

Belgium Today

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BELGIUM OFFERS EMERGENCY AID TO KATRINA'S VICTIMS

In the wake of the death and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina, Guy Verhofstadt, Belgium's Prime Minister, sent a note to President Bush conveying "the full sympathy and support of the Belgian people and government for the hard-hit populations of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama." "I want you to know," he wrote to the President, "that the Belgian government stands ready to assist in these difficult times."

Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht sent a message of support and a general offer of aid the day after the disaster to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. This was followed up by a multi-faceted offer of assistance from Belgium. The offer included one sorting/triage team of 15 medical doctors and nursing personnel from Antwerp University Hospital, one sorting and triage team of 7 from the University of Brussels (ULB) and one treatment team of 9 from the Brussels University Hospital (VUB).

While the U.S. is still considering whether this offer for sorting/triage assistance will help meet needs in the devastated areas, it did immediately accept the second part of the Belgian offer: assistance of a ten-person team of logistical specialists. Included are nine Belgian military personnel, who will operate in a civilian capacity, and one Belgian Red Cross worker. They flew to the U.S. on September 5 to work with the American Red Cross, primarily in the Baton Rouge and Montgomery areas, where they are expected to stay for about three weeks. They will help allocate resources to communities and individuals in need.

Belgium has also offered to supply balloon lamps, electrical generators, water and/or mud pumps, 115 military engineering specialists and a diving team.

Americans who have learned of Belgium's offer of assistance have expressed their appreciation to the Embassy. In the words of one writer: "Your immediate response and giving nature underline the fact that all nations are part of a united world community and for that I am grateful."

There are about 400 Belgians living in the area affected by the hurricane and the Embassy is trying to ascertain the whereabouts and well-being of each and every one of them. An Embassy representative went to Baton Rouge to try to locate those who were unaccounted for. Local representatives of the French-speaking Community of Belgium greatly facilitated this task by providing practical assistance and information on compatriots in Louisiana.

Belgium is one of the 30 European countries that have united to offer assistance to the United States. The list of offers, which is updated continuously, is available at www.eurunion.org.

KIM CLIJSTERS WINS U.S. OPEN



Photo: Belga

It was Kim Clijsters' fifth Grand Slam championship and it turned out to be the proverbial charm. The 22-year-old Belgian beat Mary Pierce at the U.S. Open in Flushing Meadows, New York, on September 10. This was the second time a Belgian woman has won the U.S. Open: Justine Henin-Hardenne was victorious in 2003.

Clijsters had missed much of the 2004 season because of an injury to her wrist. This year she rebounded with gusto, winning six major titles. Her victory at the U.S. Open has boosted her rank to No. 3 in the Women's Tennis Association. Her win also had a considerable effect on her income: because she came out first in the U.S. Open Series tournaments leading up the Open, she collected double the usual award, amounting to \$2.2 million.

In addition to being a superb athlete, Clijsters also has the reputation of being a wonderful person. Liz Clarke, writing for the *Washington Post*, said of her: "She is widely regarded as the nicest woman on the tour, as well as the least motivated by money, fame and adulation." Commentators covering the match for CBS also pointed out that she was the first tennis champion to make a personal contribution (\$25,000) to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

NEW LAW PROVIDES TAX DEDUCTION FOR RISK CAPITAL

Recent studies have shown that Belgium has become one of the most profitable countries in the world for American companies to do business with. U.S. tax policy magazines have pointed out that from 1999 to 2002 the effective tax rate for U.S. companies in Belgium decreased to 12% while their profits in Belgium increased by 84%.

Dedicated to reinforcing opportunities for local and international investors, Belgium significantly reduced its corporate tax rate in 2003, and in June of this year introduced into its tax law a "deduction for risk capital," commonly referred to as the "notional interest deduction." The purpose of this new legislation is to ensure equal treatment of loan and equity capital and thus to make capital investments in Belgium even more attractive.

At the same time, the Parliament abolished the 0.5% capital tax that is currently due on contributions to Belgian companies' share capital. The notional interest deduction

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HUMAN EMBRYO CLONED FROM IMMATURE EGGS AT UNIVERSITY OF GHENT

Researchers at the University of Ghent have managed to make the beginnings of a cloned human embryo using immature eggs incubated in the lab. If the technique can be perfected, they say it could provide a larger, more acceptable source of stem cells.

As reported in *Nature*, the cloned embryo cells have not yet developed enough to serve as a source of stem cells. But the researchers are convinced they can achieve this step within a few months.

At the moment, biologists rely on mature eggs when attempting to clone human embryos. These are often obtained from IVF clinics, where women may choose to donate some eggs for research. But since the majority of mature eggs are wanted for the IVF procedure, donation is relatively rare. However, up to 15 percent of eggs retrieved from women for infertility treatment are unripe and not used. If those can be used for cloning, the egg supply problem may be significantly eased. (www.nature.com)

Researchers have only recently managed to clone a human embryo. A team of scientists at Seoul National University achieved this feat last year by using 242 mature eggs harvested from 16 different female volunteers to produce one stem cell line.

The Belgian team attempted a similar cloning procedure with immature eggs. They placed the eggs in a solution that contained female reproductive hormones and allowed them to develop for about two days. They then removed the DNA from the eggs' nuclei and inserted genetic material from the subject they wished to clone.

The findings were presented at the annual meeting of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology in Copenhagen in June.

NEW RESEARCH ON RARE FORM OF CANCER

Gastro-Intestinal Stroma Tumor (GIST) is a rare form of cancer of the stomach or small intestine. Up to now only one effective treatment has existed for GIST: the use of Glivec. However, over time, this remedy becomes ineffective for a large percentage of patients. The research group of Peter Marynen of the Flanders Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), connected to the Catholic University of Leuven, has uncovered the process underlying the frequent ineffectiveness of Glivec. In addition, the researchers have shown that PKC412—an experimental drug currently in the second phase of clinical research — can be effective in helping these patients once again. This possible alternative to Glivec, and the genetic understanding of the development of resistance to Glivec, should make it possible to prescribe a new highly targeted therapy for patients in the future.

BRAIN TUMOR VACCINE DEVELOPED AT LEUVEN

The Bulletin has reported that researchers at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL) have developed a vaccine that arrests the growth of brain tumors and can even destroy them. A team under Professor Stefaan Van Gool developed a technique whereby blood cells are taken from a patient and the antibodies removed which allow the body to fight the tumor. Those are then 'spliced' with material from the tumor itself, and returned to the patient's body. This reinforces the body's own defenses, and helps prevent the return of tumors that have been removed.

Initial trials have been "very promising," the university said. Patients given only six months to live were well more than a year later, and younger trial patients were still in remission after three years.

TAX DEDUCTION (continued from page 1)

applies as of the financial year ending on December 31, 2006. It applies to all Belgian companies and branches without the need to obtain a ruling or specific license.

The concept of a notional interest deduction is a unique and innovative tax feature. It entitles Belgian companies and branches to annually calculate a fictitious interest expense on their aggregate equity amount (share capital and retained earnings), thus reducing their taxable base.

The new regime serves multiple objectives. It reduces the existing discrimination between debt and equity financing. It also provides a viable alternative for the expiring Belgian coordination center regimes and thus enhances Belgium's position as a suitable location for treasury and headquarters activities.

VAN HOOL BUSES IN DC

Belgian-made buses began rolling on the streets of Washington, DC this summer. Twenty-nine buses manufactured by the Province of Antwerp -based Van Hool Company make up the fleet of the Circulator, a privately-run system that is providing a new, fast and inexpensive way to cross town. The black and red buses are 40 feet long, have three doors for fast loading and feature a low floor with no steps.

Van Hool produces some 1700 buses and coaches a year in Belgium. Sixty percent of its production is exported to Europe, but an average of 600 coaches a year go to the U.S. Since 1987, Van Hool has had an exclusive American distribution agreement with ABC Bus Companies, Inc. in Florida, which has consequently become the largest importer of buses in the U.S. When in 1990 Van Hool delivered buses to Montreal, it became the first European manufacturer ever to provide completely finished buses for North America.

LANCE ARMSTRONG FEELS 'PARTLY FLEMISH'

U.S. cyclist Lance Armstrong loudly applauded Belgium's assistance after winning his record 7th Tour de France. Armstrong thanked his Belgian team staff in Paris and even admitted he felt "partly Flemish" after eight years of cooperation with team chief Johan Bruyneel and the other staff. Bruyneel is considered as the tactical brain behind Armstrong's success.

(Excerpted from an article that first appeared on Expatica.com)

IMAGES OF RESISTANCE

Since 1998, Anne Griffin, Professor of Political science at The Cooper Union in New York, has been gathering testimony on the Resistance in Belgium during World War II. In 2001-2002 she spent six months in Brussels at the Center for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGES). While her aim had been to write a book, a serendipitous encounter with photojournalist and portrait photographer Jean-Marc Gourdon encouraged her also to create an exhibition on the topic.

The exhibition honors the courage of those who, more than 60 years ago, actively resisted Nazi occupation and tyranny in Belgium. Griffin's research interests have always been focused on the relationship between collective memory and policy. She wanted to tell the story of the Belgian Resistance while there are still living witnesses to the event—before it fades into history.

She explains: “Jean-Marc Gourdon's portraits represent members of that Resistance not only at the end of their own lives, but also at the limit of living memory. The intervening decades have swept away all who were not young, or very young, at the time of their action. Still, with the exception of their relative youth during the war, they represent a broad range of backgrounds and of Resistance organizations. Some suffered arrest and deportation and the horror of the camps. Their careers after liberation varied widely. By definition these are the survivors — of danger, ordeal, chance, and time.”

Twenty-seven individual resisters are featured in the show. Their contemporary portraits, taken in 2002, are paired with photographs of them at the time of their activity. The wartime pictures include Andrée Guelin followed by a Wehrmacht officer on a Brussels street; Arthur Haulot as an inmate at Dachau; Andrée Dumon on the bicycle that would later be struck by a Gestapo vehicle; Paul Lévy broadcasting from London; Etienne Plissart at the time of his training as a parachutist; Albert De Coninck's wedding party; and Albert Mélot and Fernand Strubbe in uniform.

The exhibition will also include several images of “memory places”: the Dossin armory in Mechelen, the Citadelle in Liège, the Enclos des Fusillés and the Monument to the Women of Ravensbruck, both in Brussels, and others. These too will be paired with wartime photographs, where possible. It will conclude with a panel listing some of the accomplishments of the Resistance: the saving of thousands of Jewish children, the rescue and return to active duty of over 800 Allied airmen, and the role of the Resistance in the liberation of the Port of Antwerp.

The show will open at The Arthur A. Houghton Gallery at The Cooper Union on October 28 and will remain on view until December 10.

Public events in connection with the exhibition will include a symposium “Resistance in Belgium” with scholars from both the U.S. and Belgium, and the screening of several films, such as *Comète*, about the rescue of downed Allied aviators, and *As If It Were Yesterday*, about the rescue of Jewish children.

PORTRAITS BY MEMLING AT THE FRICK



Hans Memling
Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer, c. 1485-94
Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

An exhibition of thirty portraits by Hans Memling (c.1440-1494) will be presented at the Frick Collection in New York from October 12 through the remainder of the year.

The show provides an overview of this Renaissance master's successful career in portraiture and includes portrait-wings from diptychs and triptychs along with autonomous panels of individual patrons. It also explores the function of portraiture in Flanders during the fifteenth century and the role of the workshop in artistic production.

The traveling exhibition made its debut at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, in February and was also shown at the Groeningemuseum, Bruges, during the summer. The Frick is the only museum in the United States to present it.

CULTURAL UPDATE

◀ Michel Draguet, the new director of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, has decided to create a new museum in the Belgian capital dedicated to surrealist painter René Magritte. The **Magritte Museum** will house the world's largest collection of Magritte's works and is expected to open to the public in early 2007.

◀ In an August 26 review in the *Los Angeles Times*, film critic Kenneth Turan called the film *The Memory of a Killer* (originally titled *The Alzheimer Case*) “one terrific thriller...with complexities and twists of plot...[and an] ability to keep you guessing and wondering.” The film, which has just been released in ninety cities in the United States, is one of Belgium's biggest box-office draws of all time and is the country's submission for the next Academy Awards.

◀ The **Plantin-Moretus Museum** in Antwerp, a printing and publishing house that dates back to the Renaissance, and which is linked with the history of the invention and spread of typography, has been added to UNESCO's World Heritage List. The list includes 812 properties which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value.

◀ The **Walters Art Museum** in Baltimore will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its original Palazzo Building with the reinstallation of over 1,500 objects, largely from the museum's Renaissance and Baroque collections. One of the highlights will be the re-creation of a collection of art and wonders as it might have been assembled by a 17th century nobleman in Flanders: his gallery of arms and armor, a private study with his most precious collections of bronzes, timepieces and antiquities and a chamber of wonders, encompassing marvels of nature and human ingenuity from all over the world. The new galleries open on October 22.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through October 2— Washington, DC

Sunshine Express, new paintings by Dominique Samyn-Werbrouck, at the Studio Gallery. Info: 202 232-8734

September 23 — Bethesda, MD

The Washington Bach Consort presents Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, with Belgian countertenor Patrick Van Goethem, at the Music Center at Strathmore. Info: 301 581-5100

September 23 — Washington, DC

The Memory of a Killer directed by Erik Van Looy and starring Jan Declair, will open at the Avalon Theatre. Info: 202 966-6000

September 24-December 24 — New York, NY

Exhibition of bronze sculptures by Fernand Vanderplancke, artist-in-residence at the Agora Gallery. Info: 212 226-4151

October 3 — Washington, DC

Dutch language classes will resume at the Embassy. Info: 202 342-8346

October 12 - December 31 — New York, NY

Memling's Portraits at the Frick Collection. Info: 212 288-0700

October 13-16 — San Francisco, CA

Poet Miriam Van hee participates in the 4th San Francisco International Poetry Festival, at the San Francisco Art Institute. Info: 415 826-3168

October 28, 29, 30 — New York, NY

Micheline Van Hautem and Frederik Caelen in *Brel & Piaf* at Danny's Skylight Room. Info: 212 265-8133

October 28 - December 10 — New York, NY

Images of Resistance: Past and Present, an exhibition pairing wartime and contemporary photographs of Belgian Resistors, and including a panel discussion (Oct 28) and films (Oct 29) at The Cooper Union. Info: 212 353-4195

BELGIAN COMMUNITY IN THE U.S. MOURNS YOUNG CANCER VICTIM

Jan-Willem Knapen, a 16-year-old Belgian who had been living in San Jose, California, since the age of 4, succumbed to brain cancer on August 3. While undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments over the past two years, Jan-Willem, or JW as he was known, started a drive to build a house for young cancer patients and their families at Kaiser Permanente's Santa Clara hospital. He succeeded in raising a half million dollars to fund the J.W. House, which is expected to open in 2007.

His incredible spirit and his dedication to this goal attracted the attention of The American Institute for Public Service, a national foundation that honors community service, and he was awarded its highest accolade, the Jefferson Award.

Donations may be made in his memory to JW House Fund, P.O. Box 3666, Santa Clara, California 95055. See www.jwhouse.org for more information.

PUBLIC RADIO AIRS MUSIC BY MONKS OF CHEVETOGNE

Millennium of Music, a program produced for National Public Radio by Robert Aubry Davis, has recently aired a series of programs featuring liturgical music by the Monks of Chevetogne, in Wallonia. Davis told *Belgium Today* that this series, which will continue through October, has elicited more positive response from the public than any other series he has produced. E-mails have poured in from around the country from listeners who have been deeply moved by the beauty of the singing and who want to know how to obtain copies of the recordings.

Since its founding in 1925, the Monastery of Chevetogne has been devoted to Christian unity, hoping to heal the ancient schism between Western and Eastern rites. The monks at Chevetogne sing both the Roman liturgy and the Orthodox liturgy. Although they have been producing recordings since the 60's, in 1984 they began a new production of liturgical recordings under their own label. Today CD sales have become their primary source of income. For more information, please visit: iconographie@monasterechevetogne.com

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