



U.S. Cotton Offer Skirts Dumping Controversy

by Emad Mekay

WASHINGTON, Nov 13 (IPS) - The United States has offered poor African countries a seven-million-dollar plan to boost their cotton sales and limit the damage done to their farmers by U.S. cotton subsidies. But independent advocacy groups say the deal will do little to help African cotton farmers, and that the United States should take far more sweeping measures ahead of an important round of multilateral trade talks in which subsidies for cotton and other farm agricultural remain a sticking point. The crucial talks, called the Doha Round because they were initiated in the Qatari capital in 2001, will take place in Hong

Kong in December. High on the agenda are the hefty agricultural subsidies that rich nations give to their farmers.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks also aim to remove global trade barriers in goods and services, and to break an impasse created when trade diplomats met in Cancun, Mexico in 2003. Poor nations say that the subsidies given in places like the United States, Europe and Japan allow farmers in rich nations to sell their produce at artificially low prices and depress global prices, hurting farmers in developing nations. In March, the WTO backed a petition by Brazil, which was supported by some West African cotton-producing nations, challenging

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U.S. Fights to Remain the Ultimate Webmaster

by Haider Rizvi

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 13 (IPS) - International efforts to break down the digital barriers facing the world's poor will backfire if governments fail to work out their differences on the issue of internet governance, diplomatic observers here say. Many heads of state and technical experts from around the world are due to attend the United Nations Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis next week, where, among other things, they will try to negotiate the legal and technical future of the internet. But with the United States unwilling to embrace any changes in the network it helped create in the 1960s, and other nations seeking to alter the current system, indications are that negotiators could pack up without a concrete agreement.

The most contentious among the issues to be discussed at the summit is Washington's role in overseeing the internet's address structure known as the domain name system (DNS), which enables millions of computer users around the world to communicate with each other. Currently, the system is managed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (Icann), a California-based nonprofit private organisation that works under contract to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Despite certain differences on the issue, both the developing countries' bloc led by China, India, Brazil and others, and the European Union are stressing that the internet should be governed internationally with multiple stakeholders involved in the

Afghanistan: Reporting More Than Bombs And Burkhas

By Peter Dhondt

BRUSSELS, Nov 13 (IPS) - The world will soon hear more about Afghanistan. An alliance of four Afghan media organisations and the international news agency Inter Press Service (IPS) has launched a project to improve coverage of key development issues in Afghanistan, and distribute that news worldwide. The initiative introduced last week in Brussels also puts an end to the isolation of Afghan media. An international media conference will be organised in Kabul in September next year. "We will

select 200 journalists and give them specific training on issues like gender, health or the economic development process in depth", project coordinator Ricardo Grassi told reporters.

News about Afghanistan at present mostly deals with armed confrontations between the international troops and the Afghan rebels they are fighting, or with reconstruction efforts financed by big donors. The media in Afghanistan too follow that pattern. The new project will enable Afghan journalists to cover other issues that matter for the country, said

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several types of U.S. agricultural support measures, including financial backing for cotton farmers.

A statement from the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said that Thursday's offer was part of the U.S. effort to break that deadlock, and that it was a direct response to requests made in meetings about cotton at the WTO in the run-up to Hong Kong. U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and USTR Rob Portman announced the launch of the West Africa Cotton Improvement Programme (WACIP) during a high-level visit to Africa. Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Senegal are the countries that will benefit from the offer. "We are pleased to announce the allocation of seven million dollars -- five million dollars in fresh funding -- to begin the work of this programme", said Johanns.

The programme will be finalised after the Hong Kong meetings. The West Africa Cotton Improvement Programme is one more way the United States is specifically addressing the needs of cotton dependent countries in Africa, said Portman, whose country is the world's largest cotton exporter. As part of the deal, the National Cotton Council of America, an industry group, will be a key partner, providing assistance in West Africa during the cotton harvest on measures to control insects and the application of biotechnology. To watchdog groups, however, the move falls short of addressing substantial concerns of cotton growers in West Africa who are suffering from U.S. dumping of cotton at cheap prices.

"This is the U.S. offering aid to help West African countries produce and market their cotton", said Ben Lilliston of the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). But it does nothing to address the dumping of cotton by U.S. based agribusiness firms onto the world market. Organisations that follow the international agriculture trade have long blamed dumping, saying the practice depresses global cotton prices and makes it hard, if not impossible, for West African countries to compete.

IATP issued a report on U.S. dumping that found that in 2003, the latest year for which numbers are available, cotton was exported from the United States at 47 percent below its cost of production. This announcement appears to be part of a strategy to avoid making concrete changes in international trade rules at the WTO to stop dumping, Lilliston said. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture data, between August 1999 and July 2005, U.S. cotton producers received more than 18 billion dollars in subsidies.

The international advocacy group Oxfam says West African countries lose as much as 250 million dollars in revenue each year because of U.S. cotton dumping. Celine Charveriat of Oxfam reacted to the proposal by saying African farmers, among the world's poorest, need genuine trade reform. "We are disappointed", she said. "Cotton improvement efforts may help some farmers in the region but will not give them the level playing field they are looking for". Another reason non-governmental organisations have criticised the modest proposal is that it covers only five of the 33 countries that grow cotton and are affected by U.S. subsidies and dumping.

Over the past year, the economic situation of West Africa's cotton farmers has worsened. World prices have declined, compounded by the recent movement of the dollar against the euro. Farmers purchase their input needs in euros and make sales in dollars. For 2005, a modest decline in acreage is expected in West Africa, with production falling to 4.62 million bales. Production had hit record levels in 2004 with China, the United States, India and Pakistan accounting for roughly 70 percent of the enormous crop, according to USDA figures.

Advocacy groups hope that the cotton issue will be addressed in coming weeks to prevent the collapse of the world trade talks again at the Hong Kong meeting. But the USTR statement said that the West Africa Cotton Improvement Programme represents only one part of the overall U.S. response to help these countries address the development obstacles in their cotton sectors

+USTR (<http://www.ustr.gov>)

+FAO (<http://www.fao.org/default.htm>)

+FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE (<http://www.fas.usda.gov/>)

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decision-making process.

While many developing countries want internet governance to be controlled by an international body such as the U.N., the Europeans have proposed what they call a cooperation model to deal with Icann. The model points to a forum that would allow governments, interested organisations, and industry to discuss internet issues. But Washington continues to oppose such suggestions, arguing that internet security and stability are best maintained through the current systems of technical controls overseen by Icann.

"As important as internet governance discussions are, I don't think anybody believes that as a result of them there will be one more computer or one more cell phone in rural parts of Africa, South America, Asia or any where else", said David Gross, who has led the U.S. delegation at the previous U.N. meetings on information technology. The plan of action adopted at the conclusion of the first U.N. summit on the information society held in Geneva in 2003 laid out clear targets for increasing information and communication technologies (ICT) access and internet connections for rural areas, hospitals, libraries and universities in the developing world.

The plan also set targets for online access for local governments, for the availability of content in all languages and for developing primary and secondary school curricula to meet the challenges of the information society. Developing countries argue that meeting such goals requires changes in internet governance, but the U.S. says the current system is already producing positive results. "I think, as I look around the world,

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that a lot of progress has been made in those areas", Gross says. But of course there is a lot of work still to be done.

While the vast majority of people without access to the internet live in developing countries, there are also millions of people within the developed world who are unable to use the web for economic reasons. At recent U.N. meetings on information-related issues, diplomats from developing countries have consistently contended that internet governance must be more transparent and inclusive in order to foster economic and social development.

Internet governance should not be the prerogative of one group of countries or stockholders, Maria Luiza Viotti, a Brazilian diplomat, told a recent forum at U.N. headquarters in New York. Governments have a stake, and the concerns of developing countries should be taken into account. But U.S. officials countered this position on the ground that governments' involvement in internet governance in certain countries would cause further erosion of the freedom of expression and independent political opinion.

Michael Gallagher, U.S. President George W. Bush's internet adviser, believes that countries seeking changes in internet governance are seizing on the only central part of the system in an effort to exert control. "They are looking for a handle, thinking that the DNS is the meaning of life", he says. But the meaning of life lies within their own borders and the policies that they create here. The European Union and Canada share many of the U.S. concerns over governments' control. But at the same time they also appear to be equally wary of Washington's dominance over internet governance.

Those closely watching the negotiating process say it is too early to suggest that the summit will prove to be a fiasco, yet there is a possibility that it may conclude without any meaningful agreement signed. "It would be foolhardy and unrealistic to assume that the U.S. would not continue to play a major role in the future governance of the internet", writes Irmran Chaudhry, an information technology expert at the of George Mason University in Virginia. "It seems implausible the U.S. would cede any ground to a U.N.-sponsored regulatory body", he goes on to say. In that sense, it is possible that the current debate may be an exercise in futility, because no matter what ultimate proposals are presented to the Secretary-General Kofi Annan, they will be subject to de facto U.S. veto.

Others fear that such a scenario could lead China, Russia, Brazil and other nations to launch their own versions of the internet. "We have to have a platform where leaders of the world can exercise their thoughts about the internet", Viviane Reding, the European Information Technology Commissioner, told the Guardian newspaper. If they have the impression that the internet is dominated by one nation and it does not belong to all the nations, then the result could be that the internet falls apart.

+WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
(<http://www.itu.int/wsis/>)

Spreading the Gospel of Microcredit

by Ayesha Gooneratne

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 13 (IPS) - Representatives from more 100 countries met last week to discuss ways to expand the reach of microfinance, which is primarily charity-based, to include profitable business opportunities that can benefit poor people, governments and investors. The three-day forum at U.N. headquarters in New York, a highlight of the International Year of Microcredit 2005, drew a wide variety of participants, including Stanley Fischer of the Bank of Israel, Jose Antonio Ocampo, under-secretary-general of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Paul Wolfowitz, president of the World Bank.

"Microfinance is a powerful tool for reducing poverty", Wolfowitz said. "It enables people to increase their incomes, to save and to manage risk. It reduces vulnerability and it allows poor households to move from everyday survival to plan for the future". The topic of expanding microcredit to reach an estimated three billion people who lack access to financial services was heartily endorsed by the panelists and participants. The focus of the U.N. Year quickly expanded from microcredit to the whole of microfinance, including services such as savings, insurance and money transfer, as well as lending, Fischer said.

With good reason, the main message of the U.N. Year became (that) there is a vital, pressing need to build inclusive financial sectors in which the billions of poor people around the world have access to affordable financial services. In theory, microcredit, or very small loans, empowers borrowers to escape from poverty by giving them the means to establish small businesses. The loan, which generally does not require collateral, is usually paid back over a period of six months to a year.

Microcredit began in the 1970s in Bangladesh when the Grameen Bank began giving small loans to those too poor to be eligible for credit from other banks. The forum honoured entrepreneurs like Shakila Sarajuddin from Afghanistan, who suffered marital abuse so extreme that it led her to attempt suicide by self-immolation. Today, Sarajuddin runs a tailoring business in Kabul, which she founded with a loan of just 100 dollars, and is able to support her three children. She has never been late with a payment.

Ernesto Silva Toledo and Milkov Machaca from Tacna, Peru secured a credit line of 5,000 dollars. They opened a business that produces 3,000 litres of homemade beer per month, supports five employees, and is successfully competing with the industrially-produced beer that was the only kind previously available in the area. They and others from Bangladesh, China, India, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone and South Africa were given awards at the closing ceremony from celebrity guests that included singers Jennifer Lopez and Marc

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Anthony, and Chelsea Clinton, the daughter of former U.S. President Bill Clinton (1993-2001).

Speakers at the event expressed their hopes that the momentum garnered from the International Year of Microcredit would continue to grow, championing a future where everyone would have access to the financial services they need. Christina Barrineau, the chief technical advisor with the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), told IPS that awareness has been heightened 100-fold, and the year has effectively opened up the floodgates. Barrineau and others noted that the future of microcredit and microfinance also required greater involvement from the private sector.

According to the World Bank's latest development report, "While most microfinance programmes have been funded by governments and donors, efforts are now shifting to fostering commercial microfinance institutions". Improving the environment for microfinance can also extend more credit to the rural poor, it notes. In Bangladesh, birthplace of the microcredit movement, 48 percent of the poorest households with access to microcredit loans rose above the poverty line.

During the year, the World Bank and the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor have worked with national committees around the world to host conferences linking microfinance to the fight against poverty. Over 300 conferences and events have been held, and Barrineau said that more than 100 national committees have been established underlying how important the debate is. She likened one of the biggest accomplishments of the Year and the closing events to the notion that The International Year of Microcredit exemplified exactly what the U.N. was created to do.

Microfinance is considered especially important for women, with studies showing that access to financial services has improved their status within the family and the community, and made them feel more assertive and confident. Proponents of microfinance note that it allows women to own assets, including land and housing, and play a stronger role in decision-making. The fact that the panels consisted of representative from multinational and domestic institutions, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, central banks, private sector representatives, U.N. agencies, microentrepreneurs acknowledges that the Year and the U.N. did not engage in subscribing to a particular viewpoint, Barrineau added.

Rather, a neutral platform was presented where debate was free to take place. "One of the most beautiful panels that I saw was the panel on Africa", she said, which featured Sir Nicholas Stern, head of Britain's Government Economic Service, representatives from Senegal and Kenya, and a microcredit client from Malawi. This image of people with diverse backgrounds and interests sitting side by side underlined how relevant the U.N. is in bringing together disparate voices, Barrineau said.

'Information Society Must Block Paedophiles'

by Marwaan Macan-Markar

BANGKOK, Nov 13 (IPS)- A major U.N. conference that aims to bridge the gap in information technology between the world's affluent and poorest societies is in danger of inadvertently catering to the needs and fantasies of the world's paedophiles. For leading child rights activists it is a threat that cannot be taken lightly, in the wake of growing evidence of the lengths paedophiles have gone to in exploiting cyberspace to prey on children in societies where the Internet and information and communication technology (ICT) are easily accessible.

At issue is a reluctance on the part of the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to embrace concrete language that calls on the ICT industry and other ICT decision-makers to generate safeguards to protect children from abuse. "This is unacceptable. You cannot promote development and the equitable access of ICT yet have a benign neglect of children's rights," says Paulo Pinheiro, the independent expert appointed by the U.N. secretary-general to study violence against children.

"The conference cannot simply focus on the positive elements like the expansion of people connected to cyberspace because the expansion brings very negative elements too," he argued during an interview. "We cannot pretend that this negative elements are not present." "I hope the declaration of the WSIS will reflect this language," he added, referring to the final document, or 'Plan of Action,' expected to emerge at the end of the WSIS, being held in Tunis, Nov. 16-18.

In 2002, the U.N. General Assembly asked the International Telecommunication Union to lay the groundwork for a conference to find solutions to the digital divide between the developed and the developing world. A primary objective of the planned global Information Society due to grow out of the conference in Tunisia is to ensure universal and equitable access to information and knowledge through the ICT sector. Pinheiro's concerns are being backed by a leading global child rights lobby, the Bangkok-based End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT).

Fragmented industry action to develop safeguards in ICT is "exposing children around the world to increasingly serious violence through the Internet and other cyberspace technologies," declared an ECPAT report released here Friday. In addition to the exchange of child pornography, the Internet has enabled adults who prey on children to indulge in "live" online sexual abuse for a fee, online sexual solicitation, cyberstalking and bullying and the use of cyberspace to "network for child sex tourism and trafficking," states the 91-page report.

"By 2000, police across several countries were encountering individuals who had collected hundreds of thousands of

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images of children being sexually abused," reveals 'Violence Against Children in Cyberspace'. "Now, cyberspace is host to more than one million images of tens of thousands of children subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation." It is, furthermore, a lucrative trade, since the ECPAT study estimates that the production and distribution of abusive images of children runs into billions of dollars. "Estimates of annual business volume range widely from three billion U.S. dollars to 20 billion U.S. dollars."

And it is a pattern that could only worsen, given the latest developments in technology that makes it easier for abusers to exploit. The report singled out innovations such as phone-cams, global positioning system technology and third-generation technology. What makes children even more vulnerable is the ease with which they keep embracing the development in ICT and being among its leading users. "Children and young people are in the vanguard of the almost one billion people who log into cyberspace, and they will account for a significant proportion of expansion in useage of new ICTs in coming years," according to the report.

Yet despite such growth in ICT and the dangers it has been creating to children, countries have been slow to respond with concrete measures, either through laws or by strengthening

national agencies like the police to go after those who violate children's rights through the Internet. "Police departments do not have the technology to deal with this crime (of abusing children in cyberspace) in most countries," Carmen Madrinan, ECPAT's executive director, told the media on Friday. "We are still lacking forensic efforts and tools to track crime in cyberspace." While laws to protect children from such abuse are absent in most countries, even in the few countries that have implemented some measures the legislation is weak, she said. "Child protection should be at the core of ICT development to make it safe for children."

And the forthcoming WSIS offers a testing ground to measure the industry's and governments' commitment to protecting children from current and future predators, says Deborah Muir, author of the report. "Child protection measures must be implemented within the structures of the new information society." "The safeguards must be considered right at the R and D (research and development) stage," she said in an IPS interview. "And when they (ICT sector) does its consumer surveys of how a certain technology will be picked up by the child as a consumer, we are also calling for complementary measures that address how the technology may be used in a way that would harm children."

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Grassi. The project, funded by the European Commission, is led by The Killid Group (TKG), the main independent Afghan media group. It involves the Afghan news agency Pajhwok, and the training organisations Centre for International Journalism (CIJ) and Sayara.. The latter will provide training for journalism students and journalism professors at five of the six universities in Afghanistan.

Another target group is independent media managers. Hundreds will benefit from the project, said Grassi. "And our regional focus is a huge boost for media organisations and journalism training outside of Kabul". This cooperation is extremely important for the future of Afghan media, said Farida Nekzad, managing editor of the Afghan news agency Pajhwok ('Echo'). Over the last three years, there has been an extraordinary development of independent Afghan media, but the sector is still fragile with too few qualified journalists, a weak management and financial instability.

Supporting Afghan media is vital for the development of a country that is slowly recovering from years of civil strife and the regime of the Taliban. "How is the world going to see Afghanistan?" asked IPS Director General Mario Lubetkin at the press conference in Brussels. "Solely as a country where a war is going on, or also as a place where people have dreams and realise them? That is the challenge which IPS confronts participating in this project". "Good media are essential for furthering the democratic process", said Grassi.

Afghanistan has not yet got rid of its Soviet style media system. There are plans to reorganise the government controlled TV and news agency, but that is a very slow process.

Afghanistan also has five government dailies, and only one that is privately controlled. But independent media are emerging. Two of the major players among them, the news agency Pajhwok and the Killid Group with its two weekly magazines, several regional radio stations and a media distribution agency, are involved in the training project.

All of these media depend on funding from one or another development agency, said Grassi. Because there is no advertising market yet, that might ensure self-sufficiency. The project backed by IPS will mainly provide on-the-job training. Radio programmes and articles will be used in Afghanistan, whereas some of the articles will be distributed internationally by the news agency IPS. Intimidation and violence are two serious problems reporters in Afghanistan are confronted with, said Grassi. Female journalists find it particularly hard to work. In the (southern) province of Kandahar or in the east of the country, it is very difficult for women to travel around and investigate a story.

But things are changing. At the Pajhwok headquarters in Kabul, almost half of the journalists are women. Another problem Afghan media workers have to cope with is illiteracy. Eighty percent of the men and 92 percent of the women in Afghanistan cannot read or write, says Grassi. The saving grace is that reading is now turning to a collective event in Afghanistan. One person buys a magazine and then reads it aloud to 15 others. And then everybody starts to react. The project will be making use of this reading habit. Articles will be sent to reading groups in the countryside. And the radio programmes that trainees produce will be used to support community events.

NEWSBRIEFS

New Spread of Unrest in Europe Feared

PARIS, Nov 13 (IPS) - Political leaders and experts are fearing a spread of the recent French unrest across Europe. The fears grew after youth gangs from immigrant communities set fire to several vehicles in Berlin, in the northern German city Bremen, and in Brussels. A school building and a store were set on fire in Huchting, just outside Bremen. A German police spokesperson denied any link with the riots in France, but a teenager in Huchting was quoted as saying they were inspired by events in Paris. Minister for the interior in Germany's Bavarian region Gunter Beckstein said similar developments to those in France could take place in Germany. We are not protected against such unrest, Beckstein said in a radio interview. The integration of immigrants in our society is not completely successful. Kurt Beck, Social Democratic head of government of the federal state of Rhineland Palatinate, said deprived minority youths could feel tempted to follow the example of French demonstrators. "We must pay extreme attention to this high concentration of the young population who do not see any opportunities in life", Beck said at a press conference. Margot Kaessmann, bishop of Hanover, said neglect of immigrants is leading to the creation of parallel societies. Immigrants and their children add up to about eight million, which is 10 percent of the population of Germany. The Turkish community is the largest among them. Blent Arslan, leader of the German-Turkish Forum in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia said riots similar to those in France were not possible in Germany. Peter Stech, a social worker in Huchting, said the recent incidents were not an expression of social unrest as in Paris. "Many kids think, oh, it is great, we in Huchting also come in the news", he told IPS. But there are no political intentions behind this isolated actions. Stech also dismissed worries that young gangs could develop across Germany. "I do not see gangs with 100 members around, as in France", he said...

UAE: Breaking Records to Break Records

DUBAI, Nov 13 (IPS) - The tallest hotel, the largest excavated dry docks, the biggest bowl of spaghetti, the largest stained glass mural -- the list is endless for the number of Guinness records that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) holds. In fact, the UAE is a leading contender for the record for most records per capita and makes the most claims from the Middle East (260 claims), followed by Saudi Arabia (98). In September, the launch party for the 51st edition of the Guinness Book of Records' celebrated the UAE's contributions to the register of exceptional deeds. These include the largest cargo vessel-- oil tanker Jahre Viking at 564,763 tonnes; the longest cake -- made of dates and bananas, it measured 2,530.8 m in length; the tallest all-suite Burj Al Arab hotel which is 320.94 m tall, shaped like a sail and built on a human-made island; and the highest amount won in a one-horse race 3.6 million US dollars by Dubai Millennium in the Dubai World Cup on Mar. 25, 2000. "It is indeed amazing how many records are being set by

the UAE," exclaimed Sana Raouf, a public relations executive based in Dubai, at the launch ceremony. In its search for excellence, Dubai is perhaps one of the most forward-looking countries in the Middle East and a sure example is that of the records that UAE holds, 35 of them belong to Dubai, which range from the largest box of chocolate bars made by Kit Kat (Nestle, Middle East) and weighed 1,700 kg to the largest gathering of people by the same name Mohammed!" she added excitedly. The Guinness Book of Records, first published in 1955, is a product of the inquiring and curious mind of Sir Hugh Beaver, chairman of Guinness Brewery, who decided to commission such a book after failing to find an answer to which was the fastest game bird in Europe. The Guinness World Records 2006 edition, in fact, showcases a select list of Dubai's achievements in a giant fold-out. In an interview to Friday, a weekly magazine, Laila Sohail, chief marketing officer for the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), said, "We are simply following the vision of Dubai to better ourselves and do unique things what better way than to break records and the world know we have done it." Since its inception, the DSF has managed to break records annually every record requires us to work on a planned schedule. All finer details of hygiene, perfect planning and safety are looked into even before the event starts and also at the time of execution," she added...

Farmers Get Princely Subsidies

PARIS, Nov 13 (IPS) - Prince Albert, the monarch of Monaco, is not what you would call a farmer in need. But like Queen Elizabeth of Britain, he is among the elite farmers who benefit from billions of dollars in European agricultural subsidies. The royalty of Monaco, a small principality on the Mediterranean Sea, received more than 300,000 dollars last year in subsidies from the European Union to support cereal production on his land in northern France. Others get far higher subsidies. But the prince was on a list of 58 French farmers benefiting from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) released by the World Economy Group (GEM, after its French name), a research centre at the Institute for Political Studies in Paris.. These 58 farmers receive more than 27 million dollars a year in subsidies, the GEM report says. The subsidies range from 100,000 dollars to more than two million dollars a year. Despite several 'reforms' of CAP, French farmers continue to receive about a fifth of more than 52 billion dollars in subsidies the EU pays out every year. These subsidies add up to about a quarter of the total EU budget. The British aid agency Oxfam says 15 percent of French farming companies take 60 percent of the EU subsidies, while the smaller French farmers receive only 17 percent. The EU, and particularly the French government, defend such subsidies as necessary and fair. European subsidies for agriculture are state contributions to countryside and nature management, biodiversity, rural amenities, and rural community well being, among other things, former agriculture commissioner Hans Fischler told IPS earlier...