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Background Notes : Cape Verde (06/09)

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State Department Press Release

Background Notes : Cape Verde (06/09)

Flag of Cape Verde is five unequal horizontal bands; the top-most band of blue - equal to one half the width of the flag - is followed by three bands of white, red, and white, each equal to 1/12 of the width, and a bottom stripe of blue equal to one quarter of the flag width; a circle of 10, yellow, five-pointed stars is centered on the red stripe and positioned 3/8 of the length of the flag from the hoist side.

PROFILE

OFFICIAL NAME:

Republic of Cape Verde

Geography

Area: 4,033 sq. km. (1,557 sq. mi.), slightly larger than Rhode Island.

Cities: Capital--Praia (pop. 106,052). Other city--Mindelo (pop. 67,844).

Terrain: Steep, rugged, rocky, volcanic.

Climate: Temperate; warm, dry summer; precipitation meager and erratic.

People

Nationality: Noun and adjective--Cape Verdean(s).

Population (2008): 499,796.

Annual growth rate (2008): 1.41%.

Ethnic groups: Creole (mixed African and Portuguese) 71%, African 28%, European 1%.

Religions: Roman Catholic, Protestant.

Languages: Portuguese (official); Crioulo (national).

Education: Literacy (2008)--77%.

Health: Infant mortality rate (2008)--24.8/1,000. Life expectancy (2008)--72.5 yrs.

Government

Type: Republic.

Independence: July 5, 1975.

Constitution: 1980; revised 1992, 1995, and 1999.

Branches: Executive--president (head of state), prime minister (head of government), Council of Ministers. Legislative--National Assembly. Judicial-- Supreme Court, lower courts.

Administrative subdivisions: 17 administrative districts.

Political parties: African Party for Independence of Cape Verde or PAICV [Jose Maria Pereira NEVES, chairman]; Democratic Alliance for Change or ADM [Eurico MONTEIRO] (a coalition of PCD, PTS, and UCID); Democratic Christian Party or PDC [Manuel RODRIGUES]; Democratic Renovation Party or PRD [Victor FIDALGO]; Democratic and Independent Cape Verdean Union or UCID [Antonio MONTEIRO]; Movement for Democracy or MPD [Agostinho LOPES]; Party for Democratic Convergence or PCD [Eurico MONTEIRO]; Party of Work and Solidarity or PTS [Isaia RODRIGUES]; Social Democratic Party or PSD [Joao ALEM].

Suffrage: Universal over 18.

Economy

GDP (nominal, 2007): \$1.603 billion.

GDP per capita (2007): \$3,200.

Real GDP growth rate (2008, projected): 6.5%.

Inflation (2007): 3.29%.

Natural resources: Salt, pozzolana, limestone.

Agriculture: Products--bananas, corn, beans, sugarcane, coffee, fruits, vegetables, livestock products.

Industry: Types--fish and fish products, clothing, shoes, beverages, salt, construction, building materials, ship repair, furniture, metal products, tourism.

Trade (2007): Exports--\$80.36 million: fuel, clothing, shoes and shoe parts, fish and crustaceans. Imports--\$768 million: consumer goods, intermediary goods, capital goods, petroleum. Major trading partners, exports--Spain 44.2%, Portugal 21.7%, Netherlands 12.6%, Morocco 4.6%. Major trading partners, imports--Portugal 41.1%, Netherlands 10.6%, Spain 6.5%, Italy 5.4%, Cote d'Ivoire 5.2%, Brazil 4.8%.

Fiscal year: Calendar year.

Currency: Escudo (CVEsc 70 = \$1 as of June 2008), which is pegged to the Euro.

Economic aid received: \$161 million (2005). Largest donors--Portugal (\$43 million); European Community (\$22 million); World Bank-IDA (\$21 million); Luxembourg (\$15 million); Netherlands (\$10 million); the United States (\$9 million).

GEOGRAPHY

The Cape Verde Islands are located in the mid-Atlantic Ocean some 450 kilometers (about 300 mi.) off the west coast of Africa. The archipelago includes 10 islands and 5 islets, divided into the windward (Barlavento) and leeward (Sotavento) groups. The main islands in the Barlavento group are Santo Antao, Sao Vicente, Santa Luzia, Sao Nicolau, Sal, and Boa Vista; those of the Sotavento group include Maio, Santiago, Fogo, and Brava. All larger islands but Santa Luzia are inhabited.

Three islands--Sal, Boa Vista, and Maio--generally are level and very dry. Mountains higher than 1,280 meters (4,200 ft.) are found on Santiago, Fogo, Santo Antao, and Sao Nicolau.

Sand carried by high winds has created spectacular rock formations on all islands, especially the windward ones. Sheer, jagged cliffs rise from the sea on several of the mountainous islands. Natural vegetation is sparse in the uplands and coast, but interior valleys support denser growth.

Rainfall is irregular, and the archipelago suffers periodic droughts and consequent food shortages. The average precipitation per year in Praia is 24 centimeters (9.5 in.). During the winter, storms blowing from the Sahara sometimes cloud the sky, but sunny days are the norm year round.

PEOPLE

The Cape Verde archipelago was uninhabited until the Portuguese discovered the islands in 1456. Enslaved Africans were brought to the islands to work on Portuguese plantations. They were joined by entrepreneurs and refugees fleeing religious persecution in Europe, leading to a rich cultural and ethnic mix. The influence of African culture is most pronounced on the island of Santiago, where half the population resides. Sparse rain and few natural resources historically have induced Cape Verdeans to emigrate. It is believed that of the more than 1 million individuals of Cape Verdean ancestry, fewer than half actually live on the islands. Some 500,000 people of Cape Verdean ancestry live in the United States, mainly in New England. Portugal, Netherlands, Italy, France, and Senegal also have large communities.

The official language is Portuguese, but most Cape Verdeans also speak a Creole dialect--Crioulo--which is based on archaic Portuguese but influenced by African and European languages. Cape Verde has a rich tradition of Crioulo literature and music.

HISTORY

In 1462, Portuguese settlers arrived at Santiago and founded Ribeira Grande (now Cidade Velha)--the first permanent European settlement city in the tropics. In the 16th century, the archipelago prospered from the transatlantic slave trade. Pirates occasionally attacked the Portuguese settlements. Sir Francis Drake sacked Ribeira Grande in 1585. After a French attack in 1712, the city declined in importance relative to Praia, which became the capital in 1770.

With the decline in the slave trade, Cape Verde's early prosperity slowly vanished. However, the islands' position astride mid-Atlantic shipping lanes made Cape Verde an ideal location for re-supplying ships. Because of its excellent harbor, Mindelo (on the island of Sao Vicente) became an important commercial center during the 19th century.

Portugal changed Cape Verde's status from a colony to an overseas province in 1951 in an attempt to blunt growing nationalism. Nevertheless, in 1956, Amilcar Cabral, a Cape Verdean, and a group of Cape Verdeans and Guinea-Bissauans organized (in Guinea-Bissau) the clandestine African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which demanded improvement in economic, social, and political conditions in Cape Verde and Portuguese Guinea and formed the basis of the two nations' independence movement. Moving its headquarters to Conakry, Guinea in 1960, the PAIGC began an armed rebellion against Portugal in 1961. Acts of sabotage eventually grew into a war in Portuguese Guinea that pitted 10,000 Soviet bloc-supported PAIGC soldiers against 35,000 Portuguese and African troops.

By 1972, the PAIGC controlled much of Portuguese Guinea despite the presence of the Portuguese troops, but the organization did not attempt to disrupt Portuguese control in Cape Verde. Portuguese Guinea declared independence in 1973 and was granted de jure independence in 1974. Following the April 1974 revolution in Portugal, the PAIGC became an active political movement in Cape Verde. In December 1974, the PAIGC and Portugal signed an agreement providing for a transitional government composed of Portuguese and Cape Verdeans. On June 30, 1975, Cape Verdeans elected a National Assembly, which received the instruments of independence from Portugal on July 5, 1975.

Immediately following the November 1980 coup in Guinea-Bissau, relations between Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau became strained. Cape Verde abandoned its hope for unity with Guinea-Bissau and formed the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV). Problems have since been resolved, and relations between the countries are good. The PAICV and its predecessor established a one-party system and ruled Cape Verde from independence until 1990.

Responding to growing pressure for pluralistic democracy, the PAICV called an emergency congress in February 1990 to discuss proposed constitutional changes to end one-party rule. Opposition groups came together to form the Movement for Democracy (MPD) in Praia in April 1990. Together, they campaigned for the right to contest the presidential election scheduled for December 1990. The one-party state was abolished September 28, 1990, and the first multi-party elections were held in January 1991. The MPD won a majority of the seats in the National Assembly, and MPD presidential candidate Mascarenhas Monteiro defeated the PAICV's candidate with 73.5% of the votes. Legislative elections in December 1995 increased the MPD majority in the National Assembly. The party won 50 of the National Assembly's 72 seats. A February 1996 presidential election returned President Mascarenhas Monteiro to office. Legislative elections in January 2001 returned power to the PAICV, with the PAICV holding 40 of the National Assembly seats, MPD 30, and Party for Democratic Convergence (PCD) and Party for Labor and Solidarity (PTS) 1 each. In February 2001, the PAICV-supported presidential candidate Pedro Pires defeated former MPD leader Carlos Veiga by only 13 votes.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The Cape Verde constitution—adopted in 1980 and revised in 1992, 1995, and 1999—forms the basis of government. The president is head of state and is elected by popular vote for a 5-year term. The prime minister is head of government and proposes other ministers and secretaries of state. The prime minister is nominated by the National Assembly and appointed by the president. Members of the National Assembly are elected by popular vote for 5-year terms.

Cape Verde enjoys a stable democratic system. The Movement for Democracy (MPD) captured a governing majority in the National Assembly in the country's first multi-party general elections in 1991. The MPD was returned to power with a larger majority in the general elections held in December 1995. In 2001, the PAICV regained power, with four parties holding seats in the National Assembly—PAICV 40, MPD 30, PCD 1, and PTS 1. Nationwide municipal elections were held March 21, 2004.

In January 2006, Cape Verde held a successful round of parliamentary elections, followed by successful presidential elections on February 12, 2006. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) judged both elections free and fair. The leading parliamentary opposition party filed a court case in an attempt to overrule the NEC on the grounds of alleged fraud; this action ultimately failed. Three parties now hold seats in the National Assembly—PAICV 40, MPD 30, and Cape Verdean Independent Democratic Union (UCID) 2. Municipal elections were held in May 2008, with the Movement for Democracy party taking many of the seats within the municipalities.

The judicial system is comprised of a Supreme Court of Justice—whose members are appointed by the president, the National Assembly, and the Board of the Judiciary—and regional courts. Separate courts hear civil, constitutional, and criminal cases. Appeal is to the Supreme Court.

Principal Government Officials

President—Pedro Verona Pires

Prime Minister—Jose Maria Neves

Defense Minister—Maria Cristina Lopes Almeida Fontes Lima

President of the National Assembly—Aristides Lima

Minister of Foreign Affairs—Jose Brito

Ambassador to the United States—Fatima Lima Veiga

Ambassador to the United Nations—Antonio Lima

Consul General to the United States (Boston)—Maria Mascarenhas

Cape Verde maintains an embassy in the United States at 3415 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20007 (tel. 202-965-6820) and one consulate at 535 Boylston Street, Boston MA 02116 (tel. 617-353-0014).

ECONOMY

Cape Verde has few natural resources and suffers from poor rainfall and limited fresh water. Only 4 of the 10 main islands (Santiago, Santo Antao, Fogo, and Brava) normally support significant agricultural production, and over 90% of all food consumed in Cape Verde is imported. Mineral resources include salt, pozzolana (a volcanic rock used in cement production), and limestone.

The economy of Cape Verde is service-oriented, with commerce, transport, and public services accounting for more than 70% of GDP. Although nearly 70% of the population lives in rural areas, agriculture and fishing contribute only about 9% of GDP. Light manufacturing accounts for most of the remainder. An amount estimated at about 20% of GDP is contributed to the domestic economy through remittances from expatriate Cape Verdeans.

Since 1991, the government has pursued market-oriented economic policies, including an open welcome to foreign investors and a far-reaching privatization program. It established as top development priorities the promotion of market economy and of the private sector; the development of tourism, light manufacturing industries, and fisheries; and the development of transport, communications, and energy facilities. From 1994 to 2000 there was a total of about \$407 million in foreign investments made or planned, of which 58% were in tourism, 17% in industry, 4% in infrastructure, and 21% in fisheries and services.

Fish and shellfish are plentiful, and small quantities are exported. Cape Verde has cold storage and freezing facilities and fish processing plants in Mindelo, Praia, and on Sal.

Cape Verde's strategic location at the crossroads of mid-Atlantic air and sea lanes has been enhanced by significant improvements at Mindelo's harbor (Porto Grande) and at Sal's and Praia's international airports. A new international airport was opened in Boa Vista in December 2007. Ship repair facilities at Mindelo were opened in 1983. The major ports are Mindelo and Praia, but all other islands have smaller port facilities. In addition to the international airport on Sal, airports have been built on all of the inhabited islands. All but the airport on Brava enjoy scheduled air service. The archipelago has 3,050 kilometers (1,830 mi.) of roads, of which 1,010 kilometers (606 mi.) are paved, most using cobblestone.

Future prospects depend heavily on the maintenance of aid flows, the encouragement of tourism, remittances, outsourcing labor to neighboring African countries, and the momentum of the government's development program.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Cape Verde pursues a nonaligned foreign policy and seeks cooperative relations with all states. Angola, Brazil, China, Cuba, France, Portugal, Russia, Senegal,

Spain, and the United States maintain embassies in Praia. Several others, mostly European countries, maintain honorary consulates. In addition, Cape Verde maintains multilateral relations with other Lusophone nations and holds membership in many international organizations. On July 23, 2008, Cape Verde became the 153rd member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in hopes of opening its markets for imported goods and services.

U.S.-CAPE VERDEAN RELATIONS

The cordial relations between the United States and Cape Verde have strong historical roots. In the early 18th century, U.S. whaling ships appear to have begun recruiting crews from Brava and Fogo to hunt whales that were abundant in the waters surrounding Cape Verde. Ties between the American colonies and Cape Verde are documented as early as the 1740s, when American ships routinely anchored in Cape Verdean ports to trade for salt or buy slaves. The tradition of emigration to the United States began at that time and continues today.

The first U.S. consulate in sub-Saharan Africa was established in Cape Verde in 1818. U.S. consular representation continued throughout the 19th century. The United States recognized Cape Verde on its independence day and supported its admission to the United Nations. Cape Verde assigned one of its first ambassadors to the United States, and a resident U.S. ambassador was posted to Cape Verde in 1983. Prime Minister Jose Neves visited Cape Verdean communities in New England during an official trip to the United States in 2002, and President Pires visited the United States in April 2005. Prime Minister Neves also visited the U.S. in September 2007.

The United States provided emergency humanitarian aid and economic assistance to Cape Verde in the period immediately following Cape Verde's independence, as well as after natural disasters, including a hurricane that struck the island of Brava in 1982, and after a severe volcanic eruption on Fogo in 1995. Cape Verde also is eligible for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and has signed an Open Skies agreement to facilitate air travel safety and expansion. On July 4, 2005, Cape Verde became the third country to sign a compact with the U.S. Government-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC); the five-year assistance package is worth over \$110 million in addressing rural economic expansion, infrastructure development, and development of tourism and a community college system.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador--Marianne Myles

Deputy Chief of Mission--Patrick Dunn

Consul--Leslie Hayden

Political/Consular Officer-Ruth Rudzinski

The U.S. Embassy in Cape Verde is at Rua Abilio Macedo, 6, Praia; C.P.201, tel. (238) 260 8900, fax 2611 355.

TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program advises Americans traveling and residing abroad through Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings. Country Specific Information exists for all countries and includes information on entry and exit requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, safety and security, crime, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. Travel Warnings are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country because the situation is dangerous or unstable.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found. Consular Affairs Publications, which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are also available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For additional information on international travel, see <http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel/International.shtml>.

The Department of State encourages all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad to register via the State Department's travel registration website or at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency and will enable you to receive up-to-date information on security conditions.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada or the regular toll line 1-202-501-4444 for callers outside the U.S. and Canada.

The National Passport Information Center (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4-USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778); TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-7793. Passport information is available 24 hours, 7 days a week. You may speak with a representative Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) and a web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. The CDC publication "Health Information for International Travel" can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/contentYellowBook.aspx>.

Further Electronic Information

Department of State Web Site. Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including Background Notes and daily press briefings along with the directory of key officers of Foreign Service posts and more. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) provides security information and regional news that impact U.S. companies working abroad through its website <http://www.osac.gov>

Export.gov provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.

STAT-USA/Internet, a service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides authoritative economic, business, and international trade information from the Federal government. The site includes current and historical trade-related releases, international market research, trade opportunities, and country analysis and provides access to the National Trade Data Bank.

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