

American

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Secretary Clinton Leads Meeting on U.S. Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says human trafficking is an issue of “grave importance” the United States must continue to address.

Clinton led the annual President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons meeting, held in Washington February 1.

“Anywhere from 12 [million] to 27 million people are currently held in forced labor, bonded labor, or forced prostitution,” she told the task force, a group that includes leaders from across government agencies.

Attorney General Eric Holder, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis were at the meeting, along with leaders from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture.

Clinton said the victims of human trafficking “range from the men and women enslaved in fields, factories and brothels to the girls and boys whose childhoods have been shattered and stolen, to the parents whose children have vanished. Whether they are far from home or in their own villages, they need and deserve our help and the help of the world.”

She said the State Department has employed a series of initiatives to combat human trafficking, including publishing its annual Trafficking in Persons report every May. The report, which ranks countries around the world based on compliance with the international Trafficking Victims Protection Act, included an assessment of the United States for the first time in 2010.

“As President Obama has made clear, we want to be the best champion for our own ideals, and we want to live up to those ideals ourselves,” Clinton said.

In addition to the report, Clinton said the department’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security will establish an anti-trafficking unit to “centralize case referrals and command at headquarters and offer training to all agents, particularly on how to work with victims.”

The secretary emphasized that identifying victims is a top priority for U.S. agencies. She said that, of the millions of people held in servitude, fewer than 50,000 have officially been identified as victims. She said many others are either ignored, or worse, treated as criminals.

“We need to do more to identify the true victims of human trafficking and help restore them to participation in our society,” Clinton said.

In a joint effort to combat trafficking in persons, the Department of Justice announced an initiative to create specialized anti-trafficking coordination teams.

“These teams will bring together federal agents and prosecutors across agency lines to combat human trafficking threats, dismantle human trafficking networks and bring traffickers to justice,” Holder said in his February 1 announcement.

He said the effort will be made in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Labor.

Holder said the launch of these teams will enable the U.S. government “to leverage the assets and expertise of each federal enforcement agency more effectively than ever before.”

He said agency leaders are “energized by the strength of our partnerships” but remain “firm in our resolve to do more ... to end human trafficking.”

Holder said that in 2010 the Department of Justice prosecuted more human trafficking cases than ever before, sending a powerful signal the United States will not tolerate trafficking in persons.

U.S. Says Violence in Egypt Must Stop, Transition Must Begin

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – The White House strongly condemns “outrageous and deplorable violence” that has broken out in Cairo and other Egyptian cities and has renewed its call for political change to begin in the country.

“It is imperative that the violence that we’re seeing stop and that the transition that was spoken about last night begin immediately,” White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters in Washington February 2.

According to press reports, anti-government protesters and armed supporters of President Hosni Mubarak have clashed, leaving hundreds wounded.

“If any of the violence is instigated by the government, it should stop immediately,” Gibbs said.

The political unrest in Egypt will take some time to resolve, he said, and “regardless of the amount of that time, it is tremendously important that restraint and

nonviolence carry the day during this important transition."

Gibbs said the Obama administration has repeatedly told the Mubarak government that violence is unacceptable, and that President Obama "reiterated our strong call for nonviolence" during his call to Mubarak on February 1. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton gave newly appointed Vice President Omar Suleiman the same message in a February 2 phone call.

Obama's conversation with Mubarak was candid, Gibbs said, and he told the Egyptian leader that the time for change had come.

"I do not think the president could have been clearer with the president of Egypt last night," Gibbs said.

"The Egyptian people need to see change." Meaningful political transition "must include opposition voices and parties being involved in this process as we move toward free and fair elections," Gibbs said.

Only the Egyptian people can determine when their demands have been met, he added.

"Nobody in Washington will determine the range of freedom of assembly or freedom of speech for those in Tahrir Square. And I don't think anybody in Tahrir Square is looking for us to gauge what the fence posts are on those freedoms," Gibbs said.

But the Egyptian people do not want to see appointments or speeches, he continued. "They want to see concrete action by their government. And I think that that's what the world waits for."

The spokesman also said there is "no acceptable excuse" for the shutdown of Egypt's Internet, mobile phone and satellite communications.

"Those are part of the basic human freedoms that people everywhere should enjoy," Gibbs said.

The Obama administration is continuing to respond to a fluid situation in Egypt, and "what we're watching is history being made," Gibbs said.

Looking ahead, the Obama administration wants to have a "continued stable partnership" with the Egyptian people and expects that "whatever government comes next, that government respect the treaties that ... the previous Egyptian governments have entered into."

The United States has important relationships with Egypt and other countries throughout the Middle East, and "we

seek to engage all of those entities in bringing about comprehensive peace to the region," Gibbs said.

"That outlives any particular administration, and I think that's what people throughout the world expect to see," he said.

Intellectual Property Rights Empower People and Build Societies

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Consumers who buy counterfeit products to get a good deal, beware: You could be harming yourself and your country's economy in the process.

Zayd Alathari, an attorney who practices intellectual property rights law with Washington law firm Venable LLP, said the ramifications for buying illegally manufactured goods are vast.

"Counterfeits are not only bad for the economy, they have dangerous repercussions as well that can lead to serious medical conditions or even death," Alathari said. "Counterfeiting is stealing. It leads to illegal activity and organized crime and really hinders sustainable economic development."

Iraqi-born Alathari will take part in a State Department-sponsored speaking tour of Saudi Arabia later this winter through the Bureau of International Information Programs, during which he will discuss the importance of intellectual property law. Alathari, who volunteers his time to help Arab Americans on intellectual property-related issues, is looking forward to the trip.

"I want to use all my resources and everything that I've learned to help all nations," Alathari said. "Being from the Middle East and being Arab, I especially want to use my talents and expertise to help."

Alathari graduated from American University's Washington College of Law and holds a master's degree in biotechnology from Johns Hopkins University. At Venable, he combines his passions for law and science by helping clients patent, protect and commercialize chemical, medical and pharmaceutical products.

Intellectual property (IP), distinct types of creations of the mind, affects people from all walks of life as well as an array of government and nongovernment institutions. Intellectual property rights are given to intangible assets such as music, literary and artistic works, discoveries and inventions, words, phrases, designs and more.

"Society has recognized the value of these creations and has set some exclusive rights to the owners of those

creations," Alathari said. Common types of intellectual property protection include copyrights, trademarks and patents.

"Everything in our lives has IP in it," he said. "From the clothes we wear, the food we eat, our homes, automobiles, whether we are reading, listening to the radio or music, watching TV or movies, surfing the Internet."

Protecting intellectual property generates incentives by allowing an inventor to be rewarded for a creation.

"You want to incentivize someone to create something, to invest the time and money to do it," Alathari said. "In exchange for that, society has said we understand your hard efforts, and we are going to reward you by giving you some exclusive rights for a certain time period."

Beyond protecting the owner of an idea, upholding intellectual property rights also builds economies. It generates fair competition, establishes foundations for economic stability and helps a society advance technology and creativity. A 2007 study by the World Intellectual Property Organization and the United Nations University showed "a positive correlation between the strengthening of the IP system and subsequent economic growth" in six Asian countries.

"There is a certain stability in knowing what rights you have in how to conduct business," Alathari said, "and this drives business relationships."

Intellectual property rights have a long history. A statute issued by the Republic of Venice in 1474 called for the registration of inventions with the authorities to receive infringement protection for 10 years. The U.S. Constitution contains what is sometimes known as the Intellectual Property Clause, which calls for the promotion of "the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries."

Alathari said most legal systems around the world aim to protect intellectual property. But applying the laws can be tough. Challenges include border control, identifying infringing products and making sure appropriate criminal penalties are in place.

"That way people will not infringe these rights; they will think twice about it," he said.

Saudi Arabia, Alathari said, is an excellent example of how the application of intellectual property rights helps lead to progress.

"They have made a commitment and an investment in

expanding their economy and moving forward in becoming technology advanced, from education all the way to the top with businesses," Alathari said. "It has the assets that it needs to become a hot spot for innovation, and IP rights provide the means for Saudi Arabia or any Arab nation to capitalize on its innovation both at home and abroad."

One Million Electric Cars Coming Our Way?

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Traffic on American roads soon could run a bit cleaner.

In his January 25 State of the Union address, President Obama challenged the United States to become the first nation with 1 million electric cars. His administration since has announced several initiatives it will ask Congress to fund in the 2012 budget to help spur such rapid growth.

Cleaner vehicles are part of the federal government's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build "clean" industries that provide new jobs.

Some experts have questioned whether the goal President Obama set in his speech is realistic, considering that the market for electric cars is still in its infancy.

A new report from Indiana University says automakers' production targets won't be sufficient to generate 1 million electric cars by 2015 — mainly because consumer demand isn't yet there.

"We believe that [plug-in electric vehicles] are an idea whose time has come," said Gurminder Bedi, chairman of the panel that authored the report and a former Ford Motor Company executive.

"But it's clear that the technology needs a redoubled investment in time, energy and money from both government and the auto industry before [these cars] become part of our automotive mainstream," he added.

Brad Berman, the founder and editor of PluginCars.com, is more optimistic, noting that the first two electric cars aimed at the mass market — the Chevy Volt and Nissan Leaf — have received rave reviews.

"Most forecasts peg sales ... to ramp up from tens of thousands per year in the first year or two to hundreds of thousands by 2013," he said. "While it's hard to predict exact numbers, these two models alone will get us well past the halfway mark toward the 1 million goal."

A number of additional cars will hit the market over the

next two years, adding to the overall volume, he said.

PROPOSED SUBSIDIES WOULD LOWER PRICE

Because all-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles remain more expensive than equivalent gasoline vehicles, many American consumers still can't afford them.

So one of the initiatives in the president's budget proposal is a \$7,500 rebate, or immediate price reduction, for electric cars. Today, consumers can claim a \$7,500 tax deduction, with the saving not available for months.

Under the rebate plan, a 2011 model of the Chevy Volt would cost about \$32,800. A 2011 Nissan Leaf would be just more than \$25,000.

In addition, the president will ask for \$10 million to be awarded to communities that encourage the conversion to electric vehicles – for example, by building special road lanes and parking spaces for such cars, or by training people to work in the advanced vehicle technology industry.

BATTERIES IN FOCUS

The expensive and relatively short-lived batteries for electric cars remain the big stumbling block to development of a mass market.

The Obama administration therefore is asking Congress to boost funding for electric-car research and development by 30 percent. A new "Energy Innovation Hub," meanwhile, would focus on improving battery life and capacity.

"We're going to have batteries that go 300 miles [483 kilometers] on a charge, with 10 [dollars] of electricity instead of 50 [dollars of gasoline]," Vice President Biden said during a recent visit to a battery company in Indiana.

The company Biden visited, Ener1 Inc., received a \$118.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy in 2009 to expand its production of lithium-ion batteries. The investment will allow Ener1 to ramp up production to 60,000 electric-car batteries annually and to triple employment to 1,400 by 2013, depending on demand, a company spokesman said.

FUEL PRICES KEY

Ultimately, gasoline prices may determine the market for these new cars, Berman said.

"If the price at the pumps makes a run to \$4 or even \$5, consumers are likely to flock to electric cars – which can be fueled for the equivalent of around \$1 a gallon," he

said.

Even with these uncertainties, many think sales will soar in coming years, especially as vehicle prices come down.

Pike Research, a consulting and research company focused on environmentally friendly technology, estimates that there will be 835,000 electric cars or hybrids on American roads by 2015. That would be a significant increase in just a few years.

Carmakers seem to be growing increasingly optimistic. In late January, General Motors announced that it would speed up production of the Chevy Volt in response to growing customer interest.

"We're accelerating our launch plan to have Volts in all participating Chevrolet dealerships in every single state ... by the end of this year," said Rick Scheidt, a General Motors marketing executive. "This is the right thing to do for our customers and our dealers who are seeing increased traffic onto their showroom floors."

The company quoted one Maryland dealer who said he's now getting serious inquiries from at least 10 customers a week.

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