

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Investing in U.N. Critical to U.S., International Security

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Investing in the United Nations is critical to ensuring U.S. national security, says U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice.

“When we meet our financial obligations to the U.N., we make Americans safer, save lives around the world, and share the burden of tackling common problems that threaten us all,” Rice said in prepared testimony for the House Foreign Affairs Committee April 7.

She also testified April 6 on U.S. budget and policy initiatives for the United Nations and other international organizations before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations. The congressional committees are reviewing 2012 budget requests, including U.S. contributions to the United Nations and other international organizations within the U.N. system.

Rice said the United Nations delivers “real results for every American by advancing U.S. security through genuine burden-sharing,” which she said was more important than ever at a time when threats do not stop at national borders and when American troops remain in harm’s way.

The U.S. investment and leadership in the United Nations make the United States and the international community more secure in several ways, Rice added.

Rice highlighted U.N. efforts to prevent conflict, promote stability and keep nations from slipping into war. She said more than 120,000 military personnel, police and civilian peacekeepers are now deployed in 14 operations in places such as Haiti, Sudan and Liberia.

Rice said the United Nations also helps to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and she applauded the Security Council for imposing the toughest sanctions to date on Iran and North Korea. She praised sanctions imposed against individuals and companies associated with terrorism, human rights abuses and cross-border crime.

The ambassador commended U.N. humanitarian and development agencies for often going “where nobody else will to provide desperately needed assistance,” such as food, water and medicine.

And she said U.N. political efforts “help promote universal values that Americans hold dear, including

human rights, democracy and equality — whether it’s spotlighting abuses in places such as Iran, North Korea and Burma, or offering support to interim governments in Egypt and Tunisia.”

Rice said the United States continues to work within the United Nations not only to support its missions, but also to reform its day-to-day practices. She called on U.N. managers to enforce greater budget discipline, and she demanded a culture of openness and accountability for resources and results.

Work is being done to improve the protection of civilians in violent zones and to strengthen U.N. field work by providing reasonable, achievable mandates for peacekeeping missions through restructured administrative and logistical support systems, Rice added.

She said the United Nations’ recent response to the crisis in Libya “further reminds us of its value in an age of 21st-century challenges.” She praised the Security Council’s quick action to save lives at risk of mass slaughter, to authorize a no-fly zone, to impose strong sanctions on the Qadhafi regime and to suspend Libya from the Human Rights Council by consensus.

Rice underscored the importance of the United Nations in allowing the United States to share the costs and burdens of tackling global problems, and requested the continued support of Congress for U.N. efforts.

The United States has been the largest financial contributor to the United Nations since its creation in 1945, contributing about 22 percent of the organization’s annual budget.

United States Honors Heroes Who Rescued Refugees

By Jane A. Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton honored the heroic efforts of individuals who have helped rescue and protect refugees around the world amid great stress and conflict, saying the U.S. commitment to the protection of refugees remains steadfast.

Clinton spoke at a State Department ceremony that also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an international agreement that defines the rights of refugees and the legal obligation of nations to protect them.

“Today, we reaffirm America’s commitment to the protection of refugees around the world,” Clinton said during the April 6 ceremony. “Our mission is unchanging. We intend to save lives and restore human

dignity. But we could not do it just through the programs we run and through the excellent leadership we provide and even in cooperation with the U.N. and many other international organizations.

"It takes individuals who, day after day, stand up and speak out and, more importantly, act on behalf of those who are in jeopardy," Clinton added.

Clinton recognized the efforts of six honorees, both living and dead, who have risked their lives in an effort to protect refugees often exposed to the most serious consequences of war and civil strife.

There are an estimated 18 million people currently displaced by conflicts worldwide. Clinton said that often "in times of war and catastrophe, some people lose their moral bearings, but others find inside themselves a compass that steers a true course through fear and chaos."

The following individuals were honored by the State Department:

- Josephine Dusabimana of Rwanda. During the genocide that convulsed Rwanda 17 years ago, Dusabimana, an ethnic Hutu, assisted eight Tutsi who came to her home seeking refuge on four separate occasions. She persisted in her rescue efforts despite protests from her spouse and direct threats to her family by genocidal killers. Dusabimana was able to help six people escape to safe territory, but two were slaughtered before her eyes. Dusabimana accepted the State Department honor from Rwanda, where she still lives, via a live video link.

- Captain Mbaye Diagne of Senegal. Diagne was a Senegalese army officer deployed to Rwanda as a U.N. military observer during the 1994 genocide. The U.N. peacekeeping mission operated under a mandate limiting troop intervention in the conflict. But Diagne chose instead to single-handedly rescue as many as 600 ethnic Tutsi. Ferrying three to five individuals in his vehicle at a time, Diagne employed great courage and persuasion in repeatedly crossing roadblocks manned by genocidal killers and depositing his passengers at safe locations in and around Kigali. He was later killed by a stray mortar shell while driving back to U.N. headquarters in Kigali. His widow, Yassine Mar Diop, his mother, Fatou Ndour, and his two children accepted the honor via live video link from the U.S. Embassy in Dakar Senegal.

- Larry Hollingworth of the United Kingdom. Hollingworth was head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees operation in Sarajevo during the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in the 1990s. In this position he was able to successfully access besieged towns deliberately cut off from assistance. He personally led convoys through combatant lines, bore witness to the

plight of trapped civilian victims and evacuated hundreds of women and children to safety. He warned the world of an impending Srebrenica massacre before it occurred. Hollingworth traveled from England to accept the award in Washington.

- Mina Jahic of Bosnia. In 1994, Jahic, a Bosnian Muslim, took into her home and nursed a seriously injured Muslim man who, although severely beaten, had managed to escape from a Serbian militia execution squad during the Bosnian war. In the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre, an estimated 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered by a Bosnian-Serb militia. Her courage in doing so inspired her neighbors to help the man escape to safety. Jahic's own son was executed in the Bosnian war, but the man she rescued, Ferid Spahic, lived, and he was with Jahic at the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo as Jahic accepted the award via videoconferencing.

These individuals also were honored posthumously:

- Raoul Wallenberg of Sweden. A Swedish diplomat during World War II, Wallenberg was the first secretary to the Swedish legation in Budapest. He is credited with rescuing tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust by issuing them protective passports that allowed them to be treated as Swedish citizens. Detained by the Soviets after they entered Budapest in 1945, Wallenberg is presumed to have died in a Soviet gulag in 1947.

- Harriet Tubman of the United States. Tubman was the most celebrated figure in the Underground Railroad during the 1850s. An escaped slave herself, Tubman conducted more than a dozen rescue missions that liberated 70 or more Southern slaves and escorted them to safety. Honoring Tubman illustrates that issues of persecution, trafficking and rescue are not foreign to America's own history.

"All of these courageous people have one thing in common," Clinton said. "They did not view people in trouble as strangers, as the other; they viewed them as fellow human beings, and they were unable to stand by and let brutality and violence and atrocities unfold."

She added: "We salute the courage and the dedication of all those whose moral compasses did not fail them, but instead compelled them, compelled them to help in this vital endeavor of standing up for the very best values that unite all of us regardless of geography or race, tribe or religion."

World Health Day Marked with Warnings on Loss of “Wonder Drugs”

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — Medical science made a giant leap forward in the mid-20th century with the discovery of antibiotics, but now the prospect of a reversal in progress looms, as medications once known as “wonder drugs” lose their effectiveness.

Widely used antibiotics are losing their effectiveness against fighting disease because the bacteria they target have mutated to develop resistance to the medications. The syndrome is called anti-microbial resistance (AR), and it is “a growing problem with implications for both national and global security,” according to Dr. Rajiv Shah, the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). “Drug resistance also threatens to reverse global health gains by making currently available first-line medicines less effective.”

Shah issued the statement in recognition of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) designation of April 7 as World Health Day, which this year focuses on the AR issue. Antibiotics have cured diseases that once were fatal, such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, gonorrhea or a simple wound infection. But when those first-line medications meet up with bacteria that have become resistant to them, Shah says, “the patient may have to be treated with second or third-choice drugs that are potentially less effective, more toxic and more expensive.”

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan said AR could also reverse an improving trend in the developing world of increased life expectancy. “Gains in reducing child deaths due to diarrhea and respiratory infections are at risk.”

Shah said USAID is supporting a WHO strategy for containing AR. “We pledge to contain the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance through the continued development of innovative tools and approaches that improve medicine use, assure medicine quality and strengthen health systems.”

WHO documents outline a six-point strategy to combat drug resistance:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive, financed national plan.
- Strengthen surveillance and laboratory capacity.
- Ensure uninterrupted access to essential medicines of assured quality.
- Regulate and promote rational use of medicines.
- Enhance infection prevention and control.
- Foster innovation and research and development for

new tools.

Bacteria will develop drug resistance as a natural course of evolution, but medical experts say that human use of antibiotics has sped the emergence of AR. Too frequently, antibiotics are prescribed to treat viruses, which they won’t cure, rather than bacterial diseases. Sometimes a much longer course of antibiotics is prescribed or, Chan says, too few are consumed by the patient.

“This includes underuse, especially when economic hardship encourages patients to stop treatment as soon as they feel better, rather than complete the treatment course needed to fully kill the pathogen,” according to Chan’s statement.

This tendency is a key reason for the emergence of multidrug resistance tuberculosis. The full course of treatment for TB calls for about six months of drug therapy, even though a patient will feel better within a much shorter time. Feeling healthier, patients fall off the medication regimen because of cost or uncomfortable side effects.

Given that there are many reasons an antibiotic can become ineffective, WHO’s Dr. Mario Raviglione, who oversees the TB program, says a more rigorous adherence to the prevention strategy must be implemented across many sectors of health care.

“New collaborations, led by governments working alongside civil society and health professionals, if accountable, can halt the public health threat of drug resistance,” Raviglione said in a WHO press release.

Imprisoned Iranian Journalist Wins Press Freedom Prize

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — A leading prize in the cause of press freedom around the world is going to a journalist imprisoned in Iran.

Ahmad Zeidabadi will receive the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize as “a tribute to his exceptional courage, resistance and commitment to freedom of expression, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and humanity,” Diana Senghor, the president of the jury of journalists that awarded the prize, said in a UNESCO statement April 7. “Beyond him, also the Prize will award the numerous Iranian journalists who are currently jailed,” the statement said.

Zeidabadi has been a newspaper columnist and editor, as well as a contributor to the BBC Persian news service and the Persian-English website Rooz and a professor of

political science. He also was elected president of one of Iran's leading student organizations, the Iranian Alumni Association. He has been jailed on and off since 2000, and he gained prominence for an open letter after his first arrest, in which he detailed the mistreatment of journalists in prison.

Zeidabadi was arrested two days after Iran's disputed 2009 presidential election. He faced charges in a mass trial for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government with a "soft revolution" and received a sentence of six years in prison, five years of internal exile and a lifetime ban on practicing journalism. His attorney has said that Zeidabadi is being held at Rajaei Shahr Prison along with other political prisoners. At least 26 other journalists are also still behind bars in Iran, UNESCO said.

The United Nations agency presents the \$25,000 prize each year on World Press Freedom Day, May 3; this year's observance will take place in Washington. UNESCO's director-general, Irina Bokova, called on Iran to release Zeidabadi from prison in advance of the event.

"Throughout his career Ahmad Zeidabadi has courageously and unceasingly spoken out for press freedom and freedom of expression, which is a fundamental human right that underpins all other civil liberties, a key ingredient of tolerant and open societies and vital for the rule of law and democratic governance," Bokova said.

Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, praised the decision to recognize Zeidabadi, whom he called "one of the most prominent journalists and opinionmakers" in Iran. "The speed with which they arrested him and prosecuted him after the election really showed how much they feared his voice and influence among the Iranian public," Ghaemi said.

Ghaemi said Zeidabadi was particularly skilled in providing analysis and context on Iranian foreign and economic policies but did not show a particular political bias. "He was close to the reformist circles, but he also was critical of them," Ghaemi said. "It's hard to really box him in in any label, but definitely pushing for genuine democracy and human rights was a common theme in his writing."

Zeidabadi would not be the first journalist to receive the UNESCO award while in prison; many of the 14 previous recipients have served time behind bars for their work. Two were assassinated and received the award posthumously, and three others survived assassination attempts. The UNESCO/Cano Prize is named for a Colombian editor who was gunned down in 1986 in front of his newspaper's offices. He had exposed the work of

drug traffickers.

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