

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

---

August 24, 2010

---

U.S. Expands Support for Pakistan Flood Relief.....	1
Indonesia Climate Center Seeks to Bridge Science-Policy Gap.....	1
Future Iraqi Technology Leaders Intern at American Software Firms .....	2
An Iftar for Everyone .....	3

## U.S. Expands Support for Pakistan Flood Relief

Washington – The United States is continuing to expand assistance and development programs in flood-stricken Pakistan, providing temporary bridges and mobilizing significant civilian and military resources to rescue victims of the flooding and deliver much-needed supplies, U.S. officials say.

According to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, since the flooding began at the end of July, U.S. civilian and military aircraft have evacuated at least 7,835 people and delivered more than 1.6 million pounds (725,750 kilos) of relief supplies. “The United States also is providing millions of dollars of additional in-kind and technical assistance,” the embassy said in a prepared statement August 23.

Facing the worst monsoon flooding in 80 years, more than 6 million people have been left homeless, from the mountainous north to the low-lying plains in the south, and water levels are still rising. Officials estimate 20 million Pakistanis have been affected by the floods. Authorities are hopeful that the flood waters will reach their crest and begin draining into the Arabian Sea within the coming days.

“The United States is providing approximately \$150 million to support relief efforts in Pakistan, including funding for the operations of the Pakistan National Disaster Management Authority, the U.N.’s emergency relief plan, and the many local and international organizations responding to this disaster,” the embassy said.

The World Food Programme has reached more than 1.3 million flood-affected people with approximately 16,000 metric tons of food aid, and approximately 50 percent of that assistance was provided by the United States.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided the World Food Programme with an additional \$32.2 million so local and regional authorities can buy food, which brings the total U.S. contribution for food assistance to more than \$51 million.

Since August 8, U.S. water treatment units have provided about 4.8 million liters of safe drinking water, the embassy said.

Pakistani officials met August 23 in Washington with officials from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to seek ways to maintain economic stability in the aftermath of flooding damage to the country’s farm sector and its infrastructure. Farming is the mainstay of the Pakistan economy and has been the hardest hit. USAID

Administrator Rajiv Shah said August 19 that 1.7 million acres of planted cropland and all related livestock have been lost.

The flooding will “pose a massive economic challenge to the people and government of Pakistan,” Masood Ahmed, director of the IMF’s Middle East and Central Asia Department, said in a prepared statement August 21. “The scale of the tragedy means that the country’s budget and macroeconomic prospects, which are being supported by an IMF financed program, will also need to be reviewed.”

IMF Managing-Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn told Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in a recent letter that the “IMF stands with Pakistan at this difficult time and will do its part to help the country.”

The World Health Organization is closely monitoring the crisis in Pakistan to direct responses to the outbreak of disease. The WHO said approximately 1,500 people have been reported killed and more than 2,000 injured. Pakistan’s National Disaster Management Authority has reported that more than 1 million homes have been destroyed.

At a State Department briefing August 23, Dan Feldman, the U.S. deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, told reporters that power plants in Pakistan are under water, which contributes to an already difficult situation for people trying to stay in their homes.

During his recent trip to Pakistan, Feldman said, it was quite clear that an immense amount of immediate relief is needed, and the longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts will take many months if not years to complete.

## Indonesia Climate Center Seeks to Bridge Science-Policy Gap

*U.S. experts assist with forest-preservation issues*

By Karin Rives  
Staff Writer

Washington – Indonesia is in a battle against time as it ramps up efforts to cut greenhouse gases.

Scientists reported August 17 that coral reefs off the coast of Sumatra are dying at an alarming rate due to a rapid rise in ocean temperatures, threatening the livelihood of millions of people who depend on the reef fisheries. The Asian nation, ranked the third-largest emitter of carbon dioxide, continues to struggle with illegal logging, a direct contributor to climate change.

But Indonesia is also pushing hard to address the problem, bolstered by international funding earmarked

for forest protection. Indonesia's up-and-coming Climate Change Center, funded in part by the United States, will play an integral part in its campaign to reduce emissions.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono last year pledged to slash carbon dioxide emissions 26 percent by 2020, the most ambitious goal set by any developing nation. A national center that can help government officials access the best climate science and know-how will help the country reach its target, said Hugo Yon, chief of the Environment, Science, Technology and Health Unit at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta.

"We'll be trying to fill the gap between science and policy," Yon said of the new center the embassy is spearheading. "Everybody agrees that's what's missing in Indonesia today. There are many separate discussions with all players in climate change, and they're not always based on sound science. There's also a lot of politics involved. So the idea here is to get all policymakers together and [work] out the issues."

The climate center, which received an initial \$7 million in U.S. funding under the U.S.-Indonesian Comprehensive Partnership announced in June, is already in business even though it doesn't yet have a building. In July, a delegation of climate experts from the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency traveled to Jakarta under the auspices of the Indonesian Climate Center to consult with Indonesian government officials. The topic during their three weeks of meetings was MRV — short for measuring, reporting and verification of emissions.

MRV is a critical task required under REDD+, the United Nations-led plan aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The purpose of MRV programs is to ensure that forest protection policies are properly implemented and that they meet their goals. Norway, which is funding Indonesia's REDD+ program, asked the United States to help Indonesia get its MRV activities started, Yon said.

The experts who were called in are people who understand MRV as well as the specific challenges posed by Indonesia's peat-heavy forests, Yon said. Peat is partially carbonized plants that, if disturbed, release large amounts of carbon dioxide into the air. It's been estimated that nearly 80 percent of Indonesia's greenhouse gas emissions are due to deforestation and changes in land use, including burning and drying of peat land.

"We thought our experiences were something they could use," Yon said. "How do we in the U.S. coordinate our work and how do we maintain transparency?"

In addition to the \$7 million allocated to the Indonesian Climate Change Center, the United States will spend \$10 million on programs associated with the center, including future public-private partnerships focused on on-the-ground solutions, Yon said. The funding is part of a package of \$136 million that the United States has committed to Indonesia over three years for climate change and other environmental programs.

### **Future Iraqi Technology Leaders Intern at American Software Firms**

*Interns will use new knowledge to build their country's technology future*

By M. Scott Bortot  
Staff Writer

Washington — Iraqi IT administrator Ammar Salih spent his summer internship in the United States working at a place where employees bring pets to work, get massages and eat for free.

What most amazed Salih, a resident of Sulaimaniyah who interned at Mozilla Corporation, is that this setting works.

"It makes them be more productive, actually," Salih said.

Salih is among eight young Iraqi IT specialists who spent 12 weeks at leading American technology firms through the auspices of the U.S. Embassy Baghdad IT Intern Exchange program. The program exposes future Iraqi technology gurus to American business practices, new technologies and entrepreneurial skills.

At the end of the program, the Iraqi interns met with American officials at a roundtable discussion in Washington on August 12, where they made the case that technology is crucial to their country's development.

"Corruption can be solved by security cameras, digital signals and databases," Salih said. On the business development side, advanced information technology "can even support other technologies like telecoms, payment methods [and] banking."

For Aram Azad Mustafa, a teaching assistant at Salahaddin University in Erbil, his internship with Engine Yard Inc. was an eye-opening experience. Before the internship, he thought it would be best to work with the Iraqi government. But equipped with his new knowledge, Mustafa is looking to make a mark on Iraq's IT sector.

"Since I've come here, I really want to go back and start my company and provide services for users," Mustafa said.

Ibrahim Abdul Mutalib, an IT trainer with AECOM in Baghdad, interned with AT&T, one of the largest communication companies in the world. The office he interned in contained more than 5,000 employees. Mutalib hopes to apply the managerial strategies that he learned at AT&T back in Iraq.

"[They have] an ability to manage these people to work in harmony and at the same time to produce useful work and software," Mutalib said. "This I liked very much, because we can implement that in our country in the ministries and the universities – how to manage people in a way that is profitable and productive."

Once back in Iraq, the interns face a myriad of logistical hurdles at putting their experience from America to work. For example, they agree challenges exist when it comes to licensing an idea through the current system of governance. On the technical side, improvement is still needed in the country's communications and electrical infrastructure.

Many Iraqi businesses still prefer to invest in neighboring countries, the interns said. Concerns remain over the country's stability, and fears linger that changes in regulations could affect investment. Once a new government is formed and security improvements continue, investment should turn inward, they said.

Wael Al-Sallami, a web developer from Hilla who interned with tech company Square Inc., said American investment in his country's IT sector is crucial to its success.

"Basically, if you have someone in the Silicon Valley as a backup, you could ask for any technology and he would just get it for you," Al-Sallami said. "And that is going to be very important for us, because we are going to need funding, and not only from Iraqi partners, but most importantly, U.S. partners."

As the second group of interns to come through the program, administered in the United States in partnership with the Academy for Educational Development, they plan to keep in touch back in Iraq. Al-Sallami and his colleagues urge other Iraqis to apply to the Iraq IT Intern Exchange Program.

"I think that the mechanism that this program is following is very great, along with having on-the-job training and having classes in Berkley weekly," Al-Sallami said.

## An Iftar for Everyone

*Washington's Ramadan celebrations are as varied as its Muslim community*

By Danielle Zielinski

Special Correspondent

Washington – The sun goes down, and in a mosque in one Washington, D.C., neighborhood, people eat dates and then begin the evening prayer. In an apartment in northern Virginia, friends gather for a meal. In restaurants, in college dormitory rooms and in homes across the metropolitan area, people come together to break the daily fast and observe iftar.

Welcome to the month of Ramadan in Washington, where the area's active Muslim community makes sure there are plenty of ways to celebrate their faith's holiest time of year.

"In D.C., there's stuff going on every single night," says Manna Bakhsh, who has lived in the area her entire life. "You don't have to go to a mosque. You can go to a friend's house; you can go to a restaurant."

Ramadan began August 11 for the world's 1.5 billion Muslims.

Muslims believe Ramadan is the month in which the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad more than 1,400 years ago, and use it as a time for spiritual reflection and self-discipline.

Fasting every day for an entire month isn't easy, especially with Ramadan falling in August, which in Washington makes for a long day. As many as 14 hours pass between sunrise and sunset on some of the hottest and most humid days of the year in the Washington area. But Muslims stress that there's more to Ramadan than fasting. For many, it's a time to give back. Those who do not fast – because of age, illness, pregnancy or other health reasons – commit to feed another person for the entire month. Several local Muslim groups have held fundraising iftars in the past few weeks, with proceeds going to aid victims of the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan.

The fast "just kind of comes with the territory," said Sarrah AbuLughod, who was born in Saudi Arabia, grew up in Wisconsin and now lives in Washington. "When people realize that the fast isn't from just food and drink, and more an experiment in self-control and focus, it becomes less about hunger and appetite. Regardless, though, it is brutal when a co-worker pops a bag of popcorn."

Despite living and working among people who are not fasting, most find that the multicultural nature of

Washington makes it an inviting place to observe Ramadan.

"I feel in D.C. — wearing a scarf, being a Muslim — people are more open," said Bushra Zartasht, who previously lived in Norway. "I was so surprised I could find [traditional Iftar food including] dates at the normal [supermarket]."

And even though Ramadan is typically a time dominated by family, Washington's large number of young Muslims — many living away from their homes and relatives — ensure that no one is left out.

"There are many people here without their families, so the iftar gatherings end up being many young people gathering and very few little kids running underfoot, which is very different from any other community I've been in," said AbuLughod, who has lived in Washington for three years. "The hustle and bustle of Ramadan here is unique."

The diversity of the area's Muslim community also means that regardless of personal traditions, there is an iftar for everyone. Lindsey Stephenson, a former Fulbright scholar who lived in Kuwait in 2007 and 2008, takes part in two iftars each week that are hosted by different groups. On Tuesday night, it's a women-only gathering. On Wednesdays, she attends iftar with a co-educational group called the D.C. Quran Halaqa, which includes people from many different ethnic, cultural, sectarian and professional backgrounds.

"Both of these are groups of young American Muslims in their 20s and 30s, and I think many of us feel like this is the beginning of truly a homegrown American-Muslim community that really sees itself as independent from the culture-fused Islam of new immigrants," Stephenson said.

Teddy Galloway, who converted to Islam in 2009, said his first Ramadan, spent in San Diego training Marines, was tough. It was hot. He worked 12-hour days. And he was fasting alone. But he stuck it out.

Now living in Virginia, he hosts a meet-up group for other Muslims that has nearly 50 members, and also encourages non-Muslim friends to try fasting and celebrate iftar with him. "I don't have a family to fast with," he said, "so I invite people to fast with me."

Galloway said that as a newer member of the faith, his view of the Muslim community is probably different from that of people who grew up with its traditions. But in the end, Ramadan is about a sense of togetherness.

"It feels good to be a part of something that so many people, regardless of their differences, come together to

do," he said.

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)