

American

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Secretary Clinton Calls For Strengthened OSCE

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to expand its role in promoting human rights, preventing regional conflicts and enhancing security across the continent.

Clinton spoke December 1 at the OSCE summit in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana. Kazakhstan, which took OSCE leadership January 1, is the first former Soviet republic to chair the trans-Atlantic security organization.

"Our goal here in Astana should be to move forward on democracy, human rights, economic growth and strengthening our security community," Clinton said, adding that "if we can do that, then we will not only have a successful summit, we can indeed create a safer, freer and more prosperous future together."

The secretary outlined U.S. priorities for the organization, the first of which is to increase the group's role in supporting stability in Afghanistan.

"OSCE participating states have 1,200 miles of borders with Afghanistan, and we should expect OSCE efforts to improve border security, counter illicit trafficking, boost legitimate trade and promote economic development."

Clinton said Afghanistan is "just one conflict where the OSCE can and should play an expanded role." The U.S. supports empowering the organization to respond to crises in member states, such as recent situations in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

While enhancing the group's capacity to respond to urgent conflicts is a key step, the secretary highlighted the "even more essential task" of strengthening the OSCE's role in preventing conflict from erupting or reigniting.

Clinton also emphasized the importance of member countries applying the group's commitment to human rights.

"It is not enough to design a national human rights plan if it isn't implemented. It is not enough for governments to empower only the civil society organizations they agree with while crippling others with legal restrictions and red tape. And it is not enough for a constitution to guarantee freedom of the press if, in reality, journalists are put under pressure and even assaulted."

She said obligations for member states include holding free and fair national elections, and keeping elected

officials responsible for governing democratically.

"Yes, the list is long, but we're not asking participating states to accept new principles or rights — only to honor existing commitments."

Clinton added that the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security "demands democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms for individuals within states."

The OSCE is a forum for issues of peace, security and human rights in Europe and Central Asia and is committed to democracy, tolerance and media freedoms. The U.S. Mission to the OSCE identifies it as unique among international organizations "in the acceptance by the participating states of the principle that open societies built on human rights and democracy are a necessary component of true security."

On the sidelines of the summit, Clinton met with Belarus Foreign Minister Sergey Martynov. The two announced in a joint statement that, with U.S. support, Belarus will eliminate its stockpiles of highly enriched uranium. The statement said Belarus aims to complete the project by the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit.

U.S. Officials Disappointed at Conduct of Egyptian Election

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration expressed disappointment over the conduct of Egypt's November 28 legislative elections, citing reports of irregularities, intimidation by security forces, restriction of civil rights, and the lack of international monitors.

National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer commended Egyptians who participated in the process as voters, candidates and election monitors, but said in a November 30 statement that the United States "is disappointed with the conduct during and leading up to" the vote.

"While we are continuing to assess reports from a variety of sources, the numerous reported irregularities at the polls, the lack of international monitors and the many problems encountered by domestic monitors, and the restrictions on the basic freedoms of association, speech and press in the run-up to the elections are worrying," Hammer said.

He said the Obama administration wants to continue to work with Egyptian authorities and civil society groups to help their country "achieve its political, social and economic aspirations consistent with international

standards.”

According to press reports, the ruling National Democratic Party has won 170 of the 508 parliamentary seats outright, with official results expected to be released later on November 30. The opposition party Al-Wafd reportedly has won a small number of seats, while the Muslim Brotherhood group has not won any outright, according to preliminary tallies. Runoff elections are scheduled for December 5.

The preliminary results were accompanied by Egyptian press reports of voter intimidation and the widespread stuffing of ballot boxes. Opposition leaders have reportedly called for the election to be declared invalid.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Egyptian voters “will only have full confidence in their elections when the government is able to address existing flaws, and ensure full and transparent access by independent civil-society monitors and candidate representatives to all phases of the electoral process.”

In a November 29 statement, Crowley expressed concern over reports from domestic civil-society monitors, candidate representatives and Egyptian government officials on the conduct of the election.

“We are disappointed by reports in the pre-election period of disruption of campaign activities of opposition candidates and arrests of their supporters, as well as denial of access to the media for some opposition voices. We are also dismayed by reports of election-day interference and intimidation by security forces,” Crowley said.

The irregularities “call into question the fairness and transparency of the process,” he said, adding that allowing international observers to monitor and freely report on the elections, as they do in many other countries around the world, “is very important in building public confidence in a fair and open election.”

U.S.-Maghreb Entrepreneurship Conference to Be Held in Algiers

By Lindsey Oechsle
Staff Writer

Washington — Business leaders and young entrepreneurs from the U.S. and North Africa will develop strategies to promote job creation at the first U.S.-Maghreb Entrepreneurship Conference in Algiers, December 1-2.

Hosted by the U.S. State Department and the U.S.-Algeria Business Council, the event will create a platform to discuss business ventures in North Africa and encourage

support from both the government and private sector.

The conference will focus on promoting entrepreneurship among youth in North Africa. To achieve this goal, regional American embassies have selected 10 rising entrepreneurs to attend and present their views on how to overcome the challenges facing the region and ways to promote young entrepreneurs that will boost employment and build their futures.

The conference follows the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, held April 2010 in Washington, and will offer delegates an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share lessons learned. President Obama said, “Education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century.” State Department officials believe that a successful development strategy relies on strong regional partnerships.

The U.S. State Department will announce the launch of a new public-private sector partnership, the North African Partnership for Economic Opportunity (NAPEO). In cooperation with the recently announced Partners for a New Beginning, NAPEO will build links among entrepreneurs and business leaders in the United States, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

Conference sponsors believe that the Algeria conference, with its combination of business talent from the region and the United States, including entrepreneurs from the North African diaspora, is an ideal launching point for NAPEO. Not only will the conference promote cross-border business initiatives, it also will provide skills-training workshops, networking opportunities and a schedule of notable speakers, including the president of the Maghreb Young Entrepreneurs Organization, Monia Essaidi, and the chairman of the board of the Algerian-American Foundation for Culture, Education, Science and Technology, Dr. Elias Zerhouni.

The State Department’s assistant secretary for economic, energy and business affairs, Jose Fernandez, will deliver the keynote address at the conference.

“I am confident that our collaborative work with governments, businesses and civil society organizations across the North Africa region will lead to greater economic prosperity and security for all of us,” Fernandez said.

Following the conference, Fernandez plans to travel to Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, continuing to promote innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the region.

U.S. to Fund HIV Treatment for 4 Million People by 2013

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington – Increased U.S. support for anti-retroviral treatments will help deliver life-saving drugs to more than 4 million people living with HIV around the world by 2013, according to the State Department.

“By investing in what we know works, we can save millions more in the future,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a statement marking World AIDS Day, December 1. In 2010, about 3.2 million people received anti-retrovirals, including more than 600,000 HIV-positive pregnant women, allowing 114,000 babies to be born HIV-free.

“World AIDS Day serves as an important reminder that HIV/AIDS has not gone away,” President Obama said in a proclamation on World AIDS Day. He said that 33 million people still live with the disease.

Yet recent breakthroughs in HIV research are encouraging, said Dr. Rajiv Shah, who heads the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). For example, in July, research supported by the government of South Africa and USAID showed that a microbicide gel could help prevent transmission of HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus, in women. Another study showed that an oral anti-retroviral pill taken daily can significantly reduce transmission of the virus among men who have sex with men, Shah said at a December 1 White House event.

“Our goal is to provide proven, safe and effective HIV prevention products to the most vulnerable populations as quickly as possible,” he said.

This year, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) paid for care for 11 million people in more than 30 countries. It supported HIV counseling and testing for nearly 33 million people, critical in preventing the spread of the virus, according to the State Department.

Increased support for anti-retroviral treatment will come through two funding sources: PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The United States is the largest donor to the Global Fund, having committed \$5.1 billion to the initiative since it was created in 2002. The United States has pledged \$4 billion more to the fund through 2013.

In his proclamation, President Obama said the United States is committed to treating the disease as well as “to ending the stigma and discrimination” that often surrounds HIV.

U.S. Climate Help for Developing Nations on Track

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington – Last year’s climate summit in Copenhagen failed to produce a legally binding treaty, but it generated promises from all major economies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Leaders from more than 190 countries are now in Mexico to try to build on those commitments in hopes of eventually reaching a final agreement.

The so-called Copenhagen Accord was the first time that all major economies and leading emitters had agreed to work together to slow the rise in global temperatures. So far, some 140 countries have signed on to the Copenhagen Accord, and more than 80 have submitted greenhouse gas reduction targets.

A key provision of the accord calls for developed nations to generate about \$30 billion in immediate “fast-start” assistance for developing nations, many of which are already affected by climate change.

In recent days, the United States and the European Union have announced that they’re raising money as expected to meet their initial Copenhagen goals and stand by their pledges. The prolonged economic recession on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean had many people questioning whether Western nations would be able to deliver.

The timing of their announcements was important. The so-called “fast-start” financing plan for 2010–2012 is expected to be high on the agenda at the United Nations-led climate summit that began November 29 in Cancún, Mexico, known as COP-16.

Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has said the financing is “a central key to unlock the door to success in Cancún.”

U.S. CLIMATE ASSISTANCE SOARS

Under the Copenhagen Accord, the first climate finance cycle would span 2010–2012 and then rise to a much steeper goal of about \$100 billion annually by 2020.

The United States spent \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2010 on climate change mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries. Of that, \$1.3 billion was for direct assistance and the remaining \$400 million consisted of loan guarantees for developing nations that invest in climate mitigation or adaptation projects.

“If we look at the share that the United States is putting in, it seems to be the appropriate share of the global effort to fight this particular problem, and we will continue to

work to provide that kind of budgetary support going forward," U.S. Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change Jonathan Pershing told reporters in Cancún on November 29.

President Obama has asked Congress for an additional \$1.9 billion in fast-start climate financing for fiscal year 2011, which began October 1. Congress has not yet approved the budget for the current fiscal year, however, so it's still unclear what the final figure will be.

Programs funded in 2010 make up a long list of small and large initiatives that the United States is taking in one or several countries, plus initiatives the United States and other nations work on together.

In Uganda, for example, the United States is investing \$1.5 million to replace diesel-powered water pumps at schools and health centers with pumps powered by solar energy. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been busy converting traditional diesel water pumps for several years already, and that program is now being scaled up.

Indonesia is getting \$17 million to boost efforts to protect its forests and peat swamp forests. Logging and destruction of forests account for nearly one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the UNFCCC, and tropical forests in countries such as Indonesia and Brazil are especially vulnerable.

The Maldives, a low-lying country threatened by rising sea levels, is receiving \$3 million to help the country secure drinking water and make other critical preparations.

The United States is also working with other nations to pool money for climate assistance.

In Copenhagen last year, Australia, France, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States announced they would raise an initial \$3.5 billion in public finance to slow deforestation in developing countries. Some of that money is now beginning to surface, as in the \$10 million the United States provided in 2010 to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, a United Nations-led program.

The United States also provided \$375 million to the Climate Investment Funds, two financing vehicles supported by the world's largest development banks to boost climate-friendly and climate change-resistant projects in poor countries.

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