

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

June 23, 2011

| | |
|---|---|
| Statement from President Obama on Sudan..... | 1 |
| Secretary Clinton Urges Integrated Security Strategy for Central America..... | 1 |
| Vienna Talks Focus on Improving Nuclear Plant Safety | 2 |
| Two Mighty Rivers, Intertwined to Protect Their Futures..... | 2 |

Statement from President Obama on Sudan

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
June 22, 2011

Statement from the President on Sudan

On Monday, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed an agreement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to reduce tensions in Abyei and allow UN peacekeepers from Ethiopia into the region. I commend the parties for taking this step forward toward peace, and I urge them now to build on that progress and agree to an immediate cease fire in Southern Kordofan. Under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, both parties committed to resolve their differences peacefully, and both parties have a responsibility to end the current violence and allow immediate humanitarian access to desperate people who have been driven from their homes and are now cut off from outside help.

The situation in Southern Kordofan is dire, with deeply disturbing reports of attacks based on ethnicity. The United States condemns all acts of violence, in particular the Sudanese Armed Forces aerial bombardment of civilians and harassment and intimidation of UN peacekeepers. With a ceasefire in Southern Kordofan, alongside the agreement to deploy peacekeepers to Abyei, we can get the peace process back on track. But without these actions, the roadmap for better relations with the Government of Sudan cannot be carried forward, which will only deepen Sudan's isolation in the international community. Without a cease-fire and political negotiations, the people of Southern Kordofan cannot enjoy the right to have their political grievances addressed. The negotiations now under way in Addis Ababa demand the urgent commitment from both sides to peace and to the agreement for immediate help to those civilians caught up in this conflict.

Secretary Clinton Urges Integrated Security Strategy for Central America

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — A coordinated strategy to combat organized crime and narco-trafficking is needed in Central America, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says, and the security problems plaguing the region require a transnational approach.

Speaking June 22 in Guatemala City at the International Conference of Support for the Central American Security Strategy, Clinton offered U.S. assistance that will focus on priorities set by Central American nations.

The secretary acknowledged a "shared sense of crisis" among Central American nations, and urged them to translate their concern into a shared sense of will that involves all aspects of society — from law enforcement and government to the private sector and the need to improve education and opportunities for the region's youth.

"The strategy must reflect the transnational nature of this crisis," Clinton said. "The cartels and criminals are not contained by borders and so therefore our response must not be either."

The secretary said the common priorities of "strengthening rule-of-law institutions, attacking criminal organizations head-on, rehabilitating those who have fallen into criminality while preventing young people from going down that path in the first place," will point the way forward.

The Obama administration is responding to Central America's need with nearly \$290 million in current fiscal year funding from foreign assistance accounts and agencies across the U.S. government that will support strategies identified by the countries themselves. This includes helping law enforcement institutions with data, technological and intelligence support, training for judges and community policing, and a \$20 million Challenge Grants program that will support their efforts to develop effective, accountable law enforcement institutions, Clinton said. The Obama administration also is continuing its efforts to reduce the demand for drugs in the United States and targeting weapons traffickers, she said.

In addition, the United States is beginning a new partnership with the private sector: For every dollar the U.S. government commits to preventing crime and narco-trafficking in a community, "businesses in El Salvador will invest three," Clinton said.

The Obama administration has joined with Canada, Colombia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, the European Union, South Korea, Spain, Mexico and Norway to form a "Group of Friends" whose combined assistance to Central America will total nearly \$1 billion in 2011.

But, Clinton said, Central American governments will need to show the political will necessary to root out corruption and ensure that institutions are accountable and effective as well as invest in education and opportunities for youth. They must also build "police forces and courts that are well-funded and well-equipped and capable of protecting human rights and earning the trust of the communities they serve."

Businesses and the rich “must pay their fair share of taxes and become full partners in a whole-of-society effort. True security cannot be funded on the backs of the poor,” she said.

As Central American nations demonstrate that will and confront crime and drug trafficking, she said, the United States will give them its sustained support.

“We will be your partner as you define and lead the way forward,” Clinton said.

Vienna Talks Focus on Improving Nuclear Plant Safety

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington – Member nations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are working in Vienna to strengthen the safety protocols in international agreements on the peaceful use of nuclear power.

Their meeting comes three months after the accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan.

“It is incumbent on all of us to take stock of the Fukushima Daiichi accident,” said the conference president, Antonio Guerreiro of Brazil, “and to learn the lessons it teaches us as we strive to enhance nuclear safety worldwide.”

A powerful earthquake in March sent a tsunami slamming into Japan’s northeast coast. The surge of water inundated the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and knocked out the electric power that sustained water pumps designed to maintain a safe temperature in the nuclear fuel core. The core overheated, radiation escaped the plant, people in the surrounding area were evacuated, crops have been tainted and the full scope of the irradiation is still unknown.

The incident caused reviews of nuclear power plant safety everywhere. While that process is still under way in the United States, the chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission told the IAEA member nations June 21 that “Our regulations for what is called a station blackout – essentially what happened in Fukushima – do not take into account an extended loss of AC power.” Gregory Jaczko said the review of U.S. safety practices at more than 100 nuclear facilities is also focusing on spent fuel pools, emergency planning and seismic issues.

Deputy U.S. Energy Secretary Daniel Poneman said the ministerial meeting will “inform our collective actions to strengthen” international nuclear regulatory practices. He added that the Obama administration also wants “to bolster our emergency preparedness plan and to expand our response capabilities” at home and abroad.

While international agreements on nuclear safety will be closely examined at this meeting, Poneman and IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano also emphasized that national regulators must also be allowed the flexibility to develop procedures for their unique circumstances.

The Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety adopted a declaration June 21 calling for the IAEA to have a stronger role in accident response and assistance. Over the course of the five-day meeting, working groups are developing recommendations for safety improvements and emergency response.

As it unfolded, the Fukushima-Daiichi incident caused significant public alarm in Japan and in other countries where citizens worried about the possibilities of airborne radioactive material travelling long distances and becoming an international health threat. That fear expressed itself in some cases in suggestions that nuclear power be abandoned. Poneman made clear that the United States will not turn away from nuclear power.

“Safe, secure nuclear power continues to have an important role to play in addressing global climate change,” Poneman said.

The U.S. energy official expressed admiration for the “deep courage” of the Japanese people and the “force of their national character in how they have responded to this crisis.”

Two Mighty Rivers, Intertwined to Protect Their Futures

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer

Washington – In 2010, organizations that oversee two of the world’s most powerful rivers came together to chart a better course for water-resource management.

When the Mississippi River Commission and the Mekong River Commission signed a partnership agreement in May 2010, they focused on sustainable development along their two river basins and on disaster preparation. Though the regional context may vary significantly, many of the challenges they face – improving water quality, assessing the impact of watershed infrastructure, maintaining a healthy ecological balance – are the same.

This sister-river partnership is one component of the U.S. State Department-led Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), comprising the United States and four of the nations – Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand – that share the Mekong River. The initiative seeks to increase regional cooperation and consultation on issues related to the four “pillars” of education, environment, health and infrastructure. Under the LMI’s environmental and health pillars, the United States supports projects promoting the

sustainable use of forest and water resources, preserving the biodiversity of the Mekong Basin and increasing access to safe drinking water.

For its part, the river partnership facilitates the sharing of best practices, lessons learned and other tools and techniques among the five member countries to manage waterways that are vital to millions of people in their respective regions.

According to Jeremy Bird, former chief executive of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, the two rivers' commissions strive together to manage their water resources against challenges related to climate change, extreme floods, hydropower development and increasing demand for water. He said improving navigation and trade and involving people in the river basins in decisions that affect their lives are also goals of the partnership.

Scientists, academics, and environmental and engineering experts from the five nations have already exchanged ideas on how to better manage floods and improve navigation, according to Stephen Gambrell, director of the Mississippi River Commission at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

New methods of flood control, involving the removal of levees and dams to ease floodwater pressures, are being adopted in the upper Mississippi River and its tributaries, Gambrell said. "The areas that are allowed to flood naturally within the flood plain can relieve stresses," he said. They offer one example of a U.S. water-management tool being shared with experts from other countries.

Exchanges are an important component of the sister-river partnership.

Delegates from the Mekong River Commission visited the Mississippi River Commission in June 2011. This visit, largely funded by the State Department and coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, brought high-level representatives from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, to meet with their U.S. counterparts and experts who work on issues related to basin governance, sediment transport, flood management and fisheries protection. The weeklong exchange culminated in a series of meetings and policy briefings with U.S. officials working on Lower Mekong issues in Washington, including Senator Jim Webb.

In August, the State Department's U.S. speaker program will send Shana Udvardy, of the nonprofit American Rivers organization, to Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

The State Department program is proposing a future visit by experts from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand

to two cities in Florida, two cities in Missouri, and Seattle, in order to assess environmental conditions and review communication systems for use in emergencies.

"Considering the global challenge of climate change, this exchange is truly valuable to all parties involved," said the State Department's Ariel Wyckoff.

The partnership is "a mutually beneficial relationship," agreed Gambrell. "The people of the lower Mekong have been living with and working alongside rivers much longer than [their counterparts] in the USA," so Americans have much to learn from their partners' experience.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)