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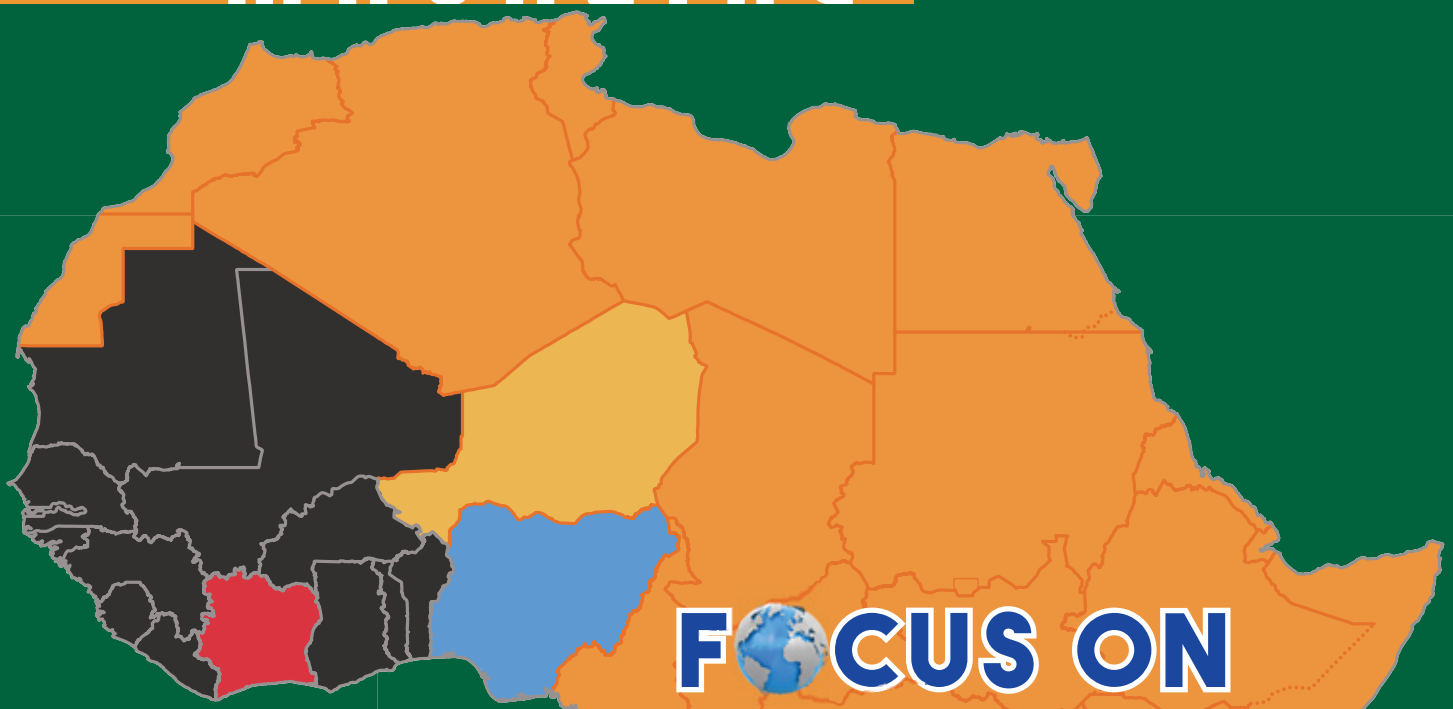
Women's Rights
Mission India Promotes Gender Equality

Nairobi Memorial
Consular Section Honors Bombing Victims



FOCUS ON WEST AFRICA

Part one of *State Magazine*'s two-issue series highlighting unique challenges and opportunities at AF/W posts

Nigeria | Côte d'Ivoire | Niger

STATE MAGAZINE

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Combating Wildlife Trafficking

A stockpile of carved ivory tusks await destruction in a warehouse.
Photo by Gavin Shire / USFWS

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In the News

Consular Sections in Nigeria Work Together

Because Nigeria constitutes the largest U.S. consular operation in sub-Saharan Africa, the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, which offers nonimmigrant visas (NIV) and American citizen services (ACS), and the U.S. Consulate in Lagos, which offers NIV, ACS and IV services, are coordinating operations for a single Nigeria-wide consular presence.

For example, briefings on the worldwide visa referral policy are offered via digital videoconference, providing both posts' staffers with the same instructions and answers to questions, regardless of which post raises them. Public outreach sessions are set for the same dates, whenever possible, and training, leave and schedules have been combined so that staffing fits the workload. Most importantly, both posts now provide TDY staff for each other, covering gaps.

Consular Team Nigeria also combined its crisis management training and planning to prepare for presidential and gubernatorial elections that occurred in March and April. Senior staff members from Abuja and Lagos spent six months building up a robust, self-sustaining ACS operation capable of responding to the fluid and unpredictable situation, having staff from both sections ready to meet any contingency.

The consular sections in Abuja and Lagos have also reinforced communications infrastructure to quickly disseminate information, sustain nationwide points of contact for American citizens in an emergency and, if necessary, move Americans to safe havens inside and outside of the country. Consular Team Nigeria harmonized its efforts to ensure

Foreign Service officers and Locally Employed Staff in Lagos' combined Visa Unit get ready to process an intense consular workload. *Photo by Jen Bauer*

American and Locally Employed staff are adequately trained, equipped and supported to respond in a crisis. Having a national ACS capability has allowed the mission to reconnect with wardens and respond proactively to Americans who are in parts of the country where security challenges exist.

In Lagos, NIV adjudications have increased 164 percent in the past five years, so consular management has maximized the section's physical space and in early 2015 combined the NIV and IV units, with officers and LE staff trained to handle both types. The visa team in Abuja, meanwhile, has used the Bureau of Consular Affairs' 1CA tools from to increase visa processing, reducing the impact of the extraordinary visa growth that has occurred during the last five years.

Nigeria's country consular coordinator, Will Laidlaw, said his management team's philosophy is to "train, plan and execute our consular mission as a single, self-supporting unit, stressing flexibility and innovation as we seek to protect and assist American citizens, safeguard the integrity of our consular processes and provide customer service." ◻

Long-serving LE staff Honored in Kabul

Ambassador P. Michael McKinley in January led a memorial ceremony for former Locally Employed (LE) Staff member Abdul Hamid Mamnoon, who passed away on Jan. 15. A member of the embassy community for more than 20 years, Mamnoon joined U.S. Embassy Kabul in 1975 and worked until 1988, when the communist regime imprisoned him for having served the U.S. government.

Released in 1993, he returned to work at Embassy Kabul until retirement in January 1998. At the memorial event, Ambassador McKinley welcomed members of the Mamnoon family and offered the mission's condolences.

"Mr. Mamnoon's commitment to his work and to serving the U.S. mission is extraordinary," Ambassador McKinley said. In the latter part of Mamnoon's term with the embassy, there were no American officers at post. Then, Ambassador McKinley explained, Mamnoon was a critical part of the U.S. government's connection to Afghanistan and its people.

Ambassador McKinley also noted that Mamnoon's son, Bashir Mamnoon, has continued the family tradition and joined the consular section as an LE Staff member. Ambassador McKinley reported that, when Bashir joined the section, visas and U.S. passports were often handwritten, which meant Bashir and a vice consul needed to verify if a visa in someone's passport was legitimate. At one point, Bashir recognized his father's handwriting on the visa and knew it had been issued at the embassy.

Ambassador P. Michael McKinley presents Mamnoon's son, Bashir, with a plaque at the event commemorating his father's service. The plaque notes Abdul Hamid Mamnoon's years of service (1975-1998) and says, "We are grateful for your example and service." *Photo by Musadeq Sadeq*

"We are grateful for Mr. Mamnoon's service and the example of dedication that he has set for the embassy," said Ambassador McKinley. "We can assure you that he will be missed but not forgotten." Bashir Mamnoon also paid tribute to his late father, saying that despite the hardships arising from his employment, his father persevered and remained committed to Mission Kabul. ◻

West African Youth Trade Clips for Cash

Filling every seat in the largest lecture hall in the country, more than 2,200 young leaders from every township in Benin came together for a week of innovative entrepreneurship training at the University of Abomey-Calavi, Feb. 23-27. The workshop's message: Creativity and hard work can generate opportunities in unsuspecting places. In a country with crippling levels of youth unemployment, the workshop was needed and much appreciated.

Demonstrating this point, participants were introduced to the "paper clip game." Starting with 430 paper clips, teams in the competition spread throughout the city of Cotonou to trade the clips for other objects, always seeking to improve their holdings. For example, one team traded its clip for a local resident's pen, then for a stapler, then for rolls of paper and, finally, for notebooks.

When participants cashed out their bartered items 24 hours later, receiving money in local currency, they had generated the equivalent of $7,679. Afterward, one said, "I know now that we have everything we need to succeed in life," and another spoke of realizing that, "from now on, I will no longer wait for someone's help before satisfying my daily needs…I can say goodbye to poverty by being my own employer."

The 2015 training was the third in a series designed jointly by the public affairs sections of the U.S. Embassies in Cotonou and Lomé. The first training, in August 2014, using an R Bureau Priority Fund grant, was a 12-day intensive Financial Independence Summer Camp (FISC) held along the Benin-Togo border for 100 disadvantaged Beninese and Togolese youth in August. Participants learned how to create income-generating activities, such as weaving, screen printing and animal husbandry, and received the skills and materials to start their own businesses.

An estimated 2,200 Beninese Youth celebrate the completion of entrepreneurship training at the University of Abomey-Calavi in February. *Photo by Taf Kpandja*

Gregory van Duyse, the founder of Cotonou's Van Duyse Entrepreneurial and Leadership Institute (VELI), led the three trainings. He said the paper clip game "encourages youth to think as entrepreneurs, evaluate local demand and develop creative solutions to match that demand." The first trades in the game are usually for objects such as pens or pencils; then, trades are made for water bottles and eventually cash. At last year's FISC, 25 paper clips generated $571, with the winning team of four women making a profit of $51 from their single clip.

Embassies Benin and Togo plan a fourth training, in August in Lomé, focused on women's empowerment. It will train 100 Togolese women in leadership capabilities and aim to foster new images of autonomous local businesswomen with entrepreneurial and personal development skills, thus breaking the bonds of gender discrimination and poverty.

Re-enactment Promotes Black History Month

In Montevideo, Uruguay, a black woman boards a bus along one of the city's busy downtown streets, but after sitting down she is approached by a young white male who demands she move to the back of the bus. She refuses, rebuking the man, and then explains to the passengers how a similar event happened in 1955 in the United States, in Montgomery, Ala.

The re-enactment of the Rosa Parks story was part of Embassy Montevideo's Black History Month activities under an agreement with the government of Uruguay to promote social inclusion. In the activity, embassy personnel boarded buses on one of the main streets of the city and performed a series of surprise stagings of the events that led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Assistant Public Affairs Officer Tiffany Miller played Rosa Parks and Marine Security Guard Sergeant Collin Wasser played the man demanding her seat.

As they boarded, the skit's participants informed the bus driver of what was taking place and passed out flyers about the skit and the history behind it. Nonetheless, some passengers spoke up to stop the action, and Wasser was almost kicked off one bus.

"It was really rewarding to see that there are people who will do the right thing when witnessing discrimination taking place," observed Miller, who wrote the script.

Between performances of the Rosa Parks skit on a local main street, PAS personnel and actors pose for a picture. They are, from left, Public Affairs intern Lucia Galan, Marine Sgt. Collin Wasser and Assistant Public Affairs Officer Tiffany Miller. *Photo by Pablo Castro*

Speaking to bus passengers after the skit, Miller explained the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and why Americans remember it. She also highlighted the U.S. stance against all kinds of discrimination.

The public affairs section (PAS) taped the presentation and sent footage to the media with a press release, and used social media to amplify the message. PAS also produced a video on Rosa Parks and the re-enactment, which received wide attention on Facebook and YouTube. The embassy held a poster exhibit and a talk to highlight black Americans and their history in conjunction with Black History Month.

In the News

Embassy Honors Retired LE Staff

At a March reception in their honor at her residence, Ambassador Bassett poses with LE Staff members who have given more than 20 years of service to the mission. *Photo by Valeria Franco*

In March, Ambassador Leslie Bassett invited 48 retired Locally Employed (LE) Staff members to her residence to thank them for their service and listen to stories from their many years of serving the U.S. Mission in Paraguay. Representing more than 1,200 total years of experience, the LE Staff said they were excited to return to the embassy where many served for most of their adult lives.

Also attending were 19 LE Staff with more than 20 years of experience who are still working. Longtime friends shared memories and photos from their time at the embassy, which will soon be transformed as construction begins on a new embassy compound by the end of 2015. A video camera was available to record former employees' stories, which (with their permission) will be uploaded to the embassy's website. Mission personnel listened as former employees recalled the highlights of American officials' visits, including that of President Jimmy Carter.

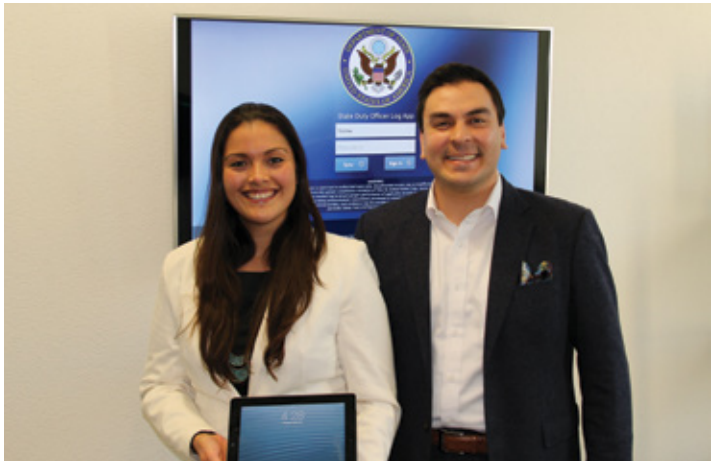
Juan Ramon Della Loggia, a former USIS worker, spoke about then Vice President Richard Nixon's visit in 1958. He said that the president ate Paraguayan asado, and was impressed by quality of the meat. The embassy compound now has a Nixon garden in honor of his visit.

Other former employees recalled embassy community events. Maria Regina de Barrios Barreto recalled the coup d'état that brought down former Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner. "We weren't scared, we were busy," she said. "We knew we would have to report on the situation the next morning."

Another retiree, Norvie Britos, swore she did not sleep for practically a month during the Falkland Islands War, and her husband, Orlando Lopez Caceres, said his busiest time was during the fall of Salvador Allende, Chile's president from 1970 to 1973. When current employees expressed surprise that a Chilean event demanded so much work from Mission Paraguay, Britos responded, "That's just the way it was back then. We didn't question it; it was actually a pleasure to do the work."

Many former employees also spoke emotionally about their jobs. After his first day of work, Reinaldo Melzer recalled, "I went home that night and was so happy to be working for the embassy, for America." Victor Gimenez, a driver who still works for the embassy, said his first day "felt like a dream. I had always wanted to work here. My dad had worked here, and I felt so happy to be here."

Users Enthusiastic at App's One-Year Anniversary



In a conference room at the embassy in March, IRM employee Vanessa L. C. Vidal-Sammoud poses with Jahiro Demian LaMadrid. They worked together to launch the Duty Officer app in Bern. *Photo by Sandro Marti*

Duty officers at the U.S. Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, no longer need to lug around the cumbersome duty officer briefcase. Instead of the old-fashioned logbook and guides, duty officers now can use a designated app on their assigned Department-owned iPad.

The app, released last year, has been adopted enthusiastically by more than 100 posts.

In Bern, the U.S. citizen services unit chief from the consular section and the information resources management (IRM) officer in October jointly began the app's deployment. The app allows duty officers to have up-to-date information from anywhere in Switzerland and to provide better customer service for those needing assistance after business hours.

The app's log has a feature that makes every entry available in real time over the Internet for those who need to know, such as management and consular officers. It also offers one-click access to maps, important Swiss and Liechtenstein contact information, resources, post phone lists and a searchable duty officer guidebook.

Prior to its March 4 launch at Embassy Bern, consular and IRM officers presented the project to the DCM and the management officer, who were supportive. After beta-testing it, they offered all direct-hire employees a one-hour training session. All other consular officers who can access the log via the Internet were given training on how to check log entries.

The app has transformed the post's duty officer program from an archaic pen and paper method to a digital solution.

Information Management Specialist John Healey conceived the app a year ago. It is compatible with both Android and Apple OS operating systems, but it cannot be used to access OpenNet. More information is at DutyOfficerAppGlobalAdmin@state.gov.

Embassy Helps Celebrate 'African Oscars'

The Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, held in Burkina Faso every other year, is the largest film festival in Africa and has played a central role in nurturing African film and television and building an international market for African cinema. Now a major international event, this year's festival showcased 133 films and TV series, and for the first time, full-length feature films from the African diaspora were entered into the competition.

An attraction for thousands of people from all over the world, the festival promotes Burkina Faso's international profile, puts Ouagadougou on the map as an important cultural hub and brings in tourist dollars that promote economic development, a top U.S. priority. Embassy Ouagadougou has long-standing involvement with the event, having in the past loaned American feature films for screening, featured an American band from the Department's Rhythm Roads program and sponsored a prize to promote digital technology.

This year, the embassy provided support to a dance troupe that performed at the opening and closing ceremonies. It also showcased U.S.-Africa ties by hosting a reception for filmmakers with U.S. connections, including two Americans who presented short films in the competition. (Both are now working on their first feature-length productions.)

At the reception, U.S. Ambassador Tulinabo Mushingi praised the transitional government of Burkina Faso for organizing the festival despite the challenges it faces in preparing for elections in October. Expanding contacts with leading Burkinabe cultural figures will be helpful later this year when Embassy Ouagadougou sponsors a regional human rights film festival.

Posing at the Embassy Ouagadougou reception are, from left, Consular Officer Cristin Heinbeck and American filmmakers Iquo B. Essien and Akosua Adoma Owusu. *Photo by Jonette Cahoon Vaughan*

Post Honors 40 Years of Culinary Magic

When Pietro Valot left his small Italian hometown in 1975 to move to Moscow, no one could have predicted that he'd stay for 40 years, meet American presidents and cook for 13 ambassadors, not even Valot himself.

Now, he can't imagine a life any different.

On Feb. 11, Ambassador John F. Tefft and colleagues toasted Valot at a dinner at the ambassador's residence. Former ambassadors sent congratulatory letters, and for once, Valot wasn't in the kitchen.

Valot was 27 when he heard about a job cooking for the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. After passing a cooking test given by the ambassador's chef in Rome, he was on a plane to Moscow. Since then, he has prepared thousands of canapés, main courses and soufflés for guests such as then-Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev; Presidents Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Clinton; and countless celebrities.

"I didn't speak Russian, didn't speak English, only spoke Italian," Valot said of his arrival. "And the day after I arrived there was already a reception."

In Soviet times, Valot relied on connections and bartering to secure what he needed, from 10 pounds of butter to tubs of black caviar. A tall, hulking man, Valot managed to cultivate friendships with store managers, village farmers and others who could help him get what he needed.

In 1987, after Soviet authorities pulled all local staff from their jobs at the embassy, Valot was down to just three helpers. That didn't slow him a bit, said Jack Matlock Jr., who was ambassador at the time.

Executive chef Pietro Valot, shown in June 2014, has cooked for 13 ambassadors over his 40 years working at Spaso House, the official residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Russia. *Photo by Valeriy Yevseyev*

"We would borrow serving staff from other ambassadors in town, pay off-duty Marine guards and embassy family members to wash dishes, but Pietro alone bore the enormous task of food procurement and preparation," Matlock said. "To this day, I am not sure how he managed, but he did."

In June 1988, Valot prepared a dinner for Reagan, Gorbachev and other dignitaries. To prove he could do it, he had to fly to Washington to cook for White House staff. A *New York Times* article about the dinner noted the menu: lobster bisque, supreme of chicken with truffle sauce, cherry tomatoes, carrot soufflé, June peas, mixed green salad, Brie cheese and frozen chocolate mousse with vanilla sauce.

"It's one thing to be a good cook. It's another to be an executive chef, not only putting on a dinner for 24 people but putting on receptions for hundreds of people, for presidents and secretaries of state," said Ambassador Tefft, who has known Valot since the early 1980s. "It's pretty amazing what he's been able to do."

Direct from the D.G.

ARNOLD CHACON,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE

An Invitation to Challenging and Rewarding Posts

For nearly 15 years, thousands of proud, patriotic Foreign Service and Civil Service employees have volunteered for service in the Department's Priority Staffing Posts (PSPs), first in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and subsequently in Yemen and post-revolution Libya. It is a testament to the commitment of our employees that not once has the Department had to resort to directing assignments to staff these critically important missions.

We are especially grateful to our Locally Employed Staff who faithfully serve every day in these challenging posts. Some of them, too, have left their families behind to serve. They have our respect and admiration for all that they do to promote America's national security.

Neither I, nor the Secretary, take for granted the tremendous sacrifice that employees make serving on unaccompanied tours in dangerous and often hostile environments. We're also deeply grateful for the sacrifices of the family members and loved ones left behind. Missed Little League games, birthday parties, anniversaries, vacations—the absence of a partner, a parent, a brother or sister are all felt acutely. There simply aren't words to express the depths of our appreciation for everything employees and their families do to further our foremost foreign policy objectives in these momentous times.

The need for brave men and women to step forward for service is no less important today than it was in the wake of 9/11. The threat posed by ISIL in Iraq, the military drawdown in Afghanistan, the ongoing fight against violent extremism in Pakistan, the volatile political evolutions in Libya and Yemen—all require the deep expertise and dedication of our talented diplomatic corps. These all pose daunting challenges on multiple fronts, but they also present significant opportunities. The Arab Spring may not have developed into the bright peaceful summer for which we may have hoped. Still, the changes it has ushered in will change the historical trajectory of the region. We all have the privilege of being a part of it. As you have done so valiantly in the past, I am asking you once again to help us meet our commitments to staffing our PSPs.

We appreciate service at other hardship posts as well, and we are proud of the fact that outstanding Department of State employees continue to volunteer for these posts. Nearly 60 percent of our employees overseas are serving at posts with hardship differentials of 15 percent or more. Their sacrifices have not gone unnoticed.

Wherever you may be serving, whether in Basrah or Baghdad, Beijing, Banjul, Buenos Aires, Bangkok or Brussels, I want you to know that I value your work, your flexibility and your vital contribution toward furthering U.S. interests abroad. My commitment to you as Director General is to do my utmost to give you the tools and support you need to carry out your mission.

As we look for talented men and women to staff our PSP posts, I encourage you to consider volunteering. These positions are on the cutting edge of U.S. diplomacy, and opportunities to make a positive difference abound.

Diversity Notes

JOHN M. ROBINSON
OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Gossip and Rumors

There is a famous line in the film "Steel Magnolias," starring Julia Roberts and Shirley MacLaine: "If you don't have anything nice to say about anybody, come over and sit right here by me." Studies show that while many rumors in organizations are based on partially accurate information, they are rarely totally accurate. Enthusiastic and expert rumor-makers, however, can compromise operations, contribute to low organizational morale and cause unnecessary confusion. Tracking down rumors can be ridiculously time-consuming and deleterious to organizational efficiency. Finally, most of us know someone who has been grievously harmed by vicious rumors, and sometimes we ourselves have been the target.

Who spreads rumors and why? Often employees who are discontented find it entertaining—and a snide way of getting back at colleagues and "higher-ups"—to create a buzz, whether based in fact or in fantasy. Some do it out of habit—it was fun in school, so why not in the workplace? Many believe gossip and rumor-mongering constitute harmless amusement, unless they are being pilloried. And much of the time, there are few if any consequences.

But when the rumor mill targets the vulnerable, inhibits operations or is maliciously prejudicial to order and common decency, then supervisors, managers, senior leaders and peers need to confront the innuendo directly. They should take direct action to quash the gossip. Address the subject openly in staff meetings, if appropriate. Confront the rumor-spreaders with the consequences of their inappropriate behavior.

Sometimes rumors include inappropriate and insensitive comments regarding protected EEO categories. Such comments can be demoralizing and could create a hostile work environment. In situations where EEO principles may be violated, notify the Office of Civil Rights by filing a workplace harassment report in accordance with 3 FAM 1525/1526.

If you have found yourself passing on unverified rumors in the past, please consider these questions before your next "creation":

1. Is the information necessary for others to know for safety or security? If not, perhaps you should keep it to yourself.
2. How will this information make others feel? If the answer is: depressed, sad or disappointed, then reconsider.
3. Did the person who shared the information give you specific permission to pass it along to others? If not, perhaps you shouldn't.
4. Do you know for certain if the information is even true? Is there a reason why you yourself cannot verify the information's veracity/authenticity before sharing with others?
5. Do you secretly just want the information to be true, based on your own opinions, intentions or interests?
6. Do others come to you often as a good source of gossip or as a reliable vehicle for "spreading the word"? (If so, this is not a good thing.)
7. Stop and ask yourself why the source favored you with this rumor in the first place. (Go back to no. 6 above.)
8. Have you ever been injured as a result of rumors or innuendo? (Remember how you felt before you pass along an injurious rumor about others.)

Gossip and rumors will never be eliminated entirely, the eloquence and sagacity of this article notwithstanding. However, we can all contribute toward muting the unhealthy effects of gossip and rumors on our workplace and reduce the time and energy wasted on tracking down red herrings and downright lies. Most of all, we can each agree not to be a link in the rumor chain. Don't pass along rumors. Do pass along this article. You have my permission.

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Calf Creek Falls is a perennial waterfall in the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah. The cascade over the lower tier, as seen in this HDR photo, is a popular hiking destination.

Photo by Fred Moore

Operations Center

24/7 resource at forefront of the Department

By Lia Miller, former Ops Watch officer, currently a public diplomacy desk officer in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs

One of the first phone numbers officers learn on entering the Foreign Service is the one to the Department's Operations Center, an organization that is vast and dynamic and is part newsroom, part command center and part switchboard—on steroids.

Ops serves the Department's principals and colleagues overseas and the secretary of state, who says he "can't say enough about the Ops crew. I get to know almost all of them by their first names. No matter the time of day, the day of the week, whether it's a holiday or a snow day, they always answer when I dial their number." No matter how challenging the request, he says, "they'll make the connection I need in record time. Ops supports me with a capability few foreign ministries can match."

The Watch team headed by Matthew Miller poses in a Main State courtyard during a team building lunch March 6. From left are Christopher Davenport, Emily Schubert, Matt Miller, Craig Ferguson, Anjoly Ibrahim and Stephanie Kang.
Photo by Lia Miller

In 1961, Ops started 24/7 operations as the Department's communications and crisis management center. Ops' two divisions, the Watch and Crisis Management Support (CMS), are fast-paced, exciting and rapidly evolving places to work. Under Secretary for Management Patrick Kennedy once said the "Department is very lucky to have its own '911' [calling ability] in the Ops Center—timely, accurate and always getting you what you need, even in the most critical times or at the oddest hour."

The Watch does alerting, briefing and communicating/coordinating. When a significant event occurs, the Watch alerts relevant bureaus, counterparts in other agencies and the Department's leaders. Watch officers must be prepared to brief the Secretary, Department principals and other officials on current world events at a moment's notice and do so succinctly and accurately. They also prepare written products for the Secretary and other Department principals, including breaking news alerts, daily overnight and afternoon briefs, and situation and spot reports on world events.

In CMS, program officers work with a network of contacts in the Department, the interagency community and overseas to develop crisis management expertise and an understanding of the long-term risks in regions and countries. Their analyses and recommendations to seventh-floor leadership, regional bureaus and posts are a key component in the Department's efforts to protect U.S. personnel and facilities.

When a crisis occurs, CMS manages the Department's initial reaction—whether it is political unrest, a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. When cross-border challenges strike, such as the Ebola outbreak or the unaccompanied child migrant surge along the border with Mexico, Ops launches into action to coordinate the U.S. response and assist American citizens. In the past year, Ops has managed 11 task forces, monitoring groups and working groups, each covering specific events, such as the World Cup and crises in Yemen, Iraq, and Ukraine.

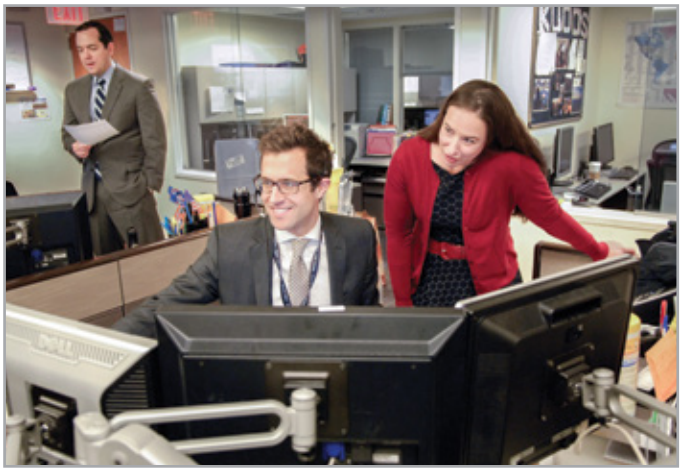
"It's not surprising that when the fighting in Tripoli began in July 2014 and the embassy came under indirect fire, my first call was to the Ops Center," said U.S. Ambassador to Libya Deborah Jones, a former Watch officer and senior Watch officer. "We maintained an open line (literally) during our 19-hour trek across the desert, mountains and oases of western Libya into Tunis, until we arrived at the C-17 awaiting us at Gabès Air Force Base."

From left, the Department's executive secretary, Ambassador Joseph E. Macmanus, Crisis Management Support Program Officer Michael Gladstone, and DS Special Agent Katie Farrell discuss breaking events in March. *Photo by Barry Smith*

The Ops Center truly embodies the notion of esprit de corps, its greatest asset. Officers must be highly motivated, with strong interpersonal skills, a commitment to excellence, a sharp intellect, high energy and team spirit. U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan and Ops alumnus George Krol said he found his Ops assignment "the perfect introduction to the Department after my first two overseas tours, and highly recommended to all officers. The friends and contacts I made on the Watch have lasted throughout my over 30 years in the service."

He added that those in his Watch cohort group hold reunions at the global chiefs of mission conferences—another sign of how an Ops tour enhances a career.

The Ops Center's diverse employee pool includes Civil Service and Foreign Service



Watch Officers Jason Starr and Emily Schubert prepare in March to set up a call with the secretary of state and a foreign leader. *Photo by Barry Smith*

officers, IT specialists, a military attaché and Bureau of Diplomatic Security agents. Ops also works closely with operations centers across the interagency community, including the White House Situation Room and other important partners.

Teamwork is the engine of the Operations Center. Seven six-member teams staff the Watch in three eight-hour shifts per day, providing 24/7 coverage. CMS's team of 14 program officers together covers regional and functional responsibilities to ensure constant global coverage.

Operations Center officers say that, in many ways, Ops was the Department's quintessential team environment, since the tour involved a year assigned not just to one specific team but also constantly creating or joining new teams to perform the mission. Whether serving on an overnight Watch shift, coordinating a task force, preparing a post for crisis or finding innovative ways to improve upon Department processes, all of Ops' tasks are performed through teamwork. Ops' collaborative essence, grounded in mutual support and effective communication, ensures that the Secretary, senior decisionmakers throughout the interagency community and colleagues overseas have the information and capabilities to respond to crises and accomplish Department goals.

If all of this sounds enticing and you're weighing whether to work in the Operations Center, be advised that successful candidates need initiative, good judgment, attention to detail, crisp briefing and drafting skills, the ability to multitask under pressure, and a solid understanding of U.S. policy and interests around the world. They also need to be able to work effectively as part of a team and have a healthy sense of humor. The reward is an unparalleled view of the U.S. foreign policy process, the satisfaction of making a difference and the chance to develop skills critical to success in the higher ranks of the Foreign and Civil Service. More information is on the Operations Center's website.

Ops Center FAQs

Who are we?

The Watch: 3 shifts per day (24/7)
45 Watchstanders (34 Foreign Service, 11 Civil Service officers)
CMS: 14 Person Team (5 FS, 9 CS officers)
Other: The Ops Center also includes a military advisor, two Diplomatic Security Watch liaison officers, a management officer, an innovation officer and a staff assistant.

What do we do?

On a typical day, officers facilitate communication between Department officers, posts overseas and interagency partners, track and alert Department officers and interagency partners on breaking developments, build four daily briefs for Seventh-floor leadership, distribute senior leaders' briefing material in advance of high-level interagency meetings and manage and prepare posts for crises wherever they may occur.

Whom do we serve?

- Department Principals
- Assistant Secretaries and Special Envoys
- Over 250 U.S. Embassies and constituent posts overseas
- The full range of Department of State Bureaus
- Interagency partners, as appropriate
- American citizens in emergencies and after hours
- Foreign diplomatic corps in emergencies and after hours

The Watch	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
Secure calls:	723	706	657
Crisis Management Support			
Hours spent on Emergency Action Plans:	186	1085	1850
Hours spent on Task Forces/ Monitoring Groups/ Working Groups/ Unofficial Task Forces:	642	3408	675
Hours spent on the Tripwire committee: *Projection for 2015 - 960*	0	166	875

Strengthening Enforcement

INL combats wildlife trafficking

By Jessica Graham, senior advisor, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

In recent years, organized criminal groups have facilitated an explosive increase in the illicit trade of wildlife and the slaughter of iconic species. This lucrative illegal activity, a multibillion dollar criminal enterprise, is morally repugnant, fosters corruption, undermines rule of law, threatens civilians and destabilizes communities that depend on wildlife.

Therefore, the Secretary of State has directed the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) to make combating wildlife trafficking a priority area in U.S. law enforcement programming.

In order to do so, INL is drawing upon decades of experience fighting narcotics trafficking and corruption, using such tools as diplomatic engagement and capacity building, and promoting the fight against wildlife crime in various multilateral forums. It has increased anti-trafficking programs and partnered with stakeholders in governments, communities, law enforcement, civil society, and the private sector.

In Africa, INL builds upon African-led efforts, such as the Arusha Declaration, which calls for more effective collaboration, cooperation and coordination across national boundaries to stop trafficking in the region, and supports law enforcement cooperation for cross-border regional action.

In partnership with the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime and INTERPOL, INL in 2014 supported more than 20 law enforcement investigative training sessions and other activities, benefitting more than 500 officials from nearly 30 countries. At its International Law Enforcement Academies in Bangkok and Gaborone, INL has supported U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service investigative training for more than 450 law enforcement

INL Assistant Secretary William Brownfield attends a U.N., organized event at the Central Park Zoo in celebration of World Wildlife Day on March 3.

Photo by Fabrice Grover

Photo By Koen Muurling

An orphan elephant eyes a visitor at Kenya's David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2013 .
Photo by Jessica Graham

officials since 2002, setting the stage for coordinated global law enforcement operations against a range of environmental crimes.

More broadly, the Department of State works within the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking to partner with other U.S. government entities to spot illicit financial flows related to trafficking. This work is guided by the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, which is co-chaired by the Departments of State, Justice and Interior. INL is the Department's lead entity on law enforcement work done under the Strategy and funds law enforcement and criminal justice technical assistance programs across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

To promote international cooperation, the U.N. Crime Commission in 2013 unanimously adopted an INL-sponsored resolution calling on member countries to treat wildlife trafficking as a serious crime. Now the 185 parties to the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime are able to access such international cooperation tools as mutual legal assistance and joint investigations to deter the trade and go after poachers.

At a March meeting of the unit of the Group of Seven nations that focuses on law enforcement, INL collaborated with Germany, which holds the 2015 G-7 presidency, to use its political clout to strengthen international law enforcement cooperation in investigating wildlife crime and related corruption.

As the corruption of public officials is one tactic of traffickers, INL is working within a platform called APEC Pathfinder Dialogue, which brings together APEC, ASEAN and Pacific Island Forum communities to combat corruption, including wildlife trafficking. INL is also supporting intelligence-led policing to dismantle transnational criminal networks and corrupt officials, and has made anti-money-laundering tools available to law enforcement agencies across Africa and Asia, so that they can target higher-level traffickers and facilitators.

President Obama's Executive Order to Combat Wildlife Trafficking is backed by $10 million in federal funding to strengthen anti-trafficking wildlife enforcement in Africa. INL also has additional funding to underwrite efforts to seek stronger laws and finance training for prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officials. The money has also equipped park rangers and others on the front lines to help make interagency and international groups better able to fight this cross-border crime.

In 2014, the United States invested more than $60 million to end wildlife trafficking. Of the U.S. funding, significant portions allocated by INL help build law enforcement's capacity to end trafficking. For instance, a relatively new law enforcement tool in this battle is the cutting-edge DNA analysis of major ivory seizures being done at the University of Washington. The research indicates most large seizures of ivory by law enforcement come from only a few poaching hotspots in Africa. The resulting, clearer picture of the trade routes in ivory trafficking will allow law enforcement resources to be used in a more efficient, targeted approach.

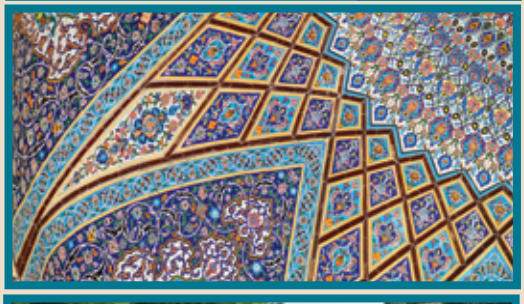
Meanwhile, in South Africa, INL funding supports work to identify, track and disrupt rhino horn trafficking networks, and assists South African law enforcement in conducting intelligence-driven investigations. The bureau also works through the OECD's Charting Illicit Trade Task Force to address the rhino horn trafficking crisis in southern Africa, building public-private partnerships to assist with mapping illicit trade networks.

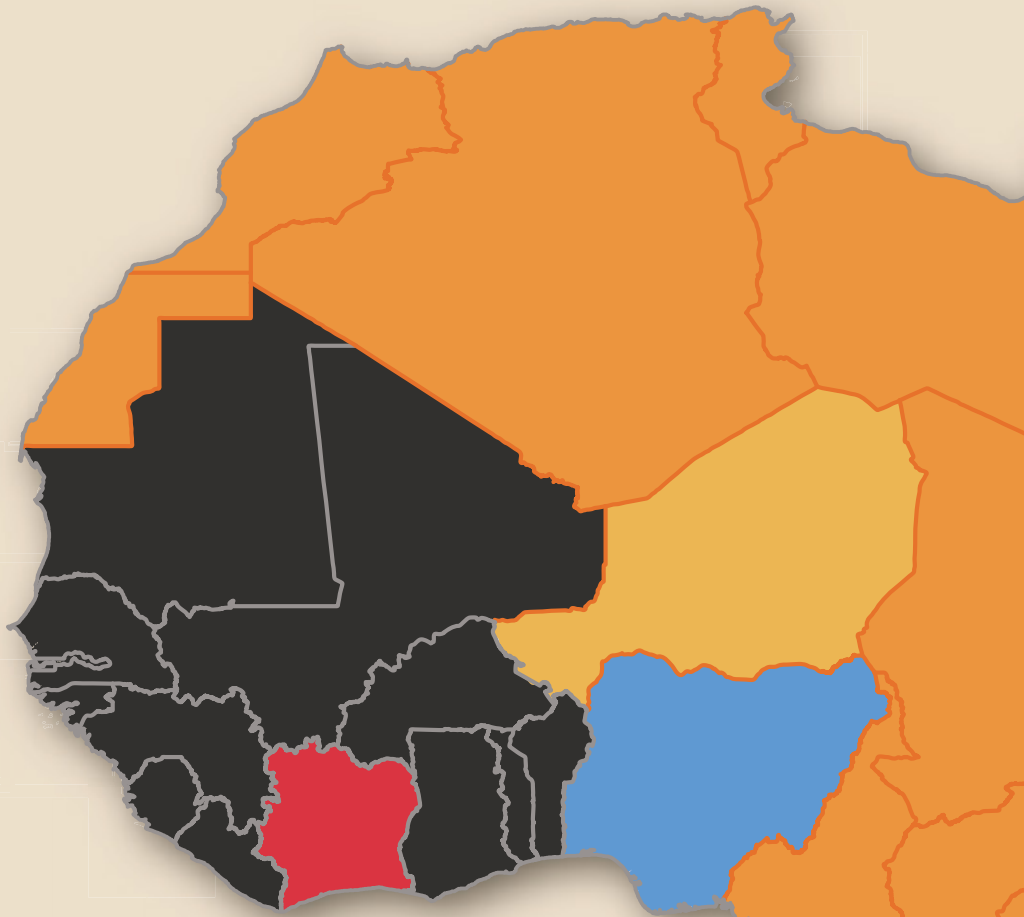
In November 2013, the Department offered a $1 million reward targeting a prolific wildlife trafficking network based in Laos and operating throughout Africa and Asia.

In terms of public diplomacy, last year the U.N. designated March 3 as World Wildlife Day. INL participated in a special event at the Central Park Zoo in New York to highlight the need for countries to adopt laws consistent with the U.N. Crime Commission's 2013 resolution. "We don't just get serious about wildlife, now we're getting serious about wildlife crime," INL Assistant Secretary William Brownfield told the event's attendees. Additionally, Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Catherine Novelli co-hosted a reception with the National Geographic Society, and convened a Google Hangout discussion in celebration of World Wildlife Day.

In the fight against wildlife trafficking, INL's anti-wildlife crime toolkit aims to augment the decades of great work by conservationists who work tirelessly to combat a threat that is more organized, complex and sophisticated. As responsible stewards of our world heritage, we must reverse this trend. Action is critical, requiring a multistakeholder, global response.

From left, the author; William Woody, chief of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement; and INL's Kristen Larson pose with confiscated ivory prior to the U.S. government's crushing of such ivory in 2013 in Denver, Colo.
U.S. Government photo





FOCUS ON WEST AFRICA

When you are Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, you aren't supposed to have favorites, but I'll admit I have two: jollof rice and chicken yassa. That's right; I'm talking about my favorite foods from West Africa.

West Africa holds a special place in my heart—and it's been an important part of my career. When I traveled there for the first time as a graduate student to do research in Liberia, I never expected to return to that same country as the U.S. ambassador three decades later. In the time between my sojourns in Liberia, I served all over the world, including two exceptional postings in West Africa—a consular tour in Lagos, Nigeria, and a political-multifunctional tour in Banjul, The Gambia. Both assignments afforded me fantastic opportunities to develop and engage with the highest levels of the host government. These professional experiences, along with rewarding personal experiences for my family and me, make these tours among my favorites.

That is why I'm so pleased that *State Magazine* has chosen to use this and next month's issues to focus on West Africa. As you read, you will quickly see the opportunities and challenges that West Africa, and the entire Africa region, provide Foreign Service officers at all levels and in all disciplines. Africa has some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. American tourism to the continent is on the rise. Democracy and good governance are on the march. We are looking for the best talent ready to seize these opportunities. Yes, we have our hardship posts and our crises, but what region doesn't? In AF, we know how to turn a crisis into an opportunity.

Take Côte d'Ivoire, for example. In 2010, after a decade of political division and economic stagnation, the nation's people voted for change, but the incumbent president refused to acknowledge defeat. After a four-month standoff and outstanding diplomacy led by the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan, the international community assisted in removing the incumbent, and the rightful president took office. Côte d'Ivoire is now reclaiming its once-lost political and economic place in the region, and is poised for increased economic growth and stability.

Or look at Liberia, where I served as ambassador, a country still emerging from civil war that elected Africa's first female president. Working together with international partners, particularly the United States, Liberia tackled the most serious outbreak of the Ebola virus on record and now has close to zero new cases.

If you look past the headlines in Nigeria, you see huge numbers of young people taking advantage of U.S. government-sponsored tools, including the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and the YALI Network, to create new businesses, promote political participation and help address challenges facing their country today.

Lastly, look at Ghana or Senegal. Both countries have become anchors for political stability and economic growth in the region. They are leading regional efforts to stand up to undemocratic changes of power, end conflict and stop terrorism, and ensure sea and trade routes are open and secure.

One of the most attractive reasons to serve in West Africa for me is the warmth of its people. It's a place where American values are shared, where roads are named after U.S. presidents and the voice of American diplomats can truly change hearts and minds.

So in the May and June issues of the magazine, I invite you to look closer at our priorities in West Africa and consider how you could make an impact on diplomacy in this dynamic region. We look forward to serving with you. ◻

Linda Thomas-Greenfield

Linda Thomas-Greenfield,
Assistant Secretary for African Affairs

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PART I

FOCUS ON WEST AFRICA

REGION

West African posts promote economic potential

West Africa is a kaleidoscope of cultural diversity and commercial bustle. Four out of the top ten best reformers in the World Bank's annual Doing Business survey were West African nations. With some of the fastest growing economies in Africa and the world, the subregion offers a fascinating mix of high-profile economic opportunities. From combatting corruption to promoting fiscal transparency, from delivering electricity to power growth to harnessing Africa's economic potential—there is no end to the hands-on opportunities for economic diplomats in West Africa.

And in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis, there is plenty of economic recovery work needed. Economic officers are working with their front offices and with USAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to implement the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). Bolstered by Ebola emergency supplemental funding to the CDC, USAID and the Department of State, GHSA aims to build preparedness and strengthen health systems to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease threats. Economic officers at posts in the region will be involved with this initiative from the ground up, working with multisectorial interagency teams to ensure coordinated work in their host countries.

The August 2014 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit put the spotlight on U.S.-Africa trade and commercial relations. Economic officers at posts in West Africa, together with the U.S. Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service, are engaged in commercial advocacy, working closely with U.S. businesses such as General Electric, American Tower, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Hershey and Cargill. In 2014, U.S. exports to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reached $8.7 billion. Countries like Côte d'Ivoire are seeking new business partners to diversify beyond traditional commercial partners such as France and Lebanon. Over the last year, the reconstituted American Chamber of Commerce has supported a number of U.S. companies in establishing new regional offices in Abidjan, including GE and ExxonMobil. Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Bisa Williams led a U.S. trade delegation that participated in an impressive Economic Investment Forum in Abidjan in February 2014.

In Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria, economic officers engage the Nigerian government to promote open markets for U.S. companies and products and strengthen Nigeria's ability to take advantage of trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, with a GDP of more than $500 billion, and has Africa's largest population, more than 170 million people. The U.S. Embassy in Abuja invited key economic leaders from the cities of Kaduna and Kano, the economic powerhouses of the northern half of the country, to a Kano Economic and Commercial Dialogue at the embassy in late January. The dialogue provided Nigerian delegations and U.S. agencies the opportunity to discuss economic realities and priorities for the region.

Economic officers in West Africa also work to reform energy sectors and facilitate opportunities for U.S. energy companies. President Obama's Power Africa initiative seeks to add 30,000 megawatts of electricity to the continent and bring electricity to 60 million new households and enterprises. Three of the six initial Power Africa "focus countries" are in West Africa: Liberia, Nigeria and Ghana. These and other African posts are working with regional institutions on energy capacity-building projects and off-grid solutions, as well as through the U.N.-World Bank's Sustainable Energy for All initiative in Ghana, an initiative supported by the Department's Bureau of Energy Resources.

Economic officers throughout the region promote good governance. Millennium

OF HOPE

By Sophia Kelly, foreign affairs officer, Bureau of African Affairs

Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compacts and MCC Threshold Programs have advanced economic growth and prosperity in 12 of 16 West African countries, in part through economic officers' effective advocacy. The United States is also working with West African countries to crack down on international syndicates illegally trafficking in ivory, rhino horn and other wildlife products. Countries such as Benin, Guinea and Togo have taken a leadership role in making arrests, seizing contraband and securing prosecutions.

In the field of fiscal transparency, the U.S. Embassy in Niamey is collaborating with colleagues from the European Union, IMF and World Bank. The U.S. Embassy in Dakar is working with Senegal's government to build on one of the outcomes of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, a partnership seeking new ways to combat corruption and money laundering in Africa.

U.S. government programs also help ensure that rough diamonds stay in legitimate supply chains and are not used by rebel groups. The Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development Program (PRADD), a collaboration between the Department, USAID and the European Union, supports best practices in small-scale mining and promotes good governance of the diamond mining sector. The program currently operates in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, and previously in the Central African Republic and Liberia. Thanks in part to PRADD's work, Côte d'Ivoire has been brought back into the Kimberley Process, and partly as a result of the embassy in Abidjan's efforts, the U.N. Security Council recently lifted Côte d'Ivoire's nine-year diamond embargo.

As with other countries of the region, Nigeria's economy is increasingly dependent on intellectual property rights (IPR) protection, with booming telecom and financial services sectors and creative industries. This includes a vibrant film industry known as "Nollywood," that makes up a large and growing percentage of Nigeria's overall GDP. Embassy Abuja is working with Nigeria's Copyright Commission to raise public awareness of the importance of IPR. At an embassy-organized event, for example, Yewande Sadiku, financier of the award-winning Nigerian film "Half of a Yellow Sun," described to aspiring entrepreneurs in Abuja and Lagos how she could not break even financially despite her film's popularity internationally and in Nigeria. One reason? The vast number of pirated copies of her film which were being sold on the streets of Lagos, depriving her of the income she so richly deserved.

A melting pot of many African cultures seasoned with French, British and Arab influences, West Africa is known for its vibrant music, friendly people, tumultuous political history and daunting economic and development issues. But it is also a region of hope. In Abidjan, there is the African Development Bank; in Accra, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center; and in Abuja, one of Africa's most effective regional organizations, ECOWAS. It is a region on the rise—emerging from Ebola and conflict, becoming more tech savvy and entrepreneurial, and offering increasingly exciting and broad-ranging economic work.

Left: Senior brokers process the day's final trades as closing bell nears on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange in Lagos. *Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco*

Center: Community members in Freetown, Sierra Leone, attended a briefing Dec. 22, 2014, aimed at helping curb the spread of Ebola there. *Photo by UN Photo/Martine Perret*

Right: TechCamp West Africa incorporated community service into its empowerment focus on entrepreneurship. Participants engaged with 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow Regina Agyare's #TechNeedsGirls effort and shared their knowledge with high school girls growing up in one of Accra's poorer communities. *Photo by Kwabena Akuamoah-Boateng*

Nigeria

U.S. Mission serves 'land of superlatives'

Story by Ellen Peterson, public diplomacy officer, U.S. Embassy in Abuja
Photos by Isaac D. Pacheco

FOCUS ON
WEST
AFRICA

Nigeria, with an estimated 177 million people is the most populous and ethnically diverse nation in Africa. The country boasts upwards of 500 languages and 250 ethnic groups, including the Fulani, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, as well as diaspora communities from other countries in West Africa, South Africa, Syria, Lebanon, East Asia, China and elsewhere.

At the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, DCM Maria Brewer describes Nigeria's 36 states as a "land of superlatives," where "even experienced diplomats grapple with the sheer size and complexity of issues."

"Few posts offer the level of direct impact as Nigeria," said Brewer. "People at very senior levels read our reporting and track closely the developments in all of our partnership efforts."

"Nigeria," she added, "is the United States' number one policy priority country in sub-Saharan Africa, and we want to attract and retain the talent to go with that designation."

To attract that talent, Mission Nigeria actively solicits officers seeking to make their careers at the nexus of diplomacy, development and defense. Mission Nigeria officers, many serving in above-grade or "stretch" positions, frequently gain valuable out-of-cone experience and handle new portfolios. Between Abuja and Lagos, 50 eligible family member (EFM) positions, including six community liaison office coordinators (CLOs), serve more than 350 employees and resident family members. Numerous work opportunities can be found at NGOs, diplomatic missions and international schools.

Brewer wants "to get people past the headlines and reputation" of Nigeria to see the nation clearly. For instance, the World Bank ranks Nigeria as 147th in the world for its ease of doing business, or lack thereof. That's due to high costs, poor infrastructure, structural distortions, official failures and dependence upon imported goods. But this has not stopped start-up companies, such as Jumia.com, one of the largest e-commerce platforms in sub-Saharan Africa, or iRokoTV, the world's largest online platform for Nigerian films, from thriving.

In fact, Nigeria is now the largest economy in Africa. This ranking is mainly due to the dynamic growth in agriculture, manufacturing and services, as well as its oil production and film industry, nicknamed "Nollywood." The nation actually has two film industries. The south's "Nollywood"—larger than India's Bollywood—based on sheer numbers of movies produced and traded worldwide—and the north's "Kannywood." Each plays to different cultural mores and tastes.

The Nigerian-American diaspora, estimated at 1.5 million, has ties in both countries; more than 7,800 Nigerian students study in the United States, and many Nigerians regularly visit the United States. Mission Nigeria's consular operations reflect this boom: nonimmigrant visa applications increased 91 percent over the last five years in Abuja and 165 percent in Lagos. In all, the mission processed 220,000 NIVs in FY2014—making it the largest consular operation in Africa.

The U.S. Mission also focuses on supporting the growth of democratic, participatory government. General elections were held in March and April, and a recent state election "proved that peaceful, transparent elections can be done," according to DCM Brewer.

Nigerians responded by the millions to exercise their civic duty in recent, historic presidential elections, in many places waiting patiently for hours to cast their ballots. According to DCM Brewer, "the process was characterized by less-than-feared violence and adherence to established procedures, proving that peaceful, transparent elections can be achieved," noted Brewer.

At the mission's USAID operation, "reducing poverty and strengthening good governance is our goal," said Ebony Bostic, USAID deputy program officer. USAID's conflict mitigation project aims at reducing ethno-religious violence in six violence-prone states in northern Nigeria by working through an interfaith network and using an early warning system to track, mitigate, and respond to violence in communities.

USAID's Office of Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace (FFP) and Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), are complementing development assistance projects in agriculture, education, health and conflict mitigation by providing humanitarian and transition assistance to up to 1.5 million internally displaced persons from the northeastern part of the country.

The mission is also setting up health systems, programs and research capacity for Nigeria. USAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) work on HIV/AIDS, malaria and polio programs. While hundreds of polio cases were reported in Nigeria just a decade ago, only six cases were found in 2014.

When the Ebola virus emerged in Lagos in 2014, 20 Nigerian health technicians, partnering with CDC technical assistance advisers, reached and monitored 99 percent of 800 contacts of Ebola-infected patients. When

symptoms were discovered, these experts isolated, tested and provided care to the afflicted in a safe environment. Nigeria was declared Ebola-free in October. Mission agencies are also working on Ebola vaccine research in partnership with the Nigerian government, World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and global pharmaceutical giants.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program in Nigeria, currently in its third five-year phase, is the largest of 15 country programs in Africa with a $458 million budget. At Abuja's Asokoro Hospital, where 1,500 HIV/AIDS-infected patients are treated every month, CDC Nigeria, under PEPFAR, works through its implementing partners to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV by placing and maintaining women on treatment and offering programs for overcoming stigmatization from the disease and income-

Clockwise from top left: Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield, standing fourth from left, meets with volunteers at the Women's Situation Room during the presidential election March 28. *Photo by Idika Onyukwu;* A vendor carries bottles in pallets atop her head at a street market in the business district of Lagos Island; A barber in Abuja's Guzape District plys his trade on a bench along one of his village's busy thoroughfares.

Background: Seen here from Ikoyi, street lights reflect off the persistent haze hanging over Lagos, giving the city's skyline a violet hue.

Opening spread: Neighbors greet each other in the watery passageways of Makoko, a massive floating slum that stretches out from the Nigerian mainland onto Lagos Lagoon and houses nearly 100,000 residents.

generation opportunities. Nine out of 10 babies born to HIV-positive mothers are now born AIDS-free.

English, Nigeria's official language, is taught in schools and spoken with varying fluency by nearly 50 percent of the population, making Nigeria the largest English-speaking country in Africa. Three languages other than English are accepted in government; nine are broadcast on national media, and millions more speak several others as first and second languages.

Nigeria's public affairs sections (PAS) in Abuja and Lagos support one of the continent's largest cohorts of fellows from the Mandela-Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and sent 46 fellows in 2014. PAS also runs a network of 11 American Corners, hosting discussion and reading groups, and is active in social media outreach and engaging Nigeria's vibrant press corps. Exchanges and media programs promote mission themes of education, political inclusion and participation, including rights for women and people with disabilities. Active EducationUSA and Information Resource Centers provide advisory services and information to 2,000 members, including students and academics countrywide.

Nigeria's future demands a commitment to good governance and careful resource management to oversee competition for scarce basic resources, such as food, water and electricity. The pragmatism and optimism of its citizens, combined with increasing governmental transparency, are essential to stave off internal violence. Lack of transparency and citizen engagement, according to Amara Nwankpa, director of the Yar'Adua Foundation Public Policy Initiative, "has led to violence and conflicting expectations over management of the country's abundant natural resources and enabled corruption and mismanagement. As a broader cross-section of citizens understands the issues, we can set expectations and empower responsible people to manage these resources."

As Nigerians turn to managing their environment, new projects and initiatives will inevitably emerge. For example, the Eko Atlantic in Lagos, a megacity development, has been heralded for its positive environmental impact in stopping erosion of the Lagos coastline. The state of Lagos also launched new rapid-transit bus systems, urban railways, and a fleet of garbage collection trucks to prevent the city, which receives up to 6,000 new migrants daily, from descending further into squalor. Social investment groups, such as Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, supported by Chevron with Department of State and USAID collaboration, will continue to work in conjunction with local communities to foster the stability needed to resolve the various governance, environmental and economic issues that threaten Nigeria's future.

Nigeria, a country on the move, remains the top policy priority country in sub-Saharan Africa. Accordingly, service in one of the two missions in Lagos or Abuja gives staff the opportunity to work in a dynamic environment dealing with some of the most important issues facing U.S. foreign policy today—including democracy, transparency and anti-corruption to economic growth, health care and security.

Clockwise from top left: Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield speaks with a Nigerian voter during the country's presidential election March 28. *Photo by Idika Onyukwu;* A vibrantly clad woman blends in with the surrounding market as she checks her phone in downtown Lagos; Palatial homes rise in the distance behind a village inhabited by Guzape District residents displaced from their homes during the development and construction of a new suburb in Abuja; Automobiles are the primary form of transportation for Lagos' 21 million residents, which often leads to congestion and traffic jams.

At a Glance Nigeria

Capital: Abuja

Government Type: Federal republic

Area: 923,768 sq km

Population: 177,155,754

Languages: English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, more than 500 additional indigenous languages

Religions: Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%

GDP per capita: $2,800

Export partners: U.S., India, Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, UK

Import partners: China, U.S., India

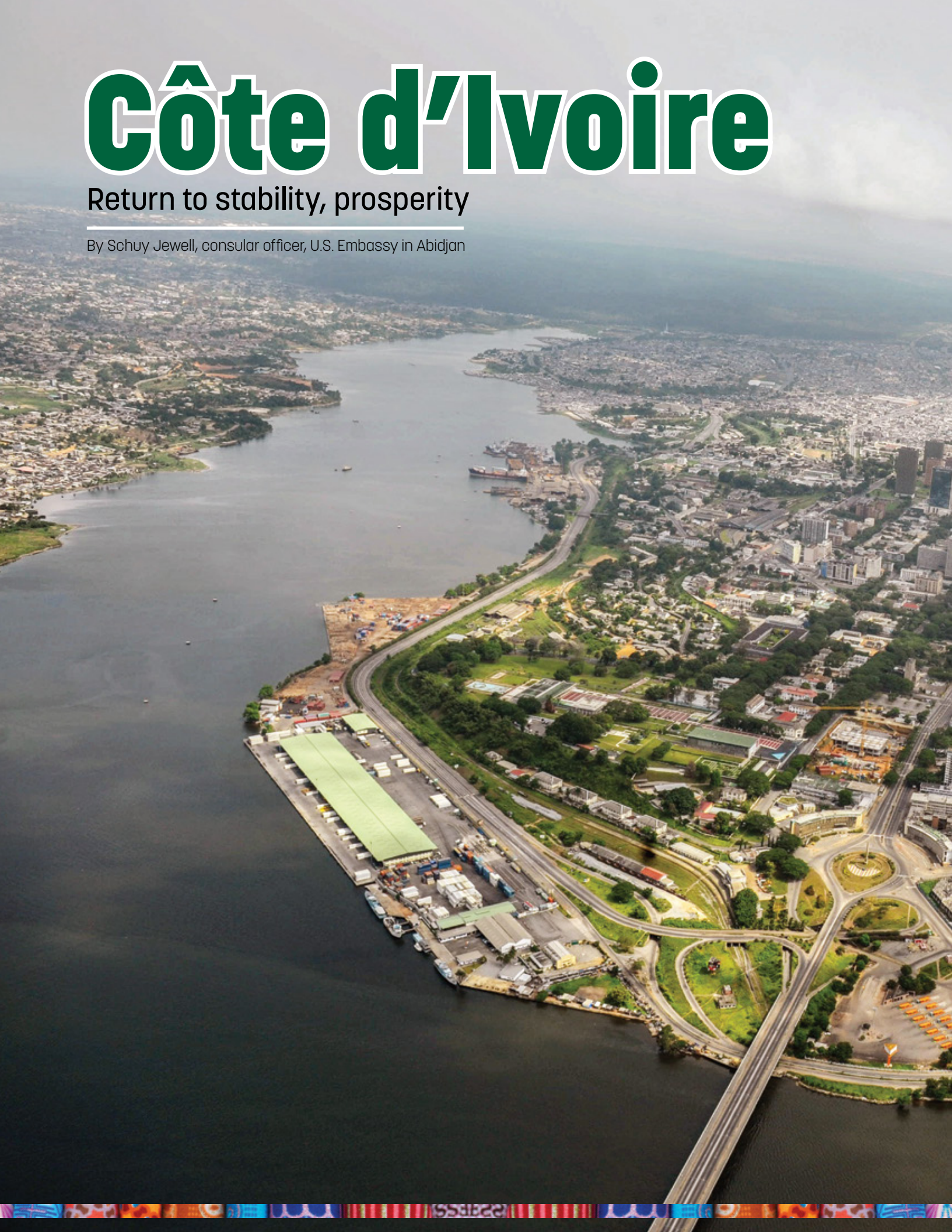
Currency: Nigerian naira

Internet country code: .ng

Côte d'Ivoire

Return to stability, prosperity

By Schuy Jewell, consular officer, U.S. Embassy in Abidjan



FOCUS ON
WEST
AFRICA

More than four years after a violent post-electoral crisis, much has changed in Côte d'Ivoire, including signs of societal reconciliation and restoration of most government services throughout the country. Consistent 8 to 10 percent economic growth, security sector reform, disarmament of former combatants and a recent announcement that Côte d'Ivoire passed its Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) scorecard all are helping the country reach its goal of becoming an emerging economy by 2020.

The "Ivoirian Miracle"

Abidjan, once considered the "Paris of West Africa," was the epicenter of the "Ivoirian miracle" during the 1970s and 1980s. As the world's largest cocoa producer and one of the world's largest coffee producers in a period of peak prices, Côte d'Ivoire was a model of stability and the economic powerhouse of West Africa. In the late 1980s, a precipitous decline in commodity prices decimated the country's economy. Abidjan became a shadow of itself.

The booming economy had attracted immigrants from throughout the region, and the population of Abidjan grew at an astounding rate. This influx remains evident today in the incredible diversity of immigrant populations from all over West Africa, including Burkinabe, Ghanaians, Malians, Togolese and Beninois, as well as French, Lebanese and Vietnamese. Nearly one quarter of the more than 24 million people living in Côte d'Ivoire were born in another country.

Unfortunately, this same diversity carried seeds of discontent. When the country's first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, died in 1993 after 33 years in power and without a clear plan for succession, it bred political and economic strife. Debates erupted concerning the rights of Ivoirians versus non-Ivoirians, particularly in terms of land tenure and voting. These issues, coupled with north-south cultural and religious divisions, contributed to the civil war of 2000-02 and the post-electoral crisis of 2010-11, when incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refused to cede power to President-elect Alassane Ouattara.

The talk today is of a new "Ivoirian miracle." The cocoa sector is strong, producing nearly 40 percent of the world's supply, with refining being done in-country instead of exported to European and American chocolatiers. International scrutiny challenges the government and corporations to find a solution to the prevalence of child and forced labor in this sector. Meanwhile, Côte d'Ivoire remains a major coffee producer, and is the world's second largest cashew producer. Shea butter, rubber and petroleum are emerging industries, attracting Ivoirian entrepreneurs and foreign investors.

U.S. Engagement in Côte d'Ivoire

Although Embassy Abidjan was evacuated twice in the period between the civil war and the present, the U.S. government maintained close ties with the Ivoirian people and is committed to the country's recovery from decade-long instability. To help build citizen confidence in strengthened democratic institutions, the mission engages with political leadership, the Ivoirian Independent Electoral Commission, members of the national assembly and grassroots community groups in urban slums and poor rural villages.

"Our embassy is working closely with actors throughout the political process to make sure the 2015 presidential elections are as free, fair, transparent and inclusive as possible," said Pol/Econ Chief Kristen Grauer.

Maintaining peace and security, and reducing corruption, are paramount to ensuring Côte d'Ivoire's meaningful and comprehensive development. To this end, USAID and the departments of Defense and State are also working to build the capacity, integrity and effectiveness of the judicial and security sectors through technical advisors, assistance programs and training.

Above: Bright colors and bustling activity are typical of the myriad fruit and vegetable markets along Côte d'Ivoire's roadsides. This one is located just northeast of Abidjan. *Photo by Travis Murphy*

Top left: St. Paul's Cathedral stands out above Abidjan's downtown business district of Plateau. The design represents both the cross and a devotee on his knees in prayer. *Photo by Guillaume Mignot*

Bottom left: Ambassador McCulley and volunteers participate in an Earth Day cleanup activity in Yopougon. *Photo by Pep Haba*

Opening spread: Aerial view of the district of Plateau in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. *Photo by UN Photo/Basile Zoma*

Côte d'Ivoire has one of the highest adult HIV prevalence rates in the region, and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is a key aspect of U.S. support to the country. Commemorating a decade of assistance in 2014, PEPFAR now funds nearly 80 percent of the Ivoirian HIV control effort, including HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. The number of PEPFAR-supported health facilities providing HIV/AIDS services and the number of patients receiving life-saving treatment has increased almost twentyfold since 2004. PEPFAR Country Coordinator Heather Davis credits an "incredibly dedicated Ivoirian team" for ensuring no break in HIV treatment services during the post-election crisis in 2010. "PEPFAR's continued support has turned the tide of the HIV epidemic in Côte d'Ivoire," she said.

The mission population has increased exponentially since the end of the post-electoral crisis in April 2011 from a skeleton staff with no family members to about 80 direct hires and an equal number of family members representing State, Defense, Treasury, USAID, CDC and Marine Security Guard personnel. Although this rapid growth has created challenges, the expanding staff has brought new energy, ideas and more planned activities to invigorate the embassy community.

A Bridge to the Future

A tangible symbol of the Ivoirian renaissance, the Henri Konan Bédié Bridge, located less than a mile from the embassy in the Riviera neighborhood, opened with great fanfare and fireworks in December 2014. Just a dotted line on Abidjan maps since the late 1990s, the "third bridge" promised relief from nightmarish traffic for decades, but remained a dream deferred until last year. "It's remarkable how something as simple as a bridge opening can change everyone's perspective," commented Community Liaison Officer Marissa Knupp. "People are discovering a whole new Abidjan. Restaurants, shopping and getting to the airport [where flying direct from Abidjan to Dulles may soon be possible] are all much more manageable tasks."

The Ivoirian government is also developing the country's infrastructure outside of Abidjan. Roads to the interior, and Côte d'Ivoire's section of the proposed Dakar-Lagos highway, will help promote regional trade. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce continues to grow; one of the most positive new arrivals is Wise Solutions, which won the bid to run Abidjan's waste management and implement a much-needed recycling program. Increasing numbers of Ivoirian delegations are attending conferences and trade shows in the United States, facilitating a burgeoning trade and investment partnership.

One key sign of renewed external confidence in the Ivoirian economy and political stability was the recent return of the African Development Bank to its headquarters in Abidjan after a decade-long relocation in Tunis. The bank's presence affects the Ivoirian economy and the embassy. Two new Treasury positions are seconded to the bank, and nearly 200 American citizens are part of the bank community.

Churches, Crocodiles, Mountains and Beaches

Abidjan is a vibrant, modern city built along a series of lagoons. The downtown skyline of Plateau is dominated by the Cathedral of St. Paul, designed by the Italian architect Aldo Spiritom. The exterior of this imposing cathedral is an abstract representation of both Jesus with outstretched arms and a cross, while the interior contains unique stained glasswork, including a large elephant. Hotels, museums and most government buildings are located in Plateau. Across the lagoon, Treichville is home to the largest traditional marketplace in the country, an area that explodes on Saturdays with shoppers, tourists, produce and poultry. Zone Quatre is the top nighttime hotspot.

In 1983, President Houphouët-Boigny designated his home village of Yamoussoukro as the political capital of Côte d'Ivoire. Although never becoming the capital he envisioned, it claims his crowning achievement: the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace, the largest basilica in the world. Pope John Paul II consecrated this immense 518-foot structure in 1990 before more than 18,000 worshippers. It is one of the country's main tourist attractions. Nearby, at the former presidential palace, one can sometimes catch a glance of legendary crocodiles named Capitaine, Chef de Cabinet or Commandant.

If they desire to escape the cities, mission families visit many beaches on the Gulf of Guinea, including Sassandra, Assinie and Grand-Bassam—the first capital of Côte d'Ivoire and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Inland, the mountains of Man and rainforest national parks to the west and north provide striking panoramas and hiking trails. Though largely depleted, the parks are lush and beautiful, and still home to many types of birds, monkeys and bats. And although the nation's name, "Ivory," and a national soccer team, the Elephants, suggest an area populated by pachyderms, their numbers are sadly diminished due to the ivory trade and human encroachment. If lucky, visitors may catch a glimpse of one of the remaining 200 elephants wandering through the country's national parks.

Côte d'Ivoire's immediate future will be largely determined by the October 2015 presidential elections. Will it continue on its transformational path to prosperity, or retreat into the turbulent ways of its recent past? U.S. Embassy Abidjan is poised to leverage Ivoirians' desire and aptitude for success, projecting the Elephants' unifying underdog victory in the 2015 African Cup of Nations soccer tournament confidently into the future.

Clockwise from top left: Women prepare cassava to make attieake, a couscous-like dish, thanks to a USAID-supported program that builds economic resiliency and provides resources for families impacted by HIV/AIDS. *Photo by Andrea Halverson*; An embassy softball game turns into an impromptu batting clinic as Trevor Fleck shows an Ivoirian youth how to swing. *Photo by Paul Cruz*; the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro, which according to Guinness World Records is the world's largest Christian church. *Photo by Jbdodane*; Embassy staff feed children lunch during a visit to a local orphanage. *Photo by Travis Murphy*; Ambassador Terence McCulley views a demonstration of cocoa harvesting in the central Ivoirian town of Daloa. Côte d'Ivoire produces nearly 40 percent of the world's raw cocoa, a major component of the country's rapidly growing economy. *Photo by Travis Murphy*

At a Glance Côte d'Ivoire

Capital: Yamoussoukro

Government Type: Republic

Area: 322,463 sq km

Population: 22,848,945

Languages: French, 60 native dialects of which Dioula is the most widely spoken

Religions: Muslim 38.6%, Christian 32.8%, indigenous beliefs 11.9%, none 16.7%

GDP per capita: $1,800

Export partners: Netherlands, U.S., Nigeria, Germany, France, Canada

Import partners: Nigeria, France, China

Currency: West African CFA franc

Internet country code: .ci

Orange

YORK
Celeste

FOCUS ON
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AFRICA
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Niger

Embassy builds partnerships, strengthens security in the Sahel

Story and Photos by Isaac D. Pacheco

Situated primarily along the eastern bank of the Niger River, Niamey is the largest and most populous city in West Africa's largest country by land area. Niamey serves not only as Niger's capital and administrative center, but also as the primary trade and cultural outlet for a nation dominated by the unforgiving Sahara desert.

The city is located in a semi-arid biome known as the Sahel that lies south of the Sahara desert and stretches 5,400 kilometers across the African continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. Sparse rainfall and a dearth of arable land make the Sahel an intensely difficult region to reliably cultivate, and thus a challenging place for humans to inhabit.

"Sahel is the Arabic word meaning shore—the idea being that it's the southern shore of the Sahara desert—as though the Sahara were an ocean. It's a transitional zone between the desert and the lush rainforests and settled agricultural lands to the south," said Embassy Niamey DCM Richard Bell.

Climate, geography and security issues have combined to hamper economic growth throughout the Sahel and Niger. Even as its capital city expands to accommodate villagers seeking refuge from violence and famine in the hinterlands, Niger is routinely one of the lowest-ranked countries on the United Nations' Human Development Index.

Above: Ambassador Eunice Reddick prepares to catch the opening pass at a "Get into Rugby" event sponsored by the Nigerien Rugby Federation and the YALI Niger Association in commemoration of International Women's Day, March 8.
Photo by Embassy Niamey

Left: The Grand Mosque in central Niamey is the largest place of worship in the city. The majority of the country's population practices Islam.

Below: Vendors hawk grains, legumes and dried insects at a street market in Niamey.

Opening spread: A young girl runs home from school in Old Town Niamey.

"People assume that the reason Niger is the least developed country in the world is because it's the most corrupt, dysfunctional country in the world," said Bell. "That's not true; there is something to work with here. It's a tough neighborhood, but Niger has a democratically elected government that has gotten off to a very good start—setting good policy directions, coming up with plausible strategic documents, lining up donor support behind those strategies—and so a lot of people, not just the United States, think that now is a really good time to be engaging with Niger."

Niger's geography makes large-scale agriculture and livestock production impractical, but subsistence farming (particularly millet) and pastoralism are still two of the primary ways large portions of the desert-dominated country's residents make their living. In the capital, however, there is a more diverse economy. While many work opportunities require manual labor, Niamey residents with in-demand trade skills and entrepreneurial know-how have a number of venues in which to ply their trades or express their creativity.

As the United States seeks to bolster economic ties with Niger's citizens, Embassy Niamey has focused heavily on building shared prosperity through commercial advocacy and entrepreneurship development.

"A specific thing we've done is try to get American businesses cognizant of the fact that there are opportunities in Niger while simultaneously working with Nigeriens to help them understand that there are products the U.S. can offer that are really a good fit," said Brian Hall, the embassy's former dual-hatted economic and consular officer. "Working with young entrepreneurs, promoting formalization of the private sector and working with successful business people to create a mentorship network, all these things have really been a great experience."

In recent years, cross-border security issues have made travel outside Niger's capital perilous and led to instability in some more remote areas. These concerns are a key U.S. focus in the region, and Embassy Niamey is taking a leading role in cooperative efforts to combat religious extremism and terrorism in Niger.

"We have greatly strengthened security relations here," said Bell. "We have a responsive government that is a willing partner in confronting shared priorities, particularly against international terrorism. It's a government that is making strides in terms of development and meeting the humanitarian needs of its people. Nigeriens like us; they want us here."

The embassy promotes U.S. foreign policy initiatives and engages Niger's citizens through a variety of programs and projects, notably via the American Cultural Center (ACC). Embassy Niamey Public Affairs Officer Marissa D. Scott, who also serves as the director of the ACC, says the center has been especially effective at promoting the embassy's strategic priorities of economic statecraft; entrepreneurship and development; education; countering violent extremism; and engaging religious groups, women and youths.

"We work a lot with youth," said Scott. "Seventy-five percent of the population is under the age of 30, and 40-45 percent of those are under 15, so there's a massive youth population here, and they are our target audience."

Despite a hardship-fraught existence, Nigeriens are warm and welcoming, and have found numerous ways to inject levity into daily life through vibrant attire, elaborate celebrations and uplifting music. Like the acacia trees that dot the countryside, the country's residents are tenacious survivors who have found ways to thrive in one of the planet's most challenging environments.

"They are looking to make a better life for themselves," said Adam Weise, former Embassy Niamey political officer. "The most rewarding thing [about working here] is that you get to be a part of that in your own unique way. If you can get excited about that, and it inspires you to come to work every day, then this is the kind of place for you. If not, then you're really going to have a hard time."

Foreign Service officers posted in Niger must contend with the country's extreme climate, security issues, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to quality medical services in a region where malaria and other vector-borne diseases are endemic. Though these challenges sometimes limit extracurricular activities, professional development opportunities abound at Embassy Niamey.

"This is by no stretch of the imagination an easy place to live, but it's an exciting place to be," said Michael Chung, Embassy Niamey management officer. "If you are in Niger right now, regardless of what your specialty is, or what your cone is, this is a good place to be. When you come here, you are going to be given lots of responsibility and lots of latitude to implement change."

Weise, who in his first overseas posting was the embassy's sole political officer, said the ability to interact in a meaningful way with leaders at post and in Washington as

an entry-level officer made Niamey a valuable place to gain experience and grow.

"You get chances to work with the DCM, the ambassador, other people within the government. You're a collaborator and you also get to see how they handle various situations," he said. "You're expected to pull your own weight."

To promote morale, embassy leaders have implemented a number of community-building programs that enhance quality of life and help mission employees and their family members stay energized. The top-tier American international school adjoining the current embassy compound, and the post's secure, spacious homes, with such amenities as swimming pools, help make Embassy Niamey more inviting for officers with families. Niamey's budding food scene and surprisingly vibrant nightlife also make it easier for people to get out and explore the community.

"Niger has been fantastic for me and my family," said Scott. "When we bid on this post, we thought we were coming to a sleepy African post, and it immediately proved to be so much more. This is absolutely a family post. There's not just one school to send your kids, so parents have choices. That's not something you always get in a post that is designated high-threat and a post that has a hardship differential like we do."

No longer a sleepy backwater post, Embassy Niamey has grown from 30 American personnel in 2009 to 53 today, and is projected to top out at 70 following the construction of a new embassy compound, which begins next year. This expansion reflects the U.S. government's evolving bilateral partnerships and regional security priorities.

"We have a lot of people here who are not under chief of mission authority; they're under the combatant commander of AFRICOM," said Bell. "I see the difference now that we have a major U.S. military command focusing on Africa, and seeing Africa as a whole. Niger borders two countries that the State Department doesn't even have in the Africa bureau—Algeria and Libya—but Nigeriens really identify themselves as Sahelian and take that to mean they have connections to both north and south of the Sahara. That means a lot to them."

The unique challenges and opportunities that typify service in Niger are providing FSOs with valuable professional experience and reshaping their perspectives on service in the developing world. Like the mighty Harmattan that drives powerful dust storms across the Sahel, powerful winds of change are blowing throughout the region. Whether these changes lead to regression or renaissance has yet to be determined, but one thing is certain: A new narrative is emerging about West Africa, and Department employees like those at Embassy Niamey are helping to write it.

Clockwise from left: An ominous red cloud signals the impending arrival of a giant dust storm, blown over Niamey by the Harmattan, a continental trade wind that lifts fine particulate from the Sahara and deposits it across the region; Professional Associate Hanan Ghannoum reads to children at the REMAR orphanage located outside of Niamey. *Photo by Embassy Niamey*; A man peddles sandals and sundries from his mobile cart in Niamey; Niger's diverse array of flora and fauna includes more than 130 mammal species such as the endangered West African Giraffe (Giraffa camelopardalis peralta), of which fewer than 500 remain in the wild; Ambassador Reddick delivers remarks at an event commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women launching a campaign of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in partnership with local NGO Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violences Familiales, Nov. 25, 2014. *Photo by Embassy Niamey*; A man ferries passengers and their cargo across the Niger River in a pirogue near Bouban.

At a Glance Niger

Capital: Niamey

Government Type: Republic

Area: 1,266,700 sq km

Population: 17,466,172

Languages: French, Hausa, Djerma

Religions: Muslim (Sunni majority) 80%, other (Christian & indigenous beliefs) 20%

GDP per capita: $800

Export partners: Nigeria, U.S., India, Italy, China, Ghana

Import partners: France, China, Nigeria, French Polynesia, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire

Currency: West African CFA franc

Internet country code: .ne

CAMPAGNE DES 16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LES VIOL
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Oldest and Newest

Mission Morocco holds both distinctions

By Gada Koehler, move and transition coordinator, U.S. Embassy in Rabat

When Ambassador Dwight L. Bush, Sr. welcomed attendees to the December 2014 inauguration of the New U.S. Embassy Compound (NEC) in Rabat, Morocco, he spoke of "this beautiful building, which will be an enduring symbol of the historic friendship between the United States and Morocco." The large group of Moroccan and international dignitaries attending the event included royal counselors, the prime minister, cabinet members and foreign ambassadors.

America's friendship with Morocco dates to 1777, when Morocco became the first country to publicly recognize the new United States, and was solidified in 1787, when Congress ratified the Moroccan-American Treaty of Friendship, the longest unbroken treaty relationship in U.S. history. The first diplomatic mission to Morocco was an American consulate established in Tangier in December 1797.

In 1821, the United States was given a building in the Old Medina of Tangier and it remains the only nation that continues to own its original building in what is now the Old City of Tangier. Morocco is, therefore, home to the oldest U.S. diplomatic property in the world, the American Legation in Tangier, the only building outside of the U.S. listed as a National Historic Landmark.

Today, the legation houses the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM), whose board is composed of scholars, diplomats and leaders from the private sector. TALIM's museum references the history of Moroccan-American diplomatic and cultural relations, and features an Arabic literacy program for women living in the medina and a research library of more than 8,000 volumes. TALIM also hosts youth outreach activities, academic conferences and roundtable discussions, book presentations, film screenings, and other community events.

Now, with the opening of the NEC, "Morocco has the distinction of hosting both the oldest and the newest U.S. diplomatic missions in the world," Ambassador Bush told guests at the inauguration ceremony.

The mission community is excited about the NEC, construction of which began with a groundbreaking ceremony attended by then-Secretary Hillary Clinton in February 2012. Staff moved into the new facility in early November 2014, five months ahead of schedule.

The three-story NEC sits on an 8.25-acre site approximately three miles from Rabat's city center in the residential neighborhood of Soussi. The 14,383-square-meter building houses the main embassy offices, Marine Security Guard quarters and maintenance shops. There are also two underground parking structures and two compound access control facilities.

The head-turning contrast of the black iron Great Seal of the United States affixed to the embassy's white façade catches the eye of all passersby on the nearby street. The building's unique architectural design features natural light penetrating from all directions and provides clear views of the interior courtyard, an oasis of tranquility landscaped with a trapezoid-shaped water fountain and young jacaranda trees.

Although modern, the compound is rooted in traditional Moroccan character and climate. "The spirit of Morocco is visible throughout the building, from the Moroccan marble flooring to the zellige mosaic tile work throughout," Ambassador Bush told guests at the inauguration ceremony.

The adjacent three-story atrium, the embassy's dining room, fosters the sense of community among the staff in an open, colorful and functional environment. A Kendall Buster sculpture, "Patterned Flow," hangs from the atrium's ceiling and is constructed of white shade cloth, to complement the atrium's colorful mosaic wall. The semitransparent cloth allows for a rich overlap of layers, giving an almost vitreous appearance, like glass without the weight and fragility.

At the inauguration, the Bureau of Overseas Building Operations (OBO) was represented by then-Principal Deputy Director Heather Townsend, who noted that OBO has completed 118 new diplomatic facilities around the world and has 41 additional projects in design or under construction.

Ambassador Bush lauded OBO project director Aziz Younes and his team, noting that Younes had shepherded the project from groundbreaking to opening: "In many ways, this building is his baby." He presented Younes with a U.S. flag, which had flown over both the new and former locations of the embassy, and thanked the government of Morocco, the Wilaya provincial government and the city of Rabat for their support and cooperation. "This was truly a group effort and I am very grateful to everyone who was involved," concluded Ambassador Bush.

Clockwise from top: From right, U.S. Ambassador to Morocco Dwight L. Bush, Sr., OBO Principal Deputy Director Heather Townsend and Moroccan Head of Government Abdelilah Benkirane celebrate the unveiling of the embassy's dedication plaque during the opening ceremony of the New U.S. Embassy Compound. *Photo by Gregory Adamson;* The new embassy's black iron Great Seal contrasts with its white façade. *Photo by Gregory Adamson;* The "Moorish Pavilion" of the legation in Tangier is the only building outside of the United States listed as a National Historic Landmark. *Photo courtesy of Archnet.org*

Eat Your Veggies

Chef's tour promotes nutrition

By Adaeze Igwe, cultural affairs officer,
U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Cuba Libre restaurants' head chef and partner Guillermo Pernot works with culinary students to assemble his signature dish, the "Garden of Eden," in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Photo by Edwar Javier Ramirez

Sometimes the best way to win "hearts and minds" may be through stomachs. That's why the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa invited a two-time winner of the James Beard Foundation Award for culinary excellence to come to Honduras to talk with residents about topics like childhood nutrition, U.S. assistance to small farmers and export promotion. The chef, American restaurateur Guillermo Pernot, spent eight days in Honduras in February, sponsored by the Bureau of International Information Programs.

Pernot is one of 60 chefs in the American Chef Corps, a Department initiative that features culinary engagement in public diplomacy. Pernot is the head chef and partner of the Cuba Libre restaurants, with locations in Washington, D.C., Orlando, Atlantic City and Philadelphia, where he helped introduce Latin fusion cuisine. "I cannot think of any better person to share his expertise than Guillermo," said Ambassador James D. Nealon.

During his visit, Pernot, a native of Argentina, showcased American cuisine, promoted American food and food-related products, and engaged with Hondurans from all walks of life.

Hondurans responded enthusiastically to the visit, which began when Pernot met with rural farmers in Cane, a small town an hour and a half from Tegucigalpa. There, USAID's Feed the Future program provides technical assistance to thousands of farming families. On one farm, with local and national media following, he urged families to consume more of the produce they typically grow for export, to decrease the impact of stunting, a chronic condition that prevents children from reaching normal height and impedes intellectual development. "Some of the products you grow on your land are similar to the products I use in my restaurants back in the U.S.—use them!" he exclaimed. The farmers gave him a few boxes of vegetables and herbs for the classes Pernot planned to teach at public and private culinary schools in Tegucigalpa.

Once there, Pernot met with more than 50 culinary school students, some of whom aspire to own their own restaurants, or to become top chefs—or just find employment in the food industry. He spent two days working with about 25 students at each institution, offering hands-on training in knife skills, herb selection and other food preparation topics.

He also demonstrated how to follow a vegetable-rich diet. Using mainly vegetables from a major U.S. importer and those from rural farmers in Cane, he created his multisensory "Garden of Eden" meal with the students of each institution. The dish was made up of grilled bone marrow, sautéed vegetables, butternut squash purée, homemade pumpkinseed brittle and brightly colored sauces.

He also spoke of the U.S. food scene, how to attain a successful culinary career and why it's best to cook with vegetables. The students were impressed. Their diets consist mostly of beans, tortillas, rice and meat. "I never before cooked with vegetables," said one of the students. "I don't like them and I did not know how to cook with them. Now because of Guillermo, I can be more creative with vegetables, and they taste good! I have learned so much from him."

Pernot was especially impressed with the work ethic of three of the students and brought them to cook with him on the most popular morning television show in Honduras. More than 800,000 people tuned in to watch Pernot make tuna ceviche with freshly made sauces at a temporary kitchen installed in one of the capital's main hotels.

Pernot used the freshest ingredients, produce and meats for the culinary diplomacy program, to which the Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agriculture Service office at post is deeply committed. FAS reached out to major importers of U.S. food products and an importer of U.S. wines to supply and promote their products at the culinary events and classroom demonstrations. During an evening reception in Tegucigalpa attended by nearly 100 food industry magnates, Pernot's culinary creations were paired with California wines. The meal featured a four-day marinated pork dish prepared Cuban-style and accompanied by a robust pinot noir. Honduras is beginning to present a potential growth market for the American wine industry.

Beyond showcasing American food products, Pernot said the tour gave him an opportunity to taste the myriad regional dishes in Honduras. For instance, ambassador Nealon's chef introduced him to Honduran staples at a reception at the ambassador's residence. Pernot likened some of the food to that at Latin food festivals in the United States.

Later in his trip, he visited the Garifuna community, an Afro-Honduran ethnic group, to learn about the community's history and share a meal consisting of rice cooked with red beans in coconut milk, coconut-based fish sauces and mashed yellow cassava, cuisine much like that of some Caribbean islands. At the largest farmers market in Tegucigalpa, Pernot ate tortillas stuffed with beans, eggs, cheese and assorted meats and other treats, plus exotic fruits like mangosteen, guanabana and abiu, which are not commonly found in the U.S. Later, while visiting Honduras' Caribbean Bay Islands, he ate crabmeat spread over guacamole.

The culinary diplomacy program was Pernot's first excursion as a chef-diplomat, something he's done informally for much of his life. He has brought several premier Cuban chefs to work in his U.S. restaurants, mentored them, and seen them return to their home-based restaurants to add new cooking techniques and spices to the menus. In 2012, he participated in a culinary exchange in which he brought guests to dine in Cuba along Havana's waterfront.

Paying Homage

Consular section honors bombing victims

By Jeremy Wisemiller, fraud prevention manager, U.S. Embassy in Nairobi

On Feb. 25, members of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi's consular team visited the August 7th Memorial Park, in the heart of downtown Nairobi. The park has a Memorial Garden and Peace Museum that stand on land once occupied by the U.S. Mission to Kenya at the time it was attacked by terrorists in 1998.

The visit was organized as a team-building activity to strengthen the section by learning more about the mission's history and inspiring staff members to practice 360-degree diplomacy. Three section staff members lived through the bombing and one was retiring at the end of the month, which meant this could be the last chance to hear her firsthand account of what happened on Aug. 7, 1998, when terrorists detonated a truck bomb outside of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, as they simultaneously bombed the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In Nairobi, more than 200 people died, including 44 embassy employees, and more than 4,000 people were injured. The site of the former U.S. embassy is now a place of remembrance to honor the victims and others affected by this tragic event.

The Memorial Park General Manager Brenda Selebwa provided an overview to embassy visitors. A beautifully landscaped park features informational signs on how the site looked before the attack. The garden's main pathway leads to the Memorial Wall, which is lined with stones collected from Kenyan riverbeds meant to symbolize the strength and resilience of the Kenyan people against terrorism.

On the way to the park's central fountain stands a sculpture constructed of mangled debris collected from the site, an emotional reminder of the blast's damaging power. The fountain is in the shape of a yin-yang symbol, and water flows from one side of the fountain to the other, representing the circle of life. The rough side of the fountain represents the dark and destructive day of the attack, and the calm side symbolizes peace.

Members of the Embassy Nairobi consular team visiting the August 7th Memorial Park in February pose before its memorial wall. *Photo by Philips Asusa*

The fountain is located in front of the park's most moving and significant feature, the Memorial Wall. Engraved in granite slabs are 218 names of those known to have lost their lives that day. U.S. ambassadors to Kenya participate in annual wreath laying ceremonies at the Memorial Wall, honoring the victims of the attack. One of the most memorable moments of the trip was when three consular colleagues who were present at the embassy on the day of the attack pointed out the names of their former boss, Consul General Julian Bartley, Sr., his son Jay Bartley and fellow Locally Employed Staff member Lucy Nyawira Karigi.

Following the tour, the group visited the adjoining Memorial Peace Museum to learn more about the events of Aug. 7, 1998, and the important work of the August 7th Memorial Trust.

The museum's exhibits and its documentary featuring former Ambassador Prudence Bushnell tell of those whose lives were forever changed by the attack. The images and exhibits also show the heroic acts of the public, Kenyan emergency services workers and international experts who responded in the immediate aftermath and subsequent investigation. Had it not been for their coordinated efforts, many more lives would have been lost and the terrorists might have never been brought to justice.

The consular section group then heard the embassy's assistant regional security officer discuss lessons learned from the embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania and how they led to changes in embassy security, emergency preparedness and response procedures at U.S. diplomatic posts throughout the world.

Today, the site of the former U.S. embassy is a serene oasis nestled among tall buildings and congested thoroughfares. Once a place of unimaginable devastation, the August 7th Memorial Park is now sacred ground in remembrance of those who lost their lives, to pay tribute to the thousands who suffered permanent injury, and to honor the heroism of those who selflessly responded in the face of unknown dangers.

Photo by Jorge Lásoar

Social Citizenship

Embassy's new media training promotes freedom

By Joshua Shen, information officer, U.S. Embassy Colombo

Which factor—Bollywood, astrology or hashtags—played a key role in the January presidential elections in Sri Lanka, where the powerful former president was defeated by a diverse opposition coalition?

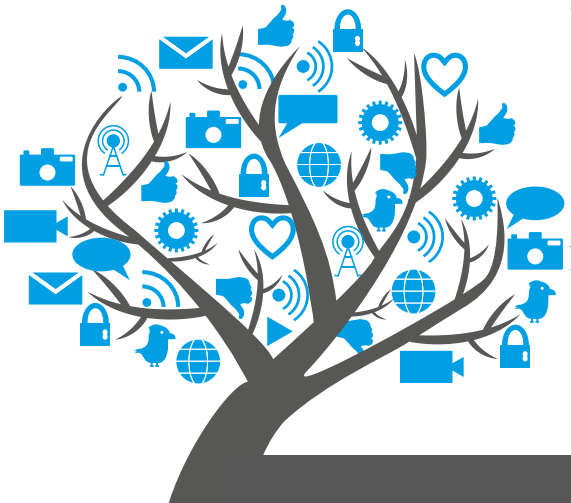
Hashtags, of course.

The use of hashtags, phrases sent via social media preceded by the "#" symbol to promote searches, is a mainstay of sites such as Twitter. In the Sri Lankan election, social media and hashtagged information became popular for citizens in opposition groups to promote independent voices and keep in touch

Since its civil war ended in 2009, Sri Lanka has struggled toward lasting peace and justice for all citizens, amid strong economic growth, rising costs of consumer goods and growing discontent among its three primary ethnic and religious communities. Sri Lanka's civil society institutions, such as the judiciary, are also under increasing political pressure: its press is either state run or slanted by corporate media interests, and activists and journalists are sometimes harassed, detained or attacked.

In this environment, Embassy Colombo's contacts can be questioned by government security forces just for attending embassy functions, and many programming partners look over their shoulders in fear.

To address this concern while promoting Sri Lankans' basic liberties and gaining a stronger voice in their country's affairs, the U.S. Embassy in Colombo beginning in 2012 launched a series of one-day Social Media Lab (SML) training sessions open to all citizens to help them better understand and utilize social media. The brevity of each session allowed the Public Affairs Section to maintain full capacity and keep trainers in-house, thus reducing the risk of external harassment.



The SML trainings were offered at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, with open registration publicized by the post's American Spaces across the country. Some lessons were tailored to key audiences, including staff at other diplomatic missions, employees at communications and advertising firms and reporters at major media outlets, even pro-government ones. Beginner-level content included creating a Twitter account and using hashtags. More advanced classes covered optimized searches via Google, Facebook marketing and interpreting social media analytics. In total, about 2,400 people have participated from all over Sri Lanka.

Interest in the trainings remains high, with new registrants and organizations frequently seeking classes, partly due to the growing number of Internet users in Sri Lanka, which is now approaching 25 percent of the population. Increasing and more affordable mobile connectivity has led to a major leap in mobile users. By one estimate, from 2013 to 2014 mobile Internet usage has risen from 18 to 57 percent.

In the newly opened political and technological environment, the SML trainings' success has provided the opportunity for Embassy Colombo to expand classes to new audiences, especially outside the capital. Regional professional trainers have been recruited to lead longer and more comprehensive workshops in Kandy and Jaffna, and there are similar plans for Malé in the Maldives. New laptops and tablets funded by the Bureau of International Information Programs provide crucial resources for attendees' use in these trainings.

In April, Embassy Colombo launched the iBus, a mobile social media training platform that is essentially a classroom on wheels. The iBus has seats and computers for 14 students and will travel to rural and provincial communities where available classroom space is limited. Its mobility and on-board generator mean classes will not be subject to local infrastructure limitations or the whims of rural authorities. Its interior is designed with Americana themes, while the exterior is covered with a collage of U.S. high-tech hotspots and social media graphics.

Hashtags played a role in what's been dubbed "Sri Lanka's first social media

The iBus brings social media and computer skills training to areas without reliable facilities and classrooms. *Photo by Joshua Shen*

election" because, despite the former regime's overwhelming control of media outlets, the electorate was able to raise its concerns over corruption, the high cost of living and weakened democratic institutions through social media. This occurred even as the former regime relied upon an astrologer and several Bollywood stars to promote its overexposed and ineffective themes.

Information relayed by social media went far beyond young and hip Colombo-based users to offline networks of friends and relatives. They succeeded in carrying breaking news, exposing campaign abuses and violence, and encouraging voting through popular hashtags like #IVotedSL. People aired candid opinions about the regime, even in rural areas, since it only took one person in a village to access social media with a smartphone and spread the information exponentially. Social media also provided a forum for intense scrutiny of incidents of campaign violence and malfeasance, bolstered by immediate, on-the-ground reporting and rapid information sharing.

Where press freedoms are weakened and state-run media control the tools of propaganda, social media gives citizens access to alternate networks and the possibility to voice their opinions. Thus, it is critical that Embassy Colombo engages with them and promotes social media usage.

In March, Chargé d'Affaires Andrew C. Mann, center left, and Public Affairs Officer Nicole Chulick inaugurated the first batch of students for two-month Social Media Lab courses at the American Corner in the town of Kandy. Mission-wide support for the lab has been crucial to its success. *Photo by Sharmini Sinniah*

Meet Me in Milan

USA Pavilion at world's fair to showcase American food

By Keith Peterson, senior advisor, Milan Expo, EUR/PD

Although many Americans are surprised to learn that world's fairs still exist, these "cultural Olympics" are hugely popular in other parts of the world and U.S. participation is avidly sought by the fair's host country. And so, for nearly two years, the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) has been shepherding the creation of a U.S. national pavilion that opens May 1 at Milan Expo 2015.

Ambassador John Phillips in Rome, Consul General Phil Reeker in Milan, Deputy Commissioner General Elia Tello and the entire Mission Italy team see the expo in Milan as a unique opportunity to develop programs that not only strengthen our bilateral relationship with Italy, but also further important transatlantic political and economic objectives.

With the theme, "Feeding the Planet; Energy for Life," Milan Expo 2015 expects to welcome between 20 and 30 million visitors. Three to five million of those visitors will visit the USA Pavilion during the six-month Expo.

Expo 2015 revolves around one central question: How will we feed nine billion people on the planet by 2050? The USA Pavilion, with the theme "American Food 2.0: United to Feed the Planet," will showcase Americans who are engaged in feeding the world globally, responsibly, nutritiously, innovatively and deliciously.

"This is not simply a fair celebrating food, and I want people to understand that," said Secretary of State John Kerry at the July 2014 reception that marked the Milan groundbreaking of the USA Pavilion. "This is much more serious, much more broad in its scope, much more visionary in its purpose."

"The Milan Expo of 2015," he continued, "is a chance for us to share with the world the work that American scientists, chefs, entrepreneurs, farmers, fishermen all continue to do day in and day out and hopefully help people to understand the ways in which we can make progress in the future."

The 1961 Fulbright-Hays Act assigned responsibility for overseeing U.S. participation in world expos to the United States Information Agency; after the 1999 merger of USIA with the Department of State, this role passed to the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. For Milan, ECA has further delegated authority regarding the fair to EUR.

Secretary of State John Kerry welcomes Douglas Hickey, the newly appointed Commissioner General for the USA Pavilion at the Milan Expo, following a December ceremony at the Department. Hickey, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, will represent the Department during the six-month World Expo in Milan and will hold the rank of Ambassador. *Department of State photo*

Because of congressional prohibitions against spending appropriated funds on world's fairs, the process of creating a U.S. national pavilion starts with a request for private sector proposals. The RFP announcement for Milan, issued in 2013, drew five proposals, and the chosen consortium includes the James Beard Foundation, the International Culinary Center and the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy, the private sector partner. This group, "The Friends of the USA Pavilion," subsequently hired James Biber Architects to design the pavilion, and Thinc Design, which designed the 9/11 Museum, to create the exhibits.

Secretary Kerry named Doug Hickey, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, as the commissioner general of the USA Pavilion in December. Hickey, with FSO Elia Tello as his deputy, is leading the effort to raise $50 million to $60 million from private sources to fund the pavilion and related programming. Thus, no U.S. government money will be spent on the pavilion. Secretary Kerry and Ambassador David Thorne, the Secretary's special representative on economic issues, have been speaking to business leaders about their opportunities at the USA Pavilion.

As one of 53 countries building a freestanding national pavilion (others are participating in food "clusters"), the U.S. will operate three physical locations, plus an online presence. The main pavilion is a 40,000-square-foot open structure featuring a hydroponic vertical farm the size of a football field that will be harvested throughout the duration of the expo. Less than 50 yards away, "Food Truck Nation" will showcase regional American food, from lobster rolls to kimchi tacos. In the historic Galleria in central Milan, a dream team of American chefs will rotate through a James Beard pop-up restaurant.

As visitors enter the pavilion, they will be greeted by Native American voices and a welcoming video featuring President Obama. Exhibits on the upper level will include a

The 40,000-square-foot USA Pavilion at the Milan Expo 2015 will be a large, open structure that will feature a hydroponic vertical farm the size of a football field. The building was designed by Biber Architects of New York.

Photo and rendering by Biber Architects

video clip of Secretary Kerry talking about climate change in the policy section as well as other videos and graphics focused on the areas of farming, nutrition, chefs, research, and industry. On the lower level, visitors will be guided through a multimedia "Great American Foodscape" that offers a look at America's diverse food culture.

Visitors to the USA Pavilion will be assisted by 120 Student Ambassadors. These university students, chosen from 1,000 applicants, collectively speak 29 different languages and will serve in Milan in two groups of 60, each for three months. Brooks Brothers designed the Student Ambassador uniforms, an important touch given Milan's status as a fashion capital.

Beatrice Camp, the Milan Expo coordinator in EUR/PD, came to the job with experience from Shanghai, where she was consul general during the 2010 Expo. "Having seen how the USA Pavilion in Shanghai served as a platform for people-to-people diplomacy, business promotion, cabinet-level visits, state and local delegations and cultural programs, I am looking forward to even broader outreach in Milan," said Camp. "With three locations and a theme that is directly relevant to the administration's interests in climate change, sustainability and innovation, we can expect a Thanksgiving feast of events and visits during the six-month course of the expo."

"Our theme, 'American Food 2.0,' aims to foster awareness and enthusiasm for American food in all its aspects," said Ambassador Phillips. "The most important trends in American cuisine aim at sustainability, innovation, entrepreneurship and healthy and delicious dishes. As a nation of immigrants, we enjoy a fusion of tastes and ingredients that knows no equal in the world."

Since arriving in Milan as consul general, Ambassador Reeker believes "Milan is the place to be in 2015," a sentiment shared by The New York Times, listing the city as no. 1 among its annual 52 must-see "Places to Go." "Milan Expo provides a global platform to gather leaders from government, business and academia," said Reeker. "The topics will be wide-ranging, including food security, climate change, free trade and cultural exchange. Everything will be on the table from good food to good conversations."

Secretary Kerry plans to visit Expo during its six-month run. Other U.S. officials are scheduling trips to Milan, including those from the departments of Agriculture, Commerce and USAID, entities that all contributed to the development of the USA Pavilion. Events such as the launch of The Economist's 2015 Global Food Security Index at the pavilion in May, Independence Day celebrations, an Aspen Institute conference and an American Chef Rally in July hint at the variety of programs that will make U.S. participation memorable.

"Innovation has defined the more than 60 expositions held since the first one opened its doors in 1851," noted Secretary Kerry. "Each and every one of them has been about changing the world and shaping the future. So I have high hopes."

More information is available on the USA Pavilion website.

Background: A streetcar in Milan, Italy, rolls up to La Scala, one of the world's pre-eminent opera houses and ballet theaters.

Photo by Bert Kaufmann

Timely Focus

Mission promotes gender equality in India

By Salman Khan, political officer, U.S. Embassy in New Delhi

Participants gather for a "flash mob" event at the American Center in New Delhi, Dec. 2014.

Photo by U.S. Embassy New Delhi

To promote gender equality in India, Mission India takes a systematic approach, focusing on programs that counter gender-based violence and promote women's economic inclusion, and on cultural programs that target opinion leaders, policymakers and youth.

Two years ago, New Delhi was rocked by the news of the rape and murder of a woman on a public bus. This and several subsequent high-profile incidents and their media coverage placed the spotlight on gender-based violence in India, a real concern. A poll released in October by the Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked India the fourth most dangerous place for a woman to take public transport and the second-worst place for women's safety at night.

To fight gender-based violence, Mission India focuses on collaboration and innovation. Its Safe Cities program, a partnership with "UN Women" (The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) and the government of Japan, supports public safety in New Delhi. Under the program, Mission India and municipal planners, law enforcement, community groups and schools assessed women and girls' public safety and identified solutions that included better lighting and more police patrols, and changed attitudes about gender-based violence through outreach to girls and boys in school.

Mission India also addressed helping men and boys combat gender-based violence. Its Hero Project challenges the link between violence and masculinity and funds small projects developed by men and boys to improve women and girls' safety in the community. Some male beneficiaries of the program developed action plans to reduce alcoholism in their communities, involve girls in sports programs and ensure women's safety and equality.

In addition, New Delhi's American Center in November launched a "flash mob" that centered around a couple of professional actors from a Delhi-based dance troupe who performed a scenario in which a man intentionally harassed a young woman to see how the general public would react. The participants also used the launch to kick-start a subsequent self-defense workshop for women led by the Street Level Awareness Program (SLAP), founded by an International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) alumna.

The flash mob event ended with the short film, "It's a Men's Issue," highlighting the need to engage men in gender-based violence discussions. More than 300 people participated throughout the day.

Another program, held in the south of India, is called Mobilize! It focuses on gender-based violence in Bangalore and offers mobilephone-based tools for health workers to use during routine medical checkups to identify whether a woman was harmed by gender-based violence, improving how urban health care workers screen and treat survivors of violence. In Mumbai, Mission India brought together technology experts and NGOs at a "Tech Camp" led by technology experts from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). There, a group of girls from the Dharavi slum—"the Dharavi Girls"—created a women's safety app now available for download.

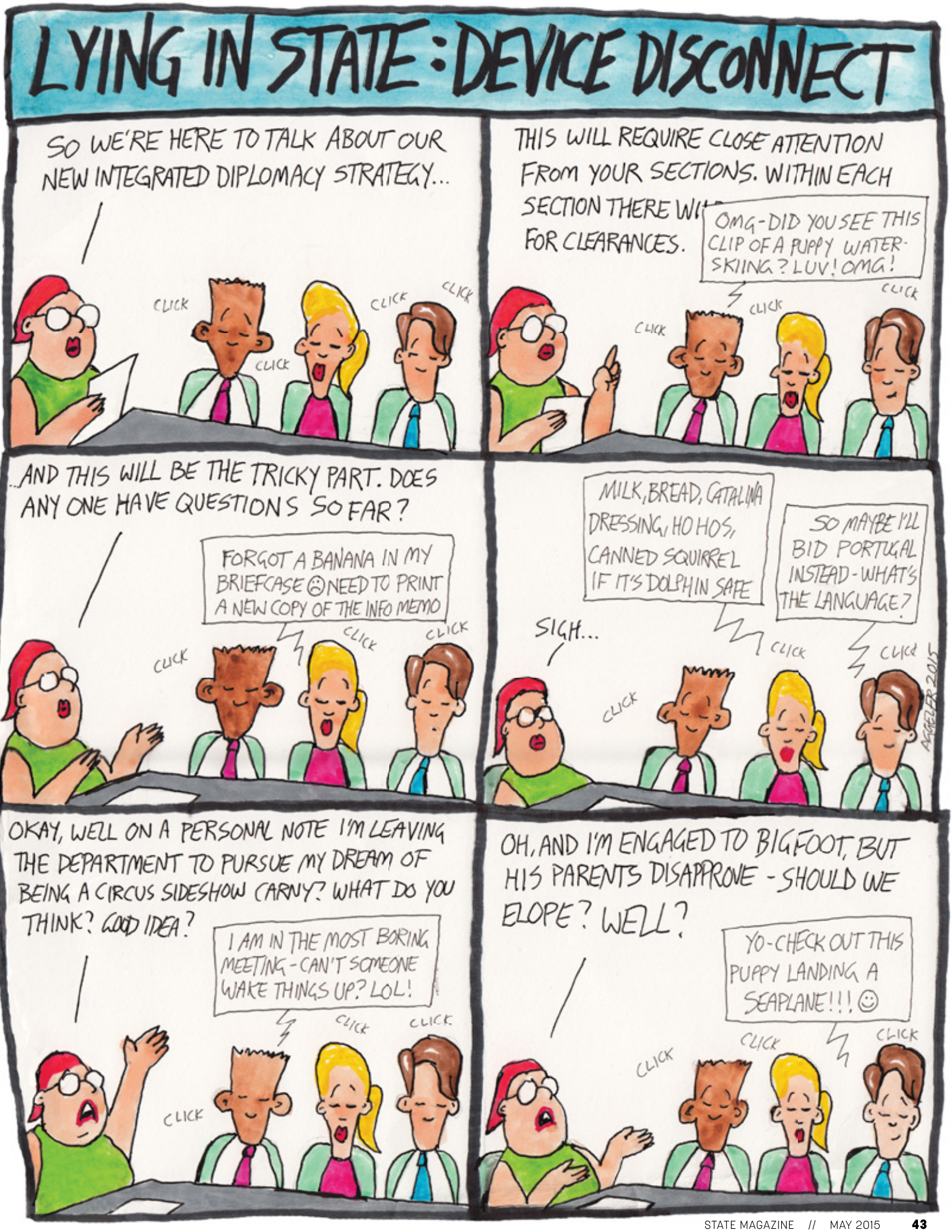
Making women's lives safer is just one part of gender equality. Increased freedom and mobility must also lead to increased economic opportunity and influence so that women's economic participation will make them more influential within Indian society and improve the Indian economy. According to the International Monetary Fund, women's full economic participation would add as much as 13 percent to India's per capita income.

Therefore, in collaboration with the World Bank and several NGOs, Mission India implemented the Women's Leadership in Small and Medium Enterprises initiative in 2012 to remove barriers to women owning and managing small and medium enterprises. Mission India also supported the Partnership on Women's Entrepreneurship in Clean Energy initiative, which empower rural women to be clean energy entrepreneurs through practical training, business support, access to finance and exposure to markets. In Mumbai, the Consulate General's Foreign Commercial Service and pol/econ section held events to raise awareness issues that Indian women face in the workplace, from career obstacles to open harassment, and ways female investors can support projects that benefit girls' education and women-owned small businesses.

Still, without changing the underlying mindset that feeds into gender inequality, improvements in safety and economic inclusion will lag. This is why Mission India uses targeted social media campaigns, performance art, photography and film to engage opinion leaders, policymakers and youth on gender equality, seeking a dialogue that will lead to tangible change.

In Mumbai in March, Mission India sponsored a women's photography contest, which was promoted on Facebook and Twitter, gaining more than 4,000 new fans and netting more than 200 photo submissions. The top 15 entries were part of a weeklong exhibition held in partnership with a local photo gallery, and the winner traveled more than 500 kilometers to attend the event—her first time in Mumbai. (She said she had sponsored her photo subject, a young girl who lived on the streets with her family, by covering her school fees.) A Mumbai photography magazine later featured some of the photos. Mission India is also planning a Women's Empowerment Dialogue with the government of India, ending a three-year hiatus of the dialogue.

By focusing on gender issues, economic inclusion and cultural outreach, Mission India strives to systematically promote gender equality in India. This is not a short-term goal. As Secretary of State John Kerry said in commemoration of this year's International Women's Day, "We will not retreat in the face of those who seek to diminish or banish women and girls to the margins of society."


LYING IN STATE: DEVICE DISCONNECT
SO WE'RE HERE TO TALK ABOUT OUR NEW INTEGRATED DIPLOMACY STRATEGY...
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THIS WILL REQUIRE CLOSE ATTENTION FROM YOUR SECTIONS. WITHIN EACH SECTION THERE WI
FOR CLEARANCES.
OMG - DID YOU SEE THIS CLIP OF A PUPPY WATER-SKIING? LUV! OMG!
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...AND THIS WILL BE THE TRICKY PART. DOES ANY ONE HAVE QUESTIONS SO FAR?
FORGOT A BANANA IN MY BRIEFCASE ☹ NEED TO PRINT A NEW COPY OF THE INFO MEMO
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MILK, BREAD, CATALINA DRESSING, HO HOS, CANNED SQUIRREL IF IT'S DOLPHIN SAFE
SO MAYBE I'LL BID PORTUGAL INSTEAD - WHAT'S THE LANGUAGE?
SIGH...
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CLICK
AGGELER 2015
OKAY, WELL ON A PERSONAL NOTE I'M LEAVING THE DEPARTMENT TO PURSUE MY DREAM OF BEING A CIRCUS SIDESHOW CARNY? WHAT DO YOU THINK? GOOD IDEA?
I AM IN THE MOST BORING MEETING - CAN'T SOMEONE WAKE THINGS UP? LOL!
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
OH, AND I'M ENGAGED TO BIGFOOT, BUT HIS PARENTS DISAPPROVE - SHOULD WE ELOPE? WELL?
YO - CHECK OUT THIS PUPPY LANDING A SEAPLANE!!! ☺
CLICK
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in brief...

Deputy Addresses Affinity Group

Deputy Secretary Heather Higginbottom, center front row, in February attended a meeting of the Arab-Americans in Foreign Affairs Agencies (AAIFAA) Employee Affinity Group as it hosted its first social gathering. The group, established in 2014, heard speeches by Higginbottom and AAIFAA's interim chair, Khulood Kandil. Also attending were AAIFAA's Leadership Liasion Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch and 30 of the group's nearly 100 members.

Photo by Robert Stewart

Ambassador Meets Cricket Club

Newly arrived U.S. Ambassador to India Richard R. Verma, in jersey no. 1, poses in February with the American Embassy Cricket Club (AECC) in New Delhi after it beat the American Embassy school and the Australian, Norwegian and Canadian Embassy teams to win the Six Nations inter-Embassy cricket tournament. The AECC was established in 2007 to foster and promote friendship between officers and staff at diplomatic missions in the greater New Delhi area through the game of cricket.

Photo by Rakesh Malhotra

Training Focus: Internet Governance

In a panel discussion at the U.S. Embassy in London in January are, from left, Ambassador Matthew Barzun, Baroness Joanna Shields and Ambassador Daniel Sepulveda. They discussed fostering government-tech community collaboration as part of an Internet Governance and the Digital Economy training involving more than 50 employees of the Departments of State and Commerce, and United Kingdom-based diplomats from more than 30 other embassies. For the event, the embassy collaborated with FSI and the Economic Bureau's Office of International Communications and Information Policy.

Photo by Victoria King

Corrections:

The caption for America the Beautiful (April 2015, pg. 5) should have indicated that the neighborhood surrounding Bourbon Street is known as the French Quarter.

The Bridging Nations article (April 2015, pg. 8) incorrectly placed the initial for Senator J. William Fulbright's first name in the middle of his name.

The map data for Tunisia (April 2015, pg. 14) incorrectly listed the country's land area. According to The World Factbook, Tunisia's land area is 163,610 sq. km.

Staff Assists Secretary's Visit

Several staff members of the U.S. Mission in Saudi Arabia celebrate after working on the secretary's March visit to Riyadh. Shown from left are Information Management Specialist Gustavo Lescano, Management Counselor Debra Smoker-Ali, Assistant General Services Officer Kevin Phillips, Visit Coordinator Maya Ndao-Fall and Economic Officer Mary Jo Pham. The mission has hosted the secretary four times in the past 12 months.

Photo by John Gaitan

Love in the Air in Santo Domingo

Recently betrothed employees of the consular section at U.S. Embassy Santo Domingo, six of whom became engaged between Christmas 2014 and early March, gather for a photo after a meeting. Shown from left are Jeremy Spector, Ken Seifert of USAID, Kamilah Keith, Cristina Guzman, Lisa Kalajian, Michelle Morales, Nileydi Munoz and Brenda Gabriel. In all, seven consular staff members are making wedding plans, including two Locally Employed Staff and five Foreign Service officers.

Photo by Timothy McNally

Retirements

Civil Service

Blackmon, Rhonda J.
Colvin, Stanley S.
Kwan, David
Mandler, Peter Coit
Manion Jr., John E.
Palmer, Robert A.
Scott, Florence J.
Toner, Patricia D.
Willig, Susan P.

Foreign Service

Fitzgerald, Timothy C.
Frederick, George G.
Guy, Patricia H. H.
Kenny, Joseph A.
Knopp, Fred J.
Le Claire, Claire
Niblock Jr., Thomas Clinton
O'Brien, Sean M.
Odette, David J.
Stallings, David W.
Wade, John F.
Westfall, George J.
Youmans, Frances M.

Ethics Answers

Q: A luxury clothing company saw a photo of our post's ambassador wearing the company's best-selling jacket and asked the ambassador for permission to post the photo on its website to promote the product, in exchange for a $25 gift certificate. May the ambassador give his permission to use the photo and accept the gift certificate?

A: No. The ethics rules prohibit the ambassador from permitting the use of his photo to promote a private commercial business, since the ethics rules bar use of one's public office for private gain. There are very limited exceptions to these rules, none applicable here, such as approved commercial advocacy for official purposes. Further, he should not accept the $25 certificate as it is an impermissible gift, because it was offered due to the ambassador's official position, with no applicable exception. It also cannot be accepted because the certificate was offered in exchange for the performance of an official act.

Ethics Answers presents hypothetical ethical scenarios Department employees might face. For help with real ethics questions, email ethicsattorneymailbox@state.gov.

A Plumbing Conundrum

By Ron Martin, certified industrial hygienist and certified hazardous material manager, OBO/OPS/SHEM

From Fukuoka to Freetown, toilets share a safety issue: flushing nonsewage items down them can create serious problems to homes and public sewer systems. In overseas environments where piping is precarious and infrastructure maintenance may be lacking, facility managers recommend exercising extra precautions.

The terms "disposable" or "flushable" are often misleading, since they imply no hazards to drains or the environment. But the opposite is the case in some circumstances.

Wet wipes are a good example. They have become very popular—not only for babies, but adults too. Despite labels to the contrary, they should definitely not be flushed down toilets. The same properties that make wet wipes so effective while in use become a problem when discarded down drains. Unlike toilet paper, wipes do not break down in water and, instead, can easily clog domestic plumbing and sewers.

A sheet of most brands of toilet paper dissolves after about eight seconds of swirling in water. After an hour, wet wipes often show minimal degradation. If they get through a building's drains, they can easily become a nightmare for public utilities and septic systems where they block pipes and pumps, resulting in sewage backups into streams, streets and even homes. At posts overseas, facility managers are concerned that such blockages may affect residences and families living in close-quartered compounds.

Wet wipe manufacturers and utility companies are actively seeking a solution to this problem. Unfortunately, progress is slow and will likely require regulatory action to create industry-wide solutions. In the meantime, cities and public utilities across America spend millions of dollars a year in increased maintenance costs to unclog and dispose of the waste material. These costs are then passed down to all of us as consumers.

The problem is not limited to wet wipes, or to the United States. Dental floss, sanitary napkins and pop-off scrubbers on toilet cleaning wands are popular worldwide and routinely cause similar problems. Disposable baby diapers do not break down either; most people recognize the potential hazard and avoid flushing diapers.

Cooking grease, poured down sinks rather than flushed, can also be a hazard to sewer systems. As it cools, the grease solidifies and over time hardens into a concrete-like mass, easily clogging sewer lines. If the grease gets through domestic piping, it can adhere to baby wipes and clog up the entire sewage infrastructure. Additionally, microbes that feed off of the grease release sulfur products, eventually becoming sulfuric acid that corrodes steel piping. A fifteen-ton blob of cooking grease and wet wipes the size of a city bus completely clogged an 8-foot diameter pipe in London in 2013. Dubbed a "fatberg," the problem was discovered when raw sewage began spewing onto public streets and into home basements. Another 250-foot fatberg was discovered last year under London streets. Many utilities in the United States are experiencing similar problems that cost individual municipalities millions of dollars in increased maintenance fees to keep the sewer systems flowing.

Another item of concern is kitty litter. Because it contains bentonite clay that can expand up to 15 times in size, even small amounts poured down drains may clog pipes. In addition, hazardous chemicals are always a significant concern. Wastewater treatment systems depend on digestive bacteria to break down toxic waste. Many household chemicals kill these bacteria. Other chemicals flow through the system unaffected by the treatment process and are discharged into the aquatic environment, where they can harm fish, wildlife, humans and pets. An article in the March 2012 edition of State Magazine discussed the environmental consequences associated with flushing medicines.

Hazardous wastes should never be flushed or dumped down a drain. It is not only illegal but may harm pipes or release toxic or explosive vapors. Even commercial products designed to unclog drains can harm plumbing. Chemical drain cleaners can harm PVC or old, corroded metal pipes. These products use formulations that when mixed may damage porcelain, stainless steel or aluminum fixtures. They may spray or release vapors harming the skin and eyes. Never mix drain cleaners or ammonia with bleach. These combinations can produce toxic chlorine gas.

In response to federal water conservation mandates and environmental "greening" efforts, wastewater treatment systems are being constructed on many embassy and consulate compounds to reuse sewage for irrigation and other purposes in addition to discharging cleaner water to the environment. One such facility in Manila quickly developed problems and required constant attention because of the trash and chemicals (cleaners, oil, food products) flushed into it, and the remedial work took maintenance staff away from other important tasks. Another overseas facility manager was forced to close a restroom where flushed feminine hygiene products were continually causing clogs and exposing maintenance staff to health risks.

As the sayings go, all drains lead to the ocean and all pipes connect, which means we have a responsibility to pay more attention to our flushing habits. When in doubt, a trash can rather than a toilet is a safer option for nonsewage items.

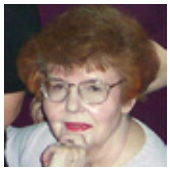
Obituaries

Mary E. Bailey, 85, a retired Foreign Service employee, died Jan. 9 from natural causes in Beatrice, Neb. She worked in communications, and after serving for 23 years at embassies in Cairo, Manila, London, Mexico City, Kabul and Karachi, retired to Beatrice in 1979. She enjoyed volunteering and attending St. Joseph's Catholic Church. She devoted time at the Community Play Center and hospital coffee shop. When not volunteering, she played cards with friends, watched tennis, listened to music and kept up with world events.

Opal Garnet Branch, 100, a retired FSO, died Feb. 24 in Urbana, Ill. After working for the War Department, she joined State in 1946 and served until 1974, including at posts in Ankara, London, Oslo, Fukuoka, Tokyo and Paris. She was an active member of Beta Sigma Phi International and, while in England in 1951, represented her chapter at the reopening ceremony of St. George's Guildhall in King's Lynn, in the presence of the late Queen Mother. In retirement she enjoyed volunteer work and was the oldest member of DACOR.

Michael M. Conlin, 86, a retired FSO, died from a heart attack on March 3 in Santa Rosa, Calif. He joined the Department in 1950 and held management positions in Brazil, Thailand, Venezuela, Belgium and Great Britain, where he was administrative officer. In Washington, D.C., he was director of management operations and an OIG inspector. In retirement since 1980, he enjoyed living in California and spending time with his family.

Marvin James Hoffenberg, 88, a retired FSO, died Feb. 17 in Naples, Fla. He served in the Air Force during World War II. After working for the departments of Justice and Commerce, and the White House, he joined State in 1951 and was posted to Mexico City, Monterrey, Quito, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Recife and Colombo, Sri Lanka. After retiring in 1983, he worked part-time as a FOIA reviewer. He enjoyed his cats, playing tennis and listening to classical and chamber music.



Jan Marquis, 86, wife of retired FSO Bernie T. Marquis, died Feb. 8 at Reston Hospital Center. Beginning in 1963, she accompanied her husband to postings in New Delhi (twice), Karachi, Vancouver, Jakarta and Honolulu. She was a "Saigon wife" living with her four children in Bangkok while her husband served in South Vietnam. Her interest in learning about the countries in which she lived led her to research and write about local textiles, especially ship's cloths, in Jakarta. In retirement since 1989, she enjoyed reading, watching favorite movies, listening to classical records and being with her children and grandsons.

Rose Marion Vierling Slutz, 94, the widow of FSO Robert ("Bob") Fleming Slutz, Jr., died Feb. 26 in Vero Beach, Fla. Together they served in Washington, D.C., and overseas in Palermo, Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila. Throughout her career as a Foreign Service spouse, Rose was active in the American Women's Association (AWA); for her service as chairperson of the welfare committee of the Bangkok AWA in the early 1960s, she was commended by Queen Sirikit. In retirement since 1979, she was active in the Florida Democratic Party and advocated on behalf of women's rights and environmental conservation in southeastern Florida.

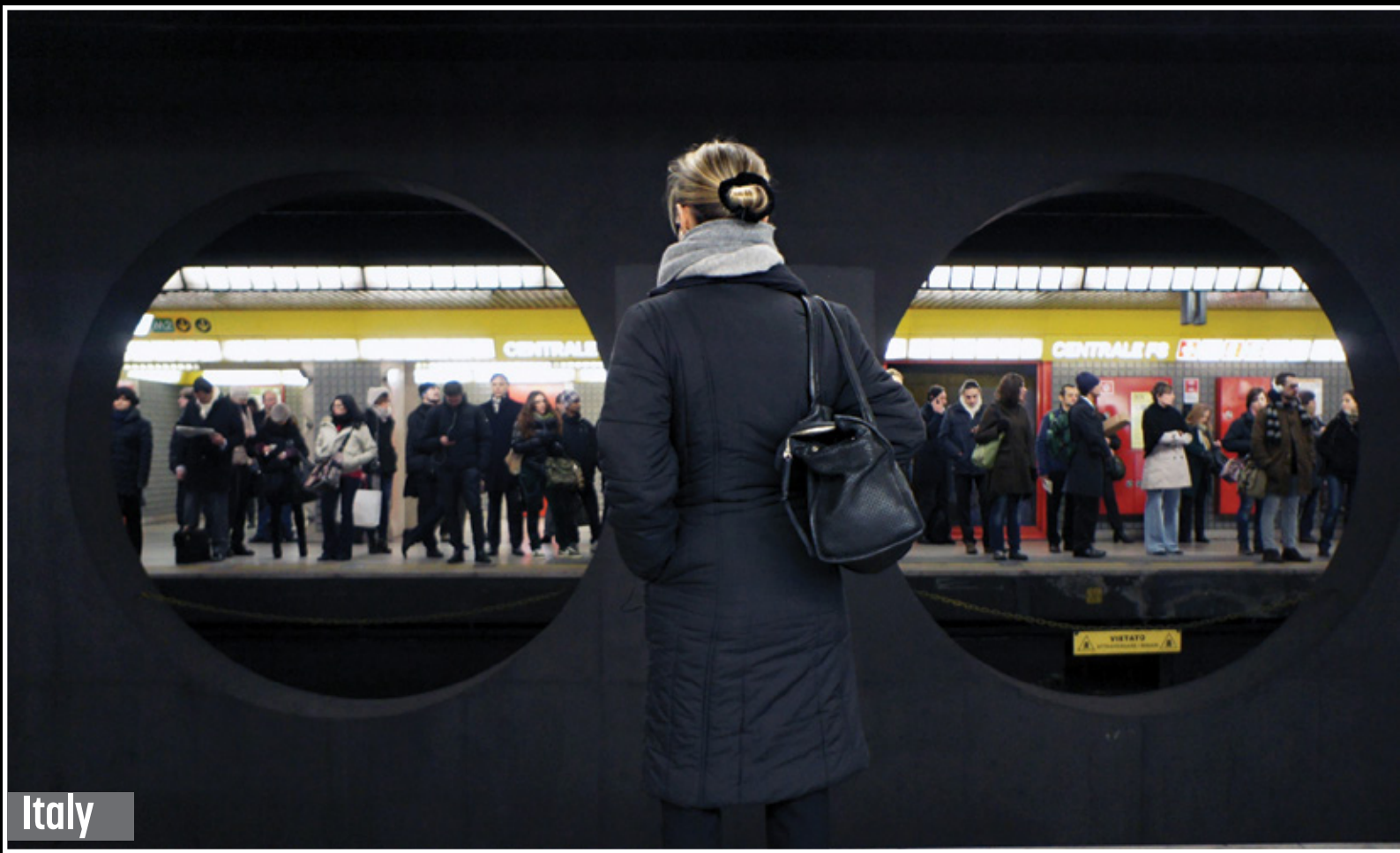
Antonius (Tony) Sterenberg, 79, husband of retired Foreign Service Specialist Margaret (Tootsie) Sterenberg, died Oct. 22 in Alexandria, Va. after a long battle with lymphoma. Accompanying his wife on embassy assignments as an eligible family member, he worked in Kinshasa, Abidjan and Pretoria in general services offices and in Beijing in the consular section. He also worked as a contract employee at the U.S. Mission in Geneva. After his wife's retirement in 2005, they moved to Stellenbosch, South Africa, before relocating to Alexandria, where he continued his love of travel, skiing, gardening and soccer.

Patsy Magee Turner, 91, died Feb. 13 in Santa Rosa, Calif. Her foreign affairs career began in 1946 with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in China's Kiangsu province. Joining the Foreign Service, she was assigned to the Consulate General in Shanghai, where she met and married Vice Consul Allen Richard Turner. Following the communist takeover, they were posted to Tokyo and subsequently to Antwerp, Windsor (Canada), Havana, Caracas and London. After her husband's death in 1977, she returned to her hometown, Springfield, Mo., where she worked as a legal secretary and enjoyed volunteering for youth organizations.

Theodore (Ted) Stark Wilkinson, 80, a retired FSO, died Jan. 25 in Washington, D.C. After serving in the Navy, he joined the Department in 1961. A specialist in Latin American affairs and arms control, his postings included Mexico City, Brasília, Caracas, Stockholm, Tegucigalpa and U.S. Missions to the United Nations and NATO. After retiring in 1996, he served on the four-nation Guarantor Support Commission to help end a border war between Peru and Ecuador. He served as AFSA president in 1989 and as chairman of the editorial board of the Foreign Service Journal from 2005-2011.

Questions concerning employee deaths should be directed to the Office of Casualty Assistance at (202) 736-4302. Inquiries concerning deaths of retired employees should be directed to the Office of Retirement at (202) 261-8960. For specific questions on submitting an obituary, please contact Michael Hahn at hahnmg@state.gov or (202) 663-2230.

Uruguay



Italy

End State

Uruguay Pg. 3

Situated in the heart of the Cordón neighborhood, La Feria de Tristán Narvaja is Montevideo's largest street market.

Photo by Isaac D. Pacheco

Italy Pg. 40

Circular cutouts in a barrier wall between tracks in the Milan Metro frame a woman as she waits for a train.

Photo by Emiliano Iko

London Pg. 45

The leading lines of a handrail highlight the flowing architecture in a street scene near Tower Hill in London.

Photo by Eric Montfort

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