

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Announces New Initiatives for West Bank, Gaza.....	1
Urging Reform, Vice President Biden Tells Kenyans, “Change Is Within Your Grasp”	1
U.S. Expands Science Engagement with Muslim-Majority Nations	2
Catching and Convicting Human Traffickers Still a Tough Job.....	4

President Obama Announces New Initiatives for West Bank, Gaza

Washington — President Obama, meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, announced an additional \$394.5 million for public projects and programs in the West Bank and Gaza.

The additional assistance will increase access for Palestinians to clean drinking water, create jobs, build schools, expand the availability of affordable housing and also address critical health and infrastructure needs, the White House said in a statement June 9 after the presidents' Oval Office meeting.

While discussing measures to improve conditions for Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, Obama and Abbas primarily focused their talks on moving indirect Israeli-Palestinian talks, known as "proximity talks," into direct peace negotiations. U.S. special envoy George Mitchell has been conducting indirect talks since March, when direct talks stalled after an announcement on housing construction in East Jerusalem.

Obama is expected to raise the issue of direct talks when his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is rescheduled in the coming weeks. Netanyahu asked Obama to postpone their June 1 meeting so he could attend to events surrounding a May 31 incident where activists aboard an aid convoy attempted to break the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza and some activists were killed.

"Obviously there is a lot of work that remains to be done so that we can create a two-state solution in the Middle East in which we have an Israel that is secure and fully accepted by its neighbors, and a Palestinian people that have their own state, self-determination, and the ability to chart their own destiny," Obama said in remarks with Abbas following their meeting.

Abbas told reporters that "we are not saying that we have conditions" with regard to transitioning from indirect talks to the direct talks.

"What has happened is that we agreed that should progress be achieved, then we would move on to direct talks. We are working in order to make progress," Abbas said.

WEST BANK AND GAZA ASSISTANCE

Obama said the \$394.5 million in assistance resulted from guidance by Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The president has described the situation in Gaza as unsustainable, and that it demands a significant

change in strategy. The Gaza Strip is under the political control of Hamas.

"While we work with our partners in the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Egypt and the international community to put such a strategy in place, these projects represent a down payment on the United States' commitment to Palestinians in Gaza," the White House said.

The projects include:

- A \$240 million investment by the Overseas Private Investment Corporation in the AMAL mortgage finance program in the West Bank.
- \$75 million in funding through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to support the Palestinian Authority's efforts to improve infrastructure throughout the West Bank and Gaza.
- \$10 million in USAID-funded projects to enhance the Palestinian private sector's competitiveness.
- \$40 million to support the emergency appeal for Gaza and the West Bank by the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- \$14.5 million in USAID projects for school rehabilitation, small-scale farming, hospital repairs and community infrastructure in Gaza.
- \$10 million for the construction of five new UNRWA schools in Gaza.
- \$5 million to start nine USAID-funded projects to repair water distribution and wastewater collection systems in Gaza.

Urging Reform, Vice President Biden Tells Kenyans, "Change Is Within Your Grasp"

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The full force of Kenya's potential has yet to be released, Vice President Biden told university students in Nairobi, pledging to them the steadfast support of the United States as their country undertakes political reforms that will produce better governance and national unity.

Speaking at the Kenyatta International Conference Center June 9, Biden said the true wealth of a nation is not determined by its size, natural resources or military strength, but by "the skill, ingenuity and determination of its people."

"By that measure," Biden said, "Kenya is a very wealthy nation."

Kenya has already become the financial capital of East Africa, building the largest non-oil, non-mineral-based economy in sub-Saharan Africa and serving as a hub for the transportation of goods and people in the region, he said. The country's diplomats and military forces are playing positive roles on the African continent, and Kenya's commitment to education has produced "world-renowned scientists, geneticists, environmentalists, writers and a Nobel Prize winner."

"But the full force of your potential – as all of you young students know – has yet to be released," the vice president said.

As the country is affected by regional instability, such as in Somalia and Sudan, and by global factors like the financial crisis and climate change, it is also confronting internal challenges such as corruption, ethnic tensions and lack of economic opportunity, he said.

"Change is within your grasp. And that change will be realized when government is transparent, accountable and participatory," Biden said, urging that corrupt officials be held accountable, that the judiciary and police forces conduct themselves honestly, and that Kenya's government reflects the country's diversity.

Biden said a new constitution will establish a framework to accelerate political reforms, including placing a system of checks and balances on the branches of government, and it will provide a path toward lasting democratic stability in Kenya. Better governance is also "the best route to economic prosperity, sparking job creation, opening up opportunity and improving the way of life for Kenyans everywhere," he said.

Better governance will also open the door to more American development programs such as the Millennium Challenge, he said. "There's so much more we could do, and want to do, in partnership with you. It could provide millions of dollars in grant assistance to Kenya that you would know how to use well to build this great nation," he said.

"If you make these changes, I promise you, new foreign private investment will come in like you've never seen and you will have a reinvigorated tourism industry that will exceed the billion dollars it was before the economic crisis," Biden said.

The vice president said President Obama is committed, concerned and "deeply involved in the formation of our policy" toward Kenya. Kenya has "a steadfast supporter in the United States," he said, and the Obama

administration is supporting the constitutional reform process by providing assistance for voter registration and civic education that is designed to help Kenyans make informed decisions in the August 4 referendum on the draft constitution.

"I hope you will forgive me, but true friendship demands honesty. So if our words are sometimes blunt, it's because our faith in the possibilities of Kenya [is] unlimited," Biden said.

But President Obama has said that "Africa's future is up to Africans," the vice president said. "We can't dictate it – nor should we – but you can."

The ultimate responsibility and power rest with Kenya's voters, rather than its political leaders, Biden said. "By your vote," he said, "you have before you a singular opportunity to strengthen Kenya's democratic institutions ... and an opportunity to open up to opportunity to give a new generation new power to help Kenya realize its immense potential."

U.S. Expands Science Engagement with Muslim-Majority Nations

Science envoys return from missions with recommendations for partnership

By Cheryl L Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington – U.S. officials described a range of science and technology partnerships launched over the past year and new activities planned for the coming year, all resulting from President Obama's historic commitment in Cairo in June 2009 to renew engagement with Muslim-majority countries.

At a June 8 gathering in Washington were Obama administration officials, other government representatives, scientists, ambassadors from Egypt and Algeria, a high-level representative from the Embassy of Indonesia, and the three U.S. science envoys announced by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in Marrakech, Morocco, in November 2009.

"Education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century," Obama said in Cairo and pledged to launch a new fund to support technological development in Muslim-majority countries and help transfer ideas to the marketplace.

"As promised," said John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), "the OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation] Global Technology and Innovation Fund began accepting

proposals last year for technological development projects to be concentrated in Muslim-majority countries and communities, and the fund has already attracted close to \$2 billion in private investment to support some of those proposals.”

In the Cairo speech, Obama said the United States would open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia and appoint science envoys to collaborate on energy, technology, water and agriculture programs. He also announced a new effort with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to eradicate polio and said the United States would expand partnerships with Muslim communities to promote child and maternal health.

Holdren said plans are under way to create two centers of excellence to be supported by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). A center in the Middle East will focus on water and one in Asia will focus on climate change. Creating such centers was also a recommendation of the science envoys.

SCIENCE ENVOYS

Obama announced the science envoy program in Cairo, and the first envoys were chosen by the U.S. National Academies with help from the White House and the State Department. Obama envisioned that the envoys would investigate partnership opportunities in all areas of science as a way to improve relations between the United States and Muslim-majority nations.

Nobel Prize-winning scientist Ahmed Zewail visited Egypt and Turkey in January and Qatar in February. Former National Institutes of Health Director Elias Zerhouni visited UNESCO in Paris, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya from February to April, and Bruce Alberts, editor in chief of Science magazine and former president of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, traveled to Indonesia in May.

“We were welcomed everywhere as science envoys,” Zewail said. “It was very clear that despite differences on political issues, when it came to science and technology people were welcoming us in all institutions that we visited.”

“Every government official I talked to, every scientist I talked to, recognized the need for more investments in science and technology ... in every country there is this awakening,” Zerhouni said. “But the educational system does not provide, despite the availability of great human capacity, a high-quality education.”

The envoys recommended creating a U.S.-led global knowledge-sharing and online learning initiative, beginning with a high-bandwidth network of digital libraries linking U.S. and Muslim scientists, Zerhouni added. Such a virtual collaboration could offer programs in agriculture, water resources and other topics, and help train the world’s science and technology information work force.

Alberts, who spent 11 days in Indonesia, recommended helping that nation bolster its science education system. In July, he said, a 10-person Indonesian delegation will travel to the United States to attend a workshop given by the Smithsonian Institution and the National Science Resources Center about how best to teach science.

He also recommended helping Indonesia create a national science foundation to make science research grants, and tripling the number of Indonesians studying in the United States and the number of Americans studying in Indonesia to strengthen the countries’ relationship.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIPS

Holdren said the newly established Gulf Nuclear Energy Infrastructure Institute is a collaboration involving the State Department, the Energy Department, the Khalifa University of Science, Technology and Research, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, the United Arab Emirates Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, Sandia National Laboratory, and Texas A&M University’s Nuclear Security Science and Policy Institute.

The institute will work with Gulf states through regional workshops and training to give those that decide to pursue nuclear energy the tools to do so in a safe and secure manner.

The State Department supported the establishment of a digital science library for the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania) to boost science and technology development, increase access to digitized scientific data and research, and encourage partnerships and networking.

USAID awarded six new Middle East regional cooperation projects to fund applied research and science and technology cooperation between Israel and Jordan, West Bank/Gaza and Tunisia on agriculture, global and regional health and environmental protection.

In the year ahead, the administration will name three new envoys to travel to Central Asia, East and West Africa and Southeast Asia. Holdren also said 2011 will be the U.S.-Egypt Year of Science, celebrating U.S.-Egypt engagement in science, promoting interest among young Egyptians in science-related careers and research, and promoting

digital engagement among the Egyptian science community with U.S. peers and institutions.

The United States is also developing plans for a Science, Technology and Innovation Conference in 2011 involving all Muslim-majority countries in cooperation with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other partners.

Catching and Convicting Human Traffickers Still a Tough Job

Law enforcement skills need further improvement, U.S. official says

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — More than 12 million people worldwide are trafficked for labor and sex each year, according to estimates by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Yet in 2008, fewer than 3,000 convictions of traffickers were reported.

If most of the world condemns human trafficking as modern-day slavery, why are so few of the “bad guys” facing justice?

According to Luis CdeBaca, the reason lies in the nature of the crime itself and the need for law enforcement to develop better skills.

CdeBaca, as ambassador-at-large for the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, coordinates U.S. government activities in the global fight against contemporary forms of slavery. He is the first former prosecutor to hold that position, having previously served at the U.S. Justice Department, where he was one of the country’s most-decorated federal prosecutors.

A HIDDEN CRIME

Human trafficking — unlike a crime such as bank robbery — is a hidden crime, CdeBaca told America.gov in a recent interview. “The perpetrator, if they’re successful, has basically kept somebody behind closed doors — kept them working, kept them in prostitution,” he explained. “So if the trafficker does their job right, nobody finds out about the trafficking situation.”

The profits generated by human trafficking are huge: Some \$31 billion a year according to ILO estimates. These ill-gotten profits are enjoyed by organized criminal groups as well as individuals, according to CdeBaca.

“One of the things that make it hard to have a one-size-fits-all response to human trafficking is that it manifests itself in so many different ways,” CdeBaca said. “If you’re only thinking of it as a transnational organized crime problem, you start looking for ‘Mr. Big.’ That doesn’t find those two victims being held in a barn somewhere by a farmer, or the one victim being held behind closed doors as a domestic servant.”

Enslaving another person, CdeBaca said, is an easy enough crime to carry out. In the United States, he said, “we’ve had everybody from organized crime figures to suburban, two-doctor couples be convicted of this crime. ... It’s not simply criminals who do it; it’s people who normally would not be engaging in criminal activity.”

Many trafficking victims enter a country legally under guest-worker programs and end up being held by an abusive employer. The difference between an ill-treated worker and a trafficking victim, CdeBaca explained, is that trafficking victims have no reasonable alternative but to continue to perform their service lest they suffer serious harm.

BETTER LAW ENFORCEMENT SKILLS NEEDED

Although about half the governments worldwide have adopted laws prohibiting human trafficking, many are quite recent.

“I think one of the reasons why there’s not as many prosecutions as we’d like to see is that these laws are so new, and that the skill set in being able to find the victims and help them ... is just being developed,” CdeBaca said.

“I think the street police are important, but at the end of the day, this is a complex crime that has to be dealt with by the detectives,” he said. “You have to have the most sophisticated policing put on this crime; otherwise you’re never going to put an end to it.”

But simply putting criminals in jail isn’t going to solve the problem for the victim, CdeBaca said: Victim counseling is critical.

In the United States, law enforcement officials are coming to realize that victim rights and the needs of the prosecution are actually the same thing, CdeBaca said.

“If your victim is scared, if your victim is still suffering trauma, if they haven’t had psychological counseling, if they don’t trust you, then you are not going to have a good witness, and you’re probably not going to put the trafficker in jail,” CdeBaca said.

In many parts of the world, law enforcement is not trusted because the police are also committing human

rights abuses, he acknowledged. Nonetheless, the overall situation is improving.

“The biggest thing that I’ve seen is a move away from having an announced but not enforced human rights standard over to a situation where we expect, even demand, that law enforcement and governments not just prosecute people, but protect the victims,” CdeBaca said. “That’s the big cultural shift that I’ve seen in the last 15 years, and it’s happening in some very surprising places.”

The State Department issues an annual report on human trafficking. The report seeks to increase global awareness of human trafficking, to highlight national and international efforts to combat it and to encourage foreign governments to take action against all forms of modern-day slavery. The Trafficking in Persons Report for 2010 is scheduled to be released June 14.

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