

#



Sign Up For This Newsletter



View As Web Page



Print This Page



Archives



Email Us

**Get
Rewarded**
with an **SDFCU** credit card.

Apply Today

**STATE
DEPARTMENT**
FEDERAL RESERVE

POUCH LISTINGS

FREE AFTERNOON EVENT

Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics — A special new book forum at the Cato Institute

[Click Here For Details](#)

GHANA TRADE MINISTER

On her recent visit to the US, Ghanaian Minister for Trade and Industry Hannah Tetteh sits down for an interview at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center.

[Click Here For Details](#)

PALESTINIAN YOUTH CULTURAL TOUR

The Palestine Strings & Danadeesh Dance Group performing in their first US Tour. Wed. June 22, 2011 at George Mason University Center for the Arts. Sponsored locally by the Ramallah Club of D.C.

[Click Here For Details](#)

GOT YOUR POUCH?

Click here for a **FREE SUBSCRIPTION** to the Diplomatic Pouch and get every issue of the latest diplomatic news & events sent directly to your inbox.

[Click Here For Details](#)

FOLLOW US

News

BY ANNA GAWEL
The Washington Diplomat



item 1

Over the past five decades, the Atlantic Council has evolved from its initial focus on cementing the then-fragile Atlantic alliance to tackling 21st-century global challenges based on the transatlantic relationship — which, though sometimes maligned as increasingly irrelevant in a globalized world, has nevertheless endured as an unparalleled bedrock of international stability.

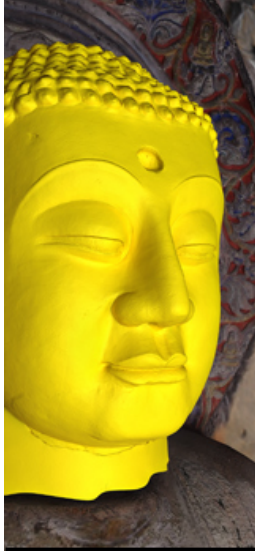
Likewise, the Washington-based think tank's annual awards dinner has quietly evolved into the go-to gala for some of the most powerful — and diverse — players on the world stage. And as the spring social season fills up with events vying to attract Washington bigwigs, some of the biggest can be found at the Atlantic Council dinner.

At this year's gathering, held May 3 at the Ritz-Carlton, heads of state joined captains of industry, decorated military men and artistic innovators to round out the council's signature all-star roster of leaders in the fields of government, business, military and the arts.

This year's honorees were in illustrious company: Past awardees include former Presidents Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush, singer Bono, Gen. David Petraeus, Tony Blair and Rupert Murdoch. There was no shortage of big names this time around either, with Vice President Joe Biden, Supreme Allied Commander for Europe U.S. Adm. James Stavridis, Coca-Cola CEO Muhtar Kent and opera icon Plácido Domingo headlining the 2011 dinner.

Even the list of introductory speakers was impressive in its own right — among them, former Secretary of State Colin Powell, former National Security Advisor Gen. James Jones and journalist Charlie Rose, who joined several hundred guests that included more than three dozen ambassadors, from Brazil to Germany to Turkey to the United Arab Emirates.

With so many political heavyweights and corporate honchos in the room, the dinner became a book party of sorts, with emcee Mika Brzezinski of MSNBC's "Morning Joe" and Atlantic Council President Frederick Kempe each promoting their new

Echoes of the Past
The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
February 26–July 31, 2011

Smithsonian Institution

FREER | SACKLER



P.O. Box 1345
Silver Spring, MD 20915
www.washdiplomat.com

books, which were also conveniently available in the goodie bags. But more importantly, the awards dinner served to officially kick off the 50th anniversary celebration of the Atlantic Council, created by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and other statesmen as a way to unite the different groups working to strengthen the transatlantic alliance.

"The Atlantic Council was born at a time of crisis in 1961, as the [Berlin] Wall that became the Cold War's defining symbol was being erected, American and Soviet troops faced off across the divided city of Berlin, and a young American president, confronting the greatest

challenge of his time, declared, and I quote, 'We seek peace, but we shall not surrender,'" Vice President Biden said in his acceptance speech, referring to then President John F. Kennedy, who went on to say that the Atlantic community was built "in a response to challenge. Now, standing strong and prosperous after an unprecedented decade of process — of progress, the Atlantic community will not forget either its history or the principles which gave it meaning."

"Those words are as relevant," Biden said, "as they were when they were spoken in 1961. America's partners across the Atlantic remain our oldest friends, and collectively our closest allies.... As President Obama said not too long ago, 'Europe is the cornerstone of our engagement with the world and a catalyst for global cooperation.' With no other region of the world does the United States share so many values, interests, capabilities and goals."

The loquacious former senator from Delaware went on to list some of those areas of cooperation between the United States and European Union, which are home to 800 million citizens and the world's largest bilateral trading partnership.

"Together, we've worked to resolve political crises in South Sudan, Belarus,

Burma, Yemen," Biden said, also noting growing U.S.-EU cooperation on missile defense and resetting relations with Russia.

"And together, we've joined forces in response to the wave of popular uprisings across the Middle East that will reverberate probably for several decades," the vice president continued. "Twenty years ago, Europeans from Berlin to Vladivostok began a difficult journey to freedom, journeys that captured the imagination and inspired the whole world. Today, these nations are free — by and large, if not totally. And they can be a shining example for Egyptians and Tunisians and others who are embarking on a similar transition in an entire swath of the world."

"The work of this partnership intersects on many fronts with our leadership in NATO, the greatest military alliance in the history of mankind," Biden added, dismissing the "interminable conferences about 'whither NATO.' God knows we've been declared dead so many times by the chattering class," he quipped.

On a more serious note, he did urge NATO members to shoulder the burdens of the alliance more equally, noting that for years, "only a handful of NATO's members have reached the defense spending target of 2 percent of GDP."

But overall he praised the security bloc, reminding the audience that, "NATO was formed only 60 years ago, when Europe was in chaos. In that short timeframe, together we've made remarkable, astonishing progress. After we crushed fascism, we dismantled communism, raised the standard of living for all of Europe, and provided for the most universal application of human rights and prosperity Europe



has ever seen in its entire history."

And today, NATO has expanded its mandate beyond Europe's borders, most recently launching a campaign to protect civilians in Libya while continuing its work in Afghanistan, where Biden said "troops are bravely working to disrupt, dismantle and eventually defeat al-Qaeda, and to help build up an Afghan security force so that Afghanistan never again becomes a haven for terrorists."



On that front, the vice president was beaming with the news that just days earlier, U.S. Navy SEALs launched a raid inside Pakistan that took out al-Qaeda's spiritual leader and the mastermind of 9/11, Osama bin Laden. "As vice president of the United States, as an American, I was in absolute awe — awe of the capacity and dedication of the entire team, both the intelligence community, the CIA, the SEALs. It just was extraordinary," Biden said to loud applause.

"And what was even more extraordinary ... there was such an absolute, overwhelming desire to accomplish this mission that although for over several months we were in the process of planning it and there were as many as 16 members of Congress who were briefed on it, not a single solitary thing leaked. I find that absolutely amazing," Biden added, in the process leaking a juicy little tidbit that appeared in the papers the next day.

The outspoken VP also found a unique way to mention the evening's fellow honorees in the same breath. Describing Adm. Stavridis as the "real deal," Biden said, "He can tell you more about and understands the incredible, the phenomenal, the just almost unbelievable capacity of his Navy SEALs and what they did last Sunday. Plácido Domingo is probably the only man who could appropriately sing their praises. And Muhtar Kent said he is sending them a lifetime supply of Coca-Cola."

For his part, Kent joked about the pairing of himself with Stavridis and Domingo as awardees: "A four-star admiral, a three-tenor and a Coke guy. Between three of us, maybe we can keep the world safe and in perfect harmony."

The eclectic grouping also mirrors the far-reaching work that the council itself has undertaken over the years, shifting from U.S.-EU relations to an array of international issues and, as Atlantic Council President Kempe put it, "renewing the Atlantic community for global challenges."

That broader mandate is reflected in two new endeavors announced at the dinner: the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security and the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, named after the slain Lebanese prime minister with the goal of bringing together North America, Europe, Russia, the Middle East and North Africa "in common efforts to address the crucial, urgent and long-lasting challenges of that region," Kempe explained, noting that "as we celebrate the 50th anniversary, we are looking forward to the next half century."

That next half century "will be just as consequential as the last half century," observed Vice President Biden. "I think we're going to look back ... and see how well did we navigate these incredible changes that run from the Caucasus all the way to China, from Tunisia, from Morocco, all the way to Pakistan and India, because the changes are going to be profound. Advancing the lot of humanity is going to continue to depend upon in my view the solidarity of the Atlantic community. It's going to fall to future generations and to organizations like the Atlantic Council to sustain this partnership.

"We obviously don't agree on everything, even to this day," Biden added. "But we agree on this, we need each other. We're stronger with each other. And we can do more for the world with each other."

Top photo: The 2011 Atlantic Council Annual Awards Dinner honored, from left, Coca-Cola Chief Executive Officer and Board

Chairman Muhtar Kent, Washington National Opera General Director Plácido Domingo, Vice President Joe Biden (also pictured on the front page), and Supreme Allied Commander of European Command Adm. James G. Stavridis for their business, artistic, international and military leadership, respectively.

Second photo: Broadcast journalist Charlie Rose, left, shares a laugh with former Secretary of State Colin Powell at the Atlantic Council Annual Awards Dinner, where they both introduced the evening's honorees.

Third photo: Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates Yousef Al Otaiba and his wife Abir Al Otaiba attend the 2011 Atlantic Council Annual Awards Dinner held at the Ritz-Carlton Washington hotel.

Fourth photo: Ambassador of Sweden Jonas Hafström and his wife Eva Hafstrom attend the Atlantic Council Annual Awards Dinner along with more than three dozen ambassadors and diplomatic representatives.

Bottom photo: From left, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Atlantic Council Fred Kempe, Atlantic Council International Advisory Board Chairman Brent Scowcroft, Bahaa Hariri, Shaukat Aziz and George Lund attend the Atlantic Council Awards Dinner, which also marked two new endeavors at the council: a center to honor former National Security Advisor Scowcroft as well as the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East after the slain former Lebanese prime minister.

Photos: Atlantic Council of the United States / Tony Powell

item 2

Special to the Diplomatic Pouch by Julie Poucher Harbin

Throughout 2011, the Peace Corps is commemorating 50 years of promoting peace and friendship around the world with roundtables, receptions and parties across the United States.

President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961. President Obama issued an official proclamation this year in honor of the group's anniversary.

"On its 50th anniversary, the United States Peace Corps remains an enduring symbol of our nation's commitment to encouraging progress, creating opportunity, and fostering mutual respect and understanding throughout the world," he said. "The lasting accomplishments of the Peace Corps continue to strengthen partnerships with leaders and countries around the world."



The importance of partnerships was also the theme of a dinner held at the Newseum last month in Washington, D.C. International Relief & Development (IRD), a development nonprofit and Peace Corps partner since 2009, hosted the reception "50 Years of Peace Corps and the Power of Partnerships" to focus on shared development objectives.

Diplomats in attendance hailed from countries where Peace Corps programs or IRD projects are ongoing, including Ambassador of Slovenia Roman Kiri, Ambassador of Mozambique Amelia Matos Sumbana, Ambassador of the Gambia Alieu Ngum and his wife Aminatta Lois Ngum, as well as Ambassador of Cambodia Hem Heng, among others.

In fact, Peace Corps volunteers — more than 200,000 so far — have



served in nearly 140 host countries, working on issues ranging from AIDS education to information technology and environmental preservation. To complete its mission, the Peace Corps works with the host governments,



community and faith-based groups, universities, international organizations and the private sector. More recently, it has stepped up its partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and other humanitarian aid groups.

Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams told the 160 dinner guests — which included more than 50 returned Peace Corps volunteers — that he's placed a renewed emphasis on cost-effective partnerships.

"It's no secret that in this budget environment, partnerships are crucial," Williams said. "In today's developing world, with organizations overlapping around the globe, with various development objectives, partnerships are not luxuries; they are truly a necessity. Only through partnerships can we coordinate efforts, maximize the effectiveness of our resources, and achieve a greater impact."

To that end, over the past eight months, the Peace Corps has signed memorandums of understanding with Population Services International (December), Special Olympics (March), Save the Children (May), and CHF International (September).



While President Obama is asking for nearly \$440 million for the Peace Corps in the fiscal 2012 budget, the 2011 operating budget was recently cut by six percent from the all-time high of \$400 million in the 2010 — leaving it at \$374 million. Meanwhile, Obama's 2008 campaign pledge to double the number of volunteers by 2011 was left unrealized.

Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-Wis.) budget proposal for 2012, while not specific on individual programs, proposes a 44 percent cut to the international affairs and foreign aid budget by 2016, which doesn't bode well for future Peace Corps funding.

Half a decade on, the Peace Corps is more popular than ever. Today, 8,655 volunteers — ranging in age from 18 to 86, and mostly college educated (90 percent) — serve in 77 countries. About 4,000 new volunteers are needed each year, but there is only space for roughly one-third of all applicants. (The Peace Corps received more than 13,000 applications in 2010.)

Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.), a former Peace Corps volunteer himself (in Columbia) and member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, has long advocated for expanding the corps.

"It's a game changer. Right now, it is 10 times cheaper than sending a soldier overseas, four times cheaper than sending a State Department official overseas, three times cheaper than sending an [agricultural] commissioner. It is the best bang for the buck America can have," Farr said, urging guests at the IRD reception to tell Congress that "in this time of cut, squeeze and trim, this is the last one we ought to cut, squeeze and trim."

Added Farr: "I'm convinced that the new world order is that governments ... cannot afford to continue business as usual. Those days are over, we don't have enough money. But we have incredible needs out there and the only way we're going to meet those needs is think smarter and develop new collaborations," he said. "I think the Peace Corps can expand exponentially as it develops these collaborations."

IRD has been doing just that. In 2009, for instance, it partnered with the Peace Corps and the African Cashew Alliance on a project, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that aims to improve the cashew value chain along the Gambia river basin and increase the income of the country's rural population. Another partnership in Mozambique helps AIDS patients receive community-based care and access to

anti-retroviral treatment.

"IRD's work with the Peace Corps in the Gambia cashew project is an ideal example of how partnerships can deliver immediate results that lay the groundwork for sustainable development that improves lives and stabilizes communities," said IRD Chief Executive Officer Alan Keys at the Newseum dinner.

Director Williams also sees these partnerships as a "win win for a volunteer because they have a chance to look at a new career downstream."

"Returned Peace Corps volunteers share a passion for public service and international development and an awareness of the challenges and opportunities that we confront in our interdependent world,"

Williams said, noting that volunteers can be found in the ranks of congressmen, cabinet members, government officials, international development experts, founders of nonprofits, corporate leaders, teachers, scientists, community activists and artists.



Williams — who was sworn in as the 18th director in August 2009 and served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic in the late 1960s — said the Peace Corps led him into his career as a Foreign Service officer and nonprofit executive.

Patrick Fine of the Millennium Challenge Corporation volunteered with the Peace Corps in 1980 in Swaziland, where he focused on adult education, literacy programs, and local farmer training. He said that today, the international development community is vastly larger than it was when the Peace Corps was founded. "Back in 1980, the civil society movement was just starting," Fine told the Pouch, noting the plethora of international NGOs that have sprung up in the interim.

So what sets the Peace Corps apart these days from the myriad of international NGOs who also get U.S. government funding?

Help from the Peace Corps "is not done for strategic, economic, or security or political reasons ... it has unadulterated goals," Fine explained, "whereas typical development workers live separately from locals, and are compensated differently," noting that workers get salaries while volunteers receive stipends. Fine said he continues to believe that "the Peace Corps is the best example of U.S. foreign assistance and a wonderful example of U.S. outreach to the world. It is a way of showing solidarity with the world."

Still, not everyone is enamored with the idealistic premise behind the corps, which has experienced its share of problems lately.

Former Peace Corps volunteer Gal Beckerman questioned the purpose of the "soft power" agency's existence 50 years on in the Boston Globe piece "The Peace Corps: What is it For?"

"Individual volunteers still manage to do good work, and they gain experience that can help them get jobs in aid agencies if they want to. But the Peace Corps is not set up to function as a development agency, and its soft-power role is no longer the national priority it once was — leaving a large bureaucracy with no clear answer about what its objectives should really be," Beckerman wrote.

Not helping the Peace Corps cause was a May congressional hearing in which female volunteers testified about the lack of support they received from the Peace Corps after they reported being raped or sexual abused in their postings (60 percent of Peace Corps volunteers are women).

According to Peace Corps figures, volunteers reported more than 1,000 sexual assaults from 2000 to 2009, including 221 rapes or attempted rapes. A 2010 report by the Peace Corps' inspector general found that when compared with crime statistics gathered by the United Nations from 86 countries, Peace Corps volunteers suffered higher rates of rape and burglary than every nation reporting.

In his testimony, Director Williams outlined ways the Peace Corps has increased its support to volunteers who have been the victims of a sexual assault or other crimes, including several new measures to improve the agency's sexual assault risk reduction and response program. "The health, safety and support of every member of our Peace Corps family is my number one priority," he said.

Making his case for the future of the Peace Corps at the IRD dinner, Williams said that while the times have changed in the past 50 years, "the needs persist" for the corps and "in many ways have grown."

Last year more than 82 percent of volunteers served in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe/Central Asia, with the rest serving in the Caribbean, North Africa and Middle East, and the Pacific Islands.

"Inequities that existed half a century ago poverty, disease, illiteracy and hunger still loom large in much of our world unfortunately," he said, pointing out that these inequities "are often exacerbated by contemporary challenges such as HIV/AIDs and climate change."

Front page: Cashews were on offer at each table set for a dinner honoring 50 years of the Peace Corps and "the power of partnerships." International Relief & Development (IRD), a relief agency, hosted the affair. IRD and the Peace Corps have been partnering on a cashew growing project in the Gambia since 2009.

Top photo: Top photo: From left, International Relief & Development (IRD) Senior Program Development Advisor and former Peace Corps volunteer Frank Pavich, CEO of MedPharm Andy Koval, IRD CEO Alan Keys, and Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams were among those honored by IRD at the "50 Years of Peace Corps and the Power of Partnerships" dinner on May 10 at the Newseum.

Photo: Julie Poucher Harbin

Second photo: From left, Gary Glasgall, Alice Gingold, Ambassador of Slovakia Peter Burian, and Jeffrey Gingold attend a reception hosted by the Slovak Embassy for returned Peace Corps volunteers and Friends of Slovakia in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps, followed by panel discussions at Peace Corps Headquarters. Alice Gingold, accompanied by her son and nephew, served in Slovakia at the age of 71 and was honored for her work. More than 320 Americans served in the Peace Corps in Slovakia between 1990 and 2002.

Photo: Julius Kassovic

Third photo: Ambassador of Mozambique Amelia Matos Sumbana, left, and Aminatta L.R. N'gum, wife of the ambassador of Gambia, attend a dinner hosted by International Relief & Development to honor the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps and the "power of partnerships."

Photo: Julie Poucher Harbin

Bottom photo: CEO of Islamic Relief USA Abed Ayoub, left, and Patrick Fine of the Millenium Challenge Corp. chat at a rooftop reception at a Peace Corps reception.

Photo: Julie Poucher Harbin

item 3

Special to the Diplomatic Pouch by Larry Luxner

The Kingdom of Bhutan, a tiny mountain nation wedged between India and China, isn't exactly on the Washington diplomatic circuit. Not surprising, considering it doesn't have an embassy here. Nor does this Himalayan Shangri-La maintain the barest of diplomatic relations with the United States.

For years, Bhutan didn't have a postal system



either, and 90 percent of its people were illiterate. But that didn't stop the kingdom from issuing outrageous postage stamps prized by philatelists the world over. Aluminum-foil stamps. Three-dimensional stamps. Scratch-and-sniff stamps. Stamps that played the Bhutanese national anthem when played on a 45-rpm turntable.



These days, Bhutan is known more for its stunning adventure tourism and its pursuit of "Gross National Happiness" — a concept endorsed by the United Nations and explored during a May 4 event at the Asia Society.

"Imagine a place where people care more about preservation of their culture, fairness and equality than they do about material gain, a place where wealth is measured by happiness and the acquisition of contentment rather than the acquisition of material wealth," said longtime environmental activist Bruce Bunting.

"That place is Bhutan, where you can go from lush tropical forests to 24,000-foot mountain peaks in a distance that's less than that from Washington, D.C., to the Shenandoah Mountains."

Bunting is president of the Washington-based Bhutan Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of Bhutan's 670,000 people while preserving the country's astonishing biodiversity.

No bigger than Switzerland — and about the size of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined — Bhutan was until very recently one of the most isolated nations on Earth. As late as 1980, only 1,200 citizens had access to a phone. It's a very different story today. More than 300,000 Bhutanese — nearly half the population — carry cell phones, and thousands of young people have Facebook accounts. Its capital city, Thimphu, still doesn't have a single traffic light.

It was Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who, in the 17th century, arrived on foot from Tibet, built many of Bhutan's castle-like "dzongs" and united it into a nation-state.

"Bhutan was perceived as a united country when the British arrived on their doorstep in the 18th century," Bunting said. "In 1907, Ugan Wangchuk was elected as Bhutan's first monarch. Since then, it has become a country built on Buddhist values, a sovereign state committed to an equitable legal system and a century of remarkable leadership."

In 1954, Bhutan began sending its brightest children to India to be educated. Today, six out of the country's 10 cabinet ministers have degrees from U.S. or British universities.

Thirteen years ago, His Majesty Wangchuk, the Fourth King, made history when he announced he was turning over authority to a council of ministers. That led to the establishment of a constitutional committee. On Dec. 6, 2006, the king abdicated after 34 years on the throne, handing power to his 26-year-old son, Crown Prince Jigme Kesar Namgyel Wangchuk, who created Bhutan's first democratically elected parliament in early 2008.

"Bhutan is therefore the world's youngest democracy," said Bunting, "but the culture of democracy remains considerably foreign to many Bhutanese."

Bunting, a veterinarian by profession, knows more about Bhutan than any American in Washington. He first visited the country in 1986 as vice-president of the World Wildlife Federation. Later on, as an advisor to the government, Bunting helped establish Bhutan's national park system as well as the Bhutan Health Trust Fund. In 1990, he wrote an article for National Geographic magazine entitled "Bhutan, Kingdom in the Clouds."

Bunting explained that for Bhutan, GNH is the achievement of individual contentment in one's life.

"It's the government's responsibility to ensure an environment in which the Bhutanese people can pursue happiness," he said. "This is based on four pillars: good governance, environmental conservation, preservation of culture and equitable

development."

"The people of Bhutan have a living, vibrant culture, a unique identity of being Bhutanese — something very important in an increasingly globalized world," said Bunting. "And probably no country has done a better job of preserving its environment than Bhutan, whose constitution states that 60 percent of the country's land area must remain forested."

As a result, rare tigers are found at elevations of up to 14,000 feet. And Bhutan has one of the largest populations of elephants remaining in Asia.

The country's major source of revenue is the sale of hydroelectric power to its energy-starved neighbor, India. At present, Bhutan generates about 1,500 megawatts of hydropower, a number likely to exceed 10,000 megawatts by 2020. India is also helping Bhutan build its first railroad link to the outside world.

Tourism is another big foreign-exchange earner, yet arrivals are severely limited by the fact that Bhutan has only one airline, and that has only two aircraft flying in and out of the country.

As a result, only 25,000 foreigners may visit Bhutan annually. And they must book their trips only through companies that work with a local travel agency, with the requirement that foreigners spend a minimum \$250 per day per person, meaning that only very upscale tourists visit Bhutan. About half the country's visitors are Americans. The rest are mainly Japanese and Europeans, with a smattering of Indians and others.

So, has the so-called "middle path to development" worked for the people of Bhutan? Bunting answers with a resounding yes.

In 1982, a baby born in Bhutan could expect to live 43 years. Today, life expectancy is 66 years. Since 1980, the literacy rate has shot up from 10 percent to 75 percent. In 1988, annual per-capita GDP was \$400. Today it exceeds \$2,000 — more than twice the \$980 average for South Asia overall.

"When you're in Bhutan, you can speak English with anybody under 40. Seven of the country's nine newspapers are in English. The country has five radio stations and 200 TV channels — this in a country that did not have television until 1999."

Some more statistics: Fourteen percent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and they own 70 percent of the land in Bhutan. In addition, Bhutan allocates close to 30 percent of its budget to the social sector, providing free education and health care — but it still has only one doctor per 5,000 inhabitants.

"There are some real problems in this modern-day Shangri-La," said Bunting.

"Bhutan faces major demographic pressures from neighboring India and Nepal, whose people would love to benefit from Bhutan's pristine environment and economic growth. Bhutan is a little island in a sea of humanity. Bhutan cannot just open up its borders to everybody who wants to live there," he said. "Sikkim did exactly that, and it's no longer an independent country but a state of India. Bhutan doesn't want to go down that path."

Asked why his favorite country doesn't have diplomatic relations with the United States, Bunting explained that Bhutan "lives in a rather dangerous neighborhood," sandwiched between the world's two most populous nations.

"Over the last 50 to 60 years, Bhutan has developed strong relations with India. It's now working on its relationship with China. But the Bhutanese feel that before they can formalize relations with yet another distant neighbor — the United States — they really need to have their own neighborhood in order. So the next step is China."

Bunting added that while Bhutan doesn't have formal diplomatic ties with the United States, informal relations are excellent. He predicted that full relations between Washington and Thimphu are likely to develop in the next five to six years.

Photo: A man removes a plastic bottle from a river in Punakha, Bhutan, clearing litter deposited during a festival from days earlier. Pictured in the background is Punakha Dzong, which houses Buddhist temples and the administrative offices of Punakha district. Bruce Bunting, president of the Washington-based Bhutan Foundation, says that probably no other country has done a better job of preserving its environment than Bhutan.

Credit: UN Photo/Gill Fickling

item 4

Special to the Diplomatic Pouch by Julie Poucher Harbin

The Embassy of Kazakhstan recently opened its doors to talk trade and culture, part of the mission's growing public outreach to promote the energy-rich Central Asian nation by its affable ambassador in Washington, Erlan Idrissov, and his active staff.

At a May 26 news conference, Kazakh Minister of Economic Development and Trade Zhanar Aitzhanova announced that Kazakhstan expected to complete its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) by 2012. A day earlier, Idrissov led a tour of the embassy to showcase Kazakhstan's rich history.



But looking to its future, the country's membership to the WTO would be a major boon, especially following its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) last year. As Kazakhstan's top WTO negotiator, Aitzhanova discussed the government's efforts to join trade bloc, as well as last year's formation of a Customs Union with Russia and Belarus.

Already in its final stage of WTO negotiations with the United States, Kazakhstan is also close to completing WTO negotiations with the European Union, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan. (Kazakhstan has already concluded bilateral negotiations with 24 WTO member states.) Aitzhanova told journalists that there were some remaining issues such as agriculture subsidies and livestock sanitation regulations to be settled before accession, but "on major issues, we don't have problems."

She was in town for three days of talks with the U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, which she described as "constructive." According to the Central Asia Economy Newswire, Kazakhstan reached an agreement with the United States on service industries covering 12 different sectors — including financial services, telecommunications, energy and transport. The agreement also covers the conditions under which employees from foreign firms will be allowed to work in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan submitted its official application for WTO membership in 1996. It entered into a trilateral Customs Union in 2010 with Belarus and Russia, and the three countries had initially opted to try and enter the WTO as a union, but all have since dropped that strategy and entered individual bids — a decision that might have contributed to speeding up Kazakhstan's bid for accession.

The Customs Union has set up a market with a total population of 170 million people and aggregate trade of \$900 billion, easing trade barriers among the three nations. It's also an attempt by Russia to boost regional trade and investment and become a bigger economic player in its neighborhood, although it remains to be seen if the move will derail Moscow's chances of joining the WTO, a long-sought goal that's dragged on since 1991.

For Kazakhstan, home to significant oil and natural gas reserves, both the Customs Union and WTO membership are part of the government's larger "strategic aspiration is to become a modern, diversified economy," according to the embassy's website.

Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare its independence from the Soviet Union nearly 20 years ago — on Dec. 16, 1991 — and has since been ruled by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been credited for reinvesting oil profits into social development but widely criticized for suppressing democratic reforms.

The country's political track record or energy riches weren't on the agenda though when the embassy tried to focus instead on the country's rich cultural traditions, part

of a public diplomacy campaign that's made the Kazakh Embassy one of the most active in town. As part of that campaign, the embassy recently teamed up with Cultural Tourism DC to host a private tour of the building by Ambassador Idrissov.

"We appreciate every opportunity to open our embassy doors and share our culture and traditional heritage with American friends. We are therefore grateful to Cultural Tourism DC for its efforts to help us more than anyone in the city in this respect," said Idrissov, whose embassy recently participated in Cultural Tourism DC's popular annual Embassy Chefs Competition. (Idrissov was also featured on a recent episode of "Bizarre Foods" with Andrew Zimmern on the Travel Channel.)

Linda Harper, executive director of Cultural Tourism DC, pointed out that Washington "is known for its great museums and historic sites, but it also has more embassies than any other city in the world. These embassies add a strong international flavor to our diverse membership and help to create a very rich D.C. experience. Kazakhstan was one of the first embassies to join Cultural Tourism DC and has been a valuable asset to the District of Columbia."

Photo: At a news conference at the Embassy of Kazakhstan in May, Kazakhstan's Minister of Economic Development and Trade Zhanar Aitzhanova announced that Kazakhstan is expected to complete its accession to the World Trade Organization by 2012.

Photos: Courtesy of the Embassy of Kazakhstan

item 5

Heading into June, the busy spring social calendar wraps up and the summer slowdown begins. But this summer, the arts and culture scene isn't taking a vacation, with the city's embassies hosting or sponsoring a large number of events in the next two months. So the Pouch offers up some of the hottest highlights:

Despite the heat, summer is a beautiful time in Washington, with trees in full bloom and sidewalk cafés packed with people. But in many parts of the world, nature's beauty is marred by environmental degradation. Eschewing postcard-pretty imagery, a new exhibit at the American University's Katzen Arts Center offers a stark look at environmental issues around the globe, from torrential rains in Brazil, to the consequences of nuclear power in Eastern Europe, to polluted riverbeds in Costa Rica.

"**E • CO**" is the culmination of the work by 20 photo collectives from across Latin America and Europe that was first shown in Madrid, Spain. So it's appropriate that for the D.C. show, the Spanish Embassy in Washington is serving as a cosponsor, as part of the larger "Spain Arts & Culture 2011" series of programming (www.spainculture.us).

Each "**E • CO**" collective has a different take on what "environment" means. So a Mexican collective, for instance, focuses on a "rainmaker" who survived a lightning strike as a child and believes — according to pre-Hispanic tradition — that he now has the ability to commune with nature and ask that water sprinkle his crops.



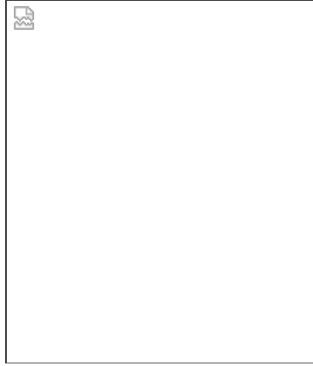
Speaking of Mexico, the Katzen is also hosting the exhibit "**Registro 02**" showcasing four individual artists from the Mexican city of Monterrey who set out to show how both the artist's process and the audience's perception help inform art's meaning (www.american.edu/cas/museum/index.cfm).

The Mexican Cultural Institute in Washington, continuing its abundant arts programming, presents an evening of opera and songs called "From Seville to Buenos Aires" featuring the Verso Libre Ensemble on Fri., June 10 at 7 p.m. Then on June 23 at 8 p.m., the Javier Nandayapa Trio II performs a repertoire of minimalist, contemporary Mexican folkloric music.

And don't miss the closing days of the wide-ranging exhibit "Beyond the Labyrinth: Latin American Art and the FEMSA Collection," profiled in the current [June issue](#) of The Washington Diplomat (www.instituteofmexicodc.org).

Another exhibition offers a far-ranging view of the tiny nation of Luxembourg. "Luxembourg by Hot Air Balloon" spotlights the aerial photography of Rob Keiffer as he floated over the fascinating scenery and settings that dot the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The exhibit, in collaboration with the Luxembourg Embassy, runs through July 15 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (www.wilsoncenter.org).



There are plenty of musical happenings as well. "Nordic Jazz 2011" returns with jazz bands from Iceland, Norway and Sweden playing on the spectacular rooftop terrace of the Swedish Embassy (i.e. House of Sweden) overlooking the Potomac River in the heart of Georgetown on June 19 at 6 p.m. (www.houseofsweden.com).

Meanwhile, the French Embassy (i.e. La Maison Française) commemorates the Fête de la Musique, a time when each year on the summer solstice, the French gather in the streets to celebrate the change of seasons with a dynamic festival featuring both amateur and professional musicians. The D.C. version takes place June 18 at 4 p.m. at the French Embassy, which recaptures this lively atmosphere with more than 50 bands and street performers dazzling audiences in its gardens (www.HouseofFranceDC.org).

La Maison Française is also supporting another French-inspired festival, "Nuit Blanche." On June 8 at 6:30 p.m., it's hosting a launch party for "Art All Night: Nuit Blanche DC," an all-night exploration and celebration of contemporary art, stretching from the heart of Chinatown to the Shaw neighborhood in D.C. that will take place later this year on Sept. 24 (www.artallnightdc.com).

The Embassy Series closes out its 2010-11 concert season by showcasing the "Great Singers of Hungary and Poland" on June 16 and 17, to honor Hungarian independence on June 16, 1989, as well as Poland assuming the rotating presidency of the European Union from Hungary. Celebrated tenor Szabolcs Brickner, mezzo-soprano Magdalena Wór and pianist George Peachey headline the concerts, which take place at the Hungarian and Polish Embassies (www.embassyseries.org).

The Austrian Embassy, a frequent partner of the Embassy Series, is holding its own concert and reception to bid farewell to Ambassador Christian Prosl and his wife Patricia Prosl-Hurni. The event on June 18 at 6:30 p.m. will feature chamber music by cellist Earl Williams and pianist Raymond Wertheim, as well as an exhibition by Ingrid Dohm — with proceeds supporting Tibetan students living in India (www.acfdc.org).

The Jamaican Embassy is supporting another worthwhile cause — hypertension and stroke prevention — with Jamaican Ambassador Audrey Marks joining John Schriffen of NBC4 to host the ninth annual "Tea-Off to Good Health Reception and Auction" at the Four Seasons Hotel on June 12 at 2 p.m. (www.jwow.org).

Also on June 12 at 2 p.m., there's another tea-related event of a different kind over at the Freer Gallery of Art, which will screen "The Meaning of Tea," a whimsical documentary that travels throughout Asia and Europe to the city of Tea, South Dakota, examining whether there is any inherent "meaning" in tea. The first 100 audience members will be admitted to a Taiwanese tea ceremony in the Freer courtyard after the screening, featuring high-altitude mountain specialty teas from Taiwan and traditional music performed by Alice Gu-Zheng Ensemble — courtesy of Ching Ching Cha and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington (www.asia.si.edu).

Various embassies are also joining forces to collaborate on some unique film and theater projects this month. The Goethe-Institut, Embassy of Switzerland and the Embassy of Austria, under the banner of the Zeitgeist DC Literary Collaborative, will present literature and play readings by top local actors performing three of Europe's newest and edgiest plays on Monday evenings from June 13 to 27.

(www.zeitgeistdc.org).

The Estonian and Finnish Embassies have also teamed up to lend their support to Estonian-Finnish playwright Sofi Oksanen, whose "Purge" runs at the H Street Playhouse courtesy of Scena Theatre from June 9 to July 3. Set in western Estonia in 1992, the play follows two generations of women challenged by a male-dominated political structure a year after the Soviet Union's collapse and haunted by the memories of Soviet occupation four decades earlier (www.scenatheater.org).

On the film front, "EuroAsiaShorts" from June 6 to 10 showcases short films from Europe, Asia and the United States, with this year's focus on "Men and Women," in partnership with Alliance Française, the Chinatown Community Cultural Center, Italian Cultural Institute, Japan Information and Culture Center, the Korean Embassy's KORUS House, the Royal Thai Embassy and the Spanish Embassy (www.EuroAsiaShorts.com).

If all of the activities leave you hungry for something more, don't miss the "Nordic Food Week" from June 21 to 26, in which the Nordic embassies of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden showcase the region's best and most creative chefs in the United States while introducing new Nordic food to the D.C. dining scene. Participating restaurants include Masa 14, DC Coast, Birch & Barley, Vidalia and Marcel's, with exclusive culinary master classes, food demonstrations and other culinary-related happenings throughout the metropolitan area (www.nordicinnovation.org/nordicfooddaysdc).

Finally, the Embassy of Indonesia has set out to break a Guinness World Record by forming the largest angklung ensemble as part of the Indonesia Festival 2011 on the National Mall on July 9 from 5 to 7 p.m. Angklung is a traditional Indonesian musical instrument made of bamboo tubes. Hold the instrument and help break the record and you get a world record certificate, while enjoying Indonesian food and musical performances (indofest2011@embassyofindonesia.org).

Front page: The American University's Katzen Arts Center offers a look at environmental issues around the globe with "**E • CO**," featuring the work of 20 photographers from France (such as "Odessa" pictured on the front page), Britain, **top photo**, and throughout Europe and Latin America.

Photo: The American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

Bottom photo: A complimentary exhibition called "**Registro 02**" showcases four artists from the Mexican city of Monterrey. A more wide-ranging exhibition of Mexican art by some of the best-known Latin artists from the past century can be found in "Beyond the Labyrinth: Latin American Art and the FEMSA Collection," which runs through June 18 at the Mexican Cultural Institute and features works such as Fernando Botero's striking "Santa Rosa de Lima."

Photo: FEMSA Collection

THE DIPLOMATIC POUCH An email newsletter produced by The Washington Diplomat

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Subscriber Services

- Sign Up
- Advertising
- Unsubscribe
- Contact us
- Web Version

About the Pouch

The Diplomatic Pouch is an email newsletter distributed to opt-in subscribers and produced by The Washington Diplomat, an independent monthly newspaper. The Pouch covers the diplomatic community, international affairs, politics, arts and culture, and social life in Washington, D.C. Although a complement to The Washington Diplomat newspaper, all content is original and exclusively written for the Pouch.

You are receiving this message because you provided your email address to us for The Diplomatic Pouch. If you do not want to receive future emails from us, please [click here](#) to be taken off the list.

© 2011 The Washington Diplomat. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication is prohibited.

