

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama on Awarding of Nobel Prize to Liu Xiaobo

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
December 10, 2010

Statement by President Barack Obama on the Awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize

One year ago, I was humbled to receive the Nobel Peace Prize – an award that speaks to our highest aspirations, and that has been claimed by giants of history and courageous advocates who have sacrificed for freedom and justice. Mr. Liu Xiaobo is far more deserving of this award than I was.

All of us have a responsibility to build a just peace that recognizes the inherent rights and dignity of human beings – a truth upheld within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In our own lives, our own countries, and in the world, the pursuit of a just peace remains incomplete, even as we strive for progress. This past year saw the release of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, even as the Burmese people continue to be denied the democracy that they deserve. Nobel Laureate Jose Ramos Horta has continued his tireless work to build a free and prosperous East Timor, having made the transition from dissident to President. And this past year saw the retirement of Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu, whose own career demonstrates the universal power of freedom and justice to overcome extraordinary obstacles.

The rights of human beings are universal – they do not belong to one nation, region or faith. America respects the unique culture and traditions of different countries. We respect China's extraordinary accomplishment in lifting millions out of poverty, and believe that human rights include the dignity that comes with freedom from want. But Mr. Liu reminds us that human dignity also depends upon the advance of democracy, open society, and the rule of law. The values he espouses are universal, his struggle is peaceful, and he should be released as soon as possible. I regret that Mr. Liu and his wife were denied the opportunity to attend the ceremony that Michelle and I attended last year. Today, on what is also International Human Rights Day, we should redouble our efforts to advance universal values for all human beings.

United States Marks Human Rights Day

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington – U.S. officials from the president on down marked International Human Rights Day on December 10, which commemorates the adoption by the United

Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

"While every nation pursues a path rooted in the culture of its own citizens, certain rights belong to all people," President Obama said in a proclamation issued December 10. "Freedom, justice and peace for the world must begin with basic security and liberty in the lives of individual human beings."

Obama said the United States will continue the fight to make universal human rights a reality for every person, regardless of race, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or circumstance.

"The challenges of a new century," Obama said, "call for a world that is more purposeful and more united. The United States will always speak for those who are voiceless, defend those who are oppressed, and bear witness to those who want nothing more than to exercise their universal human rights."

"Let us continue to stand with citizens, activists and governments around the world who embrace democratic reforms and empower free expression," Obama said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton commemorated Human Rights Day by presenting the Eleanor Roosevelt Award to four American human rights defenders for their contributions to the protection of human rights both in the United States and abroad.

The awardees are:

- Louis Henkin, who was a major figure in developing the study of human rights law.
- Alice Hartman Henkin, who, as the director of the Justice and Society Program at the Aspen Institute, brought together lawyers, business leaders and educators to help shape U.S. policies on human rights, international law and peacekeeping.
- Wade Henderson, a civil and human rights leader who has led the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights since 1996.
- Sarah Cleto Rial, a native of southern Sudan and program director for My Sister's Keeper, a Boston-based nongovernmental organization that works to advance political, social and economic justice for women and girls in Sudan.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights was established by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 1998 at the direction of then-President Bill Clinton. Eleanor Roosevelt, as the first chair of the U.N. Human Rights Commission, was a driving force behind the development and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In a statement released earlier in the day, Secretary Clinton condemned governments that continue to employ intimidation and questionable legal practices to silence the voices of human rights defenders. "We will continue to remind leaders of their responsibilities to their citizens under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Clinton said. "To support this, I have asked our embassies to open their doors to civil society activists today to listen to their concerns and demonstrate our support."

The goal of U.S. foreign policy, Clinton said at the awards ceremony, "is to make it possible for people who are very brave ... to actually realize their freedoms."

Among the notable human rights defenders Clinton named in her statement were Liu Xiaobo, who won this year's Nobel Peace Prize for his advocacy of peaceful political reform in China; Damas de Blanco, an advocate for political prisoners in Cuba; and Magodonga Mahlangu, who works to empower women in Zimbabwe.

The courage of these activists, Clinton said, "is a testament to all that is good in the human spirit."

In New York City, Ambassador Susan Rice, the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, spoke out against discrimination against those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). "I am particularly proud to say the United States is the newest member of the LGBT Core Group here at the United Nations," she said.

"We reaffirm today our common humanity," Rice said. "We celebrate the different ways in which we have been created."

In a press conference at the State Department, Michael Posner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, emphasized that the United States has "internationalized" the debate so that discussions on human rights by its diplomats go on every day.

"The world needs more attention to human rights," Posner said, "and we are trying to provide leadership on that."

Secretary Clinton Says Mideast Peace Talks Must Grapple with Core Issues

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — At this point in the Middle East peace process, the United States believes it is time to grapple with the core issues of the conflict: borders and security, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

Both sides have said they want the United States to continue its peacemaking efforts, so the negotiators will push the Israelis and Palestinians to lay out their positions on the core issues without delay and with specificity, Clinton said.

"It is no secret that the parties have a long way to go and that they have not yet made the difficult decisions that peace requires," Clinton said December 10 in a dinner speech at the seventh annual Saban Forum, a Middle East policy seminar sponsored by the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based policy research center. "And like many of you, I regret that we have not gotten farther, faster in our recent efforts."

Clinton emphasized the long-held U.S. position that there is no alternative to reaching mutual agreement.

"The stakes are too high, the pain too deep, and the issues too complex for any other approach," Clinton told the Washington audience.

Clinton had met with the chief Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators in the previous two days and discussed at length the way the Obama administration wants the peace talks to go in the coming weeks and months, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said.

Clinton held talks with Israeli chief negotiator Yitzhak Molho on December 9, and then met separately December 10 with Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat and Tzipi Livni, head of Israel's Kadima party and the former foreign minister. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the special envoy of the Middle East Quartet — which is comprised of the United States, the United Nations, Russia and the European Union — participated in the ongoing negotiations.

Before the Saban Forum, Clinton also met with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell leaves December 12 for the Middle East for talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and will also visit a number of Arab and European capitals, Clinton said.

CORE ISSUES

The United States enters this phase of the peace process with clear expectations for both parties. Their seriousness about achieving an agreement will be measured by their engagement on the core issues, Clinton said.

"We will work to narrow the gaps, asking the tough

questions and expecting substantive answers," Clinton said. "And in the context of our private conversations with the parties, we will offer our own ideas and bridging proposals when appropriate."

First, on borders and security, the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean is finite, and both sides must know exactly which parts belong to each. "They must agree to a single line drawn on a map that divides Israel from Palestine and to an outcome that implements the two-state solution with permanent Palestinian borders with Israel, Jordan and Egypt," she said.

Second, on refugees, this "difficult and emotional issue" must have a just and permanent solution that meets everyone's needs, she said.

Third, on settlements, the fate of existing settlements is an issue that must be dealt with along with the other final-status issues. "The position of the United States on settlements has not changed and will not change," Clinton said. "Like every American administration for decades, we do not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement activity."

And finally on Jerusalem, Clinton said that there will be no peace without an agreement on a city central to Jews, Muslims and Christians, recognizing that it is the most sensitive of all the issues. Good-faith negotiations are central to reaching a mutually satisfactory agreement for Jerusalem that safeguards its status.

Clinton said the core issues are woven together, and that seeing the larger strategic picture makes it easier to weigh the compromises that must be made by the Israelis and Palestinians.

"In the end, no matter how much the United States and other nations around the region and the world work to see a resolution to this conflict, only the parties themselves will be able to achieve it," Clinton told the Saban Forum. "The United States and the international community cannot impose a solution."

Clinton reiterated the U.S. position that the United States will not be a passive participant, but will push the Israelis and Palestinians to lay out their positions on the core issues without delay, in good faith, and with specifics.

Biological Weapons Pact Offers Cooperation Against Pandemics

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), which took effect in 1975, originally

was designed to ban the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons by nation states. To meet the threats of the 21st century, however, signatories are also using the convention to try to prevent bioterrorism and to expand information sharing and communication that can be used to combat any pandemic, spread deliberately or otherwise.

Discussions at the annual meeting of the parties to the BWC, held December 6–10 in Geneva, reflected awareness that prevention and response to a disease caused deliberately by a biological weapon, or accidentally by the mishandling of biological material, or naturally in cases such as cholera or bird flu, require the same mechanisms and coordination among governments, health professionals and scientists.

Laura Kennedy, U.S. permanent representative to the Conference on Disarmament and U.S. special representative for Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention issues, led the American delegation to the meeting and said enhanced cooperation among governments, health professionals and other experts will benefit everyone, including countries that do not have the capacity to manufacture bioweapons or do not believe they will be targeted. Every country is vulnerable to an epidemic outbreak, thus the BWC aims to reach out to all countries around the world, she said.

Speaking to America.gov from Geneva December 10, Kennedy said the Obama administration is "extremely pleased to see growing cooperation between health and security communities," which are working together to enhance local, national and international capacities to deal with disease outbreaks.

The United States wants to see an enhanced focus on bioterrorism as well as retention of the convention's traditional focus on state entities, she said. President Obama recognizes that "a bio-outbreak could be just as devastating as a nuclear incident, whether unleashed by a state or a terrorist group."

"When you build capacity, it is a powerful deterrence tool," Kennedy said.

But in the 21st century, deliberate use of biological weapons is not the only concern, Kennedy said. "There's a whole spectrum of outbreaks of a disease that could be caused by deliberate, accidental or natural disease outbreaks. And as we strengthen the mechanisms to deal with these challenges, we can have benefits across the board."

Haiti is currently combating the outbreak of cholera. H5N1, also known as bird flu, continues to infect and kill people around the world. Kennedy said the parties to the

BWC want the arms control and nonproliferation agreement to be used to bring together the scientific and health communities, law enforcement professionals and governments in assisting states to develop an integrated approach to any kind of prevention and treatment program for pandemic diseases.

"It's linking up international assistance, and it's providing the expertise that could conduct the investigations to determine the outbreak. So it's a whole host of tools at our disposal," Kennedy said.

Along with highlighting the overlap between deliberate and nondeliberate pandemics, the meeting in Geneva discussed the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2005 International Health Regulations, which require countries to cooperate in the prevention and treatment of diseases.

The WHO and BWC, both located in Geneva, have different mandates, but their roles complement one another, Kennedy said.

The BWC also established a network of national points of contact in the event of a disease outbreak. Kennedy said there is still a need to help countries better react to pandemic situations by helping them develop their capacities, laws and practices.

"It's plugging gaps. It's linking up and sharing information, and getting those networks in place" at the local, national and international levels, she said. "This is achieved through multilateral diplomacy, providing technical assistance to countries and conducting workshops with the help of partner states."

She said the December 6-10 meetings "put us on a very good trajectory" for the Seventh BWC Review Conference, scheduled for Geneva, December 5-22, 2011. The BWC also plans to hold a preparatory conference in April 2011, as well as a series of regional workshops, including in Kenya, Nigeria and Jordan, and additional experts meetings and seminars around the world, she said.

The Obama administration is pleased by the level of global interest and hopes soon to see "every single state signed up and fully active in the convention."

"That's certainly our overarching goal, and I think we're making progress," Kennedy said. "This is an arms control regime ... and the implementation has great benefits for every country around the world."

U.S. to Host World Press Freedom Day 2011

U.S. Department of State
Press Statement
Philip J. Crowley
Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, DC
December 7, 2010

U.S. to Host World Press Freedom Day in 2011

The United States is pleased to announce that it will host UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day event in 2011, from May 1 - May 3 in Washington, D.C. UNESCO is the only UN agency with the mandate to promote freedom of expression and its corollary, freedom of the press.

The theme for next year's commemoration will be 21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers. The United States places technology and innovation at the forefront of its diplomatic and development efforts. New media has empowered citizens around the world to report on their circumstances, express opinions on world events, and exchange information in environments sometimes hostile to such exercises of individuals' right to freedom of expression. At the same time, we are concerned about the determination of some governments to censor and silence individuals, and to restrict the free flow of information. We mark events such as World Press Freedom Day in the context of our enduring commitment to support and expand press freedom and the free flow of information in this digital age.

Highlighting the many events surrounding the celebration will be the awarding of the UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize at the National Press Club on May 3rd. This prize, determined by an independent jury of international journalists, honors a person, organization or institution that has notably contributed to the defense and/or promotion of press freedom, especially where risks have been undertaken.

The Newseum will host the first two days of events, which will engage a broad array of media professionals, students, and citizen reporters on themes that address the status of new media and internet freedom, and challenges and opportunities faced by media in our rapidly changing world.

The State Department looks forward to working with UNESCO and the U.S. executive committee spearheaded by the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy, IREX, and the United Nations Foundation and the many civil society organizations they have brought together in support of the organization of events unfolding in Washington.

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