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## Current Issues

26 October 2007

**Athletes, Artists, Governments Cooperate on Causes****Conflict resolution, refugees, other issues foster unique alliances**

World skating champion Michelle Kwan visits schoolchildren in Beijing. (© AP Images)

By Jacquelyn S. Porth  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Promoting effective conflict resolution, alleviating poverty, helping refugees and preventing wildlife trafficking require unique partnerships among government leaders, nongovernmental groups, artists and athletes to reach diverse audiences effectively.

Such public-private partnerships are increasing in a world in which multiple messages and channels of communication are needed to find solutions to issues. The U.S. Department of State, for example, has enlisted athletes and others from the private sector in its public diplomacy outreach efforts, while the United

Nations has recruited actresses and other public figures to serve as "goodwill ambassadors."

Baseball legend Cal Ripken Jr., who will travel to China October 28-November 6 as a State Department public diplomacy envoy, told *USINFO* that "baseball will be a great diplomacy tool" because "sports bring people together." (See [related article](#).)

Even though the upcoming trip to China with his wife Kelly might include some language barriers, Ripken said, "sports are universal and a lot can be done through demonstration."

Ripken, who is the department's second public diplomacy envoy, speaks from experience. Through the annual international Cal Ripken World Series event, he said, "we see kids from seven different countries play together and get along so well despite the cultural differences and the differences in language."

The baseball star also worked with a group of Chinese coaches in the United States in the summer of 2007. "They were extremely enthusiastic and eager to learn," Ripken said, adding that he is looking forward to seeing the coaches again and working together on mutual "efforts to teach the game."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says public diplomacy activities such as Ripken's should be "a dialogue with people from around the world and ... conducted" not just by government officials, "but by committed Americans from all walks of life." Ripken, who will undertake additional public diplomacy missions after his China visit, embodies the best of U.S. sports tradition, she said.

Another athlete traveled to China for the State Department in January -- public diplomacy envoy Michelle Kwan. The Olympic medalist figure skater

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Recently, actress and model Bo Derek -- who has been designated the secretary of state's special envoy for wildlife trafficking issues -- and Claudia McMurray, assistant secretary of state for oceans, international environmental and scientific affairs, worked together to increase awareness of wildlife trafficking. In October, the two visited Florida's Everglades National Park and a customs checkpoint and participated in a panel about animal preservation at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science.

"If we stop buying [products made from trafficked wildlife] ... the killing stops," Derek said, adding, "We can all do our part."

#### THE VALUE OF NONTRADITIONAL ENVOYS

Author Andrew Cooper recently told the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that the secretary of state understands the benefits and value of enlisting nontraditional advocates to promote critical causes globally.

Cooper, who has written a book on nontraditional envoys, said actors, musicians, athletes and other public figures have a worldwide reach when they promote causes. He points to U2 singer Bono's support of the Millennium Challenge Account and many other causes as the epitome of this trend. (See [related article](#).)

Whatever their backgrounds, special envoys have a stellar ability to raise awareness for causes and to educate the public about issues. Jorge Heine, vice president of the International Political Science Association, writes that film stars, musicians and business magnates like Bill Gates "have grabbed new roles on the world stage."

Rice recently met with actress and U.N. Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie, who has traveled on missions to 20 countries including Chad, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Burma.

Jolie, who represents the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, has lobbied the U.S. Congress and launched World Refugee Day activities in Washington in 2005 with Rice and Paul Rusesabagina -- a hotel manager in Rwanda who protected refugees in 1994 and whose experience served as a model for the film *Hotel Rwanda*.

Cooper says Jolie is an example of another person who has used her celebrity "to engage politicians at the highest rank," as evidenced by her attendance at events such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He also pointed to the State Department's successful programming of great jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong as "a cultural diplomatic tool." (See [related article](#).)

John Marks, president of Search for Common Ground, says his group has successfully used celebrities in music videos, documentaries and public service announcements to promote important message.

"We try to use popular culture to change behavior" and help resolve conflicts, he said. His nongovernmental organization and others also bestow awards on celebrities to gain greater visibility and boost fundraising.

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