

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Urges Kosovo-Serbia Talks “as Soon as Possible”

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Expressing firm support for both Kosovo’s sovereignty and Serbia’s efforts to integrate with the European Union, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton urged Kosovo and Serbia to begin a dialogue that leads to the resolution of their differences.

Clinton spoke with youth and civil society leaders October 13 in Pristina, Kosovo, where she said the International Court of Justice’s July ruling in favor of Kosovo’s 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia had “turned the page” toward wider international recognition of their country’s sovereignty. But she also urged Kosovo to continue on its path of economic and political reforms, including the integration of Kosovar Serbs in the north of the country, and to begin a dialogue with Belgrade “as soon as possible.”

The United States is working to make the EU-brokered talks between Kosovo and Serbia “a dialogue between equals,” and it will play a role in designing the process so that Kosovars will have “confidence that your views are being heard and respected” by all sides, she said.

With the court ruling, Clinton said, “the clock starts ticking ... now.” Kosovo will face more international attention as it undertakes reforms, as well as presidential elections that are expected in February or March 2011.

This is “the opportunity for Kosovo to step up and claim your place among nations,” she said, adding that the Obama administration will “continue to work for even more nations to recognize Kosovo.”

She urged Kosovo to stay on its current course and to “make the changes that you know you must make,” including reconciliation with its Serbian neighbors in Serbia and Kosovar Serbs.

“The people of the north will have to recognize that they have to integrate into Kosovo” and make “a commitment to working together, as many of the Serbian communities to the south have done,” she said. “At the same time, I think we have to help you do more in the north to speed the process of integration.”

Earlier, Clinton met with newly elected mayors of Serb-majority municipalities and visited the Serbian Orthodox Gračanica monastery. In remarks with Kosovo’s Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi October 13, she said the mayors are “pursuing a path of engagement and integration with the national government,” which should be “commended

and actively supported.”

She also told her audience in Pristina that Serbia has recognized the 1995 massacre of Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica, Bosnia, as well as the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Clinton urged her Kosovar audience to view these moves as positive steps, and to see Serbia’s moves toward EU membership as also being in their interests and in the interests of the region.

SERBIA CAN BE EXAMPLE IN EUROPE

The secretary met with Serbian President Boris Tadić in Belgrade October 12 and said afterward the United States is committed to working with Serbia as it moves toward greater partnership with the Euro-Atlantic community and strengthens its relations with its neighbors.

Many countries are moving toward greater European integration, but “no country has more to gain than Serbia,” she said. “EU membership could help transform Serbia’s economy and anchor the entire region in Europe.”

Although the Obama administration disagrees with Serbia’s refusal to recognize Kosovo’s independence, Clinton said the dialogue between the two countries “can and will benefit people in Kosovo and Serbia by addressing practical, day-to-day issues and the long-term relationship between you,” as well as improve Serbia’s relationships in the region and the international community.

Expressing admiration for Serbia’s progress over the past 10 years, Clinton said the United States “values Serbia as a country with not only a tremendous history, but more importantly a vast potential.”

“We are absolutely convinced that Serbia can become not only a member of the European Union but a leader in Europe, an example in Europe,” she said.

U.N. Envoy Rice: Peace Building Vital to Post-Conflict Countries

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – Peace building is the “missing middle” in the gap between peacekeeping and sustainable development for countries emerging from recent conflict, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice says.

“Supporting sustainable peace requires linking many actors together,” Rice said. “Progress has sometimes been slower than we would have hoped, but the [U.N. Peacebuilding] Commission today is delivering on the commitment it has made to the countries on its agenda.”

The Peacebuilding Commission was created in 2006 as a critical first step in filling a gap that was identified by former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Rice said during U.N. Security Council debate October 13 in New York. The commission's aim is to prevent post-conflict countries from relapsing into conflict and bloodshed.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon outlined measures to strengthen the U.N. role in helping nations emerging from conflict to maintain peace and establish long-term stability. Ban stressed the need for the rapid deployment of trained staff, adequate financing, partnerships with stable allies and participation by women in the peace-building process.

"Building peace may sound straightforward, but we know from painful experience that it is not," Ban told Security Council representatives. "Success requires patient, long-term commitments and the involvement of a wide range of actors working together."

A U.N. team is conducting a high-level international review of civilian capacities for peace building, and will report to the Security Council early next year. One important component of peace building is making sure that international assistance in the aftermath of conflict is driven by national needs and priorities, Ban said.

The Peacebuilding Commission is being reviewed to assess its progress and determine its future direction. In a statement at the launch of the 2010 review, Ban said that in its short existence, the commission has shown its worth, but looking ahead, U.N. members must consider how to make its impact more tangible at the country level.

Rice said the Peacebuilding Commission is gaining strength as an international institution and plays a critical role in bringing additional attention and resources to countries emerging from conflict while also proposing strategies to build sustainable peace. The commission, Rice said, must do more to link ambitions at U.N. headquarters with programs in the field.

The commission must also coordinate with international institutions running programs and assessing needs in post-conflict countries. It is also important for the commission to encourage the range of agencies from the United Nations, international financial institutions, nongovernmental organizations, civil society agencies and academic institutions to work together for stronger coordination of efforts so that each enhances the work of everyone and increases effectiveness, Rice said.

Ban said predictable funding for these efforts can quickly finance early action, which can prompt other sources to provide longer-term funding. The Peacebuilding Fund was created in 2006 to provide an initial source of money

during the transition from conflict to post-conflict situations.

"But the Fund is only one among many. Many other efforts are under way aimed at making all peace building financing more flexible and tolerant of risk," Ban said.

Rice also told the Security Council that for peace building to become sustainable, women must be incorporated in the process.

"Where women's roles are ignored, peace building is more likely to fail. Gender is not just a box to be checked," Rice said. "It's a key ingredient in the planning phase, throughout implementation and in the evaluation of plans."

Ban echoed Rice's remarks by saying that conflicts leave states weakened, often severely, and social structures decimated. Women ensure that the basic survival needs of families and communities are met, he said.

In supporting Ban's action plan to enhance the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, Rice cautioned that any plan means little until it is implemented.

"The U.N. must commit itself, therefore, to monitor, evaluate and adapt the proposed action plan lest we lose the very impact that we seek," Rice said.

And Rice said that ultimately the success of peace building depends on the leadership from the country emerging from the conflict, and the United Nations must make it a high priority to build the capacities of local leaders and communities for long-term peace and stability.

U.S. Environment Agency Helps Shanghai Breathe Easier

Washington — A successful U.S.-China collaboration on air quality monitoring was witnessed firsthand by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa P. Jackson during an October 13 visit to the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

AirNow International, launched in May by EPA and the Shanghai Environmental Protection Bureau, provides real-time air quality information to Shanghai citizens through the Internet.

"The AirNow International project is one of the many success stories in our bilateral partnership. With EPA's collaboration, Shanghai is moving in the right direction to improve its air quality and inform the public about health concerns," said Jackson. "This is a great way for individuals to become environmental stewards and take

the necessary steps to ensure that the air they breathe, and their children breathe, is clean and healthy.”

The administrator picked a good day for her visit: AirNow reported an air pollution index (API) of 50 for particulate matter, 21 for sulfur dioxide and 31 for nitrogen dioxide. In other words, the air quality in Shanghai rated an API “excellent.”

The API is a system for rating levels of air pollution that is somewhat similar to the air quality index (AQI) used in the United States, but the terminology used by each system to describe the same conditions differs. Levels the API describes as “excellent,” “good” and “slightly polluted” are equivalent to AQI ratings of “good,” “moderate” and “unhealthy for sensitive groups.”

The goal of both systems is to tell people how clean – or polluted – their outdoor air is and to identify associated health effects that might be a concern. Both the API and the AQI provide values for particulate matter, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. EPA’s AQI also offers measurements of the two other major air pollutants restricted by the U.S. Clean Air Act – ground-level ozone and carbon monoxide.

In the United States, EPA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Park Service worked with tribal, state and local agencies to develop the AirNow website. That site offers daily AQI forecasts as well as real-time AQI conditions for nearly 400 U.S. cities and provides links to more detailed state and local air quality websites.

AirNow International uses the tools developed for the United States and builds on Shanghai’s existing air quality monitoring network and capability in analyzing air quality data. Thanks to EPA’s technical assistance, Shanghai now can report air quality data to the public as soon as it becomes available.

The United States and China also collaborate on advanced air quality modeling to better understand air pollution sources and to reduce emissions from vehicles, power plants and other industries.

In addition, the two countries are working together to address issues related to climate change, water, toxic substances, solid and hazardous wastes and environmental governance.

U.S. Dengue Virus Discovery Might Lead to New Treatments

Washington – Discovery of a key step in how the dengue virus infects a cell might lead to new drugs to prevent or treat the infection, the U.S. National Institutes of Health

announced October 12.

NIH researchers have discovered how the dengue virus releases itself from the protective membrane that shields it from penetrating a cell. The discovery allows researchers to study the invasion process in the laboratory and provides a way to test potential treatments for the virus, according to an NIH statement.

Dengue, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, infects up to 100 million people each year, mainly those living in tropical regions. Infected people develop a fever and then other symptoms including joint pain, rash and nausea. Patients with the severe form of the disease, dengue hemorrhagic fever, may develop difficulty breathing, bruising, bleeding from the nose or gums and breakdown of the circulatory system.

The disease emerged as a worldwide problem in the 1950s. Although dengue rarely occurs in the continental United States, it is endemic in Puerto Rico, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Periodic outbreaks also occur in Samoa and Guam.

The World Health Organization estimates that 22,000 people, most of them children, die each year from dengue.

SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF DENGUE FUSION

The process of infection has a number of stages. First, the virus binds to a cell membrane, which engulfs the virus by enveloping it in a pouchlike structure known as an endosome. For the virus to deliver its genetic material into the cytosol, the fluid interior of the cell, it must release itself from the endosome. The virus does this by fusing its membrane with the endosomal membrane. When the two membranes come together, they form a pore through which the virus’ genetic material is released.

To study the fusion stage of viral entry, researchers typically observe viral fusion at the cell surface or fusion of a virus with an artificial membrane. Researchers working with dengue, however, were unable to get the virus to fuse under either of these conditions. Why dengue, unlike other viruses, would not readily fuse with these membranes puzzled researchers for years.

The NIH researchers discovered that two conditions are necessary for dengue virus fusion: an acidic environment and the presence of a negatively charged membrane. They also discovered that these conditions are present at only certain points in the endosome’s journey within the cell.

“We spent several years trying to understand how the dengue virus fuses with its target membrane,” said Leonid Chernomordik, the lead researcher on the NIH study. “The findings will now enable us to test new ways

to disrupt the fusion process and prevent infection.”

Chernomordik and his colleagues plan to test various compounds to learn whether they can prevent the virus from fusing with cell and artificial membranes with the goal of identifying potential new treatments for dengue infection.

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