

American

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President Obama Says Côte d'Ivoire's Gbagbo Must Give Up Power

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says Côte d'Ivoire's Laurent Gbagbo must give up power immediately in favor of the country's elected president, Alassane Ouattara, and tell those who are fighting on his behalf to lay down their arms.

"Every day that the fighting persists will bring more suffering, and further delay the future of peace and prosperity that the people of Côte d'Ivoire deserve," Obama said in an April 5 statement.

The president said the violence in the country could have been averted if Gbagbo had respected the result of the country's internationally recognized presidential election, which was won by Ouattara in November 2010. The four-month standoff since then has devastated the country's economy, created a humanitarian crisis and refugee situation that threaten the stability of neighboring countries, and led to the deaths of hundreds of Ivorian citizens.

Obama said the United States is deeply concerned over reports of massacres in western parts of the country, as well as the dangers that innocent people are facing as fighting continues between supporters of Gbagbo and Ouattara.

"All parties must show restraint and respect the rights of the Ivoirian people," he said, and welcomed Ouattara's pledge "to ensure accountability for those who have carried out attacks against civilians."

The White House reported that President Obama telephoned President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon to discuss the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. According to the report, both presidents shared "concerns about the ongoing violence, and discussed the need to end this crisis as soon as possible."

Obama told President Bongo Ondimba that former President Gbagbo "needs to respect the will of the Ivorian people and end his claim to the presidency," the White House said.

On March 30, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1975, which imposed sanctions on Gbagbo, his wife and three close associates, and called on Gbagbo to "immediately step aside" in favor of Ouattara. It also reinforced the mandate of the nearly 10,000-member U.N. Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), urging the U.N. forces to use "all necessary means" to

protect civilians, including preventing the use of heavy weapons against them.

On April 4, UNOCI forces undertook military operations against Gbagbo's forces to protect Ivorian civilians. In an April 4 statement, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said that in recent days U.N. peacekeepers "have been attacked repeatedly and Ivorian civilians have been targeted by heavy weaponry such as rocket-propelled grenades, heavy machine guns and mortars."

Rice condemned the violence against civilians and the peacekeepers and expressed strong U.S. support for UNOCI's "robust efforts ... to fulfill its mandate."

GBAGBO INSULTING AFRICAN PEOPLE, U.S. OFFICIAL SAYS

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson told an audience in Washington April 5 that Gbagbo's intransigence since the November election has provoked tensions across the country, and his regime has threatened the U.N. peacekeepers who are charged with protecting Ivorian citizens.

"Gbagbo's attempt to cling to power regardless of the high cost to millions of Ivorian citizens, regional stability and to Africa's reputation is a direct insult to the many millions of Africans who have worked so hard in recent years to promote economic development, democratic reform and political stability," Carson said.

From the beginning of the political crisis, the Obama administration has reached out to Gbagbo in a "proactive, engaged" effort to find a diplomatic solution to the standoff, he said.

Carson said that in late 2010, President Obama twice telephoned Gbagbo and sent a letter offering to allow him to come to the United States. The United States government had also reached out to a prestigious U.S. university to see if Gbagbo could become a distinguished fellow in residence and be allowed to write, lecture and travel in the United States. Carson added that France and two other countries had also tried to provide Gbagbo with encouragements to peacefully step down.

All U.S. overtures to Gbagbo were rejected, Carson said, and because of Gbagbo's recent participation in human rights violations, "the offer is no longer on the table."

Carson said the situation in Côte d'Ivoire offers a "test case for democracy in Africa," saying that election results and African democratic aspirations must be respected.

If Gbagbo had been allowed to hold on to power despite

losing elections, "it would have not only undermined the integrity of the ballot, it would have undermined the integrity of democracy and it would have given encouragement to a large number of African leaders who would choose to hold elections, lose them, but remain in power through extralegal means," he said.

Special Envoy Lyman Heads to Ethiopia, Sudan for Security Talks

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Newly appointed U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan Princeton Lyman is traveling to Ethiopia and Sudan to discuss Southern Sudan's transition to independence in July. The nation held a referendum earlier this year and voted overwhelmingly for secession from the northern government.

The ambassador left on April 2 for Ethiopia to attend security talks, and then travels to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on North-South issues and Darfur. While there, he will discuss a security agreement on the disputed border region of Abyei, borders for the two nations, citizenship issues and the division of oil revenues. A vote on Abyei's future was postponed, and a new date has not been announced.

Lyman will be working to support the parties' effort to fully implement the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Before leaving for the region, Lyman met with President Obama, and Lyman agreed to make two trips to the region in April — one focused on implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the other dedicated to Darfur, White House spokesman Jay Carney said after the meeting.

"The president outlined his serious concerns over the situation in Abyei and the impact that increased bombings are having on civilians in Darfur," Carney said. "The president underscored his commitment to the establishment of two viable states in northern and south Sudan in July."

Lyman acknowledged that there is a military buildup in Abyei, a disputed border region between the North and the South, and said the forces are coming from both sides in the form of militias. He said both sides are receiving more arms, which has caused the United Nations great concern.

Both are in violation of the peace agreement because neither side is supposed to have armed forces in Abyei, he said.

"There is an agreement that has been reached on how to have those forces be withdrawn, but it hasn't been

implemented," Lyman said. "It does involve the U.N. being a verifying and monitoring group."

Lyman said the first task for leaders in Southern Sudan will be to create an open, inclusive government and set economic priorities that use the new nation's resources to meet the basic needs of its people.

"Agriculture is going to be key. Education is going to be key," Lyman said at a press briefing March 31 after his appointment was announced. "They have to obviously improve infrastructure."

The fledgling Southern Sudan government will also have to learn how to manage its oil revenue, Lyman said.

Meanwhile, the State Department announced that Ambassador Robert Loftis, its acting coordinator for reconstruction and stabilization, departed for Sudan April 4. He will meet with State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials and with governors in Southern Sudan to discuss security and stabilization priorities. Loftis will also visit Civilian Response Corps members who are supporting the intensified U.S. diplomatic and development efforts throughout the South.

The United States strategy for Sudan has three major goals: saving lives and ensuring a durable peace in Darfur, implementing the long-standing 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and preventing Sudan from becoming a terrorist safe haven.

The United States continues to work closely with the African Union and the United Nations, meeting frequently with envoys from Britain, China, France, Russia and the European Union to coordinate efforts.

Throughout the peace process, the United States has continued to support and strengthen the African Union–United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). It has consistently pressed the Sudanese government to provide UNAMID with the freedom of movement required to fulfill its mission, and provides financial and logistical support for UNAMID's deployment.

PEACE AGREEMENT

The United States and the international community are focusing on a comprehensive approach to peace in Sudan that requires full implementation of the CPA. In Khartoum, the two parties to the CPA — the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) — continue their discussions to resolve outstanding issues.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, sometimes called

the Naivasha Agreement for the place where it was signed, set a series of agreements between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudanese government. It was intended to end a two-decade civil war between the North and the South, help establish a democratic government and provide for sharing oil revenues. It also set a timetable for Southern Sudan to hold a referendum on whether it would remain united with the North or become an independent country.

Medical Supplies Land in Japan; Radiation Levels Dropping

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington – More than 17 tons of medicines, supplies and hygiene products landed in Tokyo April 4, headed for the quake-battered northeastern region of Japan.

The U.S. disaster relief organization AmeriCares arranged the shipment of emergency medical supplies at the request of the Japanese government, according to an AmeriCares press release. The shipment is being delivered to AmeriCares' partner in the region, the Tohoku University Hospital. From there, the aid will be sent out to medical teams treating the injured and ailing at 14 different hospitals and evacuation centers.

"The humanitarian condition in Japan is still dire," according to the AmeriCares release, with more than 160,000 people living in evacuation centers, and thousands more staying in temporary shelters, even their cars. The shipment includes antibiotics, pain medications, sutures, bandages and wound dressings.

The Tohoku Hospital is in Sendai, the largest city in the earthquake zone, and has been assisting regional medical and evacuation centers in meeting medical needs since the March 11 disaster.

This is AmeriCares second major shipment of relief supplies into northeastern Japan since the earthquake, and it won't be the last. AmeriCares is expanding its relief team, anticipating an ongoing distribution of humanitarian aid to medical and evacuation centers in the months to come.

RADIATION MONITORING

The magnitude 9 earthquake and the tsunami that followed left a ravaged and devastated landscape in Japan, but when the damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant began spewing radioactive steam and leaking radioactive water, the disaster jumped to a new level. As Tokyo Electric Power Company struggled to prevent a meltdown of the nuclear reactors, residents evacuated a 20-kilometer zone around the plant. Radiation has been

detected in many parts of Japan and beyond since the leaks began, and monitoring equipment is widely distributed to continue to assess the invisible dangers. The World Health Organization (WHO) has surveyed the monitoring data and reported April 4 that levels seemed to have peaked about a week after the quake, and subsequent measurements detected less radiation in the air and water at most locations.

"[Radioactive] iodine levels have been on a generally downward trend following the peaks," according to the 24th situation report issued by the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office since the beginning of the disaster.

Fresh food products from various locales around the region are being tested for radiation; WHO reports that only one sample in 134 exceeded safe levels of radiation. Still, bans on both consumption and distribution of fresh vegetables are in place in designated regions near the plant.

U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE

U.S. sailors and Marines of the 7th Fleet are still in the earthquake zone, helping the Japan Ground Self Defense Force in the massive effort to return the region to some kind of normal. In Operation Field Day, U.S. and Japanese forces are cleaning up the island of Oshima, which was isolated when the tsunami destroyed ferryboats that usually shuttle between the island and the mainland. The troops have been clearing debris out of the harbors to allow a resumption of boat traffic, and they're cleaning up debris wherever else they are needed.

Colonel Andrew MacMannis, commanding officer of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, said his forces are "committed to helping out the people of Japan in any way possible." He said these forces have significant capability to apply to the disaster area.

"We are proud to help the Japan Self Defense Forces begin the large task of getting the island back to normal," MacMannis said.

U.S. troops and equipment of the U.S. Pacific Command stationed at various places in the region were headed to the area within 24 hours of the March 11 event. According to a Navy news release, the U.S. 7th Fleet has 14 ships, 130 aircraft and almost 14,000 personnel involved in the undertaking dubbed Operation Tomodachi, the Japanese word for "friendship."

Seventh Fleet forces have also had the grim task of searching Pacific waters for the dead. Ships, helicopters and other aircraft are searching almost 7,000 square kilometers for victims dragged out to sea as the tsunami receded from the land.

International Cooperation Seen as Key to Global Economic Recovery

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The major lesson of the recent global financial crisis is that international cooperation “is non-negotiable for stability,” says Dominique Strauss-Kahn, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

“The great challenges of today all require a collective solution,” Strauss-Kahn said April 4 in prepared remarks at George Washington University in Washington. “Globalization must be seen as a common endeavor.”

The global economy is too interconnected for nations to allow national interests to prevail during economic crises, Strauss-Kahn said, stressing that the new emphasis on putting global interests first ultimately is in the best interest of individual nations.

He said basic rules for monetary and fiscal policy that once were widely accepted “all came crashing down with the crisis.”

Today, with the previous consensus on managing economies “now behind us,” Strauss-Kahn said, the task remains “to rebuild the foundations of stability, to make them stand the test of time and make the next phase of globalization work for all.”

Strauss-Kahn called for a tax on financial activities, improved financial regulations and better supervision to properly implement the new rules.

While the global financial recovery has begun, Strauss-Kahn said, its effects are “unbalanced between countries and within countries,” leaving the overall economic situation fragile and uneven.

Prolonged high unemployment and high social inequality can strain social cohesion and political stability, which in turn can affect macroeconomic stability, Strauss-Kahn said. He urged countries to focus on social inclusion and to counter inequality as they work to rebuild national economies.

“We need a new form of globalization, a fairer form of globalization, a globalization with a more human face. The benefits of growth must be broadly shared, not just captured by a privileged few,” Strauss-Kahn said.

He emphasized that multilateral organizations will make up an increasingly significant part of this next phase of globalization, and said the IMF has already taken steps to adapt.

In addition to playing a key role in addressing the crisis, Strauss-Kahn said the IMF is looking ahead and “striving to better understand the complex interconnections running through the global economy.”

The goal of the IMF is to strengthen its ability to prevent crises, not just to manage them, Strauss-Kahn added.

The IMF has implemented a series of changes, including a new early-warning exercise to anticipate any future financial trouble, new reports that look at how domestic policies in “five key systemic economies” affect the rest of the world, and improvements in global monitoring of capital flows, he said.

He said the IMF is also working with the Group of 20 (G20) economies to “seek a cooperative path to higher growth,” and to strengthen the “global financial safety net to protect countries from sudden financial reversals of fortune.”

He added that the fund is moving to reconnect with its original mission: “to promote cooperation and fight the economic roots of war.”

Leaders will discuss global economic challenges and solutions at the IMF and World Bank annual spring meetings in Washington April 15-17, Strauss-Kahn said.

Scientists Detect Record Depletion in Arctic Ozone Hole

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — The depletion of the ozone layer over the Arctic is more severe than scientists have ever seen it, with a 40 percent loss occurring from the beginning of winter to late March.

“This is pretty sudden and unusual,” said Bryan Johnson, a research chemist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Boulder, Colorado.

But depletion of the ozone that protects the Earth from the sun’s harmful rays is not a complete mystery. Scientists have previously predicted that significant Arctic ozone loss would occur in the event of an unusually cold winter in the Arctic stratosphere. And the depletion is a common winter-to-spring event in Antarctica, where extreme cold in the stratosphere and ozone-depleting chemicals create what’s come to be known as the ozone hole.

The stratosphere is the second layer of the Earth’s atmosphere, beginning about 10 kilometers above the surface. We live in the first layer of atmosphere, the troposphere. Most ozone resides in the stratosphere, and

that ozone is called the ozone layer. Scientists have been watching its depletion for some time. Certain air pollutants eat away at ozone in conditions of very low temperatures and the increasing sunlight of springtime.

An international treaty, the Montreal Protocol, was adopted more than 30 years ago when nations of the world agreed that the ozone layer was diminishing and compounds called chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) – widely used as refrigerants and solvents – were the cause. Since the 1987 protocol, CFC use and manufacture has been slowly phased out, but the ozone-depleting compounds are long-lived and will linger in the atmosphere for decades to come. The ozone layer is expected to recover to pre-1980 levels outside the polar regions by 2030 or 2040. A complete restoration of the ozone layer over the poles is expected to take as much as 20 years longer.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has made the same observations about the Arctic ozone depletion this year. Secretary-General Michel Jarraud said, “The degree of ozone loss experienced in any particular winter depends on the meteorological conditions. The 2011 ozone loss shows that we have to remain vigilant and keep a close eye on the situation in the Arctic in the coming years.”

A WMO press release ventures that this year’s Arctic ozone depletion might have been worse had it not been for the phase-out of CFCs.

In Antarctica, the depletion of the ozone layer is an annual occurrence because of the extremely cold winter temperatures in the stratosphere. The Arctic winters, on the other hand, are usually not so severe and in some years, scientists detect no ozone losses in the northern regions. Before this year, the highest seasonal loss in the Arctic ozone layer was 30 percent.

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