

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Earthquake in Burma

Press Statement
Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Washington, DC

March 25, 2011

On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I offer our sincere condolences for the loss of life and damage caused by the earthquake in Burma, near the borders with Thailand and Laos. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by this tragedy.

President Obama Says U.S., Allies Succeeding in Libya

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the United States and its allies are succeeding in a “broad, international effort” to enforce United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at ending attacks on the Libyan people by forces loyal to Colonel Muammar Qadhafi.

“Because we acted quickly, a humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided and the lives of countless civilians — innocent men, women and children — have been saved,” Obama said March 26 from the White House.

He said the United States has engaged in military, political and economic missions as part of an overall strategy “to support the Libyan people and hold the Qadhafi regime accountable.”

Obama called for Qadhafi’s attacks against civilians to stop and for humanitarian assistance to be allowed to reach those in need. He also emphasized that those responsible for violence must be held accountable.

In a March 27 interview with NBC Television’s Meet the Press, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton praised international cooperation to protect Libyan civilians, and said there is a great deal of appreciation for the steps the United States and others have taken “to stop Qadhafi on his mission of merciless oppression.”

Clinton announced March 24 the United States would transfer command and control of the U.N.-mandated no-fly zone and arms embargo on Libya to NATO.

The U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 on March 17. The resolution authorized the no-fly zone that the Obama administration said has prevented Qadhafi from using air assets against his people and has helped create conditions to allow humanitarian aid workers and

supplies to reach the population. The mandate was a follow-up to Resolution 1970, adopted February 26, which condemned Libyan leaders’ violence against civilians, demanded the violence stop and imposed an arms embargo on the country.

During an interview on ABC Television’s This Week March 27, Clinton called the U.N. mandates a “watershed moment in international decisionmaking,” and said the mission was initiated by requests from Arab and European nations. She said the United States is one of a number of countries participating in enforcement of an “internationally authorized intervention” and humanitarian mission.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the CBS Television program Face the Nation March 27 that military efforts, which have focused on cutting off Qadhafi’s forces, logistics and supplies, are going “very well.”

Gates also spoke on This Week, and said U.S. military action has prevented the “large-scale slaughter that was beginning to take place.” He said that as the coalition takes on increased responsibility in Libya, the United States will begin to diminish its engagement and move to a supporting role.

In addition to the military mission, Clinton says the United States has pursued strict economic sanctions and has launched efforts to support Libyan political reforms.

She praised the African Union for convening a meeting of the international community to discuss the situation in Libya, and commended its call for democracy in Libya. The group met March 25 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. State Department acting deputy spokesman Mark Toner said in a statement March 26 that the United States is grateful for the emphasis the African Union placed on the effective protection of civilians and the urgent need to extend humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence. Toner also expressed appreciation for the African Union’s commitment to resolving the crisis within the framework of international legal structures, including the recent U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Clinton said the United States will continue to stand with Libyans and will keep working toward an end to the violence and for allowing peaceful protests that enable people to express their universal human rights and call for political and economic reforms.

U.S. Condemns Syrian Violence Against Protesters

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration strongly condemns the Syrian government’s actions against

peaceful demonstrators, including the killing of civilians and the detention of human rights activists and journalists. The Syrian people must be allowed their universal rights to freely assemble and express themselves, the administration says.

"We are calling for an immediate cease to the violence and killings of civilians at the hands of the Syrian security forces," White House press secretary Jay Carney said March 25. "And we also urge the Syrian government to refrain from in any way detaining ... human rights activists or journalists," he said.

According to press reports, at least 24 people were killed by security personnel March 25 in or around the southern city of Dara'a, and a 13-year-old boy was beaten to death at a protest in the coastal city of Latakia. Protests against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime began in Dara'a March 18 and have spread to other areas of the country, with demonstrators calling for greater freedom and an end to corruption.

Carney said the U.S. position on the Syrian government's actions against its civilians is "the same position ... as we've taken with others" in the Middle East that are experiencing political unrest.

He called on the Assad government to "pursue a nonviolent path," and to engage in political dialogue with the protesters.

"The stability and future of this region depend upon the decision by governments to listen to their people, to act on their legitimate aspirations and to open up their systems so that the people of these countries can have a greater stake in the future of their country and their own futures," Carney said.

The State Department's acting deputy spokesman, Mark Toner, described the Syrian government's actions against the demonstrators as "brutal repression" and said the Obama administration is having the U.S. ambassador in Damascus "make clear our position and urge the Syrian government to end all violence against peaceful protesters."

The United States wants to see the Assad government respect the rights of its citizens and "allow the people of Syria to peacefully demonstrate and express their free will and express their universal rights, and back away from violence," Toner said March 25.

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified said March 25 that the situation in Syria is "incredibly disconcerting" and the violence "seems to be getting worse." The official added that high-level State Department officials are "actively discussing a course of

action" on the matter.

Americans "Stand With Japan" in Support of Tsunami Survivors

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — More than 1,000 residents of and visitors to the Washington metropolitan area gathered among the city's cherry trees March 24 to show support for the people of Japan in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

The event, called "Stand With Japan," included a moment of silence followed by a walk around Washington's Tidal Basin. It came two days before the start of the city's annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, which celebrates the enduring friendship between the United States and Japan, symbolized by profuse pink and white blooms.

"Stand With Japan" was "a poignant time for people to take a moment for reflection ... on the challenges the people of Japan are facing," said Danielle Piacente, festival spokeswoman. "We are glad to be able to stand by Japan, which gave us these cherry trees 99 years ago."

The mayor of Tokyo presented a gift of 3,000 cherry trees to Washington in 1912.

Japan's ambassador to the United States, Ichiro Fujisaki, told the crowd he was grateful for the support shown at the event.

Attendees were asked to donate to the American Red Cross Japan Earthquake and Pacific Tsunami relief fund. The festival also is sponsoring an online auction, from which a portion of proceeds are designated for the fund.

"We have received an outpouring of support over the past days, and the Festival is uniquely positioned as a natural conduit to help connect, unify, and communicate to millions of people how they can support and contribute — throughout our 16 days of events (from March 26 to April 10) — and beyond," the festival committee says on its website. The website also invites viewers to make an online donation for Japan to the American Red Cross.

In addition, U.S. companies representing an array of industries are donating to the American Red Cross and encouraging their employees and customers to join them.

The American Red Cross has given an initial \$10 million to the Japanese Red Cross and is providing funding for the U.N. World Food Programme's effort to move and store relief supplies where they are needed.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is Washington's most popular springtime event. The festival is expected to attract 1 million visitors.

In East Asia, Sports Envoys Inspire Success On and Off the Field

By Sadie May Davis
Staff Writer

Washington — Three American baseball stars used their passion for the sport to teach youth audiences in South Korea and the Philippines about the link between success in sports and success in life.

Former Major League Baseball all-star Barry Larkin and Joe Logan, once a pitcher with the Montreal Expos, visited South Korea's Seoul, Gwangju and Jeju Island during a week in mid-February. They held baseball clinics, met with leaders of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and discussed the importance of diversity and tolerance with young Koreans.

Larkin and Logan focused on key lessons, including how to overcome challenges through hard work and self-discipline, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle by balancing education and sports and how multiculturalism enriches a society.

Brian Gibel, the cultural affairs officer of the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, said these messages were particularly well received by children in multicultural families who often encounter discrimination and struggle to achieve acceptance.

Larkin shared his story of growing up with a rare physical deformity: He was born with his feet turned backwards. Doctors told his parents he might be permanently disabled. Larkin had to wear a metal brace between his feet to keep them facing in the proper direction. He gradually overcame the deformity and became a successful athlete.

The players also discussed how sports and academics enhance each other, a relationship not recognized in a society where youth often have to "choose between a heavily sports-driven education and a strictly academic-focused curriculum," Gibel said.

Logan and Ken Griffey Jr. offered similar messages during a March visit to the Philippines. Ranked fifth on Major League Baseball's all-time home run list with 630 home runs, Griffey has played for the Seattle Mariners, the Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago White Sox. This was his first trip as a sports envoy for the U.S. State Department.

The baseball stars held two-day clinics in Cebu and

Manila, bringing in young players to focus on the basics of hitting, pitching and fielding while teaching coaches about developing talent and leading practices.

Logan and Griffey emphasized that hard work, teamwork and commitment are essential to success on the field and in life. Wossenyesh "Woosie" Mazengia of the U.S. Embassy in Manila said this is the first time that Major League Baseball players have conducted baseball workshops in the Philippines, and organizers expect the series of clinics to boost the sports' popularity in the country.

Larkin, Logan and Griffey traveled as part of SportsUnited, an international sports programming initiative directed by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The program aims to start dialogues at the grass-roots level with non-elite young athletes aged 7 to 17. An important goal of SportsUnited is to help participants discover how success in athletics can translate into life skills and achievement in the classroom. Since 2005, SportsUnited has sent more than 100 U.S. athletes to 39 countries.

SPORTS DIPLOMACY AS "SMART POWER"

The Sports Envoy program is one of three initiatives conducted by SportsUnited. The Sports Visitors program, a second initiative, brings athletes and coaches nominated by U.S. embassies to the United States to learn about nutrition, strength and conditioning, the U.S. law that forbids discrimination based on sex in programs receiving federal funds, sport and disability, and team building. Since 2003, SportsUnited has conducted 40 Sports Visitor programs with more than 600 participants from 44 countries.

Additionally, SportsUnited conducts a sports grant competition to enhance infrastructure for youth sports programs. The office has awarded 79 grants to U.S. NGOs to conduct programs around the world since 2002.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's vision of "smart power" diplomacy embraces the use of a full range of diplomatic tools — in this case baseball — to bring people together and foster greater understanding among people and cultures.

SportsUnited operates on the belief that sports are a shared cultural passion that can bring people together across the divisions of region, race and religion. Through these programs, athletes from the United States, visitors to the United States and participants abroad have the opportunity to share their love of sports and learn about other cultures and perspectives. In the East Asia-Pacific

region, Australia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam have participated in U.S. sports initiatives.

A variety of athletes have visited the region including baseball star Cal Ripken Jr., who visited China in 2007; Olympic figure skater Michelle Kwan, who visited China in 2007, South Korea in 2010 and Singapore in 2011; and former U.S. Women's National Soccer Team player Tiffany Roberts Sahaydak, who spent five days in Thailand in 2010.

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