

Liaison Monitoring Teams take the pulse of Kosovo

By **DAMASO REYES**
AmNews European Correspondent

LABLJANE, Kosovo - Staff Sgt. Rex Prowse is looking for shepherds. One would imagine that in this rural part of Eastern Kosovo that would be a cinch, and indeed, as he drove through the hillsides towards the local animal market, there were plenty of sheep roaming the landscape with attentive shepherds in tow. But Prowse was looking for ethnic Serbian

shepherds and he was having little luck. List in hand he approached the local farmers he encountered during his patrol and asked them if they know the shepherds on the list—are they still producing wool? Where do they live?

It might seem somewhat strange for a soldier to wander the countryside in search of sheep, but that is exactly the kind of task the new Liaison Monitoring Teams (LMT) take on in order to better under-

stand and assist the people they are charged with protecting.

One of the greatest challenges a peacekeeping force faces is staying aware of the changing mood of the local population. In a highly factionalized and ethnically mixed place like Kosovo, actions can be misinterpreted, rumors can quickly spread, and adversaries of peace can paint peacekeeping forces as an occupying army bent on oppression. Not long ago, the nations that make up the international Kosovo Force (KFOR) began creating LMTs in order to break down the barriers that separate the troops from knowing the population. These small teams of soldiers don't ride around in Humvees, they take small SUVs or cars; instead of wearing full body armor and helmets, they sport only their uniforms. Most importantly they spend time in the small towns and communities that make up most of this rural province, meeting with farmers and local townspeople to ask them not only what they need and want but what they think about what KFOR is doing and how it is being interpreted by their neighbors.

Staff Sgt. Prowse was looking for shepherds on a warm autumn day as part of a USAID

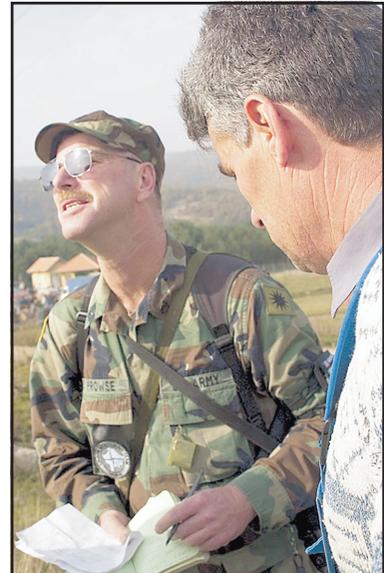


Members of a Liaison Monitoring Team speak with a local farmer to encourage participation in a future USAID project.

project that was due to begin in a few months. Local farmers had been producing wool but had stopped because of a lack of buyers. The project will fund a collective that will bring in buyers and possibly even assist in exporting, giving local farmers a new market for their products and additional income. As in all projects run in the American-administered sector, getting all ethnic groups to participate is seen as crucial, which is exactly the reason why an American sergeant was roaming the hills of Kosovo in search of Serbian shepherds.

FEELING THE PULSE OF THE PEOPLE

"We go out and talk to people, see what's going on in their lives, see what's important to
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Staff Sgt. Rex Prowse speaks with a local shepherd in order to gain more information about the local population's perspective.

1st Afro-Colombian congresswoman speaks in New York City

By **KAREN JUANITA CARRILLO**
Special to the AmNews

During the final leg of her monthlong visit to the United States, Zulia Mena García, the first Colombian congressional representative specifically elected to protect the interests of Afro-Colombians, spent two days in meetings and speaking engagements in New York City.

While in New York, Mena spoke at a Global Afro Latino Caribbean Initiative (GALCI)-sponsored discussion at the Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute on Thursday, November 3, and was also a featured guest on WBAI's Friday morning "Wake-Up Call" program with hosts Mario Murillo and Errol Maitland.

At both events, the former congresswoman emphasized the importance of the current Afro-Colombian movement for national recognition.

"People here don't have much information about Colombia - and what they do know, it seems they get from CNN," Mena said during an exclusive interview. "So there's just a basic disconnect with the reality of what's going on in my country."

"I came to the U.S. to talk about the Afro-Colombian movement - what it was like in the past, and what's going on there now."

Mena was elected to Congress in February 1994, after conducting a mere monthlong campaign for office. She has always considered herself a community worker, and says that she never wanted to be a politician.

But when the government signed "Law 70 (Ley de Negritudes/Law of the Blacks)," which was designed to protect Pacific Coast-based Afro-Colombian communities in areas such as the nation's famed predominately Black state of Chocó and grant them rights to ancestral lands, local

community organizers begged her to run for Congress and make certain the law was correctly implemented.

"Other organizers told me that if I didn't run and someone else wins that seat, someone who doesn't truly represent our people, it would be my fault," said Mena. "In a way, it was like a threat. I didn't want that responsibility on my head. So I decided that I had to run so that we wouldn't end up with a representative who was Black

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Significant reduction in measles cases and deaths in Africa

By **JOTI POIRIER**
Special to the AmNews

The TIME Magazine Global Health Summit was launched last week in New York, gathering the Measles Initiative partners to announce the progress made in Africa in fighting measles, among other issues.

Although measles is a leading vaccine-preventable disease, it has grown into a world childhood killer, infecting and killing nearly 480,000 children, 282,000 in Africa alone. Half of the children born in Africa will get measles this year and one out of every 100 will die. Measles itself doesn't kill children, instead it attacks their already weak immune system.

Tremendous progress has been made in Africa on the fight against measles, largely due to the technical and financial support of the Measles Initiative as

well as support from African governments.

"This is a major public achievement," said Dr. Lee Jong-Wook, World Health Organization (WHO) director general. "It is the result of the hard work and dedication of the government of priority countries with high measles deaths and all our Measles Initiative partners to achieve a common goal to reduce measles deaths."

In 2001, the UN Foundation joined the American Red Cross, UNICEF, the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and WHO to form the Measles Initiative. Since then, over 160 million African children have gained access to vaccines in 32 countries.

"Our goal was to reduce measles deaths in Africa by vaccinating 200 million children

over five years," said American Red Cross CEO and President Marsha J. Evans. "The Initiative has saved more than a million young lives."

In African countries where health conditions are extremely poor, living conditions are very difficult and access to health care is minimal, measles is the leading cause of death among children, before HIV, tuberculosis and malnutrition. For children living in precarious conditions, with already unhealthy bodies, measles is just one more assault. One of the most highly contagious diseases, measles can be easily contracted by children who come in contact with carriers because it is carried in the air, one of the reasons some in Uganda call it "Akwap," which translates into "disease of the air."

The Measles Initiative's

efforts over the years have enabled tremendous progress in fighting measles. "Between 1999 and 2004, measles infections dropped 60 percent," said Dr. Jim Yong Kim, director of WHO.

UN Foundation Chairman Ted Turner also announced a \$20 million commitment to the Measles Initiative over the next four years, bringing the UN Foundation's support to more than \$57 million since 2001.

"We hope these funds will mobilize more partners and supporters to help in this cause," Turner said. "The Measles Initiative has had tremendous success in reducing measles deaths, and we can't stop now. Going forward we must build upon the Initiative's accomplishments in Africa, and expand our activities into other measles-ravaged areas such as Asia."

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Kosovo

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them," said Sgt. William Ehnes of the California National Guard and an LMT squad leader based at Camp Monteith. "It's much easier for the local population to talk to you if you're not carrying an M16 and have Kevlar and vests on," he added, citing the differences between the LMTs and the patrols that he had been a part of before.

Where a regular patrol squad might drive through an area and occasionally talk to residents, the LMTs have become something like fixtures in the communities they visit. While normal patrols shift areas regularly, the strength of the LMTs is that they give inhabitants of a community a face and a name that they will see and hear on a continuing basis.

"I find people more inclined to talk to me [because] they know they are going to see me again and I'm expressing a genuine concern about their situation and I want to know more about them," Staff Sgt. Prowse, an eighteen-year veteran of the California National Guard, said. "I love it, it's put a face on the people that I'm dealing with, a human touch. You're talking to them, shaking hands with them, sitting down on their front porch having a cup of coffee and they're telling you the events of their day, things you would never before hear driving around in a Humvee," he added.

A PERFECT FIT FOR A GUARD SOLDIER

Few of the more than 2,500 Americans stationed here would have imagined that they would find themselves in the Balkans on a yearlong deployment. The vast majority here are citizen-

soldiers of the National Guard, men and women whose part-time commitment in a matter of weeks became a full-time job. Learning to become peacekeepers and intermediaries between local government and the population is something that is only beginning to be taught in pre-deployment training.

"The LMT works out perfect, well maybe 'perfect' is too strong of a word; works out very well for a National Guard soldier," Sgt.

Hooks

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to advance the understanding of the legacy of the American Civil Rights Movement through teaching and research programs.

"This institute's main purpose is to spread knowledge and information," said Hooks.

Hooks still serves as an

Ehnes said. "Most of us in our everyday lives deal with the public, we're not soldiers all the time. As a Guard member we all have civilian jobs and we have expertise in certain fields in our communities back home. As an LMT we are able to use the expertise we have with the public."

Kosovo is in a crucial period of transition not only because final status talks loom in the background but because the United Nations-trained and -supported

adjunct professor at the University of Memphis. He lectures at the school two times a month. He is extremely proud of the honor bestowed upon him with the library and is glad to see the rapid change he has seen in Black America.

"I come to Memphis and see women serving as superintendents, a city council that is predominantly Black, and to see all this progress is extremely

local municipal governments have finally begun to take over the responsibility of providing government services to the local population. One of the many roles the LMTs are playing is as a bridge between local government and a population still recovering from decades of top-down authoritarian rule, which left people here with little expectation of what their rights and responsibilities are when it comes to government.

encouraging," he said. "But, we still have a long way to go. Complacency is not an option," he added.

Hooks' great-nephew, Michael Hooks Jr., said he will use the renamed library to study for his master's degree.

"To be able to have my nephew study for his master's degree in a building named after me is an honor beyond my dreams," said Hooks.

García

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only in skin color but white in thinking."

After she was elected, Mena said her priorities were getting collective title to land tracts in Chocó and working on the issue of education. The subject of changing Colombia's educational system so that it reflects the nation's various ethnicities (and

does not solely emphasize the nation's cultural heritage from Spain) is such a hot-button issue that this past Friday, November 4, Afro-Colombian activists meeting in Bogotá, Colombia, took over a church and have stated that they won't leave until the federal government agrees to have firm talks about the evolution of a truly broad-based ethnic education in the nation.

After four years of congressional work, Mena is once again

at work in Chocó, but she says that with the granting of collective land titles, many Afro-Colombians are starting to wonder if it was really in their best interests to demand national recognition of their communities.

"What's happening now is that it seems like maybe we made a mistake fighting for our recognition," Mena laments.

Since the granting of collective land titles, Afro-Colombian

villages have been victimized by armed battles between left- and right-wing forces in the country — one of the worst incidences took place on May 2, 2002, in Bellavista, the main town of Bojayá, Chocó, where some 119 Afro-Colombians were murdered after they were caught in the crossfire of area fighting

between Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC) soldiers.

"The paramilitaries now recognize us as much as the government does and as much as the elite in power do," she pointed out. "They all know we have the land that they want."

Labor

(Continued from Page 6)

phone banks that can each make more than 300 calls in an hour and an army of volunteers seasoned in the get-out-the-vote process.

According to Ed Ott, political director of the Central Labor Council, which represents more than 400 unions and 1.5 million

members that endorsed Bloomberg in this election, labor won no matter which candidate individual unions decided to endorse.

"This election is a demonstration of labor's political power," said Ott. Taking stock of the heavy-hitting unions supporting both Bloomberg and Ferrer, Ott noted that in some cases, unions that stood on opposite sides of labor's recently highly publicized

split worked together for their chosen candidate.

"The unions on both sides of this election campaign did very well tonight," Ott said. "What labor did today was what labor has been doing for the last 15 years. We got out our members. And, from the Central Labor Council's point of view, it was vitally important that labor have a maximum presence in this election."

Korner

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panel that any overhaul of immigration laws must include a guest-worker program, a plan that continues to be reiterated by President Bush.

It's unclear how that plan would impact the millions of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. who have been working and paying taxes and sending their children to school here.

HBN immigration analyst and head of the Caribbean Immigrant Services Irwine Clare says that with conservative pressure mounting, it's time for the liberal side, the immigrant community, and Black and other clergy leaders to band together to help those trapped in the system without a voice.

"Are we prepared to ship 15 million undocumented immi-

grants, 'illegals' as they like to call them, out of this country? Are we prepared for that economic vacuum?" Clare questioned.

There are currently several bills on both sides of the aisle being pushed on the issue, both for and against. The popular one that has received some bipartisan support is the Secure America & Orderly Immigration Act, proposed by Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy, which calls for the tightening of the borders as well as allowing immigrants already in the U.S. illegally to register for the program after paying a fine.

But a bill being pushed by Republicans John Cornyn of Texas and Jon Kyl of Arizona wants undocumented immigrants to leave and return to their homelands in order to qualify for any guest-worker program.

AIDS

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first. "Worldwide, nearly half of all HIV infections are in women. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the region by far the worst hit by AIDS, half of all the people infected

with the AIDS virus are women and young girls," said Rosenberg.

Millions of people around the world are infected with HIV, which causes AIDS. The best way to prevent the risk of contracting HIV is through sexual abstinence and male and female condoms. Many women are infected

by their husbands or through forced sex, and few of them have the power to demand condom use, according to Rosenberg.

Merck and Bristol-Myers Squibb have given IPM the rights to develop entry inhibitors to develop microbicides and have licensed their experimental drugs to IPM without royalties.

Parks

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added. "There are few statues of people of color and women in the Capitol. I think this is the most appropriate way to personally memorialize Rosa Parks," Jackson concluded.

The proposal would make Parks the first African American honored in National Statuary Hall. Of the 100 statues in its collection, there are no Blacks and only eight women honored.

Former presidential candidate U.S. Senator John Kerry (D-Mass.) introduced legislation to honor Parks with a statue in the U.S. Senate.

Kerry said that even after her death, America should be reminded of her legacy.

"One way to keep her legacy alive is with a statue. Our schoolchildren, families, members of Congress and the president will be reminded of freedom whenever they pass by the statue," said Kerry.

The Rosa Parks Memorial Statue Act of 2005 gives the office a timetable of two years to erect the statue.

Democratic senators and congress members expect the bill to be passed and the statue to be built before its two-year timetable.

"Rosa Parks sat down so we could stand up, but not so we could stand still," said Kerry.

The reaction to a possible

Parks statue is being met with high regard. A recent poll conducted by NBC News found that nearly three quarters of the country believes that there should be a statue honoring Parks.

Carmine Marion, a history teacher at an elementary school in Washington Heights, believes a historical figure like Parks deserves this honor.

"It's a shame she is going to become the first African American in these halls. It makes you wonder if this country values our historical figures," she said. "Once again, Rosa Parks is the cause for change," said Marion.

Jackson, the main backer of this plan, feels a statue is important, but the statue's

location is pivotal.

"This statue does not belong in the basement, it belongs next to Robert E. Lee, Joseph Wheeler, and all who were part of the Confederacy," said Jackson. "This will show the world how a little old seamstress is now in the same room with those who tried to keep her down, but didn't succeed," Jackson added.

The bill has been met with widespread approval amongst Democrats. Republicans have yet to voice their opinions on

the proposed statue for Parks.

Parks was recently honored in the nation's Capitol Rotunda, and laid to rest in Detroit where thousands of mourners attended to pay their respects.

Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Barack Obama (D-Ill.), Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Jon Corzine (D-N.J.) are also bill co-sponsors.

The United States Senate is expected to hold a hearing on the proposal in the following months.