

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Ambassador Visits Hama in Solidarity with Syrian Protesters

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford has traveled to the besieged Syrian city of Hama to show the Obama administration's support of the Syrian people's rights of free expression and assembly, even as security forces continued to surround the area.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said July 7 that Ford had arrived in Hama earlier in the day with U.S. Embassy personnel, after passing through both military and civilian checkpoints, and intends to remain in the city overnight to show U.S. solidarity with Syrians who "want a democratic future and are expressing those views peacefully."

She said the visit was not sponsored by the Syrian government, and that Ford had no government handlers or managers, but that the Assad government had been informed that U.S. Embassy personnel would be heading to the city.

According to press reports, since protests against the government began in mid-March, at least 1,100 people have been killed, hundreds more injured and thousands have been placed under arrest. Security forces reportedly killed 11 residents of Hama on July 5.

Hama, which was the scene of anti-government protests in the early 1980s, has an important place in the "history of free expression in Syria," Nuland said. The city had recently been the scene of peaceful protests against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, and "today we see security forces ringing the city."

For Ford "to go personally at this time and stand with the people of Hama, I think, expresses in physical terms, not to mention political terms, our view that the people of Hama have a right to express themselves peacefully, and that we are concerned about the posture that the security forces have taken," Nuland said.

She said the ambassador received "a very warm welcome" and had met with at least 12 residents "who are dissatisfied and concerned about the government's action" against demonstrators. Ford also visited a hospital that has been treating some of those injured by Syrian security forces.

Nuland said the ambassador will remain in Hama until July 8 and that he had told officials in Washington that the situation is tense, with many shops closed and residents expressing concern that the security forces surrounding the city will move in.

The Obama administration increasingly is focused on giving support to Syrians who are organizing themselves and calling for change. Nuland said Ford's visit was an expression of that support.

"I think part of the diplomacy that Ambassador Ford has been conducting and that we will continue to conduct with these Syrian opposition figures is to understand what they would like to see from the international community," she said. "We're at the early stages of that conversation."

The United States wants to see an end to the violence and for Syrian security forces to "return to their barracks," she said. The Obama administration also wants to see the Syrian people allowed to peacefully express themselves and for there to be "a real dialogue in Syria about a democratic transition."

Nuland added that President Assad's participation in such a dialogue remains "a decision that Syria and the Syrian people have to make."

"We need to ensure that this process is Syrian-led, that we are responding to their interests, to their needs," she said.

Along with demonstrating support for peaceful demonstrators, a senior State Department official who asked not to be identified said Ford's visit is also meant to learn about the opposition in Hama.

"We need to know who these guys are. We need to know what they aspire to in terms of a political process and a different future for their country. We need to make contact with them, and that's what he's there to do," the official said.

U.S. Sees Historic, but Fragile Moment in Sudan

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — As South Sudan prepares to become the world's newest independent state, U.S. officials who will be attending the July 9 celebrations in Juba say the fragile peace between northern and southern Sudan must not be taken for granted, and the two states will need to work together for both to achieve political and economic success.

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice, who is leading President Obama's delegation to Juba, said July 7 that the United States "has worked tirelessly to help make the promise of this moment a reality," through its continuous and high-level diplomatic engagement, and its strong support for the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the two sides, as well as the January referendum in which southern Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for

independence.

“By any standard this is a historic moment, and the fact that it’s occurring as a result of a democratic exercise through a referendum that occurred peacefully and on time is itself all the more remarkable,” Rice said.

But Rice added that it is “a fragile and fraught moment as well,” noting recent flashpoints in the region of Abyei and South Kordofan, as well as several components of the CPA that have yet to be implemented.

The situation “cannot and must not be taken for granted, least of all by the government of Sudan and the government of the Republic of South Sudan who will have to still work exceptionally hard to achieve an enduring peace and enable the emergence of two viable states that are peaceful neighbors,” she said.

The Obama administration remains committed to its road map of improving ties between Washington and Khartoum, and Rice said that after the January referendum it had begun the six-month mandatory process required to examine Sudan’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, but she said “there can be no lifting of that designation unless and until Khartoum fulfills its obligations under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.”

There are “different stages and different elements” to the road map, Rice said. The lifting of the state sponsors of terrorism designation depends on Sudan’s fulfillment of the CPA, but she also said there are other “major aspects of normalization and improvement” that depend on progress in areas such as the humanitarian situation in Darfur.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Deputy Administrator Donald Steinberg will be among those joining Rice in Juba as part of the U.S. delegation and also spoke July 7.

Carson said that along with resolving the status of Abyei, CPA fulfillment requires an agreement between North and South over the sharing of oil revenues and other financial arrangements, the resolution of five outstanding border disagreements and clarity over the citizenship and status of southerners currently residing in the North.

Both sides need “a reinvigoration of their efforts to ensure that their separation is characterized by dignity and mutual respect and in a manner that strengthens the continued viability, security and economic prosperity” of both, he said, adding that both sides will remain “very dependent upon one another for a long period of time,” and that it is in their mutual interest to support each

other.

Steinberg announced that the United States will host a conference in late September that will allow South Sudanese leaders to demonstrate their vision for their country to the international community and to encourage investment.

“The government of South Sudan asked us to hold this conference as an opportunity for them, two and a half months into their tenure, to show the international community a variety of commitments they’re prepared to make to be good development partners and good partners for the private sector,” he said.

Steinberg said the United States has already worked with South Sudanese leaders to develop a viable, functioning government, provide their people with access to water, expand school enrollment rates and finance the construction of roads, bridges and electrical power stations, and materially supported the January 11 referendum.

The Obama administration provided \$300 million in assistance to South Sudan in 2010, and the September conference offers it an opportunity to announce new aid plans, he said.

In addition, the conference will highlight “our emphasis on gender, our insistence that the government incorporate women into not only the delegations that they’re sending to these missions, but also fully integrate gender considerations into all of their development efforts,” he said.

USAID, Scientists Join in Search for Global Development Answers

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) are undertaking a new venture to build partnerships with developing world institutions at the same time they pursue their respective missions to provide foreign assistance and to support science and research in the United States. Top agency leaders who announced this collaboration July 7 have hopes that the partnership may lead to solutions to development challenges that seem hugely daunting today.

“It’s a win-win partnership in more ways than one,” said White House science adviser John Holdren at a July 7 press briefing about the new partnership, known as Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER). “The U.S. scientific community benefits from more robust international partnerships and from an increased awareness of how research can be used to

address global development challenges. Our foreign partners benefit from the expertise and enthusiasm of the scientific community."

The director of the NSF, Subra Suresh, said partnership is increasingly important when some of the world's worst problems transcend geographic borders. "We know that many of today's most pressing research challenges are global in scale, including decreasing clean water resources; global weather disruption; geohazards, such as earthquakes and tsunamis; and food security," Suresh said. "These complex problems cannot be addressed effectively without concerted international effort."

These collaborations will help nurture scientific talent in other countries, build scientific infrastructure where it is weak, and instill the values of collaboration and competition that allow scientific activity to transcend geographic and political boundaries, Suresh said.

The announcement of this global partnership was made in a room filled with high-power talent from leading scientific and technological institutions and agencies. USAID Director Rajiv Shah told audience members that their involvement in his agency's work has the capability to "transform the broader field of global development" because of the scientists' talent and ability "to think about solutions for problems that other people might find fundamentally intractable."

Rather than defining development as a transfer of resources from a wealthy country to a poor one, Shah urged his audience to think of development as a process by which scientific and technical partnerships are formed to help countries build their own capacities to solve the environmental, economic or health problems that plague their citizens.

The history of global development endeavors is also marked by projects that failed to give full consideration to the context, the capabilities, the skill level, and the long-term resources of a target population, he said. As an example, Shah described the invention of oral rehydration salts, which restore lost body fluids to prevent infant and toddler deaths due to diarrheal diseases. USAID didn't choose a solution that would be used in a developed country – a trip to a clinic, an examination, a diagnosis, a prescription – but rather, invented simple salts that a mother might administer to a child.

"By inventing oral rehydration, this agency and its partners not only helped change the mindset of what was possible, but it put the power to save those kids' lives in the hands of their mothers instead of doctors," Shah said. "They responded as you'd expect. They did so by the millions, and saved children's lives in one of the great success stories of global development."

That story illustrates that advanced technologies or scientific advances aren't always the best answers, Shah said. "The big breakthroughs that we're hoping will result from this PEER program are really designed to take problems that look like they couldn't be solved and give people the power, the tools and capacity to solve those problems themselves."

This program is being built on the foundation of six pilot projects conducted by USAID and NSF in Africa and South Asia. The projects placed American researchers on teams with local people, jointly analyzing specific environmental and natural resource problems and working toward long-term solutions.

Using science, technology and innovation as principle tools in the pursuit of economic development has been a hallmark of Shah's leadership of USAID, and a policy priority of the Obama administration.

Persecution of Religious Minorities in Iran

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
July 6, 2011

STATEMENT BY VICTORIA NULAND,
SPOKESPERSON

Persecution of Religious Minorities in Iran

We are dismayed over reports that the Iranian courts are requiring Youcef Nadarkhani to recant his Christian faith or face the death penalty for apostasy – a charge based on his religious beliefs. If carried out, it would be the first execution for apostasy in Iran since 1990.

He is just one of thousands who face persecution for their religious beliefs in Iran, including the seven leaders of the Baha'i community whose imprisonment was increased to 20 years for practicing their faith and hundreds of Sufis who have been flogged in public because of their beliefs.

While Iran's leaders hypocritically claim to promote tolerance, they continue to detain, imprison, harass, and abuse those who simply wish to worship the faith of their choosing.

We join the international community in continuing to call on the Iranian government to respect the fundamental rights of all its citizens and uphold its international commitments to protect them.

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