

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama on International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
June 24, 2011

Statement by the President on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

As we mark the anniversary of the United Nations' Convention Against Torture, I join people around the world in honoring the victims of torture, paying tribute to all those who are courageously working to eradicate these inhuman practices from our world, and reaffirming the commitment of the United States to achieving this important goal.

Generations of Americans have understood that torture is inconsistent with our values. Over two decades ago, President Reagan signed, and a bipartisan Senate coalition ratified this landmark document, which affirms the essential principle that under no circumstances is torture ever justified. Torture and abusive treatment violate our most deeply held values, and they do not enhance our national security – they undermine it by serving as a recruiting tool for terrorists and further endangering the lives of American personnel. Furthermore, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are ineffective at developing useful, accurate information. As President, I have therefore made it clear that the United States will prohibit torture without exception or equivocation, and I reaffirmed our commitment to the Convention's tenets and our domestic laws.

As a nation that played a leading role in the effort to bring this treaty into force, the United States will remain a leader in the effort to end torture around the world and to address the needs of torture victims. We continue to support the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and to provide funding for domestic and international programs that provide assistance and counseling for torture victims. We also remain dedicated to supporting the efforts of other nations, as well as international and nongovernmental organizations, to eradicate torture through human rights training for security forces, improving prison and detention conditions, and encouraging the development and enforcement of strong laws that outlaw this abhorrent practice.

Urging an End to Violence in Burma

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
June 24, 2011

Statement by Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson

Urging an End to the Violence in Burma

The United States is concerned by on-going violence in Burma's northern Kachin State and other regions of the country and calls for a halt to hostilities. The Burmese Army and the Kachin Independence Army began fighting on June 9 and have continued over the past three weeks. We are particularly concerned by the reports of human rights abuses in the area, including reports of casualties, rape, and displacement of thousands of local residents. There have also been reports of clashes in Karen and Shan states.

We urge all appropriate authorities to ensure, in line with international standards, adequate support, safety, and protection for those persons fleeing conflict along Burma's borders. This recent violence underscores the need for an inclusive dialogue between the Government of Burma and opposition and ethnic minority groups to begin a process of genuine national reconciliation.

Secretary Clinton Says North Korea Needs to Address Concerns over Food Aid

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States will base its decision on whether to provide North Korea with food assistance on the country's relative needs and the ability to ensure that any assistance would reach the North Koreans who need it.

Speaking with South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan in Washington June 24, Clinton said the Obama administration is "deeply concerned about the well-being of the North Korean people," of which 25 percent reportedly are in need of food aid.

The United States has had a long-standing position that its humanitarian assistance is "separated from political and security concerns," Clinton said. "They are not considered in the same category at all."

U.S. administrations have provided food aid to North Korea in the past, but the Obama administration has not yet come to a decision on whether to provide new assistance, the secretary said.

"North Korea must address our serious concerns about monitoring and outstanding issues related to North

Korea's suspension of previous food aid programs before we can consider any decision," she said, and the decision "must be based on legitimate humanitarian needs, competing needs elsewhere around the world, and our ability to ensure and monitor that whatever food aid is provided actually reaches the people who are in need."

She said the United States also remains "firmly committed" to the peaceful elimination of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula and is open to direct engagement with North Korea over the issue. But, Clinton added, "Pyongyang must improve its relations with the Republic of Korea."

Both the United States and South Korea are committed to "work side by side to achieve lasting peace," while enforcing sanctions that prevent the further development of North Korea's nuclear program and its proliferation of nuclear materials, she said.

Prior to their remarks, Clinton and Kim signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the United States and the Republic of Korea on development cooperation. According to a June 23 State Department notice, South Korea is the newest member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and has made "impressive strides" to expand its overseas development assistance programs, as well as pledging to triple its budget to fund those programs by 2015.

"The MOU will enhance policy coordination between both sides to promote the impact and efficiency in aid delivery within mutually agreed priority areas such as global hunger and food security, maternal and children's health, and climate change" and "puts into place a meaningful partnership to expand the reach of development assistance and help encourage the shift from aid to sustained economic growth and prosperity," the State Department notice said.

In her remarks, Clinton said South Korea "approaches development with a unique credibility as one of the great success stories of the 20th century," noting that the country has "moved from being an aid recipient to an important donor nation."

She also praised South Korea's pledge to triple its development budget and its plans to host the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in November 2011.

"This was a poor, war-torn country that has risen to become the world's 12th-largest economy, and a very vibrant, effective democracy," Clinton said, describing its rapid economic rise as "inspiring."

Experts Cite 10 Signs of Better Health in 21st Century

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — Reductions in child mortality and progress in the prevention and treatment of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria are among the top 10 public health achievements in the first decade of the 21st century, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The nation's premier public health agency published "Ten Great Public Health Achievements — Worldwide, 2001-2010" June 24 in its *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*.

The CDC polled global health experts for their nominations in public health achievements. The list is derived from those suggestions. The report says these 10 are not ranked; all hold equal standing.

Two million fewer children die before the age of 5 than in years past, evidence that a reduction in child mortality is a significant health achievement of the last decade, according to the report. The annual rate of improvement in child mortality is also increasing. Greater access to immunizations, micronutrient supplementation and expanded access to freshwater helped to save the lives of children who might have died too soon in the past.

Expanded vaccination campaigns are key to the steep decline in deaths from infectious diseases, according to *MMWR*. Immunization against measles, polio and diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis prevented 2.5 million deaths a year. Broader understanding of the effectiveness of vaccines and innovative financing mechanisms led to this health achievement, according to *MMWR*.

The proportion of the world population with access to safe water rose from 83 percent in 2000 to 87 percent in 2008, while access to improved sanitation increased from 58 percent to 61 percent. These combined initiatives are helping to save young children from succumbing to diarrhea, which kills more young children every year than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.

A reduction in the number of new cases of HIV/AIDS and expanded access to treatment for the AIDS disease are also cited as health achievements of the last decade. The population in low- and middle-income countries receiving anti-retroviral treatment climbed to more than 5 million by 2009, a number that was inconceivable when the decade began.

The campaign against HIV/AIDS is closely linked to a reduction in the incidence and mortality of tuberculosis, one of the opportunistic infections that can attack the compromised immune system of a person who has

developed AIDS. "Since 2000, case detection and treatment success rates each have risen nearly 20 percent, with incidence and prevalence declining in every region," according to *MMWR*.

The first decade of the 21st century also brought progress against diseases that had come to be known as "neglected" tropical diseases, not because they are rare, but because they affect the world's poorest people who have little economic or political power to muster a strong counter-disease strategy. The expert poll found concerted efforts to make progress against three of these conditions, and elimination or eradication is in sight for dracunculiasis (Guinea worm disease) onchocerciasis (river blindness) and lymphatic filariasis. Fewer than 1,800 cases of Guinea worm disease were detected in 2010, and the CDC reports it is on the way to eradication. Drug distribution has controlled river blindness in the six countries where it is a threat, and elimination of transmission is expected by 2012. Lymphatic filariasis infected 120 million people in 2000, but massive drug administration campaigns have dramatically scaled back the number of cases. Sixty-three countries are still at risk.

Sometimes lives saved are not the measure of success, and such is the case with tobacco control. Premature deaths linked to smoking have risen by some 600,000 since 2000, but governmental commitments to reduce smoking through smoke-free policies, taxation, education, advertising and other methods surged, and for that reason, the CDC expert poll ranks tobacco control among the great public health achievements of the decade.

Education and awareness are the hallmark of progress for the CDC designation of global road safety as a public health achievement. Worldwide 1.3 million people die on the road each year, a number that is still climbing in developing nations. But the report finds an increased awareness of highway deaths as a public health issue, which has led to significant declines in road deaths in Europe. The U.N. General Assembly has designated 2011 to 2020 as a Decade of Action for Road Safety.

Increased international cooperation in the public health community has helped boost detection and awareness of pandemic diseases, another public health achievement of the last decade, the CDC said. International Health Regulations that became effective in 2007 provide greater capabilities for coordinated analysis and response in the event of an outbreak of a new virulent disease, the report says.

Through the CDC and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States has lent significant support to these achievements in public health. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), launched with \$15 billion in 2003, has helped

distribute HIV/AIDS treatment to millions. In 2010, the Obama administration introduced the Global Health Initiative, a \$60 billion program to continue the battle against disease in the developing world. The United States has also been in a leader in expanding immunization programs to protect more and more children from infectious disease, and in the continued pursuit of the eradication of polio.

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