

American

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Religious Freedom a Core Element of U.S. Foreign Policy

By Jane Morse, Staff Writer

Washington — Promoting religious freedom is a core element of U.S. diplomacy, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said at the November 17 release of the 2010 Annual Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom.

She also cited President Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo that "signaled a significant increase in our engagement with Muslim-majority countries and with religious communities around the world."

This year's report assesses the state of religious freedom in 198 nations. The purpose of the report, Clinton said, is not to pass judgment, but to provide useful information in the effort to secure the basic human right to believe, or not to believe, and practice, or not practice, the religion of one's personal choice.

Some countries are designated "countries of particular concern" because of their especially severe violations of religious freedom during the reporting period. These severe violations include torture, degrading treatment and detention based on religious belief. The countries of particular concern are Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

Clinton expressed special dismay regarding al-Qaida's calls in the last year for further violence against religious minorities in the Middle East. Sufi, Shia and Ahmadiyya holy sites in Pakistan have been attacked, she said, as was a Syriac Catholic church in Baghdad just a few weeks ago. In addition, she said: "We received reports from China of government harassment of Tibetan Buddhists, house church Christians and Uighur Muslims. And several European countries have placed harsh restrictions on religious expression."

Other countries have been recognized for improvements. For example, the report states that the Lao government signed a written agreement with the Institute for Global Engagement to provide training on religious freedom to government officials and religious leaders.

Lebanon is finalizing the restoration of the Maghen Abraham synagogue in Beirut that had been destroyed by shelling during the Lebanese civil war, according to the report.

The Indonesian government, the report says, hosted the first Indonesia-U.S. Interfaith Dialogue, bringing together religious leaders, scholars, students and interfaith

activists from both countries and the region.

This year's report, compared to previous years, provides much greater detail about what the U.S. government is doing to engage faith-based groups and address the issues that affect them, Clinton said.

"Our embassies will continue to support interfaith dialogue and work with religious groups across a full range of issues. And we will continue to speak out against the curtailing of religious liberty wherever and whenever it occurs," Clinton said.

Secretary Clinton Urges Security Cooperation to Protect Americans Overseas

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says it is important for the State Department and the American private sector to cooperate on protecting Americans who travel overseas, noting that despite the fact that there is "no zero-risk environment," people-to-people contacts are necessary to boost goodwill, business ties and exchanges.

Speaking to security professionals from American businesses, academia, nongovernmental organizations and other groups at a November 17 meeting of the Overseas Security Advisory Council in Washington, Clinton said the Obama administration knows "how important it is not to withdraw from the world," despite the risks that many private Americans must take when traveling.

"We want every American who is traveling overseas to travel, to do business, to take advantage of the opportunities to see the world, but with an alertness to diverse and quick-moving threats, from terrorism and organized crime to pandemic disease and even piracy on the high seas. We want to coordinate effective responses and we want to work closely with our private-sector and NGO partners," Clinton said.

The Overseas Security Advisory Council, a partnership between the U.S. government and American private-sector organizations that was founded in 1985, has worked with the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security to boost security and inform American travelers about dangers around the world.

"It is a difficult and crucial effort," Clinton said. "While we want to be as safe and secure as we can, there is no zero-risk environment, and we don't want the precautionary measures that we take in order to be as safe and secure as we can be to undermine and interfere with actually performing the work that we set out to do."

The U.S. government must provide assurances on safety levels to American investors, exchange students, tourists and others, she said.

American civilian contractors and diplomats are tasked with conducting bilateral relations, implementing aid and development assistance, and other projects in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they face significant danger.

The U.S. military, she said, "cannot be the face of American power and influence everywhere," and therefore civilians working in U.S. diplomatic posts are being asked to accept added risks.

"What we are doing is placing more civilians into harm's way deliberately, not inadvertently," Clinton said. "We are sending our diplomats and development experts not just to Baghdad, but to Basra and Mosul and Kirkuk. We're not just putting them into the embassy in Islamabad, but trying to get them out to consulates in places like Peshawar, which has already been attacked once."

Clinton urged members of the council to share their ideas on how to reduce risks to Americans overseas, saying, "We are in this together."

Cooperation Is Effective in Countering Terrorism

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A global threat such as terrorism demands that nations work more closely together than ever to prevent new attacks and disrupt terrorist groups, and for nearly a decade this collaboration has been working, says the State Department's top counterterrorism official.

At a special briefing, Ambassador Daniel Benjamin told reporters that cooperation around the world over the last nine years has been remarkable.

"In the critical areas of intelligence and law enforcement, governments have joined together time and again and prevented real attacks," Benjamin said. He is the State Department's counterterrorism coordinator.

An additional part of the approach being taken by the United States is to provide targeted development assistance that helps governments improve their ability to govern and provide vital services to their citizens, which effectively prevents terrorist groups from gaining a foothold in local communities, Benjamin said November 17 at a Washington Foreign Press Center briefing.

Benjamin pointed out that dangerous conspiracies aimed at the United States and Europe have been disrupted

because of effective information sharing.

"Al-Qaida and its followers have clearly demonstrated that they have both the U.S. and Europe squarely in their sights, and close cooperation between us is essential to successfully counter the common threat we face," he said.

Two of the United States' most effective counterterrorism programs are the Treasury Department's Terrorist Financial Tracking Program, which cuts off vital funding to terrorist groups, and the Department of Homeland Security's Passenger Name Records Program, which helps identify potential terrorists trying to enter the United States.

The programs, though, have not been without controversy over privacy concerns, but Benjamin said European allies and the United States are working to protect citizens' security and personal data. Real progress has been made in recent years in drying up the financial resources available to terrorists around the world, and those who previously offered support have been deterred from offering terrorists more assistance, he added.

This, Benjamin said, is why some terrorist groups are increasingly turning to criminal activities to pay for their operations, a pattern noted by experts for many years. Chief among the crimes to finance terrorism is kidnapping in return for extremely high ransoms.

One example he cited is al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, which is increasingly relying on kidnappings for ransom, either independently or with criminal groups, to pay for its terrorist operations.

"This is a real problem, and there exists the prospect that ... groups like this will not only become more powerful, more capable, be able to support their operatives more effectively and thereby also enhance their recruitment, but will also be passing funds to other parts of the al-Qaida network," Benjamin said. "We're deeply concerned about that."

Empowering Entrepreneurs: A New Pillar of U.S. Foreign Policy

Steven R. Koltai, senior adviser for entrepreneurship at the U.S. State Department, acknowledges Global Entrepreneurship Week with this essay about the role of entrepreneurship in U.S. foreign policy.

Washington — The ancient proverb, often attributed to Lao Tzu, tells us that when you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but when you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. While rarely cited as the foundation for foreign policy, these common-sense words capture the spirit of President Obama's belief in

entrepreneurship as a core component of American efforts to advance economic development around the world. This focus is especially timely as millions around the world observe Global Entrepreneurship Week, during the week of November 15, and as the United States celebrates the launch of the Global Entrepreneurship Program in Jakarta with one of our fastest-growing trading partners, Indonesia.

The new emphasis on entrepreneurship stems from a long-held American belief in the power of individuals and their ideas. Entrepreneurs, and the new businesses they create, are the engines of economic growth and job creation, which, in turn, are the underpinnings of stability and opportunity. Applied to an international context, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has explained, it's an approach "based on investment, not aid; on supporting local leadership and ideas rather than imposing our own."

In the spirit of fulfilling a pledge that President Obama made in Cairo in June 2009, the administration aims to spark a cooperative international effort by governments, nongovernmental organization (NGOs) and private sector participants to improve the environment necessary to allow entrepreneurs to flourish. This past April, the president hosted the first-ever Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, gathering 250 entrepreneurs from 55 countries in Washington. One of the delegates to this Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship likened the experience to "getting an MBA from the best university in the world." The summit has sparked many follow-up conferences, and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan will host the next global entrepreneurship summit in Turkey in 2011.

The administration's international entrepreneurship effort is being led by the State Department, through the Global Entrepreneurship Program (GEP). This program, announced by Secretary Clinton in her concluding remarks at the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, harnesses a variety of tools and instruments that support and empower potentially high-impact entrepreneurs overseas. The GEP catalyzes, coordinates and consults with private partners and government agencies in the United States and in the target countries.

The six areas of focus will be to identify, train, connect and facilitate funding for entrepreneurs, as it works to provide better support in the public policy sector, and publicly celebrates their successes. In each of these areas, GEP aims to generate partnerships that expand what is already being done. For example, to find many new entrepreneurs, one partner may run a competition for business plan ideas while another provides training to aspiring entrepreneurs to improve their chance of attracting funding. Both programs will be strengthened

through the coordination of their efforts.

Some GEP program areas bring new tools to emerging markets, like angel investing. According to the Angel Capital Association, angels account for 90 percent of the outside equity in start-up firms. In contrast, less than 20 percent of start-ups receive traditional venture capital backing.

The GEP initiative is extending this model from the United States by helping to start angel investor groups in several of the countries where it is operating.

In some countries, the GEP is driven by Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIR) and local GEP offices. EIRs will help to coordinate and expand partner programs on the ground and also act as role model mentors based on their business experience both in the United States and in their host country. While EIRs have long existed in venture capital firms and universities, they are new in the world of international economic development.

GEP partners are drawn from five key sectors: NGOs (many are members of the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, or ANDE), corporations (including some that are part of the Partners for a New Beginning), colleges and universities, foundations, and financial institutions (especially private equity, venture capital and other investment capital firms). These partners will work with U.S. agencies — especially the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Millennium Challenge Corporation — along with key institutions in the target countries. This new methodology is a dramatic departure from approaches taken in the past, engaging the private sector in a leading and innovative way.

Supporting entrepreneurship not only helps emerging economies where we work, but it is good for American businesses and investors. It develops new customers in new markets and allows U.S. investors to participate in the growth of these countries.

As President Obama put it, nurturing entrepreneurship is about helping individuals "take a chance on a dream — taking an idea that starts around a kitchen table or in a garage, and turning it into a new business and even new industries that can change the world." The administration's focus on promoting entrepreneurship, spearheaded by the Global Entrepreneurship Program, is a bold new effort we expect to become a permanent part of American foreign economic and development policy.

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