

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

September 21, 2011

President Obama: Libya Shows What World Can Do “When We Stand Together”	1
President Obama Helps Launch Open Government Partnership	2
Secretary Clinton: Women’s Political Participation Vital to Democracy	2
Body Count in Syria Rising “on a Daily Basis,” U.S. Says	3
Latinos Launch Campaign to Save Colorado River	4

President Obama: Libya Shows What World Can Do “When We Stand Together”

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the liberation of Libya from 42 years of Muammar Qadhafi’s rule has offered the Libyan people a new chance for freedom, dignity and opportunity, and the international community’s actions on their behalf have shown what the nations of the world can achieve “when we stand together as one.”

In his September 20 remarks to a high-level meeting at the United Nations in New York, the president said the Libyan people “are writing a new chapter in the life of their nation” after joining together in February and risking their lives through months of peaceful protests and in battle against Qadhafi’s forces.

“Make no mistake, credit for the liberation of Libya belongs to the people of Libya,” Obama said.

But the president said the international support that quickly mobilized when it appeared that Qadhafi’s forces were about to commit mass atrocities against civilians helped to stop the regime and save lives, and gave the Libyan people “the time and the space to prevail.”

“Libya is a lesson in what the international community can achieve when we stand together as one,” Obama said.

Although the world “cannot and should not intervene” every time there is injustice, there are times when it must act to “prevent the killing of innocents on a horrific scale,” the president said.

“This time, we, through the United Nations, found the courage and the collective will to act,” he said.

The intervention occurred thanks to cooperation between the Arab League, which appealed for action, the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), who enforced the U.N.-mandated no-fly zone and arms embargo and protected Libyan rebels on the ground, and Libya’s Arab neighbors, who joined the coalition as equal partners and cared for the humanitarian needs of its people, he said.

“This is how the international community should work in the 21st century: more nations bearing the responsibility and the costs of meeting global challenges. In fact, this is the very purpose of this United Nations,” Obama said. “So every nation represented here today can take pride in the innocent lives that will be saved and in helping Libyans reclaim their country. It was the right thing to do.”

The president said the United States will be a friend and partner to the Libyan people as they work to realize peace and prosperity through their newfound freedom. He announced that U.S. Ambassador Gene Cretz is en route to Tripoli and the recently reopened U.S. Embassy.

He urged those who continue to fight for Qadhafi’s regime to lay down their arms and join “the new Libya,” saying that democracy, trade and investment cannot flourish in the country unless it enjoys security. He also called for “a spirit of reconciliation, and not reprisals and violence” as Libyans seek justice for crimes committed against them during Qadhafi’s rule.

“As Libyans rebuild, let those efforts tap the experience of all those with the skills to contribute, including the many Africans in Libya,” he said. He urged the country’s new leaders to “enshrine the rights and role of women at all levels of society.”

The Libyan people deserve a transparent and accountable government, and the country’s wealth and resources must be used to serve them, Obama said.

He said Transitional National Council (TNC) President Mustafa Abdel Jalil has reaffirmed the TNC’s commitment to democratic principles. Libyans and the international community are all aware of the need for a new constitution that provides for the rule of law, the ability to form political parties, a strong civil society, and a timely transition of power that leads to free and fair elections “for the first time in Libyan history,” Obama said.

Obama warned that after more than four decades of Qadhafi’s “iron rule,” it will take time to build democratic institutions and some may even begin to “wish for the old order and its illusion of stability.”

“But if we’ve learned anything these many months, it is this: Don’t underestimate the aspirations and will of the Libyan people,” he said.

Obama told the Libyan people that now comes their chance to realize what they have been sacrificing for.

As they do so, the United States and the international community are uniting to “stand with you as you seize this moment of promise, as you reach for the freedom, the dignity and the opportunity that you deserve,” he said.

TNC President Jalil said the international response to the Libyan uprising had helped enable Libyans to liberate most of their country and realize the aspirations that they had hoped for when they began their revolution on February 17.

“The road before us is still long and there are many challenges at many levels,” Jalil said. He asked for international assistance as Libyans work to build a democratic nation where they can “govern themselves and seek official positions through elections.”

Jalil said that as Qadhafi’s forces were driven back, stability and security spread over much of the country “in a manner that proves that the Libyan people bore their full responsibility” and have limited their reprisals against Qadhafi’s supporters and former officials.

Jalil promised a “just trial” for former regime officials and said the TNC will work in “the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

President Obama Helps Launch Open Government Partnership

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton took part in the formal launch of the Open Government Partnership in New York, which brings together heads of state and senior officials from 46 nations committed to increasing openness and accountability in their own governments and around the world.

“The strongest foundation of human progress lies in open economies, open societies and in open government,” Obama said at the September 20 event, calling the partnership’s core values “the essence of democracy.”

The president spoke along with Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, who is working with Obama to co-chair the partnership in its first year. The United States and Brazil joined the initiative’s six other founding nations to release a declaration pledging to advance the group’s core values.

“We pledge to be more transparent at every level, because more information on government activities should be open, timely and freely available to our people,” Obama said of the new agreement. He said the group also committed to engage more citizens in government decision-making, to implement the highest standards of integrity for those in power, and to increase access to technology and information for citizens everywhere.

To implement these principles, Obama called on governments to partner with civil society groups to hold officials accountable, offer new ideas and help leaders make better-informed decisions.

“Our countries are stronger when we engage citizens beyond the halls of government, so I welcome our civil society representatives not as spectators, but as equal partners in this initiative,” he said.

Civil society leaders from around the world participated alongside government leaders in the launch, which took place on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. During last year’s assembly, Obama challenged countries around the world to return in 2011 with concrete plans to promote transparency, fight corruption and energize civic engagement.

The partnership’s eight founding members — Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States — responded to this challenge by presenting detailed action plans at the partnership summit. They were joined by 38 other countries from around the world committed to delivering their own action plans by March, when the partnership will hold its second high-level meeting in Brazil. The White House said each of the countries working to join the partnership has demonstrated dedication to open government principles and published a formal letter of intent to participate.

Secretary Clinton: Women’s Political Participation Vital to Democracy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says that if the international community wants a safe, secure, prosperous and peaceful future, then women must be equal partners and free to realize their own potential.

Clinton described the scarcity of political participation by women globally as one of the “great pieces of unfinished business in the 21st century.” Clinton believes that expanding women’s political participation and decisionmaking is crucial for the development of democracy, and also vital for achieving sustainable development in underdeveloped nations.

Women leaders, presidents and heads of state participated in a September 19 event at the United Nations in New York to advance the role of women in politics. It was part of a series of meetings and conferences on the margins of the opening of the 66th Session of the U.N. General Assembly.

“We are bound by a common goal: to open the way for women to participate in all decisions affecting the development of our world, at the global, regional, national and local levels,” said Michelle Bachelet, executive director of the U.N. Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (U.N. Women) and the former president of Chile.

“By making full use of half the world’s intelligence — the intelligence of women — we improve our chances of finding real and lasting solutions to the challenges that confront us,” Bachelet said.

U.N. Women estimates that women make up less than 10 percent of the world's leaders, and globally less than one in five members of national parliaments is a woman. The 30 percent critical mass for women's representation in national parliaments has been reached in only 28 countries, the organization says.

Clinton said that it's not enough for those gathered at the United Nations in New York to be committed to women's political participation, but "it's also important that we reach out to the new emerging democracies and societies, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where women have marched and demonstrated, blogged and put their lives on the line for a future that includes them, their families, their communities and their countries."

"Women have to be part of the future. And it's imperative that as constitutions are created, as political parties are organized, as elections are waged and won, nobody can claim a democratic future if half the population is marginalized or even prevented from participating," Clinton said.

No nation can achieve broad-based economic growth, which is essential in today's global economy, if women are not included in the process, she added.

"When we liberate the economic potential of women, we elevate the economic performance of communities, nations and the world," Clinton said.

The U.N. conference on women's political participation issued a joint statement that aimed to advance women's role in the leadership of nations, saying: "We stress the critical importance of women's political participation in all contexts, including in times of peace, conflict and in all stages of political transition."

The statement called on all nations to eliminate discriminatory barriers faced by women, particularly marginalized women, and encouraged nations to take measures to address the factors preventing women from participating fully in politics, such as gender violence, poverty and a lack of access to education.

Body Count in Syria Rising "on a Daily Basis," U.S. Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Syrian officials bear responsibility for the safety of the Syrian people and they have "betrayed that obligation," says the U.S. representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council, adding that those responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable as the regime of Bashar al-Assad continues its violent response to peaceful protesters calling for reforms.

Speaking at the council's headquarters in Geneva September 19, U.S. Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe said a U.N. fact-finding mission and international human rights observers have reported that the Assad regime has killed more than 2,600 civilians since protests began in March, and "the body count rises on a daily basis."

Syrian security and military forces are responsible for "arbitrary executions and detentions, torture and other abuse of detainees, including young children," she said, but the government has instead blamed "armed insurgents" for the violence and has denied access to independent observers and the international media, as well as the council's investigators.

"It is time for the regime to stop trying to mask its atrocities with propaganda. The Assad regime must step aside and let Syria transition peacefully to a representative and inclusive democracy that supports and defends the universal rights of all Syrians," Donahoe said.

At the council's session, U.N. Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha Kang said that despite the Syrian government's denial of the fact-finding mission's repeated requests to allow it to investigate, the mission was still able to gather "credible, corroborated and consistent accounts ... from victims and witnesses," including Syrian military defectors and refugees, according to a summary of the session that was posted on the council's website.

The mission "found a pattern of widespread or systematic human rights violations by Syrian security and military forces, including murder, enforced disappearances, torture, deprivation of liberty and persecution," according to Kang's report, and "it was the assessment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the scale and nature of these acts could amount to crimes against humanity."

The mission also concluded that "while demonstrations had been largely peaceful, the military and security forces had resorted to an apparent 'shoot-to-kill' policy," Kang's report said.

The Office of the High Commissioner believes that those responsible for the abuses "should be brought to justice and within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court" and has recommended that the situation be referred there, which requires action by the U.N. Security Council, Kang concluded.

Donahoe said Assad's support for the brutal crackdown has shown that "he is determined to hold on to power regardless of the price paid by his people." She expressed strong and unwavering U.S. support for the Syrian people

as they seek a peaceful transition to a representative and inclusive government.

“A legitimate government does not fear dissent, does not sow seeds of sectarianism and does not rely on violence and intimidation to force a false dialogue,” Donahoe said.

“We call on the Syrian authorities to stop killing and torturing their people immediately, and to allow the Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry, international humanitarian agencies and international media unrestricted access to report on the true conditions inside Syria,” she said.

Latinos Launch Campaign to Save Colorado River

By Karin Rives | Staff Writer

Washington – The mighty Colorado River has sustained life in the American Southwest for many generations, but today the waterway is facing unprecedented threats from urban growth and climate change.

A group of Latino leaders has kicked off a campaign to raise awareness of the Colorado, noting that the river holds special significance for Americans with a Latin American heritage. They recruited Celinés Toribio, an actress and former host for Spanish-language television and radio shows, to be the face and spokeswoman for their campaign.

Organizers of the Nuestro Rio (“Our River”) campaign say it’s the first time Latinos, America’s fastest-growing minority group, have rallied around a major environmental cause.

“The Colorado River is drying up,” Toribio said. “So much water is taken out of it that water rarely flows to the river’s delta. People forget that the Colorado River is the social and economic foundation for many who live in the Southwest.”

Nuestro Rio collected nearly 11,300 signatures on a letter it delivered to U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in mid-September. The letter calls for Salazar’s agency to “seriously address the river’s future” in a study the government is conducting to assess future water supplies and demands on the river. Specifically, Nuestro Rio is asking the Department of the Interior to incorporate new metrics for the study that account for the health of fish and water salinity, aspects of river health that directly affect communities near the Colorado.

“We want to make sure Latinos have a seat at the table,” said Amber Tafoya, Nuestro Rio’s coordinator in the state of Colorado.

So far, she said, officials at the Interior Department have

been very receptive to their ideas.

MORE PEOPLE, LESS WATER AHEAD

The challenges facing the Colorado River are monumental.

Several states and large cities such as Las Vegas, Phoenix and Los Angeles depend on water from the Colorado, as do parts of northern Mexico. The river and its tributaries provide water for more than 30 million people. It also irrigates 4 million acres (1.6 million hectares) of farmland and generates hydropower to up to 1.7 million households – energy that offsets use of polluting fossil fuels.

A year ago, however, the Colorado’s two large reservoirs, Lake Mead and Lake Powell, were only half full after a decade of drought. States were told that water may soon be rationed under formulas agreed to in 2007.

Water levels rose again in 2011, thanks to large snowfalls in the upper river basin during the winter, but scientists warn the relief may be short-lived. An interim Interior Department report issued recently projects that continuing man-made climate change could lead to a 9 percent decrease in river water over the next 50 years as hotter and drier weather becomes the norm.

At the same time, demand on the river will grow. Over the next 20 years, the populations of Arizona and Nevada are expected to more than double to 10.7 million and 4.2 million respectively, recent projections from the U.S. Census Bureau show. California is projected to grow 37 percent to 46 million.

Tafoya said it’s important that all communities that depend on the river are given access to Colorado River water in coming decades, including Latinos who historically didn’t give much input on water allocation issues.

“People are very excited about this,” she said of Nuestro Rio’s growing number of supporters. “They want to be involved.”

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