



April 9, 2008

Bi-weekly Newsletter

U.S. Embassy Joins Local Volunteers to Make Stara Zagora Greener



Embassy and local volunteers planted an impressive 15,000 trees in one day.

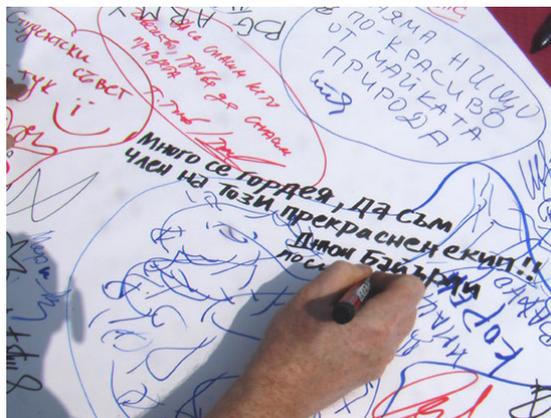
More than 350 volunteers, including 50 U.S. embassy staff and U.S. soldiers led by U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle, planted new trees in the Stara Zagora forest on April 5. The initiative "Let's Save the Forest" launched by the Stara Zagora Community Foundation strives to activate citizen participation for replanting areas deforested by 2007 summer fires. A total of 50,000 new trees will be planted near Stara Zagora. USAID has been a key partner in this initiative as part of a series of green events highlighting the close out of USAID assistance to Bulgaria. ❖



A live tree will soon grow here next to the paper one, planted by the Stara Zagora puppet theater.



USAID Mission Director Mike Fritz with wife Susan and twins Kai and Cody engaged in serious work.



"I am proud to be a part of this wonderful team."
John Beyrle, Ambassador



The U.S. soldiers enthusiastically plant trees – an activity which is not among their usual duties.



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Join USAID on Earth Day!

On Tuesday April 22 at 10am, USAID will officially commemorate the donation of more than 600 trees planted in Sofia's South Park with a ceremony behind the City Center Sofia shopping center.

Ambassador Beyrle will participate in the unveiling of a permanent plaque marking the donation as a symbol of the lasting partnership between the Bulgarian and American people. ❖

>> At USAID Anti-Trafficking Program Final Event, Schoolchildren Teach Audience about Risks of Trafficking



Deputy Prime Minister Valtchev and Ambassador Beyrle (l-r) surrounded by young anti-trafficking experts.

A group of schoolchildren from Balvan and Resen villages were the stars of the USAID/International Organization for Migration anti-trafficking program closing event in Sofia on April 8. The young participants in the NGO program "Open Your Eyes: You Can Get Help!" participated in a lesson about the dangers of trafficking in persons in front of the several hundred gathered guests. The children also introduced the speakers at the event, Deputy Prime Minister Daniel Valtchev, Ambassador Beyrle, and IOM Chief of Mission Ilyana Derilova.

The children's demonstration of their knowledge about the risks of trafficking highlighted the project's work with vulnerable groups at the grassroots level. Seventeen grants to local organizations and municipalities supported activities to raise awareness about trafficking and to promote educational and employment opportunities among high-risk groups.

The event coincided with International Roma Day, and Ambassador Beyrle noted in his remarks that Roma women and children are at particular high risk of trafficking. Deputy Prime Minister Valtchev praised the work of IOM and the National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons to establish local anti-trafficking commissions. The official program ended with the singing of a special anthem created for IOM in Bulgarian.

Karandila, a well-known Roma orchestra from Sliven played boisterous tunes during the reception, and girls from the Elit Roma Cultural Center in Sofia showed off their dancing skills. ❖





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>> English Teacher Trainees Celebrate New Skills and Friendships



English teacher trainees pose with some of their "practice students."

The atmosphere was festive but also slightly sad on April 2, as the group of English teacher trainees who participated in the Bulgarian Center for Development and Training (BCDT) one-month course celebrated its completion. The group of Roma and non-Roma participants from Sofia and other locations in Bulgaria acquired new skills and forged lasting friendships. The opportunity to interact closely with peers from different ethnic groups was powerful and extremely valuable for the participants. One participant commented that coming from a small, ethnically homogenous town she had never worked so closely with Roma people. Noting that she was surprised by how much she learned from and enjoyed the experience, she said that she would like to create more opportunities in her community for interaction between ethnic groups.

The training was supported by USAID and the Democracy Commission of the U.S. Embassy. BCDT Director Matt Brown commented that the training had been an extremely intense experience, but transformative for all involved. ❖

