

American

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Secretary Clinton Calls for International Cooperation in Haiti

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has joined her Canadian and Mexican counterparts to call for international cooperation to help Haiti tackle an “almost overwhelming” set of challenges.

Clinton said the country’s disputed presidential election in November has added to the difficulties Haiti faces in recovering from a devastating earthquake and an ongoing cholera outbreak. While the international community is responding to the immediate humanitarian and public health crises, the secretary said there remains “much to be done.”

“We have an economic challenge because we have to figure out ways to put Haitians back to work to begin rebuilding economic growth and giving people a decent standard of living. We have a governmental capacity challenge, which we’ve been dealing with even before the earthquake, but most acutely since, to try to create conditions in which the government of Haiti has the capacity to work toward meeting the needs of the Haitian people, and that we are in respect of their sovereignty. And we now have an electoral challenge that is acute.”

She spoke at a joint press conference with Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon and Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa after the three met December 13 in Wakefield, Quebec. Clinton commended Cannon and Espinosa, noting Canada and Mexico “have been deeply involved and committed” to rebuilding Haiti.

Cannon called on the Haitian government and its people to “assume their responsibilities and ensure that democracy in Haiti continues.” He said achieving government stability is essential to making economic progress.

Clinton also called for “greater effort” and a “more focused approach toward problem-solving” from the Haitian government.

“As we’re approaching the one-year anniversary of the Haitian earthquake, there hasn’t been the kind of coordinated, coherent response from the government of Haiti that is called for.”

Acknowledging the difficulties the Haitian people face, she said the United States stands ready to provide support.

“We are working across the international community to

devise the best possible answer to the issues that have been raised,” Clinton said.

Clinton, Cannon and Espinosa also discussed the North American economy, security, energy and climate change, among other issues.

Their meeting set the agenda for the 2011 North American Leaders’ Summit, to be held in Canada early next year with President Obama, Mexican President Felipe Calderón and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Canada is the leading trade partner of the United States, and Mexico is in third place after China, according to U.S. Census figures.

U.S. Signs New Partnership with South Africa Against HIV/AIDS

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton signed a five-year joint strategic plan with her South African counterpart on bilateral cooperation under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and said the United States wants to be “a good partner” with South Africa as it confronts HIV/AIDS.

In remarks with South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane at the State Department December 14, Clinton said the South African government’s efforts to prevent and treat the disease have made a new level of cooperation possible.

“South Africa is turning the tide against HIV/AIDS,” Clinton said. “We are already reviewing surveys being done with the South African government ... that show HIV among youth is falling.”

According to a January 2010 fact sheet (PDF, 395KB) on the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria website, approximately 5.7 million South Africans are believed to be living with HIV and AIDS, making it one of the countries most affected by the disease. The fact sheet said that between 2004 and January 2010, South Africa had received approximately \$6.2 billion through PEPFAR, and the Obama administration would be providing an additional \$120 million donation over two years to pay for anti-retroviral drugs.

Clinton recalled South African President Jacob Zuma’s December 2009 remarks when he said HIV/AIDS would be overcome only by individuals who choose to take responsibility for their own lives and the lives of those around them.

“What South Africa has done is to make a tremendous

commitment by doubling its investment, now covering 60 percent of the total spending,” Clinton said. “There is so much that is being done at the grass-roots level on prevention, efforts against discrimination, treating people with HIV and doing so much more to put together a comprehensive strategy.”

South African and American scientists also have been collaborating on the development of a microbicide to prevent HIV transmission. “It’s the kind of new partnership we want to see more of together,” she said.

Nkoana-Mashabane said that through PEPFAR, 1.1 million South Africans now are in HIV/AIDS care and treatment programs. More than 5 million have been tested for the disease, with 15 million more tests anticipated over the next 18 months, she said.

“This partnership and the PEPFAR ... really is turning the tide at home,” she said.

Upholding Human Rights Remains Challenging, But There Is Hope

Editor’s note: As 2010 comes to a close and much of the free world concludes commemorations of the 62nd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Michael Posner, assistant secretary for the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, shares his views in the following interview with America.gov regarding current conditions for human rights.

Posner is a long-time human rights activist himself, having formerly served as the executive director and then the president of Human Rights First (see organization website), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization based in New York and Washington. While he acknowledges that upholding human rights remains challenging, there is reason to hope, he says, thanks to the courage of people such as Aung San Suu Kyi, Liu Xiaobo, and many others whose names are not known to the world.

Q: What have been the biggest challenges to human rights around the world in the last year?

Posner: The greatest challenges remained unchanged. Sixty-two years since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are still countries that restrict a person’s right to assembly, or to select his or her faith, or to freely express an opinion, or to take part in their own governance. Human rights is always a challenging issue. In the last year we have seen that even democracies have to wrestle with difficult questions about citizenship, freedom of travel or religious expression.

However, I am not discouraged. All across the globe there are vibrant civil society groups working tirelessly to improve the situation in their country. The United States

is encouraging governments around the world to partner with civil society because human rights, economic development and state security are intrinsically linked. Countries with vibrant civil societies are best poised to make progress in the 21st century because they are tapping into their greatest resource: their own people.

As President Obama said when he accepted the Nobel Prize, “America will always be a voice for those aspirations that are universal. We will bear witness to the quiet dignity of reformers like Aung San Suu Kyi; to the bravery of Zimbabweans who cast their ballots in the face of beatings; to the hundreds of thousands who have marched silently through the streets of Iran.”

I would like to take this opportunity to honor Liu Xiaobo, this year’s recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Mr. Liu has been a consistent advocate for fundamental freedoms and human rights for his fellow citizens and for peaceful political reform. Mr. Liu’s work and his receipt of this honor highlight the fact that while China has made tremendous economic progress in the last three decades, political reform has lagged behind. The U.S. government has called for Liu Xiaobo’s immediate release from prison on several occasions, including in its statement celebrating Human Rights Day. We have also called for the release of his wife and supporters from house arrest.

Q: It seems that better communications via technical means and ease of travel should serve as a means to enhance human rights, but has it? Do you have any comment on Internet freedom, in light of the Wikileaks releases?

Posner: The U.S. remains steadfast in our commitment to maintaining the openness on the Internet as a platform for innovation, economic growth, ideas, and information. We have said that the release of classified data puts large numbers of people at risk and does not serve the public interest. We will continue to criticize that action. And we will also continue to support the principles found in our own Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – contrary to the suggestions of some, there is nothing inconsistent about criticizing misguided action by one person while upholding sacred principles.

Our established policy of supporting openness on the Internet will continue to face challenges from some quarters in the coming weeks and months. But democracy depends on individuals’ ability to express ideas, access independent information, and communicate with others. And in the age of the information economy, our shared prosperity rests on the reliable and secure flow of data on the global network. We cannot lose sight of these fundamental objectives, even as we respond to the illegal disclosure of classified information.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” The Internet and mobile technology has made that possible. We saw how Twitter was used in Iran to organize rallies and get around a news blackout. Facebook was used to organize a multinational protest against the FARC, a Colombian narcoterrorist group.

Naturally, any tool is only as useful as the person wielding it. The United States believes it’s critical that users of the Internet are assured certain basic freedoms. Freedom of expression is first among them. This freedom is no longer defined solely by whether citizens can go into the town square and criticize their government without fear of retribution. Blogs, e-mails, social networks and text messages have opened up new forums for exchanging ideas, and created new targets for censorship.

Q: What impact does the annual U.S. Human Rights Report have? Have the findings in the report changed anything for the better over the years?

Posner: The Human Rights Report’s purpose is to inform; it can be used by civil society and other governments as a fact base of personal freedoms and civil liberties. For the many people who live in countries without a free press or civil society, it can be the only source of information they have on this issue. The Human Rights Report is also used by our Congress and the executive branch to help form our foreign policy.

I’m moved when people working for human rights abroad tell us that learning that their efforts have been documented in the Human Rights Report reminds them that they are not alone and gives them strength to carry on.

Each year we see the report cited in the press and by nongovernmental organizations. In some countries it helps open a debate about human rights.

Q: In what ways has the Obama administration strengthened U.S. commitment to human rights around the world?

Posner: Like others before it, this administration has a clear and consistent commitment to human rights and civil society. It was President Obama who stated that, as part of our national security strategy, the United States must support democracy, human rights, and development. The United States is working closely with citizens, communities, and political and civil society leaders to strengthen key institutions of democratic accountability – free and fair electoral processes, strong legislatures, civilian control of militaries, honest police forces, independent and fair judiciaries, a free and

independent press, a vibrant private sector and a robust civil society.

Over the last year, our bureau engaged several countries including China, Egypt, Vietnam and Indonesia in human rights and religious freedom discussions. These are regular topics in all of our bilateral meetings. In addition, our bureau has a program office that funds programs to empower and enable human rights and civil society activists in developing democracies.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on a mentor and personal friend, Louis Henkin; he was chairman of the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University and is widely considered to be the father of modern human rights law. Lou famously observed that in the church of human rights, the United States is not a pillar, but a flying buttress – supportive, but only from the outside. He devoted himself to bringing us into that church. Today, 31 years after Lou urged the U.S. Senate to apply international standards to ourselves, the Obama administration is committed to advancing a single set of universal human rights principles, to apply them to ourselves and to lead by example. I think that speaks both to Lou’s principled stance and to the Obama administration’s commitment to human rights.

Holbrooke Remembered as Diplomat and Statesman

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who died December 13 in Washington, is being remembered as a consummate diplomat, statesman and troubleshooter for the United States for nearly 50 years, from the war in Vietnam to conflict in the Balkans to the United Nations and finally as President Obama’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was 69.

But Holbrooke will likely be remembered the most for his role in negotiating the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Obama paid homage to Holbrooke, who served five Democratic presidents, starting with John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s, as “a true giant of American foreign policy who has made America stronger, safer and more respected.”

“He was a truly unique figure who will be remembered for his tireless diplomacy, love of country and pursuit of peace,” Obama said in a December 13 statement.

Holbrooke was serving as the State Department’s special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan at the time of his death. He died after complications from surgery to repair a torn aorta.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Holbrooke “served the country he loved for nearly half a century, representing the United States in far-flung war zones and high-level peace talks, always with distinctive brilliance and unmatched determination. He was one of a kind – a true statesman – and that makes his passing all the more painful.”

Holbrooke was a key part of the team that is to present a strategic review of the current conflict in Afghanistan to the president by December 16. Named to the newly created post of special representative on the second day of the Obama administration in January 2009, Holbrooke had been working to find a path to stabilize Afghanistan and assist Pakistan in ousting international terrorists and remnants of the former Taliban regime that controlled Afghanistan before October 2001.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said: “That we have been making steady progress in this war is due in no small measure to Richard’s tireless efforts and dedication. I know he would want our work to continue unabated. And I know we will all feel his bully presence in the room as we do so.”

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said Holbrooke, with whom he began working during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, was among “the most formidable and consequential public servants of his generation, bringing his uncommon passion, energy, tenacity and intellect to bear on the most difficult national security issues of our time.”

U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Cameron Munter said he regarded Holbrooke as a close friend and one of Pakistan’s best friends. “Richard had an abiding commitment to deepening the partnership between the United States and Pakistan,” Munter said in a statement from Islamabad December 14.

Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry said that throughout Holbrooke’s long career, he has been a partner of those trying to foster peace. “From Vietnam to the Balkans and now to Afghanistan, he’s done it by showing America’s strength and by showing our compassion. Our efforts in Afghanistan lost a powerful advocate today,” Eikenberry said.

Holbrooke, born in New York City on April 24, 1941, served under Presidents Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Carter, Bill Clinton and Obama. His first posting as a young foreign service officer in 1963 was to Vietnam, where he served as a field officer and as a staff assistant to two U.S. ambassadors and was a junior member of the U.S. delegation during early Paris peace talks aimed at ending the war.

As an assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Holbrooke, then 35, helped to normalize relations with China. And as the U.S. ambassador to Germany in the early 1990s, he helped a rapidly changing Europe emerge from the half-century-long Cold War. With his encouragement, NATO began expanding with new members in Eastern Europe.

But his most significant diplomatic achievement was in negotiating the Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina 15 years ago this week, Obama said. The final accords were signed in Paris December 14, 1995. The accords – formally named the General Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina – were named for the place where the talks were held, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Later, as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Holbrooke was successful in helping break a political impasse and strengthen the United States’ relationship with the United Nations, and he elevated the cause of HIV/AIDS and Africa onto the international agenda, Obama said in his White House statement.

“And throughout his life, as a child of refugees, he devoted himself to the plight of people displaced around the world,” Obama said.

Vice President Biden paid tribute to Holbrooke December 13, calling him “a great friend” and one of the United States’ “greatest warriors for peace.”

“Richard Holbrooke was a larger-than-life figure, who through his brilliance, determination and sheer force of will helped to bend the curve of history in the direction of progress,” Biden said. “He touched so many lives and helped save countless more.”

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