

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

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July 14, 2010

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President Obama Expresses Support for Palestinian President's Leadership.....	1
White House on National HIV/AIDS Strategy .....	1
State Department on Release of Cuban Political Prisoners .....	2
American Medical Volunteers in Haiti .....	2
Reintegration of Former Taliban a Key to Success in Afghanistan .....	3
Muslim Convention Hosts Minister and Rabbi at Interfaith Panel .....	4

## President Obama Expresses Support for Palestinian President's Leadership

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama recently spoke with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas about progress in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian indirect or “proximity” talks that are designed to lead to negotiations for a peace agreement and Palestinian statehood, the White House said.

Obama and “President Abbas reviewed ways to advance to direct talks in the near term, in order to reach an agreement that ends the conflict and establishes an independent and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel,” a July 9 White House statement said.

“The president noted that Special Envoy [George] Mitchell would travel to the region soon and meet with President Abbas to build on this momentum to advance our common goals,” the White House added.

Obama’s telephone conference with Abbas comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Washington July 6 for talks at the White House. Obama’s discussions with the Israeli leader focused on moving the Israelis and Palestinians toward direct talks to advance the peace process.

The White House said the president, in his phone conversation with Abbas, expressed strong support for Abbas’ leadership on behalf of the Palestinian people and his commitment to peace. Obama also cited the positive momentum generated by recent improvements in Gaza and in the West Bank, and “the restraint shown by both sides in recent months,” the White House said.

For the past few weeks, both sides have been engaged in indirect talks facilitated by Mitchell, the U.S. special envoy for Middle East peace. The president spoke with Abbas previously during his June 9 visit to the White House, and since then there have been two additional rounds of proximity talks through Mitchell, White House officials said.

Mitchell met with Netanyahu in Jerusalem June 30 after visiting the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip. On June 20, Israel announced it was relaxing some of its restrictions on materials it would allow into Gaza, a move that was welcomed by Obama and others in the international community.

During the meeting with the Israeli leader July 6, the president urged Israel, the Palestinians and neighboring

Arab states to undertake confidence-building measures to improve the climate for peace in the region. Obama said he believes Netanyahu is willing to take risks for a peace settlement.

Obama said there are measures available to all sides that would improve the prospect of successful peace negotiations and that he had discussed them with both Netanyahu and Abbas.

“There are going to need to be a whole set of confidence-building measures to make sure that people are serious and that we’re sending a signal to the region that this isn’t just more talk and more process without action,” Obama said.

The president said continued progress to build confidence among the Palestinians would help them “see in very concrete terms what peace can bring that rhetoric and violence cannot bring.”

## White House on National HIV/AIDS Strategy

*\$30 million of prevention fund dedicated to implementation of strategy*

The White House  
Office of the Press Secretary  
July 13, 2010

### White House Announces National HIV/AIDS Strategy

*\$30 Million of Prevention Fund Dedicated to Implementation of Strategy*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In the United States, approximately 56,000 people become infected with HIV each year and more than 1.1 million Americans are living with HIV. To combat this growing epidemic, the White House today released the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) and accompanying NHAS Federal Implementation Plan.

Secretary Sebelius also announced that \$30 million of the Affordable Care Act’s Prevention Fund will be dedicated to the implementation of the NHAS. This funding will support the development of combination prevention interventions. It will also support improved surveillance, expanded and targeted testing, and other activities.

“We can’t afford complacency - not when in the ten minutes I’ve been talking to you, another American has just contracted HIV,” Secretary Sebelius said. “That’s why our strategy calls for aggressive efforts to educate Americans about how dangerous this disease still is and the steps they can take to protect themselves and their loved ones.”

The vision of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy is to make the United States “a place where new HIV infections are rare, and when they do occur, every person, regardless of age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic circumstance will have unfettered access to high-quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination.”

The NHAS has three primary goals:

- 1) Reducing the number of new infections;
- 2) Increasing access to care and optimizing health outcomes for people living with HIV;
- 3) Reducing HIV-related health disparities;

To accomplish these goals, the NHAS calls for a more coordinated national response to the HIV epidemic and includes a NHAS Federal Implementation Plan that outlines key, short-term actions to be undertaken by the federal government to execute the outlined recommendations. Additionally, the White House issued a Presidential Memorandum directing agencies to take specific steps to implement this strategy.

Since taking office, the Obama Administration has taken extraordinary steps to engage the public to evaluate what we are doing right and identify new approaches that will strengthen our response to the domestic epidemic. The Office of National AIDS Policy hosted 14 HIV/AIDS Community Discussions with thousands of Americans across the U.S. and reviewed suggestions from the public via the White House website. ONAP also organized a series of expert meetings on several HIV-specific topics, and worked with Federal and community partners who organized their own meetings to support the development of a national strategy.

### **State Department on Release of Cuban Political Prisoners**

*U.S. applauds efforts on release of political dissidents in Cuba*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman  
July 13, 2010

STATEMENT BY PHILIP J. CROWLEY, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

#### Release of Cuban Political Prisoners

We welcome the release of seven political prisoners by the government of Cuba and the announcement by the Archbishop of Havana that additional prisoners could be released in the coming months. We applaud the efforts of the Cuban Catholic Church, Spain and others who have

worked towards the release of prisoners of conscience from jail in Cuba. While the United States continues to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, this is a positive development that we hope will represent a step towards increased respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba. All those released from prison should be free to decide for themselves whether to remain in Cuba or travel to another country.

### **American Medical Volunteers in Haiti**

By Kathryn McConnell and Phillip Kurata  
Staff Writers

Washington — As Haiti recovers from a devastating January earthquake, American doctors, medical students and personnel are helping the country rebuild its health care system.

In June, doctors and students from Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston arrived in the first group of Tufts medical personnel who will rotate in and out regularly. They offered their services in a tent-city clinic in the capital, Port au Prince, and at the Sacre Coeur Hospital, 120 kilometers to the north, where earthquake damage was minimal. Many of the most severely injured patients had been transported to Sacre Coeur.

The lead doctor of the Tufts delegation, Dr. Mark Pearlmuter, said most of the Tufts students recently completed their first year of medical school and had little clinical experience. They performed support functions, such as taking family health surveys, measuring patients' vital signs and recording medical procedures, according to Pearlmuter. Some students also performed Pap smears, drew blood samples and inserted catheters, while others learned how to make artificial limbs, then trained Haitian counterparts to do the same, he added.

Several of the Tufts doctors and students said they found the experience inspiring.

“I have been absolutely overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the local community health workers,” said Adam Nadolski, a student. “They work with little or no infrastructure and even less funding.”

Graham Brant-Zawadzki, also a student, commented on the resiliency of the Haitian patients, who lived in tents with temperatures that rose as high as 49 degrees Celsius during the day. “They haven’t been home in five months and probably don’t even have a home to go back to, but they are smiling, singing and laughing,” he said.

Dr. Joyce Sackey, the medical school’s dean of multicultural affairs and global health, said she was impressed by the way Haitians were reaching out to their

injured neighbors by assisting them with bathing and feeding. Haitians were “encouraging people with new disabilities to dance in their wheelchairs,” she said.

Sackey said that the earthquake caused many psychological as well as physical injuries to Haitians. “Thousands need rehabilitation. The goal is to get them productive again,” she said.

Tufts students also devised a project to equip community health workers with cell phones, which they would use to notify Sacre Coeur Hospital of medical emergencies, receive advice or prepare patients for entry. A Catholic foundation, CRUDEM, which operates Sacre Coeur Hospital, supports the cell phone project.

Doctors and medical support staff from the U.S. Children's National Medical Center in Washington also work through CRUDEM to travel to Haiti and contribute care to patients and training to the Haitian medical staff there.

Dr. John F. Lovejoy III, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon, twice led groups from the children's medical center to Haiti. The first group arrived January 17, five days after the quake, and stayed for a week. His father, John Lovejoy Jr., a retired orthopedic surgeon residing in Jacksonville, Florida, was the chief medical officer at Sacre Coeur, where he has been volunteering for more than a decade. The younger Lovejoy said the doctors performed 140 surgeries on children and 15 to 20 more on adults during their week there. He said working with his father in Haiti was “an amazing opportunity ... I'll probably never get again. We both saw incredible reward in the care we were able to provide. We're both going to continue going back to Haiti and continue to help the hospital expand its capabilities.”

The younger Lovejoy will make his next medical volunteer trip to Haiti in December. The elder Lovejoy will revisit the country next February.

In his home city, the elder Lovejoy raised about \$60,000 for a prosthetics laboratory and arranged for its construction and shipment to the Sacre Coeur Hospital, according to his son. The prosthetics laboratory went into operation in May and is able to produce about two dozen artificial limbs during a 10-day period when there is adequate staff to operate it, he added. He said the prosthetics lab “was an amazing effort, and it will give benefits for years to come. I couldn't be more proud of my father.”

Suresh Magge, a pediatric neurosurgeon from the Children's National Medical Center, traveled to Haiti with the younger Lovejoy on his second trip. Magge said his week there treating children and training doctors was

an eye-opening experience.

“I realized how much need there is in many places and we can do a lot of good. I realized that many things we take for granted here are luxuries there. If more volunteers go to places like Haiti, we can do a lot of good there,” Magge said.

### **Reintegration of Former Taliban a Key to Success in Afghanistan**

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke says the launch of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program designed to persuade Taliban fighters to give up their arms and return to their communities reflects the Obama administration's view that there is no purely military solution to the continuing conflict in Afghanistan.

Speaking at the State Department July 13, Holbrooke said the program is “a key ingredient of a successful campaign in Afghanistan,” and that it is now “assembled and ready to go.”

Holbrooke will join Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in Kabul July 20 for an international conference on Afghanistan, where he said the program to reintegrate Taliban fighters will be discussed.

At a July 1 news briefing in Kabul, British Army Major General Philip Jones, director of the International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan's (ISAF's) Force Reintegration Cell, said ISAF has been working with Afghan President Hamid Karzai's reintegration adviser, Minister Mohammad Masoom Stanakzai, since January to build the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program.

“We have built a program across multiple ministries and focused at the district level and below. This program looks at villages and individuals and will create coherence and restore the dialogue between individuals and their communities and between communities and their districts,” Jones said. “This program seeks to initiate grievance resolution, help resolve grievances and to maintain the dignity and honor of everyone involved in the process.”

President Karzai signed a presidential decree in late June establishing the program, which reportedly will seek to persuade up to 36,000 insurgent fighters to lay down their arms by 2015. Jones said the launch of the program “is really excellent news” and that it has a promising future.

“There continue to be small pockets of reintegration occurring around the country and a few larger groups are

starting to express interest in it as well. People realize that this program is a benefit to entire communities, not just individuals," Jones said. "It is not a 'guns-for-peace' program, but a way for former fighters to lead peaceful and productive lives for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of their communities."

Ambassador Holbrooke said that in conflicts such as the insurgency in Afghanistan "there's always a window for people who want to come in from the cold."

"This is not a war between two foreign nations; it's a war between people who are Afghans, some of whom may live next door and take sanctuary next door, but they are Afghans. If they are willing to accept the red lines and come in from the cold, there has to be a place for them," he said.

U.S. officials have said returning Taliban fighters would need to lay down their arms, renounce extremist groups, including al-Qaida, and accept the Afghan Constitution. Holbrooke said the Obama administration had recognized the need for a reintegration program when it took office, but that it was impossible to pursue it in 2009 while Afghanistan was consumed with its presidential election.

In support of the reintegration program, Holbrooke said Japan and the United Kingdom so far have raised about \$180 million from international donors. He added that the U.S. Congress has allowed the U.S. Defense Department to reserve \$100 million in Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds for the reintegration effort.

The ambassador repeated U.S. support for Afghan-led reconciliation efforts with senior Taliban leaders, but said any such discussions do not involve the United States. "We are not in direct contact with the Taliban," he said.

Asked about efforts at the United Nations to remove certain Taliban leaders from being subject to international sanctions enacted by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1267, Holbrooke said that while the United States "will not support a blanket ending of this list," it has agreed to join other Security Council members in reviewing the names on a case-by-case basis, and he said, "We want to scrub the list down."

He said that while some of the individuals continue to be dangerous threats to the United States and its allies, some of those on the list have died since the resolution originally passed in 1999, while others have reconciled with the Karzai government and even participated in Afghanistan's political processes.

## Muslim Convention Hosts Minister and Rabbi at Interfaith Panel

*Religious leaders discuss strategies to build compassionate communities*

By M. Scott Bortot  
Staff Writer

Chicago – At the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) annual convention, a rabbi, a Christian clergyman and an imam showed that interfaith dialogue fosters more than religious understanding, it creates peaceful societies based on values shared among faiths.

During the convention's "Nurturing Compassionate Communities through Interfaith Partnerships and Cooperation" session, these religious leaders discussed how people of faith can work together to overcome the divisions that weaken communities.

Session moderator Sayyid M. Syeed, director for the Office of Interfaith & Community Alliances for ISNA, said Muslim Americans succeed when they are active in society and create dialogues with people with shared religious experiences.

"Solidifying the Muslim community in America has been derived from a pluralist democracy, where our strength has also been derived from people of other faiths who have been in the same struggle over centuries," Syeed said. "We are particularly thankful to God, that he has given us this unique opportunity of establishing alliances, brotherhood and sisterhood, with people of Abrahamic faiths that has facilitated our work in America."

Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, discussed three ways to build a compassionate community.

"What does it mean to be a compassionate community? ... Feeling the sorrows and joys of one another, welcoming strangers even as we too have been welcomed and caring together for the most vulnerable in our society and all of these are things that we can do as interfaith partners," Kinnamon said.

To stress the personal impact of interfaith dialogue, Kinnamon talked about the recent death of his father. Connecting with others, to understand their sadness, and their joy, are integral parts of a nurturing community, he said.

"I have to admit that 10 years ago I likely would not have shared with you this news about my father because I wouldn't have had the sense of connection, the sense of community to make it meaningful. ... I wouldn't have thought to ask Muslim neighbors to share my sorrow and my remembrance, but thanks be to God and thanks be to

a decade of dialogue and partnership, including most particularly with ISNA, I now recognize that we are a community of children of the same, sovereign creator," Kinnamon said.

The act of welcoming strangers is shared by the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. After reading a passage from the Quran to make this point, Kinnamon said a religious and historical precedent exists for Christians to welcome Muslims into their communities.

"If your Muslim neighbors are not welcomed, then we are not welcomed. If you are threatened, then we are threatened. In this sense, how we welcome Muslim neighbors is a litmus test of whether we Christians are living as compassionate communities," he said.

Rabbi Jeremy Schneider, of Temple Shalom in Dallas, is familiar with the concept of welcoming wayfarers. In fact, Muslims welcomed him in Cairo and in Damascus, Syria, on an interfaith mission from America to the region, he said.

Three years ago, Jewish and Muslim leaders at the ISNA convention chose 10 mosques and 10 synagogues that would build a dialogue. Schneider's congregation was among of those chosen.

Working with the Muslim community has challenged him both professionally and personally.

"And for that I say, I am grateful," he said.

When speaking at his synagogue, Schneider said, he has challenged notions of "Islamaphobia" that exist in his community and in others.

"I told my community that we must face our fears. Acknowledge our ignorance and our stereotypes," Schneider said. "We must learn what Islam truly stands for not from politicians, not from e-mail forwards, not from the media, but from Muslims themselves by engaging in dialogue."

Facing each other in dialogue, even when it is uncomfortable, is a key for building a strong society, he said.

"To see more friends in our communities, we must be willing to step out of our comfort zones," Schneider said. "Dialogue is not about winning an argument or changing one's belief, it is a disciplined act of communicating and listening."

Abdul-Malik Mujahid, chairman of the board of trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions,

stressed the importance of interfaith efforts in connecting people.

"Faith is about interconnectedness, not just between an individual and God, but also between others and ourselves," Mujahid said. "Today, more than ever, people of faith must implement the tradition of interconnectedness at a much broader level."

Mujahid said forging dialogue with Muslims on a personal level will change American perceptions of Islam. Referring to surveys about American views of Islam and Muslims, he said survey workers wanted to know why more than a quarter of Americans hold a favorable view of the religion.

"So they asked them what was the reason. The most common thing that they found is that they knew someone who is a Muslim," Mujahid said. "Human connectedness is an extraordinarily important thing, and that is what interfaith does."

As a way to build communities based on peace and justice, Mujahid called on Muslims, Christians and Jews to gather their resources to fight the challenges of poverty, torture and violence.

Representative Keith Ellison, a Democrat from Minnesota and the first Muslim elected to the United States Congress, offered his thoughts on the importance of interfaith activities. His son, Isaiah Ellison, read his father's message at the panel session.

"Our faith traditions are different and when we are called to worship, it is important to us. As human beings, our manner of seeking the face of the divine is precious to us but the call to serve humanity is not unique, the divine presence calls all of us to his service," Ellison said. "We already know the differences but through direct interaction, we can get to know one another and not dispute each other anymore. We get a chance to learn from the best among us who offers sincere devotion through the service of others."

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