

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

July 27, 2010

President Obama's Vision to Engage Muslims Moves Forward	1
Secretary Clinton Urges Legal Resolution of South China Sea Dispute	2
Arms Treaty Promotes Openness, Better U.S.-Russian Relations	3
U.S. Attorney General Sets Program to Combat Overseas Corruption	3
Investments in Renewable Energy Top Fossil-Fuel Projects	4

President Obama's Vision to Engage Muslims Moves Forward

U.S. OIC representative discusses progress with global Muslim communities

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Rashad Hussain, U.S. special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), told a meeting at the State Department on July 20 that President Obama's vision for engagement with Muslim communities is showing positive results.

"Just a few years ago if you were to ask the state of relations between the United States and Muslim communities around the world people might have told you that this is going to take a while to get back on track," Hussain said. "But I think that the president, just in the first year, his ability to craft a message, to craft a framework ... has really been an accomplishment in and of itself."

At the meeting, which was attended by officials from OIC countries, Hussain discussed President Obama's continuing outreach and partnership with Muslim communities around the world. Hussain said President Obama, in his "A New Beginning" speech in June 2009 in Cairo, created a new framework for working with Muslim communities.

"One that recognizes that we cannot engage one-fourth of the world's population based on the beliefs of just a fringe few and that our engagement can't be limited to an issue like violent extremism, but that it must be much broader than that," Hussain said.

The framework in the Cairo speech set the ground for a new era of partnerships based on mutual interest shared not only by governments, but also by people. Hussain said that Americans and Muslims around the world share concerns about jobs, health and education. It turns out that President Obama's efforts at engagement focus on these areas, and more.

"We have to have a long-term strategic vision to create programs and to seed programs that will be important in the long term to make sure that we are keeping the relationship moving forward in a manner that engages on issues that people care about in their daily lives," Hussain said.

A key component to President Obama's vision is building partnerships between America and Muslim communities. Hussain said a health partnership between America and the OIC has helped Nigeria to nearly wipe out polio.

"In just the first quarter of the year, the number of cases of polio was down to three, and that is a significant improvement over previous years where we have seen cases in the hundreds," Hussain said. "This is an agenda that we continue in the polio-endemic countries, three of which are Muslim-majority countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria; the fourth, India, being a state where the populations that are affected are Muslim-majority populations."

But cooperation on health issues doesn't stop there. In 2009, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services worked closely with the Saudi Arabian government to make sure that the H1N1 virus did not become a larger problem during the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

Partnerships between America and Muslim communities are also fostering business growth. The Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, for example, held in April in Washington, highlighted how innovation can lead to opportunities for growth. At the event, hundreds of business leaders from Muslim communities exchanged ideas and information that will lead to job creation.

Education projects are another key component to outreach. Hussain said that over the past year the U.S. government has increased funding for education exchange programs in Muslim-majority countries by 30 percent.

In the fields of science and technology, America recently sent three science envoys — Elias Zerhouni, Ahmed Zewail and Bruce Alberts — to Muslim communities around the world. Hussain said the scientists have submitted proposals to President Obama to further expand cooperation with Muslims in science and technology development.

President Obama's vision of engagement with Muslim communities extends also to Muslim Americans.

"Muslim communities here in the United States have been consulted on a whole range of issues," Hussain said. "I think we are past the time when Muslim communities were only engaged after certain events, or only engaged on the issues of extremism, or national security or civil liberties, but really we've seen Muslim communities being parts of the groups that have been consulted on issues such as immigration, health care and the president's fatherhood initiative."

On political issues sensitive to Muslims such as the Middle East peace process and Guantanamo Bay, Hussain said President Obama's policies are making progress.

"Those are the political issues that the president talked about in Cairo that have often been a source of tension between the United States and Muslim communities around the world, the first of course of those being the ongoing conflict in the Middle East," Hussain said. "This is an area where, despite tensions, I think the president has demonstrated a significant commitment to moving forward."

Hussain said that on President Obama's first day in office he signed an executive order banning torture and on his second day, he appointed former Senator George Mitchell as U.S. special envoy for Middle East peace.

Renewed effort to engage the Muslim world through President Obama's vision is still in its early stages.

"I think you have seen that in one year this very much has been a priority of the administration, something that is very much a work in progress," Hussain said. "But something that we will continue to be committed to, something that we'll continue to be persistent on, so that when we have an opportunity to reflect on the Obama administration engaging Muslim communities around the world we will see that we had a comprehensive framework that was able to address not only political issues but issues of mutual concern."

Secretary Clinton Urges Legal Resolution of South China Sea Dispute

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Although the United States does not take sides in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the Obama administration wants claimants to pursue their disputes in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea rather than through coercion.

Speaking July 23 to reporters following the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in Hanoi, Vietnam, Clinton said the United States and every other nation "has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia's maritime commons, and respect for international law in the South China Sea," which contains some of the busiest commercial sea lanes in the world.

Sovereignty disputes over the Spratly and Paracel island chains, which are potentially rich in natural resources, have pitted China against some of its neighbors, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines.

"We oppose the use or threat of force by any claimant," Clinton said.

The parties instead should pursue their territorial claims and rights through the Law of the Sea Convention. "Consistent with customary international law, legitimate claims to maritime space in the South China Sea should be derived solely from legitimate claims to land features," Clinton said.

The United States encourages all of the parties to agree upon a full code of conduct, she said, adding the Obama administration "is prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence-building measures" that are consistent with the 2002 ASEAN-China declaration on the conduct of parties in the South China Sea.

"It is in the interest of all claimants and the broader international community for unimpeded commerce to proceed under lawful conditions," the secretary said. This involves "respect for the interests of the international community and responsible efforts to address these unresolved claims and help create the conditions for resolution of the disputes and a lowering of regional tensions."

U.S.-ASEAN PARTNERSHIP

At the conclusion of the ASEAN Regional Forum, Secretary Clinton signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. Through the treaty, the United States joins the 10 ASEAN members in pledging to "promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and to cooperate in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields," according to a State Department fact sheet.

According to the fact sheet, the United States pursued its accession to the treaty to strengthen its relationships in Southeast Asia and to develop a stronger and more productive presence in the region.

"The speed at which the United States worked together with ASEAN members to realize U.S. accession to the Treaty highlights our re-energized involvement in Southeast Asia, as well as the close mutual ties sought by ASEAN and the United States," the fact sheet says.

In remarks at ASEAN's post-ministerial meeting in Hanoi July 23, Clinton said she and President Obama share the view that "America's future is intimately tied to that of the Asia-Pacific" region, noting that the United States "is a Pacific nation."

The region is now America's sixth largest export market and hosts more U.S. business investment than China, Clinton said, and the United States "is very supportive

and optimistic" about ASEAN's future.

"Our partnership is rooted in common interests. We are committed to assisting the nations of Southeast Asia to remain strong and independent, and that each nation enjoys peace, stability, prosperity and access to universal human rights," she said.

The secretary's participation in ASEAN's Ministerial Conference and Regional Forum followed a visit to South Korea, where she announced new U.S. sanctions against North Korea, and meetings with Vietnamese officials, where she celebrated the growing U.S.-Vietnamese relationship and signed a five-year plan to cooperate with Vietnam against HIV/AIDS.

Arms Treaty Promotes Openness, Better U.S.-Russian Relations

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The new arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia promotes openness between the two former Cold War foes and greater stability between the world's two largest nuclear powers, says a senior U.S. arms negotiator.

Russia and the United States possess 90 percent of the nuclear weapons in the world. The New START Treaty is designed to succeed the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START I. President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the treaty in Prague April 8.

Verification of the terms of the treaty is essential for the treaty to accomplish its goals of reducing strategic nuclear weapons, says Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, who helped negotiate the treaty with Russian officials. Verification is one of the significant aspects of the treaty raising the most concern in the U.S. Senate, which must give its consent before the treaty is ratified.

"The verification regime is based on an extensive set of data exchanges and timely notifications regarding all strategic offensive arms and facilities covered by the treaty, two types of on-site inspections, exhibitions, restrictions on where specified items may be located, and additional transparency measures," Gottemoeller said July 26 in remarks at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington.

The landmark New START Treaty between the United States and Russia would lower the limits on strategic nuclear warheads and the means to deliver them. It effectively would reduce the number of warheads each

nation possesses to its lowest level in more than 50 years.

"The New START Treaty is a continuation of the international arms control and nonproliferation framework that the United States has worked hard to foster and strengthen for the last 50 years," Gottemoeller said. "Its comprehensive verification regime will provide predictability, but it recognizes that we are no longer in a Cold War relationship."

"It allows each party to determine for itself the composition and structure of its strategic offensive arms and how reductions will be made," she added.

U.S. nuclear forces will continue to be based on the triad of delivery systems — land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and long-range bombers. The treaty provides an upper boundary of 1,550 deployed warheads for each nation, and up to 700 deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs or heavy bombers. Additionally, the treaty would permit up to 800 deployed and nondeployed missile and submarine launchers or heavy bombers.

According to a report from the U.S. Congressional Research Service, the treaty would give the United States and Russia seven years to reduce forces and would remain in force for 10 years from ratification. It contains detailed definitions and counting rules that will help the parties calculate the number of warheads that count under the treaty limits.

"New START does not limit current or planned U.S. missile defense programs," the report said.

Along with New START, Obama also submitted to Congress a plan to spend \$80 billion over the next decade to maintain and improve the United States' nuclear weapons complex, a requirement Republican senators have said is essential for their support of the treaty.

For the treaty to win final approval, a two-thirds majority of the Senate must vote for ratification, and the treaty must also win approval in the Russian Duma.

U.S. Attorney General Sets Program to Combat Overseas Corruption

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Obama administration is launching an initiative to recover funds lost to overseas public corruption, and that it will seek to build on its existing efforts to deter high-level corruption and protect public resources.

Speaking at the African Union (AU) summit in Kampala, Uganda, July 25, Holder said the Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative will mobilize a team of U.S. prosecutors exclusively to combat corruption. He also urged the 53 AU members to improve governance and strengthen the judicial sectors in their countries as part of a shared effort to “prevent the costs and consequences of public corruption,” according to his prepared remarks.

“Today, when the World Bank estimates that more than 1 trillion dollars in bribes are paid each year out of a world economy of 30 trillion dollars, this problem cannot be ignored. And this practice must never be condoned,” Holder said.

Public corruption “imperils development, stability, competition and economic investment” and “undermines the promise of democracy,” he said.

The Department of Justice initiative is “aimed at combating large-scale foreign official corruption and recovering public funds for their intended and proper use: for the people of our nations,” Holder said. “We’re assembling a team of prosecutors who will focus exclusively on this work and build upon efforts already under way to deter corruption, hold offenders accountable, and protect public resources.”

Along with new prosecution efforts, the Obama administration will continue working with African governments to strengthen their judicial sectors and work with African business leaders to “encourage, ensure and enforce sound corporate governance.”

“We should not and must not settle for anything less,” Holder said.

The attorney general repeated President Obama’s July 2009 statement in Ghana that “Africa’s future is up to Africans,” and reaffirmed the U.S. commitment that the future of the continent will not be compromised and its progress will not be derailed or delayed.

Along with promoting good governance, Holder said the United States wants to strengthen its partnership with Africans in combating terrorism, creating the conditions and capacity for economic growth and promoting the well-being and equal rights of African women and girls.

“In each of these areas, the United States intends to serve not as a patron but as a partner — as a collaborator, not a monitor,” he said.

Condemning the July 11 terrorist attacks in Kampala, Holder said the bombings were “reprehensible acts of cowardice, inspired by a radical and corrupt ideology that systematically denies human rights, devalues women and

girls, and perverts the peaceful traditions and teachings of a great religion.”

In the days following the attack, Holder sent a team of forensic experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to help Ugandan authorities. The attorney general said in Kampala that the United States is working with Uganda and others to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Holder said President Obama is committed to sending development assistance to Africa, but with the goal of building capacity so that aid no longer will be necessary. For that reason, the United States is focused on helping African countries develop clean energy sources, grow new crops and develop new education and training programs, he said.

Also, the need to empower and protect women and girls has been a special focus for the United States and “must be a priority for all on this continent,” Holder said.

Through its three-year, \$55 million Women’s Justice Empowerment Initiative, the United States worked in Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, and Benin to help “train attorneys, investigators, law enforcements officials, and medical professionals in an effort to improve prosecutions and to raise awareness about the special needs of victims,” he said.

The work “is making a difference,” he said. It is “changing lives, families and communities.”

But “its ongoing success and impact is directly linked to the engagement and commitment of you, Africa’s leaders,” he told the heads of state at the AU Summit.

Investments in Renewable Energy Top Fossil-Fuel Projects

National renewable-energy policies encourage investments, reports say

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Despite a continued weak global economy, investments in solar, wind and other renewable energy projects outpaced fossil fuel investments in 2009 for the second year in a row, a new study from the United Nations Environment Programme shows. This was true in both the United States and in the European Union.

China, meanwhile, emerged as the nation with the single largest new investment in clean energy, UNEP reported.

A twin study released by Paris-based Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century, REN21, echoed those results. The growth in renewables was especially

noteworthy in developing economies, the group said, which now possess more than half of global clean-energy capacity. China last year surpassed the United States to become the top investor in wind power and India ranked fifth — although the United States still had the largest installed capacity of wind power, 35.1 gigawatts, by late 2009, the organizations found.

The studies looked at both government and private-sector investments.

“The sustainable-energy investment story of 2009 was one of resilience, frustration and determination,” U.N. Under Secretary-General Achim Steiner said in a statement. Despite the economic downturn and disappointment by those seeking a binding international climate treaty, “there was determination on the part of many industry actors and governments ... to transform the financial and economic crisis into an opportunity for greener growth,” he said.

In Europe, 60 percent of all energy capacity installed in 2009 came from renewable sources, according to the reports. One-fifth of the continent’s energy is now “green.” Europe spent the equivalent of \$43.7 billion on renewable energy projects last year, a decline of \$4.7 billion from 2008 attributed to the slow economy.

The United States climbed to just more than 50 percent renewables out of all energy investments, and an American company — First Solar — became the first to produce more than 1 gigawatt of solar power in one year. The United States is now the world’s largest producer of ethanol and of geothermal and biomass power. Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia have set targets to ensure that a set percentage of all power consumed in the state comes from solar, wind, biomass, ethanol or other renewable sources, and that helped drive demand, the reports said.

Tax breaks and record investments in clean energy under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic stimulus bill Congress passed in 2009, continue to increase the nonconventional energy sector in the United States. Such progress notwithstanding, clean-energy investments in the North American region — the United States, Canada and Mexico — fell from more than \$33 billion in 2008 to less than \$21 billion in 2009, UNEP and REN21 reported.

UNCERTAINTY OVER NATIONAL POLICY

Wind was the clear winner among renewables in 2009. A record \$67 billion was invested in wind power stations worldwide and such projects made up 56 percent of all new clean-energy projects.

There is indication, however, that the market for wind power will slow considerably in the United States this year. According to the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), wind power installations have dropped by more than half so far this year. U.S. investment in manufacturing is also down, the organization said. AWEA and a number of environmental, industry and labor organizations have been urging Congress to pass a comprehensive energy bill. Acknowledging that they did not have enough votes to get such legislation passed, Democratic senators announced in mid-July that they will instead seek support on more limited measures.

Mohamed El-Ashry, chairman of REN21, said in statement that national policies have driven investments in more than 100 countries in the last few years. “For the upward trend of renewable energy growth to continue, policy efforts now need to be taken to the next level and encourage a massive scale-up of renewable technologies,” he said.

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)