

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

---

**February 23, 2011**

---

<b>U.S. Urges Middle East to Respond to Protests with Reforms .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>G20 a Step Closer to More Sustainable Economic Growth .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>AFRICOM Leader Cites Growth in Partnerships with African Nations .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>U.S. Disaster Assistance Team Headed to New Zealand .....</b>	<b>3</b>

## **U.S. Urges Middle East to Respond to Protests with Reforms**

By MacKenzie C. Babb  
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States urges Middle Eastern countries to take concrete action and work toward political reform in response to protests across the region, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

“Across the Middle East, people are calling on their governments to be more open, more accountable and more responsive, and the United States believes it is in the interest of governments to engage peacefully and positively in addressing their demands, and to work to respond to them,” Clinton said in Washington February 22.

“Without genuine progress toward open and accountable political systems, the gap between people and their governments can only grow and instability can only deepen,” she said.

Clinton welcomed the processes that are creating a new Tunisia and a new Egypt, and said the United States looks to them for more political change.

“We will continue to be a supportive partner to the peoples of both countries as they seek a better future,” she said.

The secretary repeated the U.S. concern over violent clashes in Libya. She said the United States has received “reports of hundreds killed and many more injured.” The bloodshed is “completely unacceptable,” and it is the responsibility of the Libyan government to “respect the universal rights of their own people, including their right to free expression and assembly,” she said.

The United States continues to watch the situation there with alarm, and joins the international community in condemning the violence, Clinton told reporters.

In a statement February 21, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed “outrage at press reports the Libyan authorities have been firing at demonstrators from war planes and helicopters.”

Ban said such attacks, if confirmed, “would constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law and would be condemned ... in the strongest terms.” The U.N. Security Council met in an emergency session February 22 to discuss the violent crackdown on protesters in Libya.

Clinton said the United States is also “gravely concerned by reports of violence in Yemen and elsewhere.” She

urged governments across the region to exercise restraint, underscoring that there is no place for violence against peaceful protesters.

In Bahrain, the secretary said, the United States has welcomed significant steps taken “to initiate a meaningful dialogue with the full spectrum of Bahraini society,” including the decision to release a number of prisoners. She called the initiative a constructive path to preserve Bahrain’s stability and meet the aspirations of its people.

Clinton said the United States will continue to support the Middle East as its countries take steps toward more open, inclusive and responsive political systems.

## **G20 a Step Closer to More Sustainable Economic Growth**

Washington — The world’s major economies have taken a step toward better coordination of their economic policies designed to prevent another financial crisis.

Finance ministers and central bankers from the Group of 20 major economic powers, who met in Paris February 18–19, struck a compromise on a set of indicators designed to gauge economic imbalances and warn governments about the risk of those imbalances reaching dangerous levels. Many economists believe that global trade and financial imbalances contributed to the recent financial crisis.

Currency exchange rates, which many policymakers and economists consider essential for measuring the imbalances, were not among the agreed indicators. The final G20 communiqué said exchange rates would be given “due consideration.”

French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde told a news conference that “divergent interests” prevented her and her colleagues from making even more significant progress toward agreement on indicators, specific levels at which they could be considered too risky and the ways to mitigate related risks.

According to news reports, China insisted on excluding exchange rates. At the previous G20 meeting, China, together with Germany and other major exporters, also resisted efforts to set binding targets on the indicators.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said in a prepared statement February 19 that China’s currency remains “substantially” undervalued, despite Beijing’s 2010 move to allow it to appreciate against the U.S. dollar at a set pace.

The final communiqué noted divergent growth trajectories among the G20 economies after the recent

financial crisis, with subdued growth and high unemployment in most developed countries and growth acceleration in major emerging markets. Geithner said some emerging markets try to deal with the related challenges by holding their currencies undervalued and limiting capital inflows. These measures only make their problems worse and "shift the burden of adjustment to others," he said.

Geithner said, however, the G20 countries are moving "gradually" to build consensus on ways to assess indicators and causes of the imbalances, which have left major exporting countries with trade surpluses and major importing countries with trade deficits. He said this process would take time but expressed optimism that the final goal would be reached because emerging market economies have a strong interest in reducing the risk from the imbalances to their future economic growth and financial stability.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing-Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn was less optimistic about such prospects. With the global economy improving, he told a news conference, countries feel less pressure to find a consensus. "Many believe wrongly the crisis is behind us, and they have domestic concerns," he said. The IMF is among international bodies designated to play a major role in monitoring the global growth adjustment process.

Lagarde said the agreed indicators would serve as the starting point for drafting of guidelines for coordinated economic policies that in turn could lead to a mutual assessment process.

The final list of indicators includes public debt and fiscal deficit, the measures on which the United States and other developed countries have promised to do better. Geithner said the budget President Obama submitted to Congress earlier in February meets the G20 countries' commitment to halve their fiscal deficits by 2013 and to stabilize the ratio of public debt to gross domestic product by 2016.

### **AFRICOM Leader Cites Growth in Partnerships with African Nations**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The commander of the U.S. military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) says that there has been positive growth in the partnership between his command and 53 African nations that work with him in helping to maintain regional stability and preventing civil strife.

"What we do are things that our partners desire of us to do," Army General William "Kip" Ward said during a February 18 roundtable briefing at the Washington Foreign Press Center.

"This is an important part of our work. Through our interactive activities, such as conferences, exercises, training, our familiarization programs, our senior leader visits, we listen very carefully to our partners, and this is all part of our understanding what matters most to them," Ward said.

The work of AFRICOM is in the interests of the United States, Ward said, but also in the interests of the African nations and the global community.

AFRICOM, one of six Defense Department regional military headquarters, became operational October 1, 2008. The command, with a military-civilian staff of 1,300, is located at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. In fiscal year 2009, the command had a budget of \$310 million and was budgeted for \$278 million in fiscal year 2010.

Before the creation of a separate military command for Africa, the United States' military and security engagements on the continent had been episodic. But after the command became operational, it has taken an approach focusing on building the security capacity of its partners, promoting strategic relationships, conducting civilian-military activities that foster stability and providing crisis response.

Africa Command grew out of the U.S. European Command, which had responsibility for 92 countries in Europe and Africa. AFRICOM focuses entirely on Africa, with the one exception of Egypt, which is still under the aegis of the U.S. Central Command. However, Ward said that Egypt is still very much an African nation and actively participates in the issues and challenges of the continent. When AFRICOM was created, Egyptian officials were consulted on the U.S. approach.

Coupled with the military cooperation is the expanded civilian cooperation through the command with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the State and Treasury departments and other agencies.

Ward told reporters there are "absolutely no plans now or in the future to move my headquarters to Africa." Since creation of the command, the question of a headquarters in Africa has been raised regularly.

Leaders of African nations have repeatedly told AFRICOM that their security priorities include such things as the development of capable and accountable professional military forces; the creation of effective, legitimate and professional security institutions at the national and regional levels; a collective ability to dissuade, deter and defeat transnational threats from terrorist and extremist organizations; and increased African leadership and participation in international

peacekeeping missions as well as peacekeeping currently being conducted in Africa, Ward said.

"We conduct a wide range of programs and activities that help our African partners meet these goals," Ward added.

Ward said his greatest challenge as commander of AFRICOM is providing the things that African leaders want.

"Our ability to provide support is certainly a factor of our resources that we have available," Ward said. And that means, he said, that there are times when the command cannot do all of things it's asked to do.

Helping African nations build professional militaries takes resources and equipment, he said.

Asked by reporters about instability in the Middle East and in North Africa, Ward said that instability anywhere causes him concern because there are always those who want to take advantage of such situations to generate instability in other places.

### **U.S. Disaster Assistance Team Headed to New Zealand**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — A U.S. disaster assistance team and a specially trained urban search-and-rescue team are being sent to help New Zealand officials in the aftermath of a magnitude 6.3 earthquake that struck near Christchurch February 22.

The U.S. Geological Survey says the earthquake struck about 12:51 p.m. local time during what was the normal lunch break in the city of about 350,000 people. The information was provided to the USGS by the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences in Lower Hutt, New Zealand. It is the second major earthquake to strike New Zealand in six months; a magnitude 7.1 earthquake hit on September 4, 2010, but no one was killed in that quake.

Christchurch is on New Zealand's South Island and is known as the Garden City.

USGS officials said the earthquake struck at a depth of 5 kilometers below the earth's surface, which is a key factor in accounting for the damage and number of casualties. The closer an earthquake is to the surface, the greater the potential for damage and fatalities.

New Zealand authorities have placed the number killed at approximately 65, and at least another 100 people are missing in rubble from fallen buildings, according to news reports. Those numbers are expected to change as recovery efforts continue.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a statement she was "deeply saddened by the news that a second major earthquake in six months has struck Christchurch. On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I send our sincere condolences and sympathy to the people of New Zealand."

When the earthquake struck, U.S. and New Zealand officials were in the middle of a partnership forum in Christchurch, discussing plans to expand the partnership between the two nations, Clinton said. All members of the U.S. delegation have been reported safe.

"The United States stands ready to provide assistance to the government of New Zealand and to the brave people of Christchurch. Our long history of friendship and mutual support in times of need is an example of our enduring bond," Clinton said.

### **DISASTER ASSISTANCE TEAM**

In response to a request from the New Zealand government, the United States is deploying a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The team will include the Los Angeles County (California) Fire Department's Urban Search and Rescue team. Several search and rescue teams in the United States are on continuous stand-by status with USAID for such missions. The teams were heavily involved in recovery efforts after the January 2010 Haiti earthquake.

The search-and-rescue component of the DART will be what is called a "heavy team," taking more than 70 specialized personnel and all necessary equipment to make live rescues in even the most precarious situations, USAID said in a statement February 22.

"On behalf of the American people, I wish to convey our sympathy, thoughts and prayers to the people of New Zealand who have been affected by this devastating earthquake," USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah said. "We stand ready to assist the government of New Zealand in any way we can."

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)