

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama's Message to Côte d'Ivoire

[The White House
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The eyes of the world are on Cote d'Ivoire. Last year's election was free and fair and President Alassane Ouattara is the democratically elected leader of the nation. And I commend President Ouattara for offering a peaceful future for all Ivorians — an inclusive government, reunification and reconciliation.

Now Cote d'Ivoire is at a crossroad and two paths lay ahead.

One path is where Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters cling to power, which will only lead to more violence, more innocent civilians being wounded and killed and more diplomatic and economic isolation.

Or Cote d'Ivoire can take another path. Where Gbagbo follows the example of leaders who reject violence and abide by the will of the people.

Where Ivorians reclaim your country and rebuild a vibrant economy that was once the admiration of Africa. And where Cote d'Ivoire is welcomed back into the community of nations.

This is the choice that must be made.

And it's a choice for all Ivorians.

I want to close by speaking directly to the people of Cote d'Ivoire.

You have a proud past, from gaining your independence to overcoming civil war. Now you have the opportunity to realize your future. You deserve a future of hope, not fear. You deserve leaders like President Ouattara, who can restore your country's rightful place in the world. You deserve the chance to determine your own destiny.

It's time for democracy in Cote d'Ivoire. And those who choose that path will have a friend and partner in the United States of America.

U.S. Aid Has Supported Ukraine's Recovery from Chernobyl

By Domenick DiPasquale
Staff Writer

Washington — A quarter-century after the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear plant, and as world attention focuses on a similar crisis in Japan, the United States continues to provide assistance to Ukraine to help that nation deal

with the consequences of one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

That aid, some completed and some still ongoing, has taken many forms: financial support for construction of a new containment structure to entomb the damaged nuclear reactor, several studies on the long-term health effects of the radiation released during the accident, developing a mobile environmental laboratory for Ukraine, helping manage forest-fire dangers within the 30-kilometer exclusion zone surrounding Chernobyl, and other assistance to prevent nuclear smuggling from that zone.

"The Chernobyl disaster continues to present Ukraine with a complex variety of challenges: health, environmental, and containment," says U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine John F. Tefft. "Our assistance is engaged in all these areas."

The April 26, 1986, disaster in the then-Soviet Union began when a power surge caused a series of explosions in reactor four at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, sparking a 10-day fire that released into the atmosphere massive amounts of radioactive material that spread over much of Europe. The most severe contamination from the accident occurred in Ukraine and parts of neighboring Belarus and Russia.

The response to the accident included construction of a temporary concrete sarcophagus to limit the further release of radioactive material and a cleanup of contaminated areas that eventually involved 600,000 workers in all, although only a small percentage of these workers were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.

Hastily erected in just more than six months and not designed to last more than 20 or 30 years, the existing sarcophagus, now covered with holes and cracks, needs replacement.

In 1995, the Group of Seven (G7, now G8) advanced industrial nations and the European Union committed to helping Ukraine build a stronger, more permanent containment structure over the damaged reactor. While the European Union has been the largest contributor, the United States is the largest individual donor country to this effort, known as the Chernobyl Shelter Fund. The U.S. contribution of \$203 million amounts to 20 percent of the \$1 billion pledged so far by the international community.

Engineering design work for the project is complete and site clearance has begun. The 108 meter-high arched structure, called the New Safe Containment and standing taller than the Statue of Liberty, is being built by a French consortium and is designed to last at least 100 years. To minimize the exposure of workers to radiation, the 20,000-

ton structure is being assembled near the Chernobyl reactor; when completed, it will be slid on rails over the reactor and existing sarcophagus.

A second major safety project under way at Chernobyl, the Interim Spent Storage Facility, is designed to ensure the safe, secure storage on-site of spent nuclear fuel. Although this facility is not exclusive to Chernobyl or Ukraine, it will meet critical needs resulting from the 1986 accident and the permanent shutdown of the three remaining Chernobyl nuclear reactors between 1991 and 2000. With a contribution of \$34.5 million, the United States is the third-largest donor to this initiative.

The United States has also been involved with a number of studies measuring the long-term health effects of the Chernobyl disaster. With co-funding from the U.S. Department of Energy, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), a branch of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, has conducted epidemiological research focused in particular on children and Chernobyl cleanup workers.

Two separate studies, beginning in 1996 in Belarus and 1998 in Ukraine, examined the health impact on children and adolescents from exposure to the radioactive iodine isotope I-131, which concentrates in the thyroid gland. A total of 25,000 people in the two nations were regularly screened for thyroid cancer until 2007. The Research Institute of Endocrinology and Metabolism in Kyiv and the Research Center of Radiation Medicine and Human Ecology in Belarus worked with NCI on these projects.

Besides contributing to enhanced knowledge of the carcinogenic effects of I-131, the two studies have assisted officials in both nations in developing appropriate health care programs and in screening at-risk populations for early detection of thyroid disease, when treatment is most effective. The studies determined that 10 to 15 years after the Chernobyl accident, the thyroid cancer risk was significantly increased among individuals exposed to fallout as children or adolescents; an NCI report released this March found that their risk for developing this cancer has still not declined.

A third NCI study has focused on leukemia among 110,000 of the cleanup workers in Ukraine who worked in the 30 kilometer-wide Chernobyl exclusion zone between 1986 and 1991. The Ukrainian Academy of Medical Sciences has collaborated with NCI on this research. The study has benefitted Ukraine by addressing health concerns about these cleanup workers and by establishing a leukemia registry to identify all cases occurring between 1987 and 2000.

The main objective of this study, which began in 1997 and ends this year, is measuring whether a correlation exists between the amount of radiation received and an

increased risk of developing leukemia. The NCI estimates that each additional gray — a standard measure of absorbed radiation — is associated with a three-fold increase in the radiation-related risk of leukemia.

Past U.S. assistance to help Ukraine deal with the aftermath of Chernobyl included the delivery to Kyiv in the late 1990s of a mobile environmental laboratory. A joint effort of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the laboratory was housed in a tractor-trailer truck and contained scientific equipment to measure and analyze radioactivity.

Specialists from the U.S. Forest Service have met their Ukrainian counterparts in recent years to assess and reduce the risk of forest fires within the 300,000 square-hectare Chernobyl exclusion zone. To lessen the risk of a catastrophic wildfire — a concern, given the density and composition of the pine-dominated forest within the zone, and the fact that trees play a major role in sequestering contaminants — U.S. and Ukrainian forestry experts have worked together to review the hazard and recommend actions to lessen it, such as active fire monitoring.

“The Ukrainians will be in the business of containment of fallout from this disaster for years to come,” said Ambassador Tefft. “Chernobyl will prove to be a long-lasting legacy from the Soviet past.”

Hispanics Become Largest Minority Group in United States

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Hispanic Americans make up the nation’s largest minority group, according to newly released findings of the U.S. census, a massive data-gathering project that helps define the future of the country’s democratic process.

The Census Bureau collected the data throughout 2010, mailing a survey or sending an agent to every household in the country to count how many people live there and collect other demographic data. The findings show a total population of 308.7 million people, 16 percent of whom are Hispanic.

The U.S. Constitution requires a national census be conducted every 10 years to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the last decade, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, reaching 50.5 million by 2010. The more than 15-million-person growth in this ethnic group accounted for more than half of the nation’s overall growth through the decade. The non-Hispanic white population remains the

largest group in the U.S. population with 196.8 million, which amounts to roughly 64 percent of the population. African Americans are the third-largest ethnic group, with about 13 percent of the total population, at 38.9 million. Asian Americans are the next largest group with about 14.7 million people, making up 5 percent of the total.

“We are approaching a new high point in the prevalence of U.S. residents who were born outside the country,” commented Census Bureau Director Robert M. Groves in a blog. “The size of the foreign-born population has never been greater since the 1920s.”

WHAT IS THE CENSUS?

The census serves as a cornerstone of U.S. democracy in that it provides data that form the basis for determining how legislative seats are apportioned in order to uphold the principle of one person, one vote. The number of members of the House of Representatives remains constant at 435, and each member will represent just more than 700,000 people. Eight states will get increased representation in the House because of the growth in their populations documented in the 2010 census. Ten states that have lost population will sacrifice seats to the growing states.

Since the initial announcement of the findings in December 2010, the Census Bureau has been conveying packages of data to each state government. The legislative bodies in each statehouse will examine the data and determine where to draw the lines to form congressional districts of roughly the same population size. These debates can be among the most contentious that state lawmakers undertake because political parties and interest groups are all vying to create districts that will maximize their voting strength, thus increasing their influence in policymaking.

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