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Secretary Clinton: Murdered Aid Workers Came to Afghanistan Only to Help

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The 10 medical aid workers whose bodies were discovered August 6 in Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan province had come to deliver free medical care to impoverished Afghan villagers, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said. Their murders, claimed by the Taliban, are a further demonstration of how far the militant group is willing to go to "advance their twisted ideology," she said.

Speaking at the State Department August 9 with Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, Clinton said the Obama administration is "heartbroken by the loss of these heroic, generous people" and condemns their murder "in the strongest possible terms."

"We also condemn the Taliban's transparent attempt to justify the unjustifiable by making false accusations about these aid workers' activities in Afghanistan," she said.

"They were doctors, dentists, translators and technicians, and their mission was solely humanitarian and wholly independent from that of any government. Before their deaths, they had spent several days treating cataracts and other eye conditions in Nuristan Province. At their next stop, they planned to run a dental clinic and offer maternal and infant health care," she said.

Six of the 10 victims were Americans. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters August 9 that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has opened a formal investigation into their deaths.

"Under federal law, they have jurisdiction to conduct investigations worldwide when U.S. citizens are killed," Crowley said. "We're trying to understand the circumstances by which they were killed. We certainly want to see justice served here." The FBI will be working closely with its Afghan colleagues in the investigation, he added.

Clinton said that according to the Taliban, the aid workers "were stopped on a remote road, led into a forest, robbed and killed."

The workers were unarmed, and not being paid for their services, she said. At least two of them had worked in Afghanistan since the 1980s, when the country was occupied by the former Soviet Union, and had stayed despite continuing difficulties under areas controlled by warlords and the Taliban.

"They had traveled to this part of Afghanistan because they wanted to help people in need. They were guests of the Afghan people," Clinton said.

The Taliban's cruelty is well documented, she said. Its members have "assassinated tribal elders, thrown acid in the face of young girls on the way to or from school. And earlier this summer, they accused a 7-year-old boy of being a spy and then hanged him."

The aid workers represent "exactly what the Taliban stands against: a future of peace, freedom, opportunity and openness, in which all Afghans can live and work together in safety, free from terror," Clinton said, adding that the United States has joined the government and people of Afghanistan as they work to achieve this vision.

Holbrooke said he has spoken with U.S. officials in Afghanistan who relayed that "the shock and the reaction" to the murders among the Afghan people "has been enormous."

"These people were particularly well-known and revered and beloved in those elements of Afghanistan that knew them," he said.

According to an opinion poll taken earlier in the year by international media, Afghan support for the Taliban "is in the single digits," Holbrooke said. The murder of the aid workers "was an act of a small, ruthless minority, which is what the Taliban are," he said. "But entrenched, ruthless people have the ability to kill unarmed people who are coming back from a humanitarian mission."

"It's not hard to do. It just illustrates the nature of the enemy," he said.

To Reassure World, Iran's Leaders "Know What They Have to Do"

Clinton: U.S. to "be responsive" if Iran complies with nuclear obligations

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration remains committed to peaceful dialogue with Iran to resolve international concerns over its nuclear activities, but Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says Iran's leadership "holds the keys" to a successful engagement.

International sanctions against Iran will continue to increase the cost of its government's refusal to provide reassurances that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes, Clinton said.

Speaking to reporters from the New York Times August 6, Clinton said that if Iran's leaders "begin to show signs

that they're willing to comply with the obligations that they already undertook, we're going to be responsive."

But through continued sanctions and diplomatic isolation, "we're committed to sharpening their choices and putting them in a position where they feel the consequences of not changing their policies," she said.

The secretary said the United States looks forward to the resumption of discussions among the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany – collectively known as the P5+1 – which she said would be held in late September or early October.

The group last met with Iranian representatives in Geneva in October 2009. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters July 28 that the United States would again "welcome a meeting like that if that is what Iran is willing to agree to."

During the fall 2009 discussions, Iran agreed to consider a proposal by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) by which it would transfer its uranium to another country so it could be enriched for use in a medical research facility near Tehran. The deal was designed to meet Iran's demands for enriched uranium while ensuring that the uranium could not be enriched highly enough to make a nuclear weapon.

The Obama administration is looking for "a process through which Iran would be prepared to engage constructively on a range of issues, including our questions about the nature of its nuclear program, whether there is a deal to be had involving the provision of fuel for Tehran's research reactor to help Iran address very legitimate humanitarian needs that it has at home," Crowley said. "We had hoped that this would be a confidence-building measure, but we have yet to be able to engage Iran constructively and directly on these kinds of issues."

After Iran's failure to agree to the deal, it announced in February that it had increased its uranium enrichment capacity to 20 percent, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions. A proposed deal brokered by Turkey and Brazil in May would have allowed for some of Iran's uranium to be enriched in another country, but Iran declared it would also be continuing its own enrichment activities, in spite of its international obligations.

Clinton said Iran's leaders "know what they have to do. They have to reassure the international community by words and actions as to what their nuclear program is intended for."

The U.S. pursuit of engagement through multilateral channels "has been meant to give Iran the opportunity to

change its strategic calculus in order to pursue a different course," she said. "But when Iran did not seize the opportunity that we offered, we backed up our words on the other track of our engagement strategy with the sanctions. And the sanctions are meant to be one tool among several intended to impact Iranian behavior regarding its nuclear program."

Since the additional sanctions were passed in June under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929, and were followed by unilateral action by the European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan and the United States, "we are hearing from many different sources around the world that this is having an impact on Iran's thinking," Clinton said.

"They've undertaken dramatic diplomatic and commercial maneuvers to try to prevent the sanctions from being levied on them or being implemented against them, and are falling short – much, I believe, to their surprise," she said.

The Obama administration remains committed to engagement, but the secretary said U.S. leaders are also "realistic that there's not one single action that will change Iran's ultimate decisionmaking on its nuclear program." They are also aware that "the costs for [Iran's] refusal to offer that reassurance about their intentions and their actions to the international community is beginning to bite," she said.

Using the Power of the Pen in Sudan

At Obama forum, a delegate gathers facts, phone numbers

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington – As a journalist, Alsanosi Ahmed Ibrahim says he will bring something valuable back to his fellow citizens of Sudan from the President's Forum with Young African Leaders: a better understanding of the world.

"Sudanese have a stereotype about the U.S. government and about the U.S. in general. I came here to see if this stereotype is correct or incorrect. When I go back home, I tell people. I have the power of the pen." Ahmed Ibrahim said. Ahmed Ibrahim was particularly struck by America's diversity: "When I came here to Washington, I was greeted by an Asian American. I went inside; the officer was Indian American. The other woman was Latin American. There is multiculturalism in America. This is something very good – I didn't know that. I saw it on TV, but it's not like when you see it for yourself."

At 22, Ahmed Ibrahim has made a remarkable start in his profession. "I always wanted to be a journalist, since I was very young," he said. After two years as a reporter, he works for The Citizen, one of Khartoum's three independent English-language newspapers – and is a

stringer for the Los Angeles Times and other American news organizations, helping their correspondents and providing reports independently. His work has taken him to nearly every part of Africa's largest country — pretty much all 25 of Sudan's states, he said.

"I think journalism is addiction," he said. "If you start working as a journalist for three months, you will never stop. Even if you stop, you will come back again. It's addiction. It's hard to quit it."

Ahmed Ibrahim said he and other journalists have a major and crucial task ahead: covering the January 2011 referendum on independence in southern Sudan. A 2005 peace agreement promised the South autonomy and the right to the referendum after six years. And he said he expects the government to put more pressure on the media as the referendum nears.

Ahmed Ibrahim said Sudan has failed to integrate people of different ethnicities and cultures into society, and he said his visit to Washington showed that it can be done.

Ahmed Ibrahim said his family is from the troubled western Sudanese region of Darfur, but he grew up in Khartoum. He qualified for university admission and studied arts and humanities.

And he said his participation in the president's forum in Washington is another step in his education that will help him as a journalist for years to come, in part through the contacts he has made with leading young people from more than 40 African nations.

The joys of journalism and the chance to improve his country go hand in hand, he said. "You feel that you have the power of the pen. You don't have to be rich and be happy. You can be poor and happy," he said. "If you're a journalist, you are in a position of helping many people. And everybody knows you. So this makes me happy; I don't have to have millions of dollars to be happy."

African Trade Ministers Visit Kansas City Board of Trade

AGOA Forum attendees see firsthand the importance of commodity exchanges

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Kansas City, Missouri — African government officials attending the ninth annual U.S.-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum — better known as the AGOA Forum — visited the Kansas City Board of Trade August 5. The board trades more than 10 billion bushels of hard red winter wheat annually and sets the benchmark price worldwide for that key commodity, which is the primary ingredient for bread in many

countries.

In an interview with America.gov, Deborah J. Bollman, assistant vice president for marketing at the board, said the visit represents a "wonderful opportunity to have African visitors here ... to be exposed to how we run a futures and options exchange in the heart of America for the bread wheat" that is grown in America's heartland.

Bollman said Nigeria, Egypt and Jordan are some of the exchange's biggest customers. Last year, Nigeria alone imported some \$80 billion of U.S. wheat, making wheat imports the second-largest business sector in that country behind petroleum.

It is at the Kansas City Board of Trade in Kansas City, Missouri, Bollman said, "where price discovery is established ... all based on supply and demand," where the true value of the product — hard red winter wheat — is determined in a transparent, open marketplace.

Wheat is traded on the exchange in bushels. Each bushel contains 35.23 liters of wheat. Forty-two percent of all wheat produced in the United States is hard red winter wheat.

Bernardo Vimpi, a Kansas City Board of Trade intern who is Angolan and attending a local college, said the board plays an important role. "You have to have organizations like the K.C. Board of Trade that are willing to do such a tremendous job in helping to determine the price worldwide," and structure the orderly handling, pricing and sale of such commodities.

While at the exchange, the government ministers viewed a video presentation and then walked onto the open trading floor to witness wheat being traded.

Wheat is traded at the board of trade in what are called trading pits, tiered areas where colorfully attired traders stand and trade the wheat either electronically on laptop devices or verbally by what they call "open outcry," where they shout buy and sell orders to each other in a frenzy or gesture with sign language. The traders wear brightly colored jackets so they can be easily spotted from afar and identified by their companies, fellow traders and exchange officials.

This system allows transparent price setting for red hard winter wheat, providing some price predictability so large baking companies and buyers of the commodity can lock in prices for wheat that is milled into flour for bread and pastries.

The Kansas City Board of Trade was organized in 1856 by a group of Kansas City merchants. Initially, it served a function similar to that of a chamber of commerce.

Located on the northern border between Kansas and Missouri and at the junction of two rivers, Kansas City is situated in one of the most productive wheat-growing regions of the world. Original members of the board met on the banks of the Missouri River to develop a more organized method of buying and selling grain.

Alfred Mahamadu Braimah, director of private sector investment for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, spoke with America.gov following his tour of the board. He called his visit “a major eye opener.”

“I think one of the main challenges we have in West Africa is making farming into a business, and embedded into that, the challenge is having a regulatory type of exchange where the forces of supply and demand can be brought into place to determine price.”

“That [type of exchange] would bring transparency to the whole pricing process and ... will also enable farmers to forecast way ahead of time what kind of revenues they are going to get and therefore what kind of cost structures they need to be profitable.”

Braimah said the private sector is truly the pivot point and platform for economic efficiency. “Government cannot do that all alone. What government can do is to provide the enabling environment.”

“The broad bulk of the people – especially within the ECOWAS area – will fall within the private sector group ... more than 70 percent of the population. The only way that you can address all the issues of poverty and all the issues of food security, etc., [is] to create a platform for this large, massive population” that will continue to move the region toward greater economic development.

Braimah said what he saw at the Kansas City Board of Trade “reinforces the thinking process within the ECOWAS Commission that we will need a commodity exchange for our own agricultural products,” to allow for the mobility of those products across the region and to allow farmers to see pricing in a transparent way that minimizes opportunities for fraud by intermediate agents. Fifteen West African states are members of the ECOWAS Commission.

Following their tour of the board, the ministers heard a presentation from a group of America’s land-grant universities, which were established in the 19th century to help teach agriculture, science and engineering. The theme of the presentation was that the American farmer has been successful because he or she works not alone but within a broad network of partners, from the universities and extension services to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Commodity markets like the Kansas City

Board of Trade function as part of that network.

The ninth annual AGOA Forum held sessions in Washington before moving to Kansas City for two days of meetings August 5 and 6.

Russian-American Doctors Help Heart Patients in Russia

RAMA helps educate local doctors on latest techniques

By Alexandra Draggeim
Staff Writer

Washington — The temperature in Kemerovo, the Siberian city that is the administrative center of the Kemerovo Region in Russia, dropped to 30 degrees below zero Celsius, but the Kemerovo Center for Cardiology remained busy.

An international medical team worked in the cardiac center for two weeks in February 2010 and again in June to save the lives of young patients with congenital heart disease as part of charitable missions to Kemerovo organized by the Russian American Medical Association (RAMA).

With about 500 members and chapters in 40 U.S. states and Canada, RAMA is a network of medical professionals that helps to organize humanitarian projects in Russian-speaking countries. Most members are Russian speakers who collaborate with other American and Canadian colleagues on projects such as the Siberian Pediatric Heart Project (SPHP).

The SPHP in Kemerovo was started in 2008 by Dr. Yakov Elgudin who, with the help of the International Children’s Heart Foundation (ICHF), recruits doctors, nurses and other volunteers, most of whom are Americans. The doctors take leave or use their vacation time to travel to the remote Russian area and operate on infants and train local doctors.

“Our goal is not only to perform surgeries, but also to establish a channel for local doctors to improve their skills and utilize the available equipment,” said Elgudin in a 2008 press release. In a recent interview with America.gov, Elgudin said that 250 to 300 children in the region are born with a heart defect every year.

“With appropriate surgery most of them will have a second chance at life,” according to the ICHF, which conducts medical missions all over the world.

This year alone, doctors plan to make three SPHP-sponsored trips to Siberia to educate local doctors on everything from diagnosis to post-operative treatment, and to eventually transform the newly constructed Kemerovo Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery Center into a

regional cardiac center. Surgeries are supplemented by lectures, educational courses and clinical conferences. RAMA doctors follow their patients' progress over years.

Dr. Lyuba Varticovski, one of RAMA's founders, said that she follows her "virtual patients" by talking to their doctors, examining pathology reports, conferring on the diagnosis and even advising them on therapy, which is then performed by local doctors.

"If we go there and do it halfheartedly, it will not even be personally satisfying," she told America.gov. "We work as a team and teach them exactly how we would be performing in the United States."

"Medical standards in foreign countries often differ from those in the U.S. — for example, in how medication is used," Varticovski explained. "To set up the highest level of practice we really need to look at the American standards."

Varticovski said she is working on a pharmacological program in Kazakhstan to search for anti-cancer properties in native plants. She is also coordinating a conference with Russian and American participation to explore potential collaboration in cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and liver disease.

Hailing originally from Siberia and having studied medicine in Russia, Colombia and the United States, Varticovski said she is well aware of the language barriers existing for foreign doctors. This was one of the reasons, she said, that she created RAMA's predecessor, the Association of Russian Speaking Physicians, in Boston in the 1980s.

RAMA doctors bring with them American equipment and medications, often donated by pharmaceutical companies or from the vast warehouses of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the U.S. government health-research agency. Though RAMA's efforts, last year NIH donated to an institute in Moscow a sophisticated, fluorescence-activated machine for sorting cell mixtures that has broad medical applications in such areas as transplantation, hematology, tumor immunology and chemotherapy. Preparations are under way to donate another cell-sorter machine to Azerbaijan.

RAMA is expanding its work by starting projects modeled on the SPHP in Belgrade, the Russian cities of Tomsk and Krasnodar, and other cities, where local doctors will receive training in surgeries requiring advanced technology, such as plastic surgery and orthopedic and neurological operations.

RAMA has also begun to cooperate with the Russian-American Dental Association and the Russian-Speaking

Academic Science Association on projects and conferences.

In 2010, Dr. Boris Vinogradsky, the founding director of RAMA, developed a training program to bring several Russian medical professionals to the U.S. for up to six weeks. The program is already under way in Olympia, Washington, and at two hospital systems in Cleveland. It is scheduled to begin at Cleveland Clinic in October.

"There's no better policy than improving health of a country based on education and direct example," Vinogradsky said. "There's no better friendship policy than educational exchange programs. We are ready to pick up a bigger piece, and I think Cleveland Clinic serves as a good example of what we could do."

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