouri.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Fitzgerald sat down with America.gov to preview the event, which has as its theme "AGOA at 10: New Strategies for a Changing World."

Fitzgerald said the August 2–3 session will be the usual type of AGOA meeting where ministers meet with U.S. officials to discuss agriculture, competitiveness, health and how to boost U.S.-Africa trade. "It will focus mainly on the policies related to trade," he said.

On August 4, the venue will move to America's heartland – the Midwestern city of Kansas City. "The goal behind going out to Kansas City is to have businesspeople talk to

businesspeople," Fitzgerald said. "We have the trade policy experts here in Washington talking about trade and then move to focus in Kansas City to where it all comes together. ... The U.S. government will bring them together and then get out of the way and let the free market do the rest."

"Most experts agree that for African economic growth to increase, they have got to step up in the agricultural field. Kansas City is a big agribusiness hub" for the United States, Fitzgerald said.

The Kansas City Board of Trade, which the delegates will visit, is where agricultural goods are traded, he explained.

"At this point we have more than 60 African businesspeople coming to Kansas City plus the 34 women entrepreneurs who will participate, with an equal if not greater number of American businesspeople."

African participants will spend two days there, meeting American business representatives ranging from farm-equipment producers to seed developers and sellers. They will also visit a local farm to see how technology has radically transformed the American farm, Fitzgerald said.

While subsistence farming will continue in Africa, he said, there is also an effort to promote larger commercial farming. Business delegates will visit a coffee roaster in Kansas City. "As you know, Kenya, Ethiopia and other African countries have taken advantage of shipping their arabica beans to the United States," he said.

Focusing on the 34 women African entrepreneurs, Fitzgerald said, "There are a growing number of African women who are getting involved in business," from soft drinks to banking to agriculture and trading.

"Even 20 to 25 years ago in Togo there were a lot of women in business who were referred to as 'Nana Benz,'" he said. They gained that moniker, he said, because many drove Mercedes Benz automobiles after becoming wealthy selling fabric throughout the African continent.

"Women must have the opportunity just as much as the men do" to enter and prosper in business, Fitzgerald said. "These entrepreneurs are the ones who are going to drive job growth and economic development, just as small and medium-sized enterprises have done in the United States."

AGOA has been a success as a trade preference program, but could be an even greater success if small and medium-sized businesses on both sides of the Atlantic become more involved under AGOA, Fitzgerald said.

Presently, oil and minerals make up some 95 percent of all imports to the United States from Africa under AGOA.

“Frankly, manufacturing, agriculture and other fields should make up a greater part of AGOA, so the U.S. government is devoting resources to capacity-building for the small-scale entrepreneur to be able to ramp-up and take greater advantage of AGOA,” Fitzgerald said.

To do this, he stressed, “Africans must free up their market economies. The regulatory frameworks and structural impediments seem to grow every year.”

“When we look at the sub-regional level, we have been impressed with the East African Community’s progress. They recently signed the latest common market agreement that will allow workers to secure employment regardless of their nationality,” Fitzgerald said.

“Exports need to start within the countries themselves, within Africa. It will give them the experience in developing markets, creating quality goods and turning a profit. The East African Community gets it.”

“The Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] gets it too and has approved a number of economic and commercial agreements, but they have not implemented many of them.”

Since 2006, Fitzgerald said, the U.S. government has offered commercial assistance to another sub-regional economic group, COMESA, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and trade has increased 109 percent within that community. With U.S. technical assistance, the Kenyan port of Mombasa has streamlined operations, and the time to clear a container has dropped from 12 days to six.

Looking to the future, Fitzgerald said, the Obama administration clearly embraces the importance of entrepreneurship, having recently sponsored an international entrepreneurship conference in Washington.

Entrepreneurs are the engines and catalysts for growth, he said. For them to prosper, they need an open business environment free of bureaucracy and too many governmental regulations.

“We need to have a frank talk with the Africans — and I think that will happen — on how we can support them, following up on what President Obama said when he visited Accra a year ago.”

In a speech before the Ghanaian parliament in 2009, President Obama said the 21st century will be formed by what happens not only in Washington, Rome and Moscow but in Accra and Africa as well.

Thirty-Four African Businesswomen Attending AGOA Forum

Women entrepreneurs strengthen U.S.-Africa trade ties

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — Thirty-four African women entrepreneurs are participating in the 2010 U.S.-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum — better known as the AGOA Forum — and the African Women’s Entrepreneurship Forum to further enhance the U.S.-Africa trade relationship by expanding their businesses and increasing economic growth in their own countries.

Four of these women — entrepreneurs from Uganda, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Botswana — talked to America.gov July 27.

Maria Odido, chief executive officer of Bee Natural Products Ltd. in Uganda, said she is currently assessing how her business could benefit under AGOA, the African Growth and Opportunity Act. “It would take me a while to access the U.S. market for several reasons,” she said. “First of all, production levels are not very high, and therefore I cannot freely export to the U.S. I don’t have a problem with quality, but I do have a problem with quantity.”

Odido said she would like to see an expanded role for AGOA in the area of agricultural trade and in her particular business sector, which has a direct link to food security. Odido called small businesses like hers, known as SMEs for “small and medium-sized enterprises,” “the backbone of the economy, because a lot of times they employ the unemployable. They are underfunded and not properly recognized, but they still exist and continue to exist alongside major multinationals. What I would like to see is recognition of the value that SMEs play in Africa, just as developed countries have recognized the role of SMEs in their countries and used them to strengthen their economies. That has not become a reality in Africa.”

Whatever else is done, she said, “more attention needs to be directed at SMEs.”

Her business employs 42 people and is the biggest honey and beeswax producer in Uganda and second largest in Kenya, Odido said. She hopes to begin exporting to three other East African countries soon, and stresses the importance of greater intra-Africa trade.

“While it is fantastic to romanticize about trading with the rest of the world,” Odido said, “if we cannot have intra-Africa trade, intra-regional trade, then how are we going to understand international trade? Africa is composed of small SMEs and ...it is the small SMEs that make up the backbone of African trade.”

Not only do African countries need to drop their tariffs to stimulate trade among themselves, she said, "but regional bodies in Africa need to understand the realities on the ground and break the barriers both on the ground and not on paper."

"Right now we have governments in Africa who talk in the air, but whatever they talk ... is not translated on the ground. The bureaucrats, the technocrats on the ground cannot implement the visions of the heads of state and all the rectifications that have been made through the year," she said.

Odido suggested five ways to improve intra-Africa trade:

- Africans need first to understand each other and have pride in the products that are produced in Africa.
- African products must be of the highest quality and up to worldwide standards.
- Regional taxes must be uniform and forward-looking for the future.
- Individual border inspections should be removed and each African country that trades within a regional group should have confidence in the revenue and inspection standards for the group.
- Infrastructure must be developed to allow for the smooth flow of regional trade. "That is where the governments must play a leading role to ensure that we are able to continue doing business, so that we can play our part and the governments can play their part," Odido said.

Caroline Jose Ernestine Sack Ep Kendem, general manager and founder of Ken Atlantic, a clothing manufacturer in Cameroon, is in the United States to gain access to the U.S. market under the AGOA trade preference program.

Her company, which produces swimwear for export to Europe, wants to export work uniforms to the United States and has a contract with U.S. pharmacy chain CVS Caremark.

"I really hope to expand my business network" at AGOA, she said. Factors facing African businesses wanting to trade with the United States are many, she said, including high transportation costs (up to 45 days to ship from Cameroon to the United States) and the need for improved banking networks to facilitate business. "It is a big issue," she said, talking of the shipping conundrum. "We have one ship a week" visiting Douala.

Kendem said her items can be cost effective and she hopes to expand from 110 to 800 employees if she secures additional U.S. contracts. "This is my goal for this year. So I need to meet some partners."

Nigest Haile Goshu, founder and executive director of the Center for African Women Economic Empowerment, an indigenous nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, says her organization is working closely with the U.S. embassy and AGOA specialists to try to take advantage of the trade preference program, especially in the area of handicrafts and traditional weavings for home décor, as well as in textiles, leather and flowers.

The level of interest among Ethiopian women who are hoping to export under AGOA is very high, she said. Experienced businesswomen are working as mentors and role models, sharing their "best practices" with other businesswomen in an attempt to help them prosper under AGOA.

Helping women in business helps the local community, Goshu said. "Empowering women empowers the family. Empowering women is empowering a community and then empowering a nation. When you empower a woman and empower a man, you can see the difference. Whatever profit and benefit the woman is getting, she is investing that in her children, and she is investing in the home, better education for her children, better food, and better nutrition. So there is a great difference."

Chigedze Virginia Chinyepi, managing director of Tjina Njando Crafts of Botswana, is in the United States seeking customers for her company's handicraft products, which include custom decorative baskets. She has already exported her products on a small scale to the United States and displayed them at the prestigious Santa Fe Folk Art Market in New Mexico and the Los Angeles International Gift Show. "The goal we want is to secure permanent buyers," she said, much like the basket producers of Rwanda have done with the large retailer Macy's.

U.S. imports from sub-Saharan Africa increased by 78 percent to \$26.6 billion in the first five months of 2010. Imports under AGOA increased 74 percent to \$18.8 billion during this period. AGOA non-oil products included vehicles and parts, apparel, jewelry, fruits and vegetables, wines, nuts, spices, baskets, cocoa powder, cocoa paste and seafood.

Filmmaking Competition Hopes to Spur Help for World's Poorest

Contest launches ViewChange.org, funded by Gates Foundation

By Ralph Dannheiser
Special Correspondent

Washington — Web-savvy filmmakers are getting the chance to focus attention on wide-ranging efforts being made to conquer some of the developing world's most pressing problems — and to win \$20,000 in the process.

ViewChange.org, a new multimedia website due to go live at the end of October, is sponsoring a short-film competition, which it says “aims to find meaningful stories showing how international development efforts are impacting and improving the lives of the world's poorest people and making progress toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.”

“Tell your story. Change the world,” the contest home page invites filmmakers.

The U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals were adopted by all 192 member states and 23 of the world's leading development institutions following a conference at U.N. headquarters in New York in 2000.

The goals range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education — all by the target date of 2015. Other goals involve advancing universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, environmental sustainability and global partnership toward achieving these ends.

The video contest, designed to inspire further action to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries, is open to both professional and amateur filmmakers.

ViewChange — being funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation — is an offshoot of Link TV, which was launched in 1999 as a noncommercial American satellite television network that describes itself as providing “diverse global perspectives on news, current events and world culture not typically available on other U.S. networks.”

Entrants in the video content must pack their message of change into an ultra-small parcel. As the Link TV website puts it, the sponsors seek “powerful five-minute films” that answer the question, “What are people doing to help end poverty, disease, hunger, conflict, inequality, and illiteracy?”

The website displays a handful of films already submitted — films that are emblematic of the sort the sponsors hope to receive:

- *Seeds of Hope: Cambodia* sketches the story of a community-based initiative that instituted a local rice-seed credit bank, improving the lot of poverty-stricken rural villagers and allowing them to mount health and nutrition programs for their children.

- *Garbage Dreams*, narrated by Adham, a 17-year-old trash worker, focuses on a village on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt, that houses 60,000 Zaballeen — Arabic for “garbage people.” Having eked out a living for generations by collecting and recycling Cairo's waste — their recycling rate is 80 percent, Adham proudly proclaims — they maintain what could be the world's most efficient waste disposal system. But the film finds them threatened by new competition from multinational garbage disposal companies that rely on landfills.

- *Chocolate Country* relates the self-help story of the founding of the Loma Guacnojo cooperative, which has allowed more than 200 poor Dominican cacao farmers to circumvent exploitive middlemen and market their own output.

Film entries will compete in one of six categories: sustainability, demonstrating solutions that will last; innovation, new solutions to old problems; overcoming conflict, such as cultural barriers or war; empowerment, showing people improving their own lives and those of others like them; leadership and governance, including citizen engagement in government; and local-global partnerships, reflecting teamwork between on-the-ground efforts and government, nongovernmental organizations and private initiatives.

The winner in each category will receive \$5,000. The winner of the overall contest receives \$20,000.

Online viewers will select two of five finalists in each category, while Link TV will name the other three. The category and overall winners then will be chosen by an international panel of judges from the arts and the political world.

Those judges will include Mexican actor-director Gael García Bernal, German director Wim Wenders, U.S. actor-director Danny Glover, U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, Grammy Award-winning singer Angélique Kidjo from Benin, U.S. filmmaker and philanthropist Charles Annenberg Weingarten, and Nigerian-born Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of *Purple Hibiscus* and recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship.

The contest announcement quotes Glover, a Link TV board member and U.N. goodwill ambassador, on the point of the contest. "There are countless beacons of success in eradicating poverty, hunger and disease in the developing world, but these stories rarely get told," Glover said. "We know that stories have the power to change the world for the better, and these films will allow us to clearly show and share the meaningful progress that is happening on a daily basis."

Submissions are due by August 31, with finalists to be announced in mid-September and winners in mid-October. The winners' and finalists' entries will be telecast in the United States on Link TV, and on other television channels worldwide.

Wendy Hanamura, vice president and general manager of Link TV, told America.gov that the response so far has met expectations, but that based on experience, "We're looking for a groundswell in the last couple of weeks." As for the submissions in hand, Hanamura said, "We're especially excited to see top filmmakers participating."

A Link TV spokesman said contestants can upload their entries at ViewChangeFilmContest.org. The complete contest rules are available on the Link TV website.

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