

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

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## Obama Administration Takes “Holistic” Approach to Human Rights

By Jane Morse  
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration is taking a “holistic” approach to human rights — viewing human rights, democracy and development as supportive of one another, says Michael Posner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor.

“Human rights reflect what a person needs in order to live a meaningful and dignified existence,” Posner said March 24 in a speech to the American Society of International Law, a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization founded in 1906 that has some 4,000 members from nearly 100 nations.

“Human dignity has a political component and an economic component, and these are inexorably linked,” Posner said. He acknowledged that many Americans have been suspicious of the international focus on economic, social and cultural rights because of the misuse of these demands in earlier times.

“For decades, the Soviet states and the nonaligned movement critiqued the United States for a perceived failure to embrace economic and social rights,” Posner said. “They used the rhetoric of economic, social and cultural rights to distract from their human rights abuses. They claimed economic rights trumped political rights, while in fact failing to provide either. We have prioritized political and civil rights because governments that are transparent and respect free speech are stable, secure and sustainable — and do the most for their people.”

But “it is time to move forward,” Posner said. “The Obama administration takes a holistic approach to human rights, democracy and development. Human rights do not begin after breakfast. But without breakfast, few people have the energy to make full use of their rights. As [American civil rights leader] Martin Luther King once noted, an integrated lunch counter doesn’t help the person who can’t afford to eat there.”

The United States, he said, will work constructively to adopt “fair and well-reasoned” resolutions at the United Nations that speak to issues of economic, social and cultural rights and are consistent with U.S. laws and policies. “We will emphasize the interdependence of all rights and recognize the need for accountability and transparency in their implementation, through the democratic participation of the people,” Posner said.

“We will do this understanding that these goals must be achieved progressively, given the resources available to

each government,” he said. “But we will also stress that nothing justifies a government’s indifference to its own people. And nothing justifies human oppression — not even spectacular economic growth.”

Posner added that the United States will “push back against the fallacy that countries may substitute human rights they like for human rights they dislike, by granting either economic or political rights. To assert that a population is not ‘ready’ for universal human rights is to misunderstand the inherent nature of these rights and the basic obligations of governments.”

Posner said the link between the liberty of a country’s citizens and their basic economic and social well-being can be seen today on the streets of Cairo, Tunis and other Arab cities.

“In the Middle East, the public understands the connection between corruption and impunity on one hand and lack of freedom and economic opportunity on the other. That is why the story of a Tunisian vegetable vendor, who was so humiliated by local authorities that he set himself ablaze, resonated around the region,” Posner said.

Posner, who accompanied Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton when she visited Egypt the week of March 14, said the Egyptian activists and government leaders they spoke with view political and social rights, transparency and accountability, economic and social progress as inextricably linked.

“Egypt’s prime minister described his goals as promoting ‘freedom, democracy and social justice,’” Posner said. “Young activists told us the Tahrir Square Revolution was spurred by both the denial of basic political freedoms and the absence of jobs and economic opportunity.” Egypt’s new labor minister, Posner said, stressed his efforts to restore workers’ rights to free association, which he sees as a prerequisite to building a strong Egyptian economy. “And when we met with Coptic Christian leaders, they spoke of a desperate need for educational reforms to combat religious bigotry and sectarian violence. Egyptians see the intersections between these issues as obvious and uncontroversial.”

U.S. policy, Posner said, “aims to help the Egyptian people achieve true stability as they build a political system that will honor the aspirations of all citizens — women and men, Muslims and Copts, bloggers and businessmen. Egyptians need the freedom from fear that the state security police will knock on their door in the night or hack their Facebook pages. And they also need decent jobs for the nearly one-fifth of the population that is still living on less than \$2 a day.”

The United States, Posner said, will continue to urge other countries to invest in a better future for their citizens. "We stand willing to assist by pursuing an approach to development that respects human rights, involves local stakeholders, promotes transparency and accountability and builds the institutions that underpin sustainable democracy," he said.

### **Clinton Statement on U.N. Council Action on Religious Intolerance**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman  
March 24, 2011  
2011/466

#### STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

#### Adoption of Resolution at Human Rights Council Combating Discrimination and Violence

The United States welcomes today's action by the UN Human Rights Council to further the international community's efforts to combat religious intolerance. The consensus resolution adopted by the Council today represents a significant step forward in the global dialogue on countering intolerance, discrimination, and violence against persons based upon religion or belief. We appreciate the leadership shown by the Organization of the Islamic Conference and member states on today's landmark achievement.

The United States strongly supports today's resolution, which rejects the broad prohibitions on speech called for in the former "defamation of religions" resolution, and supports approaches that do not limit freedom of expression or infringe on the freedom of religion. This resolution demonstrates a desire to move the debate on these shared challenges in a constructive and affirmative direction. Our divides can be bridged through an effort to listen to each other and to seek common ground. This resolution is a direct result of this type of engagement with the global community.

Today's adoption of this resolution by the UN Human Rights Council is an important statement that must be followed by sustained commitment. At a time when violence and discrimination against members of religious minorities is all too common, we urge the international community to continue to uphold the freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As I said last month in Geneva, we must support those who are willing to stand up on behalf of the rights we cherish.

### **NATO Assuming Command of Libyan No-Fly Zone**

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States is transferring command and control of the international community's enforcement of the no-fly zone in Libya to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Speaking in Washington March 24, Clinton said all 28 NATO member countries had also agreed to "authorize military authorities to develop an operations plan for NATO to take on the broader civilian protection mission" that was authorized by United Nations Security Council resolutions 1970 and 1973 in response to the Libyan government's attacks on its own people.

Clinton said that U.S. forces will continue to provide support for the operation, known as Odyssey Dawn, and she welcomed the decisions of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to contribute aircraft.

The secretary also announced that the U.S. Agency for International Development has sent 18 doctors and nurses to provide medical support to the Libyan people in Benghazi.

At the Pentagon, Joint Staff Director Vice Admiral Bill Gortney said March 24 that the handover of command and control will be "a complicated process" because of the need to try to keep the same type of architecture and information technology support that has been in place under U.S. command.

But Gortney noted that the pace of Operation Odyssey Dawn has been "pretty phenomenal" when considering that only one week has passed since the U.N. Security Council authorized the operation and military forces began taking action on March 19.

Gortney said approximately 75 percent of combat air patrol missions in support of the no-fly zone are now being executed by non-U.S. military personnel, and U.S. coalition partners are contributing 26 of the 38 ships that have been deployed in support of the operation.

#### COALITION SEEKS TO AVOID CAUSING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Gortney said that when and where forces loyal to Colonel Muammar Qadhafi threaten the lives of their own people or violate the no-fly zone, "they will be attacked," and the coalition will also stop any of the regime's attempts to break the arms embargo that was imposed by the United Nations.

"Our message to the regime troops is simple: stop fighting, stop killing your own people, stop obeying the orders of Colonel Qadhafi. To the degree that you defy these demands, we will continue to hit you and make it more difficult for you to keep going," he said.

Although regime forces have withdrawn from Benghazi, they are still attacking civilians in Misurata and Zintan, he said. The coalition's rules of engagement permit them to attack Qadhafi's forces inside populated areas, but Gortney said they are not doing so, out of concern that such an operation would cause civilian casualties.

"Unless we can find – a mechanism to achieve the effect without harming the very people that we're trying to protect is the challenge there," he said. "That's a very, very hard task to do, and we're trying to do it to the best of our ability."

Despite claims to the contrary by Qadhafi's regime, there are currently no reports that Operation Odyssey Dawn has caused any Libyan civilian casualties. Gortney said coalition forces are trying to put pressure on Qadhafi's forces outside the cities.

"If you can work on their supply lines, their logistics capability, cut them off, they're not going to be able to sustain their efforts inside the city," he said.

### **U.N. Rights Council Approves Investigator on Iran**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington – The U.N. Human Rights Council authorized a special investigator on Iran March 24 to examine reports of excessive use of the death penalty, executions by stoning and inhumane treatment of political opponents.

"The United States and other partners are gravely concerned about the situation in Iran, where respect for fundamental human rights has deteriorated dramatically in recent years," U.S. Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe said during council debate in Geneva.

"Today we have been able to see the council respond to a chronic, severe human rights violator, which is Iran, and we're very pleased at this development," Donahoe said later.

Donahoe told reporters after the council meeting that the decision represents a seminal moment for the Human Rights Council. "It is the first new mandate that is country-specific that has been created at the Human Rights Council since the creation of this body in 2006, so it's a very important moment," the ambassador said.

The council voted 22-7 with 14 abstentions for the resolution, proposed by Sweden, to appoint a special rapporteur on human rights in Iran.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a report to the Human Rights Council on March 14, called on the Iranian regime "to fully guarantee freedom of expression and assembly and to open up greater space for human rights lawyers and activists."

According to that report, "The human rights situation in Iran has been marked by an intensified crackdown on human rights defenders, women's rights activists, journalists and government opponents. Concerns about torture, arbitrary detentions and unfair trials continue to be raised by U.N. human rights mechanisms."

"There was a noticeable increase in application of the death penalty, including in cases of political prisoners, since the beginning of the year 2011," Ban's report said.

He also cited numerous cases of amputations, floggings and the continued sentencing of men and women to death by stoning for alleged adultery.

Donahoe said country-specific special rapporteurs are used only in extreme situations, and Iran is one of those.

"It's an extremely valuable tool for the Human Rights Council. And it's probably the single most important tool that was created along with the council," she said.

Donahoe said Iran stands with cases like North Korea and Burma, both of which have been the subject of human rights resolutions at the General Assembly every year.

"Those two other cases also had had a special rapporteur at the council," she said. "So the fact that Iran did not have a special rapporteur until today was a glaring omission on the part of the council that was rectified by the action today."

Donahoe said the independent reporting from the special investigator will help the Human Rights Council responsibly address the serious human rights abuses described by Ban's report.

"The most important thing to keep in mind is that the establishment of this special rapporteur will have a lot of value for a variety of reasons regardless of how the Iranian regime reacts," she said. "It's important that the international community speak strongly to condemn the human rights practices in Iran, and we have done that today."

## Save the Children Opens Safe Spaces for Young Evacuees in Japan

By Kathryn McConnell  
Staff Writer

Washington — The aid group Save the Children has set up child-friendly spaces at six evacuation centers in Japan's Iwate and Miyagi east coast prefectures where children can rest and interact with other children.

"The spaces provide young children an opportunity to draw, play cards, play with balls and talk with other children close to their age," said Ian Woolverton, a spokesman for the group. "Within a space, children of similar age tend to gravitate toward each other."

On March 11, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake occurred off Japan's east coast. The quake and resulting tsunami caused extensive damage in a wide area. More than 9,100 people have been confirmed dead so far, nearly 14,600 are missing, and about 264,000 displaced people are housed in evacuation centers. The United States has provided more than \$23 million in humanitarian aid to Japan, according to a March 22 fact sheet from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"Our experience in disaster response tells us that if we can return a child to as normal an environment as possible following a disaster like a tsunami or earthquake, there is every chance that child will not suffer from long-term psychological anxiety," Woolverton said.

The protected play areas also give parents a break from child care and time to look for other family accommodations, apply for disaster assistance or begin to clean their home.

The spaces, which currently serve around 200 hundred children between ages 5 and 11 from 10 evacuation sites, are either in an extra room at an evacuation center or are outdoors if all the rooms at a center are full. More child spaces will be set up in coming weeks to serve more children, Woolverton said.

Staff members recruited from among people staying at an evacuation center lead activities for the children. The children are eager to have something to do other than watch distressing images on television news broadcasts, Woolverton said. The volunteers are supplemented with members of the Save the Children teams in Japan. Save the Children has been operating in Japan for 25 years.

Woolverton talked about two boys, ages 9 and 11, who met at a child-friendly space. The two soon began to talk to each other about their anxieties associated with what had happened to them and what they see on television about the Fukushima nuclear plant. They became "an

informal support network for each other," he said.

A 9-year-old girl named Erika enjoys her child-friendly space so much that she markets it to other children by drawing pictures of the space and putting them up around the evacuation center, Woolverton said.

As of March 24, Save the Children had received a total of \$18 million in cash and in-kind donations worldwide to help Japan. Approximately \$12.7 million of those funds were from U.S. sources, according to spokesman Lane Hartill.

Large corporate donors include major U.S. retailers Target Corporation and Toys"R"Us Inc. Each contributed \$500,000 to support children and families affected by the earthquake and tsunami. In addition, Toys"R"Us donated urgently needed diapers, blankets, pajamas, washcloths, towels and hats in affected areas.

Support also is coming from artists like Linkin Park, Enrique Iglesias and Counting Crows, who are contributing new songs to the nonprofit group Music for Relief to support Save the Children's work in Japan. (The growing catalog of songs can be downloaded at a download to donate website.)

In addition to establishing the child-friendly centers, Connecticut-based Save the Children distributed blankets to help evacuees cope with unusually cold temperatures, coordinating its efforts with those of other nongovernmental organizations and local charity groups.

"If we were working in a place like Pakistan or Haiti, we would be doing a whole range of relief programs — providing basic health care and distributing food and shelter materials. But here there is no need to do that because the Japanese authorities have done a really good job of responding to the most pressing humanitarian needs. We try to identify where we can add some value."

So Save the Children concentrates on spaces for children. Says Woolverton: "We know from experience that children are the most vulnerable in a disaster."

## Gains Noted, but Resolve Against Disease Reaffirmed on TB Day

By Charlene Porter  
Staff Writer

Washington — Tuberculosis treatment has become more accessible, deaths have declined and new treatment and diagnostic methods are in the pipeline. Those are the gains against the disease being noted on World Tuberculosis Day, March 24.

At the same time, the international health community

recognizes that a sustained campaign against an increasingly dangerous disease must be "aggressive and innovative," according to the head of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Dr. Rajiv Shah.

In his statement marking the day, Shah noted "tremendous progress" against TB. "Milestones include a 35 percent decline in mortality since 1990, a 14 percent decrease in the prevalence of TB between 1990 and 2009, and the emergence of new diagnostic technologies that can detect multidrug-resistant TB."

These achievements of recent years have energized the cadre of specialists who focus on this disease, caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis. Christy Hanson, chief of USAID's Infectious Diseases Division, has been working on TB for about 20 years, and she says innovation in diagnostics and the promise of new drug development have given hope that the pace of progress against the disease might quicken.

"The mood, the tone of discussions in the TB community, is just dramatically different," Hanson said in an interview. "We can do this in a different way; we can let patients be cared for at home. [We may soon have] little home tests, community-based tests, so people don't have to go to health centers for diagnostics."

Disease research is producing these tools, and new drug treatment regimens may also soon be available to shorten the course of treatment from six months to four, Hanson said.

While some of the solutions are getting easier, the problem is also tougher, and it is called MDR-TB: multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, and its uglier cousin, extensively drug-resistant TB, XDR-TB.

Since the 1950s, TB has been effectively treated with a group of antibiotic drugs. But the long course of treatment can easily go off track, and a patient feeling better may stop use of the medicines amid uncomfortable side effects. That gives the TB bacteria still remaining in the patient's system the chance of developing resistance to the drugs to become MDR-TB.

"This form of the disease takes longer to treat with second-line drugs, which are more expensive and have more side effects," the World Health Organization (WHO) says. "XDR-TB can develop when these second-line drugs are also misused or mismanaged and therefore also become ineffective."

The drugs that can treat XDR-TB are even more limited. The disease remains transmissible in this advanced form, and the rapid spread of a difficult-to-treat disease is the nightmare of public health specialists everywhere.

WHO estimates that there are about 500,000 cases of MDR-TB, and an unknown number of cases of XDR-TB, perhaps 20 percent, or 100,000, of the MDR-TB cases. Less than one-third of XDR-TB cases are treated successfully, the agency reports.

"We cannot allow MDR-TB to spread unchecked," said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan in a Tuberculosis Day appeal for nations to step up efforts to tackle MDR-TB. WHO calculates that 2 million new cases of MDR-TB may emerge by 2015.

While this projection seems grim, remember that new mood among the specialists perceived by USAID's Hanson. That spirit can also be attributed to a new resolve to fight the disease in the international community, and recognition in recent years that public health is a security and economic issue. Without a healthy, robust population, a nation cannot hope to advance economically, and can become more vulnerable to crime and unrest.

The rapid and fatal spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1990s was key to that understanding of the importance of public health. Attention refocused on tuberculosis, an opportunistic infection that is the actual cause of death for many people whose immune systems have been ravaged by HIV. These developments have given rise to an unprecedented degree of funding and collaboration in the fight against diseases. International partners have created the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the United States implemented the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the Obama administration has created its Global Health Initiative.

USAID funding alone for international TB programs was \$243 million in 2010, up from \$176 million in 2009. A 2008 law authorizes \$48 billion over the next five years to combat global HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

But perhaps the greatest single symbol of U.S. commitment to fighting tuberculosis and related diseases is the attention the issue has received at the highest levels. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton reaffirmed the national commitment to fighting TB.

"We must redouble our efforts toward stopping the spread of this disease, and recommit ourselves to tackling this 9,000-year-old scourge that drains the life and saps the potential of so many," she said in a statement.

Clinton said the U.S. health and development agencies, with partners around the world, are making new discoveries about disease, improving laboratories, training more health workers, introducing new diagnostic and treatment tools, and saving lives.

**State Department Statement on Violence in Syria**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Office of the Spokesman  
March 23, 2011

STATEMENT BY MARK TONER, ACTING DEPUTY  
SPOKESMAN

Violence in Syria

The United States is deeply troubled by violence and civilian deaths in Dara'a at the hands of security forces. We are concerned by the Syrian Government's use of violence, intimidation and arbitrary arrests in Dara'a to hinder the ability of its people to freely exercise their universal rights. We condemn these actions and extend our deepest condolences to the families and friends of those who have been injured or lost their lives. We call on the Syrian Government to exercise restraint and refrain from violence against peaceful protestors.

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