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United States Diverting Funds for More Pakistan Relief.....	1
Science Outreach Brings Libyans, Moroccans to U.S. Space Camp	1
U.S. Aiding Preservation of European Cultural Patrimony	3

United States Diverting Funds for More Pakistan Relief

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States is providing an additional \$50 million to help Pakistan cope with the worst monsoon flooding seen there in more than 80 years, says Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Shah announced the additional funding in Sukkur, Pakistan, August 25 after he had completed a relief flight delivering plastic sheeting for shelters for flood-affected families. The new funds are being diverted from a five-year, \$7.5 billion development program to help Pakistan that was announced by President Obama in 2009.

“The additional funding will support early recovery programs, such as rehabilitation of community infrastructure and livelihood recovery activities,” USAID said in an August 25 announcement.

The United States has already committed \$150 million to Pakistan flood relief.

Shah told reporters that because of the immediate crisis, some priorities outlined in Obama’s development program for Pakistan may have to be shifted to a greater focus on recovery and reconstruction. Shah visited the Sukkur Barrage, which was partially breached by the heavy flooding. He discussed relief efforts with local officials and also spoke with families and visited a health clinic, according to USAID.

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. The United States is working closely with Pakistan’s National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in relief efforts.

U.S. Army Brigadier General Michael Nagata, the deputy commander of the Office of the Defense Representative, Pakistan, said at a briefing August 25 that the “focus, of course, is to save lives and provide humanitarian assistance, at the request of the government of Pakistan, to the people that have been affected by this terrible natural disaster.”

One of the pressing challenges is reaching people cut off by the flooding, Nagata said. The United Nations said August 25 that there are about 800,000 people who are accessible only by helicopters. Nagata said the United

States is providing helicopters to the Pakistani authorities and will provide more as requested.

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 in the most remote areas of Pakistan where relief convoys cannot travel overland. “The United States also is providing millions of dollars of additional in-kind and technical assistance,” the embassy said in a statement August 23.

Pakistani authorities say 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.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton previously announced that the United States is providing approximately \$150 million to support relief efforts in Pakistan, including funding for the operations of the National Disaster Management Authority, the U.N.’s emergency relief plan and the many local and international organizations responding to this disaster.

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

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. U.S. water-treatment units have provided 4.8 million liters of safe drinking water, the embassy said.

Science Outreach Brings Libyans, Moroccans to U.S. Space Camp

Five more nations plan U.S. training for future spacefarers, leaders

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington — Nearly 50 future Libyan leaders have trained as astronauts at the U.S. National Space & Rocket Center’s Space Camp since 2009, and media coverage and a film of the students’ experiences have helped ease U.S.-Libya tensions and inspired other Muslim-majority nations to pursue the program.

The Libyan Space Camp program, now in its second year, was developed through a unique relationship among the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, NASA, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, the Libyan General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and the Libyan General People's Committee for Education and Scientific Research. It was launched as part of the U.S.-Libya agreement on science and technology signed in 2008, the first U.S. bilateral cooperation agreement signed with Libya in decades.

The chronicles of the 24 participants in the 2009 Space Camp were documented and made into the film *One Small Step, One Giant Leap*.

"The young participants in the film, broadcast frequently on regional television, now have nearly rock-star status in Tripoli," said Maria Otero, under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs, at a June celebration of the anniversary of President Obama's Cairo speech. "And hundreds of young Libyans have now applied to Space Camp."

The 2010 Libyan Space Camp, July 16-25, was followed August 1-6 by a Space Camp adventure for a dozen Moroccan students.

The two student groups from North Africa joined other young people from around the world in Huntsville, near NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, to participate in simulated space shuttle missions, training simulators, rocket building and launches, scientific experiments and lectures on space exploration. They also met and received graduation certificates from four-time NASA shuttle commander Robert "Hoot" Gibson.

The Libyan students were chosen based on their knowledge of English and science, their geographic and socioeconomic diversity and their ability to represent their country.

TRIPOLI TO HUNTSVILLE

In August 2009, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli sent the first group of 24 Libyan students, along with two teachers and a professional Libyan-American film crew that included two Libyan student interns, on their way to Huntsville.

They were the first group from North Africa to attend Space Camp and only the second group from an Arab country since 1982, when Space Camp was founded to promote the study of math, science and technology, teamwork, decisionmaking and leadership.

The film of their adventure, which premiered in December 2009, aired more than 20 times on local television in Libya, reaching millions of people, William

Lawrence, adviser for science partnerships in the State Department's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, told *America.gov*.

"Between the program and the movie, it engendered huge excitement among students, parents, school officials, senior government officials and the population to a degree never really seen for any other program," Lawrence said.

"Space has a very high appeal to audiences young and old around the world, and there are absolutely no hurdles to that," he added. "We'll have conversations about space with populations we don't talk about much else with. Space tends to bring out that kind of response."

2010 LIBYA SPACE CAMP

This year, 24 Libyan students aged 14-18 participated, traveling with the same Libyan-American film director, members of Al Shababiya Television, and a representative of the Libyan General People's Committee for Education and Scientific Research.

The students wore official NASA flight suits, and for a week they worked shoulder-to-shoulder with students from the United States, Canada, Germany and other countries.

In international and technical teams, the students were presented with challenges that included what to do with a damaged fuselage, miscalibrated steering mechanisms and punctured air filtration systems. Together, they applied advanced principles of physics, chemistry and mathematics to solve some of the same problems experienced by U.S. and Russian astronauts on the International Space Station and during the historic Apollo 13 mission.

The high-impact program is relatively inexpensive, Lawrence said – a total cost of \$205,000 for the first year, including the film. In 2010, four U.S. companies – Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Coca-Cola and Conoco Phillips funded roughly 25 percent of the costs.

The students' training has helped expand their educational and professional interests at home and abroad. Since attending Space Camp, one 2009 Libyan student participant is seeking a career in aeronautics and flight communications by studying at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Another was recently accepted to Cornell University in New York State, and another received a full scholarship to Harvard University in Massachusetts.

Suleiman Ben Sufia said the camp "was beyond my expectations, and it was really a lifetime educational and

informative journey.”

“Space Camp touched me, and I look forward to apply such knowledge I’ve learned here in my beloved country,” Ali Elseddik wrote.

Libya and Morocco plan Space Camp programs in summer 2011, Lawrence said, and U.S. officials in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt are seeking to establish programs.

U.S. Aiding Preservation of European Cultural Patrimony

Projects in 12 European nations will benefit from special fund

By Domenick DiPasquale
Staff Writer

Washington — From fourth-century wall paintings in Macedonia to a 14th-century fortress in Moldova, landmarks in a dozen European nations in the Balkans, the Caucasus and elsewhere are the latest cultural heritage sites to receive much-needed support from a U.S. government fund that is helping to protect the world’s historical and cultural patrimony.

Over the past 10 years, the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, established by the U.S. Congress and administered by the U.S. State Department, has supported 640 cultural preservation projects in more than 100 countries. The State Department announced in June the 63 projects worldwide that were chosen for funding this year.

The 2010 grants reflect the diversity of projects to protect and restore cultural heritage that the Ambassadors Fund supports. The European projects that were selected this year encompass the continent’s rich patrimony, ranging from restoration of stone churches and medieval castles to textile conservation, documentation of folk dances, and archaeological work.

In Georgia, for example, the Ambassadors Fund will support work at a fourth-century B.C. archaeological site near the town of Mtskheta, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The archaeological remains include royal tombs, Greco-Aramaic tombstones and a third-century B.C. temple, all vulnerable to natural deterioration. The grant will finance a site survey, clearing of vegetation, stabilization of structural remains and the installation of interpretative panels and visitor paths.

Another ancient treasure that will benefit from the Ambassadors Fund is the late Bronze Age tumulus, or burial mound, of Kamenica in southeastern Albania. The site, which contains more than 400 graves from the 15th to the sixth century B.C., is suffering from an accelerating

rate of deterioration. Funding will allow creation of an overall conservation plan, done in coordination with the University of Tirana’s graduate program in heritage conservation.

Ols Lafe, the director for cultural heritage at the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, explained why the help from the Ambassadors Fund is so valuable. Kamenica represents a long period of cultural and social development in Albania during the Bronze Age and Iron Age, Lafe said.

“The site represents the only monument of its kind which will be conserved and preserved in Albania,” Lafe told America.gov. “This project will also serve in the longer term by training Albanian archaeologists on excavation and preservation techniques.”

The remains of fortresses in Kosovo and Moldova will receive funding. An Ambassadors Fund grant will help document the Moldovan ruins at Orheiul Vechi, a landscape and architectural site that was formed by millennia of human interaction with nature and whose structures include not only fortresses but also religious buildings and settlements. Likewise, funding will be available for a comprehensive site survey and conservation assessment of the castle remains in the center of the Kosovo city of Vushtrri, once a major trading center.

Textile preservation will be the focus of two projects. Repairs to the roof, ceiling, and interior walls of the Ethnographic Museum of Serbia will protect its collection of kilims, or Balkan tapestry rugs, traditional ethnic attire and other handmade textiles. In Ukraine, a grant from the Ambassadors Fund will support restoration of curtains, upholstery and tablecloths in the dacha in Yalta that once belonged to famed Russian writer Anton Chekhov and that now is a museum honoring his life and work. The grant comes on the 150th anniversary of the author’s birth.

Not all projects involve tangible structures or artifacts. In Armenia, for example, funding will support the documentation of 20 Armenian folk dances and their associated music and traditions. The project will include production of an instructional dance DVD to be broadcast on Armenian television.

While the vast majority of grants made through the Ambassadors Fund are for less than \$100,000, four projects worldwide received large-scale funding of several hundred thousand dollars apiece.

One was a \$625,000 grant to the World Monuments Fund for the conservation of the remains of the 11th-century Surp Prikitch (Church of the Holy Redeemer) in eastern

Turkey at the medieval Armenian site of Ani, once a thriving city along the legendary Silk Road linking Europe with China. The church, which already had suffered damage in a 12th-century earthquake and subsequent abandonment in the mid-1700s, sustained even more damage in the mid-20th century when a lightning strike caused its partial collapse. The resources provided by the Ambassadors Fund will finance emergency stabilization of the structure to ensure its long-term preservation.

The importance of cultural preservation projects was highlighted by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who in a video message earlier this year said the Ambassadors Fund “demonstrated America’s respect for the world’s cultural heritage.”

“Cultural heritage serves as a reminder of the historical experiences and achievements of humanity,” Clinton said. “The more we know about each other and about our world’s diversity of cultures and traditions, the more we can learn from each other to help build a better future for all.”

A State Department video looking at some of the projects supported by the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation in 2010 is available at YouTube.

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