

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Support for Japan Unwavering in Face of Disasters

By Charlene Porter and Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the Japanese people “are not alone” as they cope with the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami and continue to respond to dangers posed by the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

Speaking at the White House March 17, Obama said his administration is “working aggressively” to support Japan through the efforts of U.S. civilian and military personnel and by providing humanitarian assistance.

“To date, we’ve flown hundreds of missions to support the recovery efforts and distributed thousands of pounds of food and water to the Japanese people. We’ve also deployed some of our leading experts to help contain the damage at Japan’s nuclear reactors. We’re sharing with them expertise, equipment and technology so that the courageous responders on the scene have the benefit of American teamwork and support,” Obama said.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has deployed two urban search-and-rescue teams to look for survivors, as well as a disaster assistance response team to help assess damage and coordinate a response.

The magnitude 9 earthquake was followed by a tsunami that pounded ashore in northeast Japan, crushing towns, villages and infrastructure. A resulting power failure disrupted cooling systems at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and utility workers have been working frantically to cool the cores of multiple nuclear reactors and restore water to cooling ponds where spent fuel rods are stored.

The Japanese people “will find a hand of support extended from the United States as they get back on their feet,” Obama said, paying tribute to the close alliance between the two countries over the past half century.

“Our people share ties of family, ties of culture and ties of commerce. Our troops have served to protect Japan’s shores. And our citizens have found opportunity and friendship in Japan’s cities and towns,” he said.

Obama praised the “strength and spirit” of the Japanese people in their response to the tragedy, noting the ways they have helped each other by opening up their homes and sharing scarce resources of food and water.

“They’ve organized shelters, provided free medical care and looked out for their most vulnerable citizens,” he

said.

He also urged Americans to support the ongoing relief efforts by donating money to organizations listed on a USAID webpage that are providing assistance on the ground.

Earlier March 17, Obama visited the Japanese Embassy in Washington where he signed a condolence book. According to a reporter who traveled with the president to the embassy, Obama said he had wanted to express America’s heartbreak over the tragedy and assure that the United States is “doing everything we can to stand by our great friend and ally, Japan, in this hour of need.”

According to the reporter, Obama wrote in the book that “because of the strength and wisdom of its people, we know that Japan will recover, and indeed will emerge stronger than ever.” Obama also expressed his hope that the tragedy ultimately will serve to strengthen the relationship between Japan and the United States.

Obama spoke with Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan on March 16 and told him the United States will do everything possible to help Japan overcome the series of disasters that have occurred since March 11.

Secretary of Energy Steven Chu told a congressional committee March 16 that his department has sent 39 people and 17 tons of equipment to aid in the effort. The equipment includes aerial measuring devices and detectors to help detect radiation.

The Japanese government has evacuated people within 20 kilometers of the Fukushima plant due to slightly elevated radiation levels and warned those within 30 kilometers to avoid exposure by staying indoors. The U.S. government is urging Americans to retreat to a somewhat greater distance from the area based on standards used in the United States.

Despite escalating concern about a nuclear accident, the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami remain the source of greatest loss for most Japanese. Some half a million people are homeless, and the number of dead is expected to exceed 10,000.

U.S. Radiation-Detection Experts and Supplies Sent to Help Japan

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration has sent equipment and expertise to help Japanese authorities as they work to contain the emergency at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant.

U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu told a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee March 16 that the Obama administration has sent two Energy Department experts to provide "advice and technical assistance" to Japan, and is positioning "Consequence Management Response Teams" in U.S. consulates and military installations located in the country.

"These teams have the skills, expertise and equipment to help assess, survey and monitor in sample areas. They include smaller groups that could be sent out to gather technical information in the area," he said.

To help assess radiation levels in the country, the United States has sent Japan some aerial-measurement capability that includes detectors and analytical equipment, he said.

In total, the Department of Energy team "includes 39 people with more than 17,000 pounds of equipment," Chu said.

Deputy Secretary of Energy Dan Poneman spoke to reporters via teleconference March 16 and said the Energy Department's radiation detectors are already being used to collect data.

"There's nothing we want more than to have accurate data," he said. "We're flying those pods that we just sent over yesterday ... to pick up better data on the ground and any radiation that might be coming."

Poneman said the Obama administration is doing "everything in our power" to support the Japanese efforts to cool down the reactors' fuel elements. "The more success we have at that, the lower the long-term effect is going to be," he said.

Speaking with Poneman, the State Department's under secretary for management, Patrick Kennedy, said the reactor failures at the Fukushima Daiichi plant are posing a serious hazard to people living in the vicinity of the plant and could present "a potential health hazard to a broader region." He said the U.S. commitment to Japan is "unshakable" and Americans are standing by the Japanese people.

"The United States continues to support the strenuous and heroic effort by Japanese responders to address this nuclear emergency and is making available all relevant expertise, assets, equipment and technology at our disposal," Kennedy said.

He said U.S. military forces, which have been responding to the humanitarian disaster, are remaining in Japan and have "the full capability to fulfill our alliance commitments" despite warnings issued by the United States and other countries for their citizens to leave areas

in northeastern Japan.

Kennedy said U.S. diplomatic, consular, military and other governmental operations in Japan are continuing, and U.S. disaster relief teams continue to help Japanese authorities throughout the affected area.

U.S. HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS CONTINUE

The Japanese government reported that, as of March 16, the earthquake and tsunami have caused 4,314 deaths and left 8,616 people missing. In response to the disasters, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team comprised of disaster response experts, nuclear experts, and urban search-and-rescue (USAR) teams from the Fairfax County, Virginia, and Los Angeles County, California, fire departments.

Those teams include 144 people, 12 canines trained to detect live victims and 45 tons of equipment.

USAID reported that on March 16 both USAR teams deployed with the Disaster Assistance Response Team to southern Ofunato City and Kamaishi City in Iwate prefecture to search for survivors. They are conducting more searches March 17, the agency said.

President Obama used his March 16 appearance on the sports network ESPN to urge Americans to support relief efforts in Japan. In an interview in which he was asked to discuss his predictions for the popular NCAA college basketball championship tournaments, the president urged sports fans to take time while making their predictions to visit USAID's website and contribute to charities listed there.

Obama said individual American contributions to help the people of Japan in their hour of need would be "a great gesture."

Secretary Clinton Offers U.S. Support for Tunisia's Transition to Democracy

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States will work to create new jobs and economic opportunities in Tunisia as the country transitions from decades of autocratic rule. Speaking in Tunis, Clinton also praised the country for its response to the humanitarian crisis sparked by fighting in neighboring Libya.

Clinton is highest-level U.S. official to visit Tunisia since its people pressured Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali to relinquish power on January 14 after weeks of

protests that were triggered by the December 2010 suicide of a young fruit seller.

Speaking with Tunisian Foreign Minister Mouldi Kefi in Tunis March 17, Clinton said the Tunisian people "made history" and showed the world that "peaceful change is possible."

The United States "will stand with you as you make the transition to democracy and prosperity and a better future," Clinton said.

"We know there is a lot of work to be done, but we are very confident about the potential for democracy and economic opportunity in Tunisia, and the United States will be ready to assist in any way," she said.

Clinton announced new U.S. support for democracy, job creation and greater prosperity in Tunisia. She said U.S. technology companies such as the Microsoft Corporation will work with Tunisian civil society groups to expand information and communications capacity across Tunisia by providing computers, software, training and other technical assistance.

"We will also work to create new jobs for Tunisians," she said. The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) "will offer financial support in the form of direct loans, guarantees and political risk insurance," she said. "OPIC is already supporting two Tunisian private equity firms that are focused on small and medium-size businesses and will support investor visits by American businesses to Tunisia."

The State Department had also announced March 15 that OPIC will be providing up to \$2 billion in financial support to encourage private sector investments and build partnerships between U.S. and Arab businesses in support of investment across the Middle East and North Africa.

Clinton said the Obama administration is asking the U.S. Congress to establish a Tunisian-American enterprise fund that would "stimulate investment in the private sector and provide businesses with low-cost capital," with a particular focus on Tunisia's less-developed areas.

"We will also work through the United States-North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity to link business leaders and young entrepreneurs. We want the ideas of young Tunisians and we want to provide the startup capital that they would need to begin their own businesses," Clinton said.

She said she and Foreign Minister Kefi also discussed additional ideas for economic assistance, and said Tunisia is eligible for consideration for a grant by the State

Department's Millennium Challenge Account, adding "we look forward to receiving the proposals from the government as they are formulated."

The secretary also praised Tunisia's humanitarian response to the violence in neighboring Libya, which has caused many refugees and foreign workers to seek emergency shelter in Tunisia.

"During a difficult time for your own country, the Tunisian people have shown great generosity in helping to ease the suffering on your own borders. The United States has been very proud to support your efforts," she said.

Peace Corps Honors First Director for Commitment to World Peace

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — In early March at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, a group of early Peace Corps volunteers passed the torch — actually a piece of kente cloth — to a new group of volunteers in a traditional African departure ceremony.

The returned volunteers knew that the challenges the departing volunteers were about to face would turn into lifetimes of community engagement and greater understanding of other peoples.

Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams described this scene to a gathering of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers at a March 15 State Department ceremony honoring the corps' first director, R. Sargent Shriver. "By living among the people they serve, sharing their food, their customs ... Peace Corps volunteers offer assistance in a direct and personal way. ... Inevitably they learn as much as they teach," Williams said.

"We honor Sargent Shriver and his commitment to promoting world peace and friendship," Williams said. Williams presented a Peace Corps lifetime achievement award to Shriver's son, Tim Shriver, head of the Special Olympics. For many years, the elder Shriver also was active in the organization his wife Eunice founded and his son now leads. Sargent Shriver died at age 95 on January 18, less than two months shy of Peace Corps' 50th anniversary on March 1.

"People around the world realize [Peace Corps] is not a service of one country to another but of people to people," Tim Shriver told the gathering, which included the ambassadors of Ghana and Tanzania, the first countries to host Peace Corps volunteers. "This is a service of peace, of building a community with the exchange of ideas and the understanding that comes from learning a language and

living together.”

Through volunteers’ service in other countries, “Peace Corps helps ensure global development is a two-way street — development not only of societies and economies, but of outlooks and perspectives as well,” said Williams, a Peace Corps volunteer teacher-trainer in Costa Rica in the late 1960s.

Kelly McCormack, a volunteer in municipal development in Guatemala from 2007 to 2009, agrees. “I have memories and a global perspective that will stick with me for the rest of my life,” said the resident of Northern Virginia.

Today, volunteers work “shoulder-to-shoulder with their hosts ... combating the spread of malaria in Senegal, empowering women through microenterprise in Thailand, teaching students computer literacy in the Dominican Republic, improving the health of children in Morocco,” Williams said.

In a taped message aired at the ceremony, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called volunteers “ambassadors to the world. They’re often the first American in their host community and the first American that many have ever met. They share their generosity, creativity and skills in ways that change lives and deepen understanding across cultures.”

“Peace Corps volunteers commit to making a difference for others and in turn find themselves forever changed,” added Judith McHale, under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.

Working as an agricultural teacher in Chiti, Nepal, in the mid-1970s, Paige Grant discovered an interest in soil-erosion prevention and other forms of conservation. So, she enlisted children in the community to join her in planting trees in an eroding watershed. When Grant returned to Chiti for a visit with her family in 2007, she was delighted to see that the watershed had recovered.

President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps by executive order weeks after taking office in 1961 and convinced Shriver to lead the agency. Nine months later, Peace Corps sent 500 volunteers to nine countries. At the beginning, Shriver decided to “risk everything in a leap of faith” to keep the agency going when many people didn’t think it could succeed and even referred to it as a “kiddy corps,” his son said.

Two years after the first volunteers left the United States, 6,500 volunteers were serving in 50 countries and 800 volunteers had returned home. By 1965, 3,000 volunteers had returned to the United States, and that year one-third of them came to a conference in Washington organized by Vice President Hubert Humphrey to explore the role

veterans might take in education, business, community programs and government.

One area in which returned volunteers have made a difference is education. The Peace Corps has supplied U.S. schools with a steady flow of teachers. Returned volunteers have brought to American universities the teaching of languages like Hausa, Pashto and Tamil, Williams said. Grant, who farms near Santa Fe, New Mexico, educates informally, speaking to community groups like the Girl Scouts about Nepal and conservation.

Kathryn Clark served two tours as a Peace Corps volunteer. After her first tour in Sierra Leone from 1968 to 1969, she returned home to North Carolina where she became a state coordinator for Special Olympics. At Sargent Shriver’s request, she rejoined Peace Corps and served in Jamaica in the mid-1980s, becoming the first volunteer to launch a Special Olympics project in that country.

As McHale said, “It’s telling that Peace Corps volunteers don’t refer to themselves as ‘former’ anything. They are simply ‘returned.’”

On March 16, Tim Shriver and Williams signed an agreement for Peace Corps and the Special Olympics to work together to increase opportunities to support youth and people with intellectual disabilities around the world.

Since the Peace Corps began in 1961, nearly 200,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in 139 countries. More than 8,000 volunteers are currently serving in 77 countries.

Statement on Illicit Arms Smuggling in Middle East

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
March 16, 2011

STATEMENT BY MARK TONER, ACTING DEPUTY SPOKESMAN

Illicit Arms Smuggling in the Middle East

In light of the recent seizure of advanced arms and related material by Israel and Egypt bound for terrorist groups, the United States reiterates its strong condemnation of illicit smuggling activities. We underscore that all countries have obligations under relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions to prevent such trafficking in arms and ammunition. Iran, in particular, is prohibited by United Nations Security Council resolution 1747 from exporting any arms and related materials. Any activity to the contrary is another example of Iran’s destabilizing activities in the region. We call upon all regional countries to enforce these obligations. We will continue to work

closely with our partners to prevent the shipment of arms to terrorist groups.

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