

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Urges Reforms as Path to Albania’s EU Membership	1
Analysis of Nearly 1,100 Human Genomes Could Help Treat Diseases	1
U.S. Response to Natural Disasters Taps Broad Range of Assets	2
U.S. Seeks Updated Definition of Conflict Diamonds.....	3
EU, U.S. Partner to Promote Global Open Investment Policies	5
University of Chicago Has Top Graduate Program in Economics.....	5

Secretary Clinton Urges Reforms as Path to Albania's EU Membership

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 01 November 2012

Washington — As Albania prepares to celebrate 100 years of independence, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton addressed the country's parliament.

She lauded Albania's rise since the end of communism and pledged U.S. support for its aspirations to join the European Union.

"We not only want to see our relationship grow even stronger, we want to see you grow even stronger," Clinton told Albanian lawmakers in Tirana November 1. "We want to see your economy, your democracy be the envy of people everywhere. We fully endorse Albania's EU aspirations because we think that will make you stronger," she said.

Albania proclaimed its independence from the Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912. Clinton said Albanians and Americans have shared a similar determination to be free and to build "a thriving democracy and a flourishing economy."

Albanians and Americans also hold a fierce desire to put past struggles behind them and "achieve a future of peace and opportunity for all," she said.

Albania deserves a place in the EU, Clinton said, but that will require the country to make critical decisions — such as ensuring that its 2013 parliamentary elections are verifiably free and fair. She called on all Albanians to "work hard to make this next election a success that reflects the depth of your commitment to democracy."

Consolidating Albanian democracy will also require strong governing institutions, including "an effective and impartial judiciary," open and accountable government, and tackling the problem of corruption, she said.

"This is a fight every country must wage and win, because all over the world, corruption is a cancer that eats away at societies. It drains resources, it blocks economic growth, it shields incompetent and unethical leaders, and perhaps worst of all, it creates a culture of impunity that saps people of their will to improve their own lives and communities," Clinton said.

POLITICAL LEADERS NEED TO PUT COUNTRY ABOVE PARTY

Clinton said corruption is "as old as human nature," and "if there were an easy answer, the world would have solved this a long time ago." To root out corruption,

Albania's leaders need to work constantly and in cooperation with their political rivals, Clinton said.

In terms of working cooperatively with political rivals, Clinton said she is still asked how she can work as President Obama's secretary of state after fighting a bitter and expensive political campaign against him for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2008.

"Believe me, I did everything I could to beat him, but he won," she said. Clinton said there is a "a very, very simple answer" to why she joined the Obama administration despite their campaign battle: "We both love our country."

In politics, individuals can hold different beliefs and each can feel that he or she would be the best leader, but "at the end, putting individual interests and party interests behind national interests is what democratic leaders are called to do," Clinton said.

The secretary said the United States has stood with Albanians since its independence and it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. She pointed out that, under communism, Albania was once "the most isolated country in Europe" whose people had endured invasion, occupation, dictatorship and deprivation.

Now it has elected representatives, is a valued member of NATO and is creating the conditions for better economic opportunities through entrepreneurship, trade and investment, she said.

"You have so much to celebrate now. This jubilee is not just about the past. It is a challenge to what you will become in the future," she said.

"As you make the tough decisions that are required for your further progress for moving, as you rightly belong, into the European Union, the United States will support you in these difficult decisions. We believe that we're in this together, the United States and Albania," Clinton said.

Analysis of Nearly 1,100 Human Genomes Could Help Treat Diseases

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 01 November 2012

Washington — An international scientific collaboration has produced an analysis of 1,092 human genomes identifying genetic variants that can lead to disease or robust good health.

The National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, helped fund the consortium of researchers in the United States, Britain, China, Germany and Canada. A NHGRI

press release calls the work “the largest, most detailed catalog of human genetic variation.” The results were published in the October 31 issue of Nature.

“The 1000 Genomes Project is a large, international effort aiming to characterize human genetic variation, including people from many different populations,” said Dr. Eric Green, NHGRI director. “The newly published findings provide deeper insights about the presence and pattern of variants in different people’s genomes, which is critical information for studying the genomic basis of human disease.”

Researchers will be able to use this data as a reference point when they look for disease in the genomes of particular individuals and compare subjects to the norm for their ethnic groups.

Populations from 14 countries in Europe, the Americas, East Asia and Africa provided genetic material that was the basis of the research.

“We are all walking natural experiments; some of our genes are switched off, some are active, whilst others are overactive,” said Professor Gil McVean of Oxford University, the lead author for the study. “Our research has found that each apparently healthy person carries hundreds of rare variants of genes that have a significant impact on how genes work, and a handful of rare changes that have been identified as contributing to disease in other people.”

The causes of complex conditions such as cancer, heart disease, multiple sclerosis and diabetes are thought to lie with these variants. Identification of these variants can help future researchers search for treatments and cures.

“The DNA donors in the study were not known to have any diseases, so the study gives us the genomic background we need for understanding which genetic variations are ‘within the normal range,’” said Aravinda Chakravarti, a professor of medicine at the Institute of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

The patterns of variants are considerably different, the research finds, in comparing subjects with varying ethnic backgrounds. Groups involved in the project include the Yoruba in Ibadan, Nigeria; the Han Chinese in Beijing; the Japanese in Tokyo; a Utah Mormon community; the Luhya in Kenya; African descendants in the southwest United States; the Toscani in Italy; Mexican descendants in Los Angeles; the Southern Han Chinese; English and Scottish of Britain; the Finnish in Finland; Spanish Iberian populations; the Colombians of Medellin; and Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico.

More than 100 authors from 111 institutions worldwide

contributed to the study, funded by NIH and other international agencies, according to a press release from the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

The first human genome sequence was completed in 2003, a scientific achievement that was compared to the Apollo moon landings in its scope and complexity.

U.S. Response to Natural Disasters Taps Broad Range of Assets

By Bridget Hunter | Staff Writer | 31 October 2012

Washington — When disaster strikes the nation, all elements of the U.S. government work together to save and sustain lives and restore livelihoods. Superstorm Sandy is no exception.

At the direction of President Obama, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), working closely with state and local governments, coordinates federal government assistance, including aid provided by the Defense Department’s military assets.

In such situations, the FEMA administrator — currently William Craig Fugate — is authorized by the president to ensure that federal partners make available all resources needed to support state, local, territorial and tribal communities.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with those in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states who’ve been affected by this storm,” Fugate said in an October 30 statement. “FEMA continues to provide the full support of the federal government for the life-saving and life-sustaining activities such as search and rescue, power restoration and debris removal that remain the top priorities of state, tribal and local governments.”

State governments identify what types of aid are needed and which communities need them. The governors of affected states contact the president to request a state-of-emergency declaration. Such a declaration authorizes deployment of federal assistance. Currently, much of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States are identified as operating in a state of emergency.

As of October 30, more than 1,900 FEMA personnel were working to support Hurricane Sandy disaster response and recovery operations, including search and rescue, situational awareness, communications and logistical support.

FEMA also reported nine federal urban search-and-rescue task forces were staged along the East Coast and are deploying into affected areas as needed, with an additional six federal urban search-and-rescue task forces placed on alert for activation if required.

Another element of FEMA response is logistical support. Mobile emergency response teams have been deployed to provide states with voice, video and information services, as well as operational support. FEMA also sent personnel to advise state and local emergency management authorities on alert and warning, evacuation and sheltering needs.

The agency maintains stockpiles of commodities, including more than 5 million liters of water, 3 million meals, 900,000 blankets and 100,000 cots at distribution centers strategically located throughout the United States and its territories.

WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CRISIS

In a national disaster, FEMA is on the front lines of emergency response, but it draws on the assets of many other federal entities.

Department of Defense personnel and equipment are helping affected communities by drawing on supplies positioned in advance of the storm at incident support units at Westover Air Reserve Base in Massachusetts and Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey.

More than 7,400 National Guard forces are directly supporting the governors of New York, Massachusetts, Virginia, New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maryland by helping local first responders at evacuation shelters, clearing roads and delivering essential equipment and supplies.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers mobilized temporary emergency power resources to provide support to areas affected by Sandy while other teams help with debris management, infrastructure assessment, temporary roofing, water planning and remediation of flood waters.

While the full extent of infrastructure damage is being assessed, the Department of Transportation announced October 30 that \$13 million in quick-release emergency relief funds are available to New York and Rhode Island to help begin repairing damage already identified.

The Department of Health and Human Services activated ambulance contracts to evacuate patients as needed and requested by states. The department also deployed two 50-person medical assistance teams to provide triage and basic care in shelters in New Jersey.

The Department of Energy worked closely with state and local officials responsible for coordinating with utility companies as they prepared for the storm and now work to restore power.

In preparation for the storm, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) placed inspectors in all nuclear power plants at risk for negative storm impacts. Out of caution, three reactors were shut down during the storm, while another plant, Oyster Creek in New Jersey, was closely monitored. The NRC will coordinate with other federal and state agencies prior to the restart of the affected plants.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service worked closely with local emergency management officials to track the storm, and its navigation response crews are beginning waterway surveys in the affected areas.

Along the nation's East Coast, the U.S. Coast Guard, part of the Department of Homeland Security, conducted search-and-rescue missions and continues to assess and advise on the status of ports.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is identifying available housing units to temporarily shelter those displaced by the storm. It also is speeding federal funds to New York and New Jersey to help homeowners and low-income renters forced from their homes by Sandy.

The Department of Agriculture's regional Food and Nutrition Service leadership is working with state commissioners and program administrators to meet food needs for emergency shelters and feeding sites and to assist with Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program requests.

The U.S. Postal Service is taking steps to restore mail service, including ensuring timely delivery of mailed ballots for the November 6 elections.

Throughout the affected area, state and local governments are cooperating with the American Red Cross to operate emergency shelters along the East Coast.

"The great thing about America is when we go through tough times like this we all pull together," President Obama said October 29 in advance of the storm's landfall. "We look out for our friends. We look out for our neighbors. And we set aside whatever issues we may have otherwise to make sure that we respond appropriately and with swiftness."

U.S. Seeks Updated Definition of Conflict Diamonds

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 31 October 2012

Washington — The United States will urge representatives at an international meeting on diamond certification to agree to an updated definition for "conflict diamond."

At the November 27-30 meeting at the State Department, the United States also will encourage the 77 countries that participate in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to strongly enforce certification rules. That will stem the illicit flow of diamonds used by rebel movements to fund wars against legitimate governments, said U.S. Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, who leads the 2012 U.S. chairmanship of the Kimberley Process.

Law enforcement and customs officials have been invited to a separate meeting that week to discuss better ways to combat fraud and improve international enforcement of the Kimberley Process. The State Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the World Customs Organization will host the meeting.

The United States and several other participants in the Kimberley Process have proposed that universal criteria be adopted that ensures that diamonds do not fuel conflict and that evidence of this is independently verifiable. The definition of conflict diamonds could also be applied to armed force between nations or protracted violence between groups within a country.

"Today, we see diamonds emerging from conflicts that do not involve the same types of rebel movements, but from broader contexts of conflict, and we believe the KP [Kimberley Process] should carefully consider how best to address this," Milovanovic said in a February blog post.

The reform proposal states that the concept of conflict diamond should not be applied to isolated incidents or to situations in which an armed conflict is not related to the diamond sector. It further states that certification should not address human rights, financial transparency or economic development, issues that "are better advanced through the exchange [among members] of best practices," Milovanovic said.

The proposal states that certification should be implemented on a site-by-site basis where diamonds are mined or cut and polished, and be consistent with groups like the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region that certify mined minerals.

FOUNDED IN 2003

The Kimberley Process was formed in 2003 when African diamond producers met in Kimberley, South Africa, to discuss ways to stop the trade in conflict diamonds and to ensure that diamond purchases would not finance violence by rebels and their allies. The process is open to all countries willing to adopt legislation and institutions to certify that diamonds have not been associated with conflict and to prevent diamonds involved in conflict from entering legitimate trade. Representatives of industry and civil society serve as Kimberley Process

observers. Unlike some international efforts, changes to the Kimberley Process must be adopted by consensus.

Milovanovic has worked to promote an understanding of the importance of updating the definition of conflict diamond and to protect consumer confidence. Addressing the World Diamond Conference in Mumbai in October, Milovanovic noted that in its nearly 10 years, the Kimberley Process has played a valuable role in diminishing conflicts around the world and in "maintaining the reputation of diamonds as symbols of purity, devotion and enduring love."

The proposal has received a strong endorsement from a coalition of leading U.S. diamond-industry groups that says the definition for conflict diamond should include all systemic violence. They want the Kimberley Process to evolve and to respond to public concerns about the diamond sector.

ENSURING STRONG DEMAND

"As U.S. chair, we are interested in helping to ensure that the demand for diamonds remains strong and predictable because the consumer continues to feel that diamonds have a good reputation and that this is a product they want to own," Milovanovic said in an April letter to Kimberley Process members.

Kimberley Process members account for nearly all of the global trade in rough diamonds, according to the Kimberley Process website. Millions of people from miners to gem cutters, polishers and retailers depend on diamonds for their livelihoods, Milovanovic said.

Concern about the definition for conflict diamond peaked in 2008 when diamonds from mines in the Marange area of Zimbabwe were associated with violence, Milovanovic said. Marange is a major source of rough diamonds.

Zimbabwe then began to reform its diamond industry, and at a 2011 meeting in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kimberley Process members decided to allow the country to resume diamond exports. One condition was that Zimbabwe make efforts to prevent conflict and allow Kimberley Process monitors and members of the country's civil society groups to visit Marange mines, Milovanovic said.

"There is a real risk that demand for and revenues from diamonds could be affected if the KP's standard is not updated and consequently no longer provides the assurances sought by today's and tomorrow's consumers," Milovanovic said. "The KP needs to act before consumer concerns reach crisis proportions."

EU, U.S. Partner to Promote Global Open Investment Policies

29 October 2012

Washington – Senior officials of the European Union and the United States met in Washington October 24 to continue discussions on global investment policy.

The talks have worldwide implications because the United States and the European Union are the world's largest sources and destinations for foreign investment. Trans-Atlantic investment benefits companies and workers by creating high-paying jobs, boosting exports and spurring innovation in both the United States and the European Union, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said.

The meeting of the Working Group on Investment, a dialogue of senior officials under the auspices of the Transatlantic Economic Council, was led for the United States by Assistant U.S. Trade Representatives Christine Bliss and L. Daniel Mullaney and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Deborah McCarthy. The European Union delegation was led by European Commission Director of Services and Investment, Intellectual Property and Public Procurement Rupert Schlegelmilch.

According to USTR, the two sides discussed global investment policy and third country issues of common concern, and reaffirmed their shared commitment to maintaining and promoting investment policies that are open, transparent and nondiscriminatory, including through the negotiation of "high-standard" international investment agreements.

In line with these objectives, USTR said, the United States and the European Union continue to promote their Shared Principles for International Investment, which were agreed upon in April.

The principles embody a number of shared core values, including a commitment to open and nondiscriminatory investment policies, a level competitive playing field, strong protections for investors and their investments, neutral and binding international dispute settlement, strong rules on transparency and public participation, responsible business conduct and narrowly tailored reviews of national security considerations.

The investment policy discussions and the April shared principles stem from a November 29, 2011, meeting of the Transatlantic Economic Council, a political body that seeks to oversee and accelerate government-to-government cooperation with the aim of advancing economic integration between the European Union and the United States.

At that 2011 meeting, U.S. Cabinet-level officials and EU commissioners urged that a joint set of international investment principles be developed to strengthen collaborative efforts to foster open investment policies.

After the shared principles were adopted in April, the Department of State and USTR issued a joint statement on their significance. "The United States looks forward to working with the EU to promote the principles around the world, including through the G8 Deauville Partnership with countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)," State and USTR said.

An April 10 joint U.S.-EU statement recognizes that governments can embrace these shared principles without compromising their ability regulate in the public interest.

"We believe that governments can fully implement these principles while still preserving the authority to adopt and maintain measures necessary to regulate in the public interest to pursue certain public policies. We further believe that governments should not seek to attract foreign investment by weakening or failing to apply such measures," the joint statement said.

University of Chicago Has Top Graduate Program in Economics

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer | 27 October 2012

Washington – The University of Chicago, consistently ranked as one of the best American institutions of higher learning by the magazine U.S. News & World Report, is a magnet for gifted students from around the globe. Today, international students comprise almost 19 percent of the school's student body.

UChicago, as it is popularly known, also boasts the number one U.S. graduate program in economics, according to the 2012 U.S. News rankings. The university's economics department is chaired by John List, a pioneering figure in experimental economics. Experimental economists conduct field or classroom experiments to analyze and explain economic activity.

In a recent UChicago News interview, List revealed that his career path began to take shape when he started buying and selling sports cards to help finance his undergraduate studies. At the time, he recalled, he noticed that mothers accompanied by young children were more likely than other customers to offer high prices for cards, typically because they were reluctant to barter with dealers when they had their children in tow.

Such decisions, he realized, offered a window into the nation's larger economic picture.

"It was a chance to apply what I was learning in college

about economics to a real-life situation," List said.

Ever since his earliest discoveries about consumer behavior, List has been testing economic theories using a creative and rigorous approach that has put him at the forefront of his field. Among other things, he has studied motivations behind charitable giving, the reasons why women are paid less in the workplace than men, and the origins of discrimination.

List's reputation as an innovator has attracted many students to the University of Chicago, including Yang Xu, a doctoral student from China. Xu and two other students were interviewed October 25 via email by the U.S. Department of State.

Xu said he enrolled in UChicago's graduate program in economics "because it was ranked one of the best economics Ph.D. programs in the world," and besides, "Professor List, one of my favorite professors, was at the University of Chicago."

"Professor List has always been quite helpful to his students," Xu said. "He gave me great suggestions on how to improve my second-year research paper." Also, UChicago's core and field courses "have provided me with powerful tools to conduct research in experimental economics and related fields."

Daniel Hedblom, a doctoral student from Sweden, was drawn to the UChicago economics program for the same reason as Xu. At first, though, "I actually did not know that much about experimental economics," he said.

Experimental economics "forces you to think differently" because "you are essentially creating your own data," unlike traditional economics, which relies on existing data, he explained. "You need creativity in all kinds of economic research, but the creativity you need for experimental economics is of a slightly different flavor."

Not long ago, Hedblom conducted an experiment that examined whether people are more willing to take away money that others earn through financial work rather than through manual labor. "Casual observation suggests that people are willing to support higher taxes for rich individuals working in finance," he said. "Is this because people believe there is something immoral [about finance]? Or is it because their income is perceived as mostly a result of luck? People seem to approve some inequalities, but not others."

Doctoral candidate Anushree Subramaniam, of Malaysia, said she came to the University of Chicago because of the "unparalleled faculty expertise" of its economics department.

Subramaniam took List's experimental economics class in 2011. By explaining the thought process behind experiments, List "trains you to be a better researcher," she said. "Experimental economics is a really fun field and demonstrates how humans sometimes behave quite differently from what we would expect."

All three students said they would recommend UChicago's economics program. "The Ph.D. program here is very rigorous and you need to be prepared to work very hard," Subramaniam said. "However, the learning opportunities are incredible."

"Many faculty members are famous, high-profile economists," but "they remain accessible to students," she said.

While pursuing degrees, UChicago students can also experience Chicago's cultural amenities and sporting traditions. "I am a hockey fan, so I really appreciate the [opportunity] to go and see the [Chicago] Blackhawks play once in a while," Hedblom said.

For her part, Subramaniam described Chicago as "a very vibrant city" with "lots of great architecture, museums, live concerts, comedy clubs [and] shopping."

"Graduate school in economics is like an endurance test," Hedblom added. "You either need to be in a department that you really like or in a city that you really like. Here, I actually have both."

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