

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## U.N. Report Says Syrian Forces Committed Gross Human Rights Abuses

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 23 February 2012

Washington — A United Nations report says the Syrian regime has committed “widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations.”

The report, prepared by a three-member panel of investigators, was presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva February 23.

“A reliable body of evidence exists that, consistent with other verified circumstances, provides reasonable grounds to believe that particular individuals, including commanding officers and officials at the highest levels of government, bear responsibility for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations,” the published report said.

“The human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has deteriorated significantly since November 2011, causing further suffering to the Syrian people,” the report said. “Widespread violence and increasingly aggravated socio-economic conditions have left many communities in a perilous state.” For many if not most Syrians, meeting basic needs to sustain everyday life has become increasingly difficult.

The report is based on 369 interviews with victims, witnesses, defectors and others who have “inside knowledge” of the crisis in Syria. The investigators also examined photographs, video recordings, available government documents and satellite imagery of areas where military and security forces were deployed and related violations occurred. This evidence was used to corroborate a number of witness accounts, the U.N. report said.

The investigators also took into account a report from the observer mission of the Arab League from January 22, including interviews with former observers from that mission.

“The present situation risks further radicalizing the population, deepening inter-communal tensions and eroding the fabric of society,” the report said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters February 23 that the overwhelming number of victims of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s brutality are innocent, unarmed Syrian civilians.

“The victims here are overwhelmingly Syrians and the assault that Assad continues to wage against the Syrian

people is heinous and unforgivable,” Carney said. “That’s why we’re working with a broad array and a growing array of international partners to isolate and pressure Assad to bring about a peaceful transition in that country, a transition which is inevitable and which is already under way.”

Carney said that the United States, led by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, will be an active participant in the “Friends of Syria” meeting in Tunis. Representatives from more than 70 nations are meeting to find ways to support Syria’s opposition forces, and to find ways to provide humanitarian assistance, especially urgently needed medical supplies in places such as Homs, which has been under attack by government forces for 20 consecutive days.

The U.N. investigators said they received credible and consistent evidence identifying high- and mid-ranking members of the armed forces who ordered their subordinates to shoot at unarmed protesters, kill soldiers who refused to obey such orders, arrest people without cause, mistreat detained persons and attack civilian neighborhoods using machine guns and armored tanks.

“The government has manifestly failed in its responsibility to protect its people,” the investigators said.

An effort to obtain a U.N. Security Council resolution to promote an Arab League peace plan failed when two permanent Security Council members — Russia and China — vetoed the measure. The Arab League plan called for a transition where Assad would relinquish power to his vice president and permit the creation of a unity government. The Damascus regime rejected that plan.

The 22-member Arab League suspended its observer mission in Syria, saying that it was unsafe to continue operations because of the “grave deterioration of the situation in Syria, and the continuation of violence and exchange of shelling and shooting.”

The United Nations estimates that 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting between rebel forces and the Syrian government security forces as of January. Newer information is unavailable because the information cannot be independently confirmed.

## USAID Announces Plan to Get Tougher on Human Trafficking

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 23 February 2012

Washington — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has announced a plan to intensify its efforts to combat human trafficking.

At a February 23 press conference at the White House, Rajiv Shah, USAID administrator, announced the new agency policy that, among other goals, will:

- More closely scrutinize the activities of its employees, contractors and subcontractors for any involvement with human trafficking.
- Increase collaboration with government and nongovernment colleagues to combat human trafficking.
- More stringently evaluate the effectiveness of USAID countertrafficking programs.
- Employ technological advances such as mobile phones and social networks to reach trafficking victims and help them find help.

According to estimates provided by USAID, human trafficking for cheap labor and sexual exploitation ensnares anywhere from 12 million to 27 million people worldwide and represents a \$32 billion criminal business. The most vulnerable to trafficking are the poor, uneducated, and people living in conflict-ridden countries.

To combat enslavement, the U.S. government since 2001 has provided approximately \$528 million for countertrafficking assistance overseas. USAID has been a major part of this effort, providing more than \$163 million in assistance to more than 70 countries.

USAID, an independent government agency, supports U.S. foreign policy goals by providing economic, development and humanitarian assistance around the world. While USAID programs do reach vulnerable populations, the agency's new policy seeks to have its missions overseas more deeply integrate countertrafficking efforts into every aspect of their work and develop cooperative programs with governments as well as nongovernmental and faith-based organizations, according to Shah.

USAID's new policy, Shah said, "provides guidance on pursuing more effective, efficient and evidence-based approaches in countertrafficking."

### **Clinton to Participate in "Friends of Syria" Meeting in Tunis**

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 22 February 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will be joining her counterparts from more than 70 countries in Tunisia as the international community continues its efforts to stop the Syrian government's slaughter of Syrian civilians and to promote a democratic

transition in the country.

According to a February 21 statement from State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, Clinton will be in Tunis on February 24 and 25 to participate in the first meeting of the "Friends of Syria" group, which will include some of Syria's neighbors and Syrian opposition representatives.

State Department deputy spokesman Mark Toner told reporters February 22 that the immediate goals of the conference will be to discuss ways of getting humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people as well as trying to stop the Syrian government's onslaught against the city of Homs and achieve a cease-fire.

"We expect a very large showing from five continents and talk about all the issues that we've been discussing: how we can tighten the sanctions further working nationally and regionally, what we can do to get more humanitarian aid to those who are suffering, and how we can support the opposition in presenting a united front representing the interests of all Syrians for a democratic process going forward," Toner said.

Toner said the meeting would also discuss how to promote a democratic transition along the lines of a plan developed by Syria's neighbors in the Arab League.

On February 4, the U.N. Security Council failed to adopt a resolution backing the Arab League's proposals for an end to the violence, for the release of political prisoners, and for Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to delegate power to the Syrian vice president and allow the creation of a national government of unity.

Toner said that despite the United Nations' failure, "the vast majority of the international community ... stands squarely on the side of the Syrian people."

"The question is, what do we do?" he said,

"We're trying now, through this Friends of Syria group, to build pressure on Assad, to look for new ways to add to the pressure, but also, as I said, try to take immediate steps ... whatever we can do to ease the suffering of the people of Homs through humanitarian assistance and a possible cease-fire," he said.

According to Nuland's statement, Clinton begins her travel with a meeting in London February 22 to attend a conference on building stability and peace in Somalia.

"Heads of state and foreign ministers from over 50 countries as well as representatives of the United Nations and the African Union will attend. The timing of the conference is significant, as it convenes six months prior

to the end of Somalia's political transition, which is set to take place by August 20, 2012," Nuland said.

Following her participation in the "Friends of Syria" group, Clinton will meet with Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and members of Tunisian civil society to discuss bilateral cooperation as well as Tunisia's progress in its democratic transition.

She will then travel to Algeria on February 25 to meet with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to discuss domestic developments in the country, as well as preparations for Algeria's May 10 parliamentary elections and challenges facing the Middle East and North Africa.

On February 25 and 26, Clinton will visit Morocco and meet with Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, as well as members of Moroccan civil society, before presiding over a groundbreaking for the new U.S. Embassy in Rabat, according to Nuland's statement.

### **Food and Farm Experts Seek Breakthroughs to Feed the Future**

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 22 February 2012

Washington — The Obama administration is turning to agriculture and food industry experts to identify breakthrough ideas to double or triple food production in nations facing chronic hunger.

A February 22 meeting at the White House was the next step in the Feed the Future initiative, a three-year-old program launched in the aftermath of food shortages in 2007–2008. Various economic, market and weather events combined to drive up food prices during that time to a level that reversed a 40-year pattern of declining hunger worldwide and shoved more than 100 million people back to extreme hunger and poverty.

The experts convened at the meeting are looking beyond the agricultural basics to technical issues such as crop genomics, seed technology, and agricultural finance and risk management. The head of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Rajiv Shah, reminded the private-sector audience of the huge advances made by the Green Revolution in the 1970s and said he hoped for a repeat of that success.

"We know that sub-Saharan Africa can double or triple its actual food production in a generation," Shah said. At the same time, systemic changes could help transform the economies of those developing nations to bring hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, he said.

"We know that your technologies that are in your firms,

in your people, in your labs, applied to these problems will make a very specific difference," Shah said. The top U.S. international development official suggested that seed research under way in major agricultural companies might be applied to projects USAID has in progress now to develop crops that perform better in drought or produce greater and more reliable yields.

Sharing of information and success stories has helped improve American agriculture since the early 19th century. The support system became formalized with the creation of a national agricultural extension service in 1914. Introducing mechanisms to improve information exchange and comparative methods is one idea gaining significant attention as a means to improve developing world agriculture.

Shah said 21st-century information technologies are already helping farmers improve yields in developing countries: "The modern version of the 'farmer field school' is likely to be empowered by information technologies. That is perhaps the greatest transformational force that has taken hold in these communities in the last decade."

Feed the Future has an ongoing objective to advance new methods and techniques. Shah said the program has already invested more U.S. assistance funds into agriculture and increased consultations with other organizations working in this area.

### **USAID Supports Clean Cooking Solutions in Haiti**

22 February 2012

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is aiming to establish a sustainable local market and industry for clean cooking solutions in Haiti, a country whose high demand for charcoal has contributed to widespread deforestation.

USAID recently announced an award to Chemonics International to implement the three-year Improved Cooking Technology Project. Through close coordination with the government of Haiti, the Haitian private sector and Haitian civil society, the project will establish a thriving local market as well as a sustainable industry for clean cooking solutions, including liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and more efficient biomass cookstoves, USAID said in a press release.

The use of firewood and charcoal in Haiti by individuals and small businesses has increased pressure on local natural resources and the environment. This reliance on charcoal is a major reason why forests now cover less than 2 percent of the country.

“The goal of the Improved Cooking Technology Project is to decrease Haiti’s consumption of charcoal by establishing a sustainable market for clean, efficient and affordable cooking solutions,” said USAID/Haiti Mission Director Carleene H. Dei. “Without the protection of natural, wooded watersheds, Haiti’s denuded hillsides leave the country vulnerable to erosion and devastating flooding.”

In addition to the environmental degradation caused by the inefficient production and consumption of solid fuels, the use of traditional stoves and fuels can lead to health problems. According to the World Health Organization, exposure to smoke from traditional cookstoves is one of the five most serious health risks facing people in poor, developing countries. Nearly 2 million people die annually from respiratory illnesses caused by inhaling smoke produced by unclean cookstoves. Women and young children are disproportionately affected, as they spend more time in proximity to the harmful smoke.

Urban households and food vendors also spend a considerable portion of their incomes on charcoal. By promoting more efficient charcoal cookstoves and LPG, the project will help users to consume less charcoal to meet the same cooking needs and enable them to save more of their income for other purposes.

#### PROFITABLE BUSINESS IN CLEAN COOKSTOVES AND LPG

USAID’s \$7.2 million project in Haiti will develop for-profit businesses in the production and distribution of improved charcoal cookstoves and LPG stoves. Large charcoal consumers will be targeted for conversion to LPG. The project will target nearly 10,000 street food vendors in Port-au-Prince, along with about 800 schools, orphanages and other energy-intensive entities in and around the capital.

USAID will also assist the Haitian government in building a legal and regulatory framework for LPG, including rules to ensure safety, developing appropriate licensing regimes, discouraging predatory commercial practices and encouraging investment. In addition, by promoting more efficient charcoal stoves that produce less greenhouse gases, the project will be able to earn additional revenues that will go toward reducing the costs of stoves to customers and further expanding the improved cookstove market.

This activity reflects USAID’s support of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, a public-private partnership led by the United Nations Foundation. USAID is a founding partner of the Global Alliance, which seeks to encourage the adoption of 100 million clean stoves around the world by 2020. USAID’s

commitments to the Global Alliance focus on efforts to improve commercialization of the cookstove sector, provide stoves to displaced populations and reduce exposure to indoor air pollution.

“People have cooked over open fires and dirty stoves for all of human history, but the simple fact is they are slowly killing millions of people and polluting the environment,” said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton during the launch of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves. “The results of daily exposure can be devastating: Pneumonia, the Number 1 killer of children worldwide, chronic respiratory diseases, lung cancer and a range of other health problems are the consequence. By upgrading these stoves, millions of lives could be saved and improved.”

#### Water Management in Mideast Focus of USAID-University Partnership

22 February 2012

Washington – Increased food production and improved water management in the Middle East are the focus of a new partnership between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Nebraska.

“We look forward to deepening our partnership with the University of Nebraska as we help to build scientific and research capabilities throughout the world,” USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah said at a ceremony with university President James Milliken marking the signing of an agreement between the agency and the university.

Milliken said he was “delighted that the University of Nebraska has this unique opportunity to partner with USAID to address one of our most important shared concerns: the need to feed a rapidly growing global population with a limited amount of water.”

Through collaborative research, education and outreach programs, USAID and the university will focus on irrigation, groundwater management, rain-fed agriculture, and drought risk assessment and mitigation – areas important for global food security.

Shah and Milliken were joined at the signing ceremony by Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska; Representative Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska; Roberto Lenton, the new executive director of the University of Nebraska’s Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute; Mara Rudman, assistant administrator for USAID’s Middle East bureau; and John Wilson, director of the Office of Technical Services for USAID’s Middle East and Asia bureaus.

“The University of Nebraska’s Water for Food Institute is invested in exciting world-class research that may lead to

advances in farming technology of immense global impact," Fortenberry said.

Nelson said the partnership between USAID and the university "has the potential to have a lasting impact in a part of the world where water scarcity causes dangerous tensions between countries and severe suffering among people."

The partnership will support the Middle East North Africa Network of Water Centers of Excellence (MENA NWC), according to USAID. The network consists of 20 centers in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. MENA NWC also includes the University of Nebraska and four other U.S. universities and two international agriculture research centers.

The network links technical institutions across the Middle East and North Africa with each other and counterpart U.S. institutions to address water challenges confronting the region. MENA NWC helps build the regional capacity to improve water planning and management, expand water supply, manage demand, and dramatically increase its efficient and productive use.

### **Syria a Top Priority for U.N Human Rights Council, Donahoe Says**

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 22 February 2012

Washington — Syria will be a top priority at the upcoming session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, says Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, the U.S. representative to the council.

The 19th regular session of the council is set to be held February 27- March 23.

"I think there's an overwhelming consensus that the Assad regime must go; the violence has to stop," Donahoe said at a press conference at the Palais des Nations in Geneva February 22.

"Assad is being more and more isolated. Unfortunately, it's not yet universal. The condemnation isn't quite to that point yet, but it's moving in that direction," Donahoe said. She noted that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton will be attending the February 24 Friends of Syria meeting in Tunis with other world leaders to find ways to deliver humanitarian relief to the most threatened areas in Syria and look for other ways to pressure Assad to leave and end the violence.

The recent deaths of journalists in the Syrian conflict, Donahoe said, underscored the value of free media.

"Without a free media, human rights defenders and activists cannot get their messages out," she said. "The international community is not able to support the work or convey support for anyone in a closed society if we don't get their messages."

Marie Colvin, an American journalist, and French photographer Remi Ochlik died when a shell hit their makeshift media center February 22 in the Syrian city of Homs.

Regarding Sri Lanka, Donahoe said the United States firmly believes a Human Rights Council resolution is warranted that would call for real reconciliation based on a truthful accounting of the government's involvement in the large-scale civilian casualties that took place during the years-long civil war that finally ended in 2009.

"We are working to convince the Sri Lankan government that there has to be greater evidence of serious implementation of the recommendations in their own domestic report and greater accountability in order to satisfy the victims and the various communities that feel like they have not yet been heard," Donahoe said.

In her comments on Iran, Donahoe said the council's landmark resolution last March to establish a special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran will most probably be renewed.

"We hope to be able to increase pressure on the Iranian regime through either increased numbers or other potential language in the resolution to allow the special rapporteur to enter Iran," she said. "Whether that happens or not, we think there's real value in continuing this mandate because it shows the people inside Iran that the international community is paying attention and that the Iranian narrative about how they treat their people is not fooling anyone."

### **Chinese VP Xi Concludes U.S. Visit with Biden in California**

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 21 February 2012

Washington — Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping wrapped up a five-day trip to the United States with a stop in California that included meetings with U.S. government officials and private sector leaders and a visit with local schoolchildren who are studying Chinese.

"Cooperation between China and the United States cannot be closed by any force," Xi said in remarks to business leaders February 15 in Washington. "On the contrary, it will open wider and wider."

The vice president's trip came at the invitation of his U.S. counterpart, Vice President Biden, following Biden's trip to Beijing in August 2011. The trips have come as part of a series of reciprocal visits announced by President Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao during the latter's visit to Washington in 2011.

"China has made the most remarkable progress in the shortest amount of time of maybe any country in history," Biden said at a lunch to welcome Xi to Los Angeles February 17. Biden said that the United States welcomes China's gains, and that there is great potential for both countries to grow if they work together to solidify relations.

"The honest, sustained dialogue we've had this week can and will build a stronger relationship that benefits both our nations and our people," Biden said.

Xi also commended efforts to strengthen ties, calling on Chinese and American citizens to "seize opportunities, intensify exchanges, build trust, deepen cooperation and make China-U.S. cooperative partnerships grow."

In California, Biden and Xi visited students studying Mandarin at an international school, attended a professional basketball game and met with local leaders, U.S. governors and Chinese provincial officials. They also visited the port of Los Angeles, the busiest by volume in the United States, a stop that underscores the importance of the strong U.S.-China trade relationship. Nearly 60 percent of the imports moving through the port came from China in 2011, with bilateral trade topping \$446 billion for the year.

Before his visit to California, Xi stopped in Muscatine, Iowa, which he had visited on an exchange program when he was still an agricultural official in Hebei, Iowa's sister province. He visited his former hosts and met with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, who was also governor when Xi visited the state in 1985.

Xi's trip to the United States began with two days of talks in Washington, including meetings with President Obama, Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Army General Martin Dempsey and leaders from the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

The meetings covered a wide range of topics, including trade and economic issues, agriculture, security and military issues, human rights concerns and regional and global challenges.

The United States has been working to strengthen its relations in East Asia through the East Asia Summit, the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which Obama hosted last year in Hawaii. Obama also recently completed a trip across the region to expand U.S. trade and reaffirm U.S. security commitments, which are seen as a significant source of stability and security in the 21st century.

### **Agreement Paves Way for More U.S. Films in China**

21 February 2012

Washington – Chinese audiences will have access to significantly more U.S. films under a new agreement between the governments of China and the United States.

The agreement, announced by Vice President Biden's office February 17, is intended to resolve outstanding issues related to films after the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled in favor of a U.S. complaint in 2011.

"This agreement with China will make it easier than ever before for U.S. studios and independent filmmakers to reach the fast-growing Chinese audience, supporting thousands of American jobs in and around the film industry," said Vice President Biden, who spent February 17 in the Los Angeles area with Vice President Xi Jinping of China. "At the same time, Chinese audiences will have access to more of the finest films made anywhere in the world."

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, in the announcement on the White House website, said U.S. filmmakers view China as one of their most important world markets, "but barriers imposed by China and challenged by the United States in the WTO have artificially reduced the revenue U.S. film producers received from their movies in the Chinese market."

The Chinese film market is large and growing quickly. In 2011, the White House said, Chinese box office revenue was up to \$2.1 billion. Much of this revenue came from 3-D titles, which are a rapidly growing sector of the film industry.

The new agreement allows more American exports to China of 3-D, IMAX and similar enhanced format movies on favorable commercial terms, strengthens the opportunities to distribute films through private enterprises rather than the state film monopoly and ensures fairer compensation levels for U.S. blockbuster films distributed by Chinese state-owned enterprises, the White House said. The agreement will be reviewed after five years to ensure that it is working as envisioned.

## AGREEMENT STEMS FROM APRIL 2007 DISPUTE

The United States initiated the underlying WTO dispute in April 2007. In the dispute, the United States sought to address significant market access concerns relating to China's treatment of films for theatrical release, as well as other cultural products.

On films, a WTO panel found in a report issued in August 2009 that key Chinese film import restrictions were inconsistent with China's WTO obligations. In December 2009, after China appealed, the WTO Appellate Body rejected China's claims and upheld the panel's findings. China promised to come into compliance by March 2011, but informed the United States at the deadline that this would not be possible. The two sides have been making efforts to resolve their differences since then, the White House said.

The head of the major trade group representing U.S. film industry interests, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), called the agreement "a major step forward in spurring the growth of U.S. exports to China."

MPAA Chairman Christopher Dodd, who previously served as a U.S. senator from Connecticut, said on the group's website that the agreement will return a better share of box office revenue to U.S. studios, allow more than 50 percent more U.S. films into the Chinese market and protect intellectual property and jobs in both countries.

"By promoting the growth of a legitimate marketplace for U.S. movies in China, this agreement will also complement efforts to fight movie piracy and help protect the jobs of workers in both countries, whose livelihoods are dependent on a healthy entertainment industry," he said.

Dodd also praised U.S. and Chinese government officials for the work leading to the agreement. "We thank Presidents Obama and Hu, as well as Vice Presidents Biden and Xi for their leadership on this issue, along with the negotiators from both countries who worked so tirelessly to reach an agreement, especially U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Ron Kirk and his team for their enormous commitment to this effort," Dodd said.

## U.S. Awards Wildlife Conservation Grants for 60 Countries

21 February 2012

Washington — Partners in 60 countries in six regions will share nearly \$15.5 million in wildlife conservation grants from a U.S. agency to protect endangered wildlife.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is awarding the grants through its Wildlife Without Borders program. "These grants provide crucial assistance in the effort to prevent extinction by reducing threats to species survival and increasing the capacity of communities to value, conserve, and manage their wildlife," said USFWS Director Dan Ashe. "The Service's Wildlife Without Borders program funding is vital to saving some of our fastest disappearing and most treasured species, empowering people to help conserve key habitats, and form innovative conservation partnerships worldwide."

The \$15,484,700 in grant funding will leverage more than \$22 million in matching funds through partnerships with more than 170 nonprofit organizations, government agencies, universities and community groups.

Of the \$15.5 million total, \$12.5 million will conserve tigers, elephants, rhinos, apes, marine turtles, amphibians and other critically endangered species through Wildlife Without Borders-Species grants.

Wildlife Without Borders-Regional grants will provide \$2.9 million in support for capacity building and technical assistance in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico, and Russia and East Asia. The Wildlife Without Borders-Global program will also provide \$100,000 for migratory species conservation through the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative.

Funding will support a full range of priority conservation activities, USFWS said, including antipoaching, law enforcement, capacity building, community outreach, habitat restoration, disease research and mitigation of human-wildlife conflict. For example, in South Africa, CapeNature, a governmental organization, will control invasive pine trees to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire in rough moss frog habitat. In Indonesia, the Wildlife Conservation Society will conduct wildlife crime investigations and assist in the prosecution of poachers to protect Sumatran orangutans. In Colombia, Fundación Proyecto Titi will aid rural communities with sustainable development projects to reduce deforestation in cotton-top tamarin habitat.

The Wildlife Without Borders program is based on the fact that species do not recognize artificial boundaries — political or otherwise. USFWS says that too often political boundaries cut through specific ranges, fragmenting habitats and species conservation efforts. Further complicating the issue, according to USFWS, is that countries with the most diverse and ecologically significant wildlife often are those with the fewest resources for wildlife conservation.

The result, USFWS says, is that species survival is related directly to their worth to local communities. Therefore,

the Wildlife Without Borders program focuses on people by addressing grass-roots problems from a broad landscape perspective using capacity building and strengthening institutions as primary tools.

The three subprograms of Wildlife Without Borders – Species, Regional and Global – have supported more than 1,000 conservation projects in 80 countries from 2004 to 2008.

### **Obama Promotes U.S. Trade**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 17 February 2012

Washington – President Obama announced new measures to boost U.S. exports through sufficient financing as part of a broader goal he set two years ago to double U.S. exports in five years and help rebalance the economy, which has been driven by excessive consumer demand.

“Two years ago, I set a goal of doubling U.S. exports over five years,” Obama said February 17 at the Boeing aircraft production facility in Everett, Washington. “Today, we’re on track to meet that goal – ahead of schedule.”

The president also said that he is adding new measures to boost exports “that will help more American businesses sell their products around the world, create jobs right here at home and help us build an economy that lasts.” In the aftermath of the 2007–2009 recession, Obama said, he recognized that the United States needed to reduce its consumer demand and expand its exports to bring balance to the economy and reduce the impact of wide swings in the economic cycle.

Part of that effort is the president’s National Export Initiative, which is intended to help open markets for U.S. goods and level the trade environment for American businesses that have struggled at times to be competitive in the global marketplace.

Exports are up nearly 34 percent since 2009, exceeding \$2.1 trillion in 2011, according to the U.S. Commerce Department.

Obama also has signed into law a series of free-trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia and Panama that will boost exports of U.S. goods and services. Economists generally believe that a national economy that has a healthy mix of exports serves to bolster the base economy and stabilize employment over time.

Another administration measure extends the U.S. Export-Import Bank’s authorization. The bank provides direct loans, credit guarantees and credit insurance to U.S.

businesses so they can more effectively compete against foreign businesses that often receive financing from their governments. The bank set financing records in 2011 for the third straight year, with overall financing exceeding \$32 billion.

“This financing has supported \$41 billion in U.S. exports from over 3,600 U.S. companies and almost 290,000 export-related American jobs,” according to the White House.

The president proposed a number of measures to further advance U.S. exports including:

- Authorizing the Export-Import Bank to provide U.S. companies competing for domestic or third-country sales with matching financing support to counter foreign official financing that fails to observe international disciplines.
- Launching the Global Credit Express to help small-business exporters locate hard-to-find short-term lines of credit of as much as \$500,000.
- Calling for Congress to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank and boost its current lending ceiling, which is expected to run out at the end of March.
- Simplifying the process for foreign trade zones, which delay or reduce duty payments companies have to pay on foreign merchandise.
- Seeking legislation that will allow the administration to consolidate six government agencies and related programs into a single department that focuses on exporting and competitiveness for U.S. businesses.
- Issuing a presidential directive for the newly created Export Promotion Cabinet to work across agencies to maximize efforts to support U.S. trade priorities.

### **U.S., EU Want Sustained and Productive Talks with Iran**

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 17 February 2012

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton welcomed Iran’s apparent offer to resume talks with the United States and its partners in the P5+1 as “an important step” and said the offer is being closely analyzed.

“This response from the Iranian government is one we’ve been waiting for and if we do proceed, it will have to be a sustained effort that can produce results,” Clinton told reporters at the State Department February 17 in remarks with the European Union’s High Representative for

Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton.

site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)

Ashton has been representing France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, China and the United States – collectively known as the P5+1 – in discussions stemming over international concern that Iran is developing nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program.

In a written response to Ashton's October 2011 letter to Iranian officials, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said February 14 that his government is ready to resume nuclear talks with the P5+1 at the "earliest" opportunity.

Clinton said the P5+1 is now collectively engaged in thorough diplomatic consultations to evaluate Jalili's response.

According to Ashton's 2011 letter, the P5+1 had said any discussions with Iran would need to begin with talks about its nuclear activities.

"Iran's response to Cathy's letter does appear to acknowledge and accept that," Clinton said.

Ashton had also asked for assurances that there would be "a sustained effort by Iran to come to the table, to work until we have reached an outcome that has Iran coming back into compliance with their international obligations," Clinton said.

In her remarks, Ashton also welcomed the possibility that Iran may be ready to resume discussions.

"I am cautious and I am optimistic at the same time," Ashton said.

Iran last had talks with the P5+1 in January 2011, during which the group offered a series of suggested confidence-building measures Iran could take to help move the process forward. In addition, Ashton said the P5+1 has continued to offer its October 2009 proposal to provide Iran's Tehran Research Reactor with enriched uranium fuel, provided that the enrichment be done outside Iran to ensure that the uranium would not be enriched to a level that could be used for nuclear weapons.

"If we start the talks, we want to sustain them," and therefore there will need to be a process to allow P5+1 to clarify what they want to achieve and "what we're expecting from the Iranians," Ashton said.

"That's what we're in the process of doing right now," she said.

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