

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Comprehensive Strategy Critical to Fighting Narcotics, Kerry Says

By Jane Morse | Staff Writer | 06 June 2013

Washington — A comprehensive strategy and strong partnerships are critical in fighting the scourge of narcotics, says Secretary of State John Kerry.

Speaking to the press June 5 in Antigua, Guatemala, Kerry called for vigilance on interdiction, enforcement and eradication “because all of those things are part of a comprehensive policy, and it is only in a comprehensive policy that we can make the greatest difference for our citizens.”

Kerry was in Guatemala to attend the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), the hemisphere's main political, juridical and social governmental forum. The OAS brings together 35 independent states in the Western Hemisphere to discuss issues of critical importance to all, most especially democracy, human rights, development and security. This year's focus was on controlling the spread of narcotics.

Under a mandate given OAS at the Sixth Summit of the Americas held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, in April 2012, OAS produced *The Drug Problem in the Americas 2013*. According to OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza, the report, which was discussed at the 2013 meeting, covers all stages of drug trafficking and its impact on public health and security. The report also provides possible scenarios for action by regional governments.

The United States, Kerry said, has already taken demand-reduction steps. They include, he said, much greater efforts to educate the public about the dangers of narcotics as well as prevention through law enforcement.

To squelch the siren call of narcotics, Kerry said, the Obama administration has put more money and effort into outreach programs in schools, police departments, youth groups and nongovernmental organizations.

As a result, demand for narcotics in general is down in the United States by 40 percent to 50 percent, Kerry said. “One of the ways that we've been able to achieve the reduction,” Kerry said, “is by changing the habits of people in the United States, and one of the ways we've done that is by increasing treatment.”

Kerry said that President Obama “has been very specific about wanting to change the dynamic between the United States and other countries on the subject of counternarcotics.”

The United States welcomes the focus on drug policy throughout the hemisphere that the OAS has chosen, Kerry said.

“We welcome this discussion,” the secretary said. “It's a very healthy, very important discussion. And we take very seriously our shared responsibility for dealing with world drug problems.”

“What we want to do now is build on existing partnerships,” Kerry said. “I believe that if the OAS governments continue to work side by side, we will make greater progress towards our common goals.”

Future Leaders Exchange Program Celebrates 20th Anniversary

06 June 2013

Washington — The U.S. Department of State is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program, the department announced June 5.

Since its creation by Congress in 1993, the program has sought to ensure long-lasting friendship and understanding by enabling young people from Eurasian countries to learn about the United States through yearlong high school exchanges.

Since 1993, more than 22,000 FLEX students, from 12 Eurasian countries, have received scholarships and spent a year living with American host families. During the program, students engage with their communities, attend high school, share culture, develop leadership skills and learn about American society.

FLEX participants have volunteered more than 1 million hours of service across the United States during the lifetime of the program. Current participating countries include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

FLEX program alumni have gone on to do important work. Elena Milashina, a FLEX program 1994 alumna, was recognized with the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award for her bold work as a journalist and human rights activist. Milashina was one of just nine women who received the award in 2013 at a March 8 ceremony at the State Department.

“Elena Milashina is one of the most influential and respected journalists in Russia,” Secretary of State John Kerry said during the award ceremony. “She's built a career investigating drug trafficking, terrorism, military disasters and the killings of fellow journalists.”

"In the face of threats from her government, corporations and even private citizens, Elena has continued to expose the truth and to combat negative influences in Russian society," Kerry said. "She bears the scars of physical and verbal assaults, but she also carries the confidence of the many whose lives she has made better through her commitment."

On June 6, 180 current students, alumni, host families, and nongovernmental organization partners of the FLEX program attended an anniversary celebration at the State Department. They were also joined by members of Congress at a formal reception on Capitol Hill hosted by Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Ann Stock.

The Rial Is Next Target for Pressuring Iran on Nuclear Activities

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 06 June 2013

Washington – Starting July 1, the United States will be able to impose sanctions on financial institutions that conduct significant transactions or hold accounts that are dominated by Iran's currency, the rial. The measure is the latest in long-standing U.S. efforts to deter Iran from its illicit nuclear activities.

Speaking to the U.S. Senate's Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee June 4, Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen said the measure is aimed at making the rial "essentially unusable" outside Iran and further isolating Iran from the international financial system and commercial markets.

Over time, the United States has tried to target its actions on the parts of Iran's economy and financial system "that have the greatest likelihood of affecting the calculation of the leadership," Cohen said.

"We are taking direct aim at the rial because we have seen that its value and stability is of great importance to the Iranian regime. Already the rial has lost some two thirds of its value in the last two years. And when it plummeted uncontrollably last fall, the regime was rattled," he said.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman told the committee that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is "the sole decisionmaker" on Iran's nuclear activities and its approach to diplomatic discussions with the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, collectively known as the P5+1.

"He's affected by others around him, but he is the sole decisionmaker when it comes to the strategic calculation about whether to really deal in these negotiations. We

believe he will do that when he thinks there's a greater risk to him to not doing it than to doing it. ... We don't think he's made that calculation yet. We think we're getting closer to the potential for him doing so," Sherman said.

Along with the upcoming restrictions on the rial, the United States has also recently enacted sanctions targeting Iran's automotive sector and expanding its sanctions on Iran's petrochemical sector. Its efforts to pressure Iran economically have been joined by the European Union, Australia, Canada, Norway, the Republic of Korea and Japan, as well as separate United Nations Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions in response to Iran's continued nuclear activities.

Sherman said history has shown that sanctions will only have an impact on a country's behavior over time as they take a cumulative effect on its economy and international isolation.

The sanctions have not yet changed the Iranian government's calculus, but Sherman said there had been some indications in the latest P5+1 negotiating sessions in April that the sanctions are beginning to have some impact on Iran's leadership.

"For the first time, Iran was very, very vocal about its desire to have sanctions removed, particularly financial and oil sanctions, which are, of course, connected to each other in terms of viability. And we are not in any rush, of course, to remove any sanction until we see concrete, verifiable results that can be monitored and cannot be reversed," she said.

Cohen said that through sanctions, "we've been able to isolate Iran from the international financial system and drive down Iran's oil exports by some 50 percent over the last 18 months. In addition, Iran's dwindling oil revenues have been locked up by sanctions that require that Iran's oil earnings can only be used for limited purposes."

Sherman said the United States is aware that international consumers of Iran's oil "can't go to zero overnight" and said it is working to ensure it is "withdrawn from the market in a timed and phased way that does not raise global oil prices." But "exceptions require real and substantial action by our partners" in pressuring Iran to end its nuclear activities, she said.

"The onus is on Iran, not on our partners, because we have to keep the international coalition together. We want to make sure that we help our friends and allies replace any petroleum needs that they have as they make these reductions and changes, and that the world community can sustain that and can sustain prices that are acceptable to consumers, even with the need to put pressure on

Iran," she said.

The committee chairman, Senator Timothy Johnson (Democrat from South Dakota), said that ultimately it will be up to Khamenei to decide how to respond to the international pressure.

"He has remained indifferent to the sufferings of his own people and to their demands for political, economic and social reform. It seems clear that his decision to continue Iran's illicit nuclear activities will not be reversed without intensified economic pressure coupled with heightened political and diplomatic efforts by the P5+1 group," Johnson said.

Rover Heads for New Destination in Mars Exploration

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 06 June 2013

Washington — The rover Curiosity and the scientific instruments of the Mars Space Laboratory (MSL) have been tested and proven in the last nine months. Now NASA points the rover in a new direction, heading for a mountain about 8 kilometers away.

Scientists think there's a lot to explore and examine along the way. The rover has traveled more than 730 meters since NASA landed the spacecraft on Mars in August 2012, investigating surface features in an area smaller than a football field. Engineers and scientists have tried out most of the craft's instruments and capabilities at this pace, and found them to be performing as expected.

During a June 5 news briefing, NASA officials speaking from the mission's control center at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California called the start of the trip to Mount Sharp the "biggest turning point" of the mission since the landing.

"We're hitting full stride," said Mars Science Laboratory (MSL) Project Manager Jim Erickson. "We needed a more deliberate pace for all the first-time activities by Curiosity since landing, but we won't have many more of those."

Mount Sharp was selected as a destination for the MSL mission before Curiosity ever left Earth. Scientists studied orbital images of the surface to identify geologic formations that might offer clues to the mystery Curiosity is trying to solve: at some time in the past, did the Martian environment support life?

Images taken by the craft orbiting Mars have already shown Mount Sharp's geology is "preserving a record of how things were in the past and how they've changed, as you go from the older rocks at the bottom to younger rocks at the top," said MSL Deputy Project Scientist Joy Crisp.

Questioned by journalists about when the car-sized Curiosity will reach the mountain, Crisp said planning the rover's itinerary is like a vacation — you want to see everything in the place where you are, while you're also eager to see over the next horizon. In the 730 meters the rover has traveled so far, scientists have already noted a few places they want to take a second look at, so they'll be making those stops along the way.

"Just like a geologist on a field trip," Crisp said, "we're going to tend to stop at [rocky] outcrops where there's large exposures of rock sitting in place where it originally formed."

The JPL team plans a stop at a rock formation examined earlier, named Shaler. Analysis of images taken on the first pass concluded that the site is a dried up stream bed. Crisp said Curiosity will stop there to conduct "paleo-hydrology."

"We want to study the geometry of the layers and structures to figure out how fast and in what directions the water was flowing," Crisp explained, "and what the water depth was when the streams were forming these rocks."

After the second look at the Shaler formation, the journey to Mount Sharp will begin in earnest in a few weeks, according to Erickson. But keeping the 8-kilometer journey on an arbitrary schedule to reach the 5-kilometer-high mountain is not a priority.

"I would hazard a guess that somewhere between 10 months [and] a year might be something like a fast pace," Erickson said

The rover's many cameras will be recording images all along the way, and those images may give reason to stop the craft's progress to examine interesting formations.

Vice President Biden: The Americas Ascendant

05 June 2013

This commentary by Vice President Biden originally appeared in the Wall Street Journal on June 5. There are no republication restrictions for use by U.S. embassies.

The Americas Ascendant

By Vice President Joe Biden

The spread of free trade and democracy has been a boon to the hemisphere.

Last week, during a five-day trip through Latin America and the Caribbean, I visited a cut-flower farm outside Bogota, Colombia, an hour's drive from downtown that would have been impossibly dangerous 10 years ago.

Along the way I passed office parks, movie theaters and subdivisions, interspersed with small ranches and family businesses. At the flower farm, one-quarter of the workers are female heads of households. The carnations and roses they were clipping would arrive in U.S. stores within days, duty free.

What I saw on the flower farm was just one sign of the economic blossoming in the year since a U.S. free-trade agreement with Colombia went into force. Over that period, American exports to the country are up 20%.

The U.S. experience with Colombia reflects a larger economic boom across the Western Hemisphere that offers many exciting partnership opportunities for American business. In Rio de Janeiro, I met with Brazilian and American business leaders – representing the aerospace, energy, construction and manufacturing sectors – who laid out a remarkable vision for prosperity that spans the Americas. As these business leaders made clear, Latin America today is a region transformed. Elections that once were exceptions are now largely the norm. In a growing number of places, conflicts between left and right have given way to peaceful, practical governance. And in the process, Latin America's middle class has grown 50% in the past decade alone. By some estimates, it is nearly the size of China's.

There is enormous potential – economically, politically and socially – for the U.S. in its relations with countries of the Western Hemisphere. And so the Obama administration has launched the most sustained period of U.S. engagement with the Americas in a long, long time – including the president's travel to Mexico and Costa Rica last month; my own recent trip to Colombia, Trinidad, and Brazil; Secretary of State Kerry's participation in the Organization of American States' annual meeting in Guatemala; the president of Chile's visit to Washington this week and a planned visit to Washington by the president of Peru. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff arrives in Washington in October for the first state visit of the second term.

As leaders across the region work to lift their citizens out of poverty and to diversify their economies from commodity-led growth, the U.S. believes that the greatest promise – for Americans and for our neighbors – lies in deeper economic integration and openness.

The process is further along than you might think. Not only is the U.S. deepening what is already a trillion-dollar trading relationship with Mexico and Canada – we also have free-trade agreements that stretch nearly continuously from Canada to Chile.

One of the most promising developments is the year-old Alliance of the Pacific among Chile, Colombia, Peru and

Mexico. This pact, involving four of the region's fastest-growing countries, now has nations across the world seeking to participate or to play a positive supporting role. We're one of those nations. By committing to lowering trade barriers and integrating diplomatic and commercial interests, alliance members are showing that pragmatism, not ideology, is the secret to success. The effort also serves as a reminder of the deep connections between our enhanced engagement in this hemisphere and our Asia-Pacific rebalance.

For Brazil, as for the U.S., one of the most important frontiers is energy. From biofuels to deep-water oil reserves to shale gas to hydroelectric, Brazil is energy-rich, and that has tremendous implications globally. Brazil already is a leading expert in renewables and deep-water extraction, but both of our countries can advance further if we work together. I know from my meeting with President Rousseff that Brazil is equally committed to an energy partnership.

Ultimately, all of these economic opportunities rest on democratic protections and citizen security. Through the Inter American Democratic Charter, the nations of the hemisphere committed to promote and defend representative democracy; this commitment remains as important as ever to the success of the Americas. And from Mexico to the Caribbean to Colombia, we remain invested in long-term security partnerships. The U.S. will continue to stand by Colombia as it seeks to bring an end to the longest-running conflict in the Americas and inspires other countries in the region to overcome their own challenges.

That's going to require some honest conversations, like the one that will take place next week at the OAS General Assembly on drug policy. Similarly, many countries have serious concerns about weapons coming from the U.S. and are angry about our criminal-deportation policy for its lack of transparency. We won't shy away from these kinds of difficult discussions.

Here at home, we need to reform our immigration system because it is the right thing to do for our own country. But it also will strengthen our standing in the hemisphere. Success in international relations, like any relationship, comes down to respect. And fully realizing the potential of these new relationships requires treating people from other nations living inside our borders with respect.

The changes under way invite the U.S. to look at Latin America and the Caribbean in a very different way. The defining question for U.S. policy is no longer "what can we do for the Americas?" It is "what can we do together?"

In the 1990s, we imagined a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. Today, I believe we can credibly envision an

Americas that is solidly middle-class, secure and democratic – from the Arctic Circle to the Tierra del Fuego and everywhere in between.

(Joe Biden is the vice president of the United States.)

China, U.S. Share Priorities on Climate Change

05 June 2013

Washington – President Obama is preparing for a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping June 7-8 as U.S. presidential advisers lay the groundwork for future agreements to advance a shared agenda.

The two nations have already identified shared priorities in their concern for climate change and the need for actions to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Obama administration's special envoy for climate change, Todd Stern.

"We believe that forceful, nationally appropriate action by the United States and China – including large-scale cooperative action – is more critical than ever," Stern said in a statement issued in Beijing June 3. Stern had meetings with Vice Chairman Xie Zhenhua of the National Development and Reform Commission, who oversees energy policies.

China and the United States, the world's two largest economies, issued a joint statement on climate change in April and established a working group to advance cooperation on technology, research, conservation, and alternative and renewable energy. Stern was in Beijing as chairman of that group, which seeks "to identify concrete, pragmatic actions that our two countries can take together to reduce our emissions in various sectors."

In the fifth year of the Obama administration, Stern also cited a number of steps taken in several arenas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions contributing to planetary warming trends. Those actions include:

- New fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks.
- Development of clean energy technologies.
- A twofold increase in renewable energy generation.
- Wider application of energy efficiency standards.

The U.S. Department of Energy presented evidence of U.S. efficiency gains in late May with the release of a progress report on the Better Buildings Challenge (BBC). More than 100 partners in the initiative have adopted better practices in 7,700 facilities, for an overall 2.5 percent increase in efficiency. The BBC partners are working to increase efficiency by 20 percent by the year 2020 in public and commercial buildings, one of the nation's most energy-intensive sectors.

Stern said the Beijing discussions "hold promise for reducing emissions in various segments of our economies." He said the working group will continue to work "to prepare the new initiatives." The group is on a deadline to present new ideas at a Strategic and Economic Dialogue to be held in Washington in July.

The United States and China established the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) in 2009 as a platform to create a positive and cooperative relationship between these two major nations that have so much influence on global economic and environmental issues.

The June 7-8 California meeting will be the first between Obama and Xi since Xi became China's president. The two had a White House meeting in 2012 when Xi traveled to the United States, serving as vice-president at that time. The two leaders have spoken on the telephone since Xi took office.

Biotechnology Should Be Central to Food Security, Researcher Says

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 05 June 2013

Washington – Scientists worldwide believe that genetic engineering should play a central role in meeting the growing global demand for food, says Jon Entine, founder of the Genetic Literacy Project.

"Modern conventional technology alone is not enough," Entine said June 4 at the Cato Institute, a Washington policy research organization. Entine said that by 2050, the world's farmers will need to produce 70 percent to 100 percent more food than they do today.

"We can have organic gardens. That's a great choice for some of us in affluent countries. But if you are a citizen of the world ... organic farming simply will not feed enough children," he said. Entine also is a senior fellow at the Center for Health and Risk Communication at George Mason University in Virginia.

He said that although conventional breeding "has turned inedible wild grains like corn and wheat into delicious modern varieties," the technology is imprecise and can introduce unpredictable genes with unwanted characteristics into a variety along with genes with desired characteristics. "It can take decades to weed them out," slowing the development of beneficial new varieties, he said.

In contrast, Entine said, genetic engineering – or crop biotechnology – can introduce genes with desired characteristics without also introducing genes responsible for unwanted characteristics.

"It's precise," he said. That is something that is attractive

to farmers eager to get new seeds that can produce higher yields and are resistant to pests, he added.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture supports the safe and appropriate use of science and technology, including biotechnology, to help meet the food needs of the 21st century. USDA plays a key role in assuring that products produced using biotechnology in the United States are safe. Once these products enter U.S. commerce, USDA supports bringing these and other biotech products to world markets.

Entine said crop biotechnology first became commercially available in 1996 and is now used by 17 million farmers in 28 nations, 90 percent of them smallholders in developing countries. There also are other signs of biotech's growing acceptance, he said, pointing out that 81 percent of the world's soybeans and cotton are biotech, as is 35 percent of the world's maize and 30 percent of its canola.

"The trends increasingly show that the developing world has been and will be embracing this technology," he said.

Speaking about concerns that some who oppose biotech crops have expressed, Entine pointed out that more than 1,000 scientific studies and major scientific organizations, including the National Academy of Sciences in the United States, the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, the World Health Organization and the Union of German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, have concluded that genetically modified foods are safe for human and animal consumption.

He said that scientists are developing new crops that greatly reduce the need for polluting fertilizers and that show resistance to drought and floods. "We have new animal breeds and innovations to protect us from nature's dangerous side, for instance, by knocking out the proteins in fruits and nuts like peanuts that cause debilitating allergies," he added.

Kevin Folta, interim chair of the horticulture department at the University of Florida, said humans have been doing genetic crop breeding and selection for more than 20,000 years, for instance, turning a bushy weed with small ears of rock hard kernels into the modern maize that is a staple crop today.

Other examples of domesticated, tasty crops that had inedible, wild beginnings are bananas and tomatoes, he said.

"In all cases, humans were the driver of the genetic modification of these species," Folta said. "It was done by selecting what tasted best, what would perform best and wouldn't make you sick. This was the idea of breeding and selection."

Wearable Air Pollution Sensor Wins Innovation Prize

05 June 2013

Washington — New technology that creates a personal, portable and wearable air pollution sensor, developed under the My Air, My Health Challenge, was announced June 4 at the Health Datapalooza in Washington as the prizewinner. The grand prize of \$100,000 was awarded to Conscious Clothing.

The challenge was held by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Health Datapalooza is intended to encourage innovation and partnerships between technology specialists and health professionals to further biomedical research and solve health problems, NIH said. Conscious Clothing's design was chosen from four finalists.

The winning team created the Conscious Clothing system, a wearable breathing analysis tool that calculates the amount of particulate matter that is inhaled. The system uses groove strips, stretchy, conductive strips of knitted silver material wrapped around the rib cage, to measure breath volume. The device collects and transmits data in real time, via Bluetooth, to any Bluetooth-capable device.

"With people wearing these new data-collecting devices, researchers will be able to see and understand the relationships between varying levels of air pollutants and individual health responses in real time. This is a big step toward treating and, more importantly, preventing disease and illness," said Linda Birnbaum, director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, part of NIH. "This is an exciting time in research."

"This integration of technologies represents a growing area of interest for environmental and health scientists," said Glenn Paulson, EPA science adviser. "We're at the edge of a technology wave where anyone can use these sensors. The potential impact on personalized health and local environmental quality is tremendous."

"The finalists for this challenge demonstrate that health information technology can range from personal, wearable sensors to integrated hospital electronic health record systems," said National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (IT) Farzad Mostashari. "The benefits of health IT, whether being worn by a single person or managed throughout a large hospital, will have similar results in helping keep people healthy."

NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 institutes and centers and is a component of the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research and is investigating the causes, treatments and cures for both common and rare diseases.

The United States shares scientific research and works with partner institutions globally. A November 2012 White House report said U.S. science and technology innovation also says much about the national character.

“It is the evidence of a commitment to a better world not driven only by individual self-interest but also by a desire to pool talents and discoveries that promote the general welfare,” that report said.

“But beyond such benefits, science and research also speak to the national character. They are indicators that facts and proof actually matter, that ideas are strengthened by the unfettered discourse among peers, and that justice is based not on rhetoric but on conclusions drawn from fact and reason.”

Further, it is an American social value, according to the report, “to be generous in bringing healthier lives to our own neediest and to the world.”

U.S. Agencies Campaign to Reduce Food Waste

04 June 2013

Washington – Feeding the hungry, preventing waste, saving money and cleaning the air are the multiple objectives in sight for World Environment Day 2013. U.S. government agencies join a U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) campaign for preventing huge amounts of food waste that occur in nations everywhere.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the launch of the Food Waste Challenge June 4, calling for support from farmers, retailers, consumers and food processors and manufacturers to lessen a mountain of food that ends up as garbage.

“Food waste is the single largest type of waste entering our landfills – Americans throw away up to 40 percent of their food,” said EPA Acting Administrator Bob Perciasepe. “Addressing this issue helps to combat hunger and save money, while also combating climate change.”

In U.S. landfills, food waste decomposes to become methane, one of the greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. Food production and transportation also contribute to greenhouse emissions, so preventing waste contributes to further reducing the energy consumed and the emissions produced in those activities.

USDA and EPA are asking American individuals, businesses and institutions to attack the problem three ways: reduce food loss and waste, recover wholesome food for human consumption and recycle discards to other uses, including animal feed, composting and energy generation.

EPA already has some tools in place to help the public achieve these goals, developed from a food recovery program launched in 2012. More than 200 businesses, universities and other organizations have made the commitment to prevent food from entering their landfills with a three-pronged strategy. They take greater care in estimating food needs, divert what exceeds their needs to other users and compost waste into organic material that nurtures further food production.

The EPA Food Recovery Program has won the backing of industry heavyweights such as the Grocery Manufacturers of America and the National Restaurant Association.

For World Environment Day June 5, UNEP is asking people to reduce their “foodprint” and follow recommendations similar to that advocated by EPA. UNEP quotes a U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimate that 1.3 billion tons of food go to waste each year, at the same time one in every seven persons worldwide is hungry each day.

Food waste goes beyond the loss of calories and nutrients that a hungry child might need, according to UNEP. It also uselessly discards resources and energy consumed to produce the foodstuffs.

“For example, it takes about 1,000 litres of water to produce 1 litre of milk and about 16,000 litres goes into a cow’s food to make a hamburger,” according to a UNEP document.

UNEP cites food production as the cause of 80 percent of deforestation and 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

U.S. Researchers Search for More Nutritious Rice

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 04 June 2013

Washington – U.S. researchers have discovered varieties of rice that appear to have increased calcium and other varieties that keep arsenic out of developing grains, findings that eventually could benefit rice farmers and consumers around the world.

Calcium is a mineral important to human bone structure and can lead to increased resistance to diseases and environmental stresses. Arsenic is a mineral contained in grain, but if consumed in excess can be harmful to human

health. "Finding factors that can keep it out of the food chain is important," said rice geneticist Shannon Pinson, who is part of a group of researchers looking to find genes that affect how rice varieties take in or store one or more of 16 essential dietary minerals, including zinc and iron.

The goal of the group's study is to provide breeders with the knowledge they need to conventionally develop new varieties of rice that have bolstered nutritional value, said Pinson, who studies rice at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Dale Bumpers National Rice Research Center in the lower Midwestern state of Arkansas, which grows nearly half of America's rice crop. Since conventional breeding doesn't require genetic engineering, it is acceptable to many consumers, she added.

Rice provides more than 40 percent of the global population's daily calories, and is low-fat and easy to digest. The grain could be a primary protein source in parts of the world where rice is a diet staple, Pinson said.

Starting in 2007 with funding from the National Science Foundation, Pinson and colleagues at Purdue University in Indiana and Dartmouth College in New Hampshire studied three groups of rice represented by 1,643 lines, or accessions, collected from 114 countries and stored in USDA's rice seed collection of more than 17,000 domestic and nondomestic wild rice accessions.

They grew seeds in controlled flooded and nonflooded test plots at the joint USDA and Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center in Beaumont, Texas, looking for desired genetic traits, such as increased calcium content. Flooding is not essential for rice plant growth, but it provides a nonchemical form of weed control, Pinson said.

"We've crossed these accessions with the U.S. cultivar Lemont and are now evaluating the seed of second-generation plants for extreme concentrations of these minerals," she said. A cultivar is an improved group of plants, or variety, selected for desirable traits like yield, disease resistance and grain quality. Breeders select individual varieties for desired combinations of traits, Pinson said. Lemont is an early-maturing long-grain rice developed in 1983 by USDA and Texas A&M University.

The research team found that there is a wide range of mineral concentrations in rice varieties collected from around the world. It found that mineral concentrations fluctuated more in rice grown in nonflooded fields than in flooded fields, for nongenetic or environmental reasons. By studying plants grown in both soil conditions, the team was able to surmise something about how the genes affect element intake, Pinson said. Rice with the highest levels of minerals like molybdenum, important for plant nitrogen nutrition, is often deficient in acidic soils.

Increased ability to take up the mineral from soils can be a factor related to acid tolerance, Pinson said.

"I'm trying to find the genes that control the nutritional value of rice," the researcher said.

The team also has identified genes that affect other features such as grain shape, heading time and plant height, characteristics that are controlled by the chemistry of the weather and soil.

Through its Agricultural Research Service (ARS), USDA has been a significant contributor to progress in agriculture that has benefited farmers, consumers and the environment, said Anna McClung, another USDA geneticist. ARS projects focus on crop and animal science, food safety, nutrition and the preservation of natural resources.

In the early 1800s, USDA collected rice cultivars from Japan, Taiwan, Honduras, the Philippines, India and Madagascar and later from countries represented at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. That was followed by field studies in Arkansas, Texas, California, South Carolina and Virginia.

Some of the first rice varieties developed through breeding were released for commercialization in the United States in the 1940s.

Hagel Meets with Malaysia, Singapore Leaders

By Karen Parrish | American Forces Press Service |
03 June 2013

This article was originally posted to the Department of Defense website on June 2.

Singapore – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel met with counterparts from Singapore and Malaysia this weekend following his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue and a series of bilateral and trilateral meetings June 1.

Hagel is attending the 2013 Asia-Pacific security conference that this year drew hundreds of political and military leaders and experts from 27 countries in the region and beyond.

Hagel met separately here June 1 with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen to discuss a range of regional security issues, Pentagon press secretary George Little said.

"Prime Minister Lee and Defense Minister Ng welcomed the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region and noted the importance of robust U.S. engagement in the region," Little said. "They also reaffirmed the importance of the United States forward deploying on a rotational basis its

first littoral combat ships to Singapore to enable the United States to increase its engagement with the region.”

During the meetings, Hagel thanked the Singaporean leaders and people for their contributions to coalition operations, including in Afghanistan, Little said.

Hagel met June 2 with Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, Little said.

The press secretary said defense cooperation with Malaysia continues to grow, particularly through exercises, training, and interoperability, and reflects the importance each country places on the strengthening relationship.

During the meeting, he said, both leaders emphasized the importance of working bilaterally and multilaterally toward greater stability in Southeast Asia and beyond. They also discussed cyber issues and transnational threats. Hagel received an invitation to visit Malaysia and accepted, Little said.

Hagel thanked Hishammuddin for Malaysian Armed Forces medical personnel who will continue to play an important role contributing to stability in Afghanistan, Little said.

Safe Water, Sanitation Reaching Indonesia's Urban Poor

31 May 2013

Washington – In spite of Indonesia’s hard-won status as an emerging middle-income country, only around 40 percent of its urban households have access to clean water, and just over half have access to basic sanitation.

As in many countries with similar levels of coverage, it is low-income households that suffer the most. That is where the Indonesia Urban Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (IUWASH) Project comes in.

The \$33.7 million, five-year effort, which began in 2011 and is part of the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership, works in more than 50 municipalities across the archipelago to help provide access to safe water for up to 2 million people in urban areas and access to improved sanitation for up to 200,000 people.

“Water and sanitation are basic human needs that must be within reach of everyone, but for many in Indonesia, this is still not the case,” said Andrew Sisson, director of USAID's Indonesia mission.

“The government of Indonesia recognizes the importance of ensuring equity in the development process, including offering a path for low-income households to access water

and basic sanitation services. The United States, through USAID, is very pleased to support them in their efforts,” Sisson said.

FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIP

One challenge of urban water supply and sanitation development is the large number of organizations that have an important role to play. These include the water utilities and private businesses that handle service delivery; the communities and households that rely on such services for their health and economic well-being; and the government institutions that are responsible for policies and planning to guide development.

The USAID project works with these groups, including national government agencies and private-sector partners, from small businesses to banks and large companies.

According to the Indonesia mission's environmental office director, John Hansen, by working together with this range of stakeholders, there is an ability to generate real, sustainable change. Leaving out any one of these key actors would jeopardize the success of the effort, he said.

“IUWASH works at the intersection of communities, local governments and utilities to improve advocacy, capacity and regulation in water and sanitation services delivery,” said Tri Linggoatmodjo, a program management specialist with USAID’s Indonesia mission. “IUWASH is organized around these three key stakeholder groups and has programs in place to support municipalities in most every critical area: from building citizen awareness of important sector issues to improving the efficiency of utilities to assisting local government in developing more effective policies and institutional support structures.”

ONE WOMAN’S STORY

Like other women in her community, Lilik Amana used to haul water back to her house from the Cumpleng River or from a nearby reservoir that was only sometimes full. The daily chore was backbreaking and took time away from taking care of her family.

For Amana and her neighbors in East Java, the partnerships fostered by IUWASH have made piped water affordable. Amana’s household is one of more than 100 in her community that have signed up for IUWASH-supported microfinance programs, which bring together banks and water utilities to design programs suited to the needs of low-income households. The loan process is simple and straightforward, typically with loans processed within a couple of days and the pipes installed within a week of loan approval.

“For the first time, I have piped water to my home that I

can use for cooking, bathing and washing,” Amana says. “I no longer have to haul water back from the river, and the monthly payment of [approximately \$9] is affordable. I also have more time for my kids, and we all have more water for our daily needs.”

A total of 4,000 households across Indonesia have received IUWASH loans to pay for piped water installation. Loans are now expanding into the sanitation realm, and are showing similarly promising results.

TAKING ACTION ON SANITATION

In some respects, urban sanitation presents greater challenges than access to clean water, USAID says. With only about 2 percent of urban households connected to sewerage systems, up to 18 percent of urbanites practice open defecation.

IUWASH works closely with the government of Indonesia on several initiatives, such as Community-Based Total Sanitation, which helps families construct environmentally safe latrines with proper wastewater septic systems.

IUWASH also works with local health department staff and community leaders to assess local conditions, undertake special promotional events, and get local leaders and households to develop improved sanitation facilities. These activities are designed to increase awareness of good sanitation and encourage households to take action.

“It is very encouraging to see that people are willing to change because they want to change, and not just because they have to. It takes time, but it’s worth it,” says one local leader, Karim of the Kampung Pekong neighborhood in the Tangerang district of West Java.

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