

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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State Dept. on Meeting with Burmese Foreign Minister

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
September 26, 2011

QUESTION TAKEN AT THE SEPTEMBER 26 DAILY PRESS BRIEFING

Burma: Foreign Minister Meeting

Question: Can you please provide a read-out of Assistant Secretary Campbell's meeting with Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin?

Answer: Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell and Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma Ambassador Derek Mitchell met with Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 22. The meeting was productive with an open and candid exchange of views by both sides. Assistant Secretary Campbell and Ambassador Mitchell welcomed recent positive steps taken by the Government of Burma, including President Thein Sein's dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. They emphasized that the United States seeks concrete steps from the Government of Burma to signify a genuine commitment to reform including release of all political prisoners, further meaningful dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, a cessation of hostilities in and violence against ethnic areas, and transparency in its relationship with North Korea.

Secretary Clinton Marks Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves Anniversary

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is celebrating the first anniversary of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, a public-private partnership that addresses the major health and environmental problems caused by cooking over open fires and with dirty stoves.

“On its one-year anniversary, the United States has made additional financial commitments to the alliance of up to \$55 million, bringing the total United States commitment up to \$105 million in the first five years,” a September 22 State Department news release said. The department called the initiative “an important U.S. diplomatic and development priority” and said the United States is working with international partners to create a thriving global market for clean and efficient household solutions to unsafe traditional stoves.

Clinton said smoke and soot from stoves and open fires kill at least 2 million people each year, more than malaria

and tuberculosis combined. She said the problem mainly affects women and children, as they spend more time at home.

Addressing this issue is part of Clinton's efforts to empower women worldwide. The secretary spoke September 22 at the Clinton Global Initiative annual meeting in New York.

Traditional cookstoves also have severe ramifications for the environment, with emissions from stoves in China and India alone accounting for an estimated one-third of the world's black carbon emissions. Scientists believe these emissions play a significant role in climate change, as black carbon stays in the atmosphere for a relatively short time before falling to the ground. Because of its dark color, it absorbs heat both in the atmosphere and on the ground, resulting in higher temperatures and ice melt.

Companies are now selling stoves in developing countries that use cleaner-burning biomass fuels, built-in fans and solar or wind energy for power. But while prices for clean stoves have dropped in recent years, they are not low enough to create a mass market.

To make sure the new stoves reach homes in targeted markets, the alliance is working to reduce trade barriers, improve consumer awareness and boost access to carbon financing to reduce stove costs.

The State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have led the Obama administration's whole-of-government approach to the initiative, which has also included efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other key agencies. The State Department says every U.S. federal agency has met or exceeded the initiative's first-year goals, which range from diplomacy and capacity building to stove testing, applied research and field implementation and evaluation.

The alliance, led by the United Nations Foundation, is working toward a goal of getting 100 million homes to adopt clean and efficient stoves and fuels by 2020.

U.S.-Russia Codeathon Programs for Better Governance

Washington – The first U.S.-Russia Codeathon, a weekend-long, trans-Atlantic gathering of volunteer computer programmers and civil society experts, took place September 24 and 25 in both Moscow and Washington.

In Washington, competitors assembled at American

University, while Russian teams competed at the Moscow headquarters of Yandex, an Internet technology company, according to a September 26 announcement from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

During the 30-hour timed event, software designers and computer science students in both locations worked to address challenges and issues related to open governance in both countries. The issues had been raised by civil society groups as part of the expanded dialogue between U.S. and Russian civil society organizations that is part of the Obama-Medvedev Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC).

An Internet video bridge linked the two sites, allowing teams to interact during the marathon event. Because of the eight-hour time difference, the judges announced the winners early Sunday evening Moscow time, while Washington coders were still going strong after a long night of coding. The Washington event closed early on Sunday evening local time.

At Yandex, seven teams of energetic coders participated. The winning Russian team of coders, which included Yandex employees, developed a prototype for an anonymous, fraud-proof, verifiable e-polling system.

The Washington winner, a three-person team from American University, produced a unique search tool capable of connecting citizens to legislation relevant to their interests and helping them to understand it.

The second- and third-place teams in Washington produced an SMS-based neighborhood networking service and a heat-map visualization tool for crime statistics. In Moscow, second place went to a program for visualization of government-procurement spending data, while the third-place finish was awarded for a program to track the assets and income of public officials.

Winning teams were selected by a panel of judges made up of representatives from the tech and open-data communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Programmers signed up through an open registration portal at <http://code4country.com>.

The Code4Country event was a U.S.-Russian public-private initiative involving technology companies, civil society and ordinary citizens in the United States and Russia to foster cooperation, business development and transparency and efficiency in government.

Volunteers from multiple universities and several high-tech companies – including Yandex and Google – together with the Skolkovo Foundation met in Washington and Moscow under the framework of the U.S.-Russia BPC to make the Codeathon a reality.

Presidents Obama and Medvedev have supported such civil society bridges to promote dialogue between the peoples of both countries and to spur this kind of initiative to solve common problems.

Code4Country aims to generate innovative tools that could make government more transparent and empower citizens in both countries to hold their governments accountable. Organizers believe it is likely that applications created in Russia during the Codeathon will benefit transparency and e-government in the United States and that applications created in the United States will have the same benefit in Russia.

For several weeks in advance of the event, Russians and Americans submitted problem definitions to the bilingual website, <http://code4country.com>, identifying an obstacle and a proposed solution for improving openness in their countries and communities through information technologies.

Financial support for the Codeathon was provided in part by USAID.

U.S., Ukraine Sign Nuclear Security Cooperation Accord

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington – For the United States and Ukraine, ridding the world of nuclear weapons is a significant priority, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

“At last year’s Nuclear Security Summit, both President [Viktor] Yanukovich and President Obama vowed to work together to prevent proliferation and to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials,” Clinton said at a September 26 briefing in New York.

“And, in fact, President Yanukovich announced Ukraine’s decision to get rid of all of its stocks of highly enriched uranium by March 2012, when the next Nuclear Security Summit will convene,” she added.

Clinton and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko signed an agreement on nuclear security cooperation on the sidelines of the opening session of the 66th U.N. General Assembly in New York. The agreement makes formal an intent to fully implement the commitment made by the two presidents in 2010 to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the means to make them, and to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials, a senior State Department official said.

Yanukovich pledged to get rid of Ukraine’s highly enriched uranium, which is a crucial component used in the making of nuclear weapons, by the time of the next security summit in Seoul, South Korea, March 26–27,

2012, the senior official said.

At the first Nuclear Security Summit April 12–13, 2010, President Obama said nuclear weapons are not just an issue for the United States and Russia, which hold the largest stockpiles, but are a threat to the common security of all nations.

Leaders from more than 47 nations and international organizations had gathered in Washington to discuss steps to secure vulnerable nuclear weapons and the means to make them. It was the culmination of days of nuclear diplomacy that began with the United States issuing a revamped nuclear strategy April 6 and the signing of a new arms-reduction treaty between the United States and Russia April 8 at ceremonies in Prague, Czech Republic.

The president first proposed the summit in an April 2009 speech in Prague where he outlined his vision of a world free of nuclear weapons and nuclear threats. In Prague, Obama called for a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world, break up black markets, detect and intercept materials in transit, and use financial tools to disrupt illicit trade in nuclear materials and technologies.

Under the agreement signed by Clinton and Gryshchenko, the United States expects to provide \$60 million to help Ukraine dispose of its highly enriched uranium, the State Department official said. "Specifically, we'll be providing financial and technical assistance to help with the elimination of highly enriched uranium and to help modernize Ukraine's civil nuclear research facilities," the official said.

The aim is to operate its civil facilities using safer low-enrichment uranium fuel, Clinton said.

Gryshchenko said, "We are working together to relieve Ukraine of the burden of having highly enriched uranium in the time when low-enriched uranium is really an answer to many of the issues, to many of the challenges that Ukraine as a nation faces in the area of nuclear safety, future of nuclear energy, medical uses of isotopes and many other areas of use of peaceful atom."

"Today, we have signed a document that provides for practicalities, which clearly stipulates the obligations of each party, and we have full confidence in ability of both Ukraine and the United States to meet the stated goals and timelines," Gryshchenko said.

20 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

Clinton also noted at the New York press briefing that 2011 marks the 20th anniversary of Ukraine's

independence.

"It gives us an opportunity to reflect on another key aspect of the strategic partnership between our nations, our joint commitment to democracy and shared values," she said. "It's not been easy to build a strong democracy from the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, but Ukraine has made significant gains."

Gryshchenko told reporters that the United States has been for the last 20 years and will continue to be a major strategic partner in the global economy and in global politics.

"We believe that democratic developments in our country need to be based on an understanding that democracy brings with itself full responsibility of those who are elected or appointed to high positions in government," Gryshchenko said.

"We believe that listening to the people, interacting with them, is important for our own future and our own success," he said.

International Cooperation Aims to Boost Public Health Systems

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and the World Health Organization (WHO) are moving to a higher level of cooperation, combining resources to help other countries boost their public health infrastructure for the good of their own people and the rest of the world.

In New York September 19, the two parties signed what is formally called a "memorandum of understanding" to help developing countries improve their public health capabilities and create better adherence to the International Health Regulations (IHR). President Obama expressed his commitment to the endeavor when he addressed the U.N. General Assembly.

"We must come together to prevent, detect and fight every kind of biological danger," Obama said in his September 21 speech.

The United States and the WHO have a long record of cooperation and mutual support in working together to contain infectious disease outbreaks, expand vaccination coverage and decrease infant and child mortality rates. This agreement elevates that cooperation to a "whole-of-government approach," according to an official in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR).

"It's about any event that may have a negative impact on

international public health," said Dr. Jose A. Fernandez, the acting deputy director of the ASPR Division of International Health Security. "Radiological releases, chemical spills, food-borne outbreaks and pandemic influenza would all be examples" of events that have the potential to move rapidly across borders and harm individuals with no regard for nationality.

The regulations took on an expanded form in recent years after sudden outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and avian influenza caused major public health scares and proved how transportation and globalization can put disease on a fast track.

One-hundred-ninety-four nations are signatories to the IHR, but Fernandez says many nations need some assistance to upgrade their disease identification, surveillance and response capabilities.

The United States has been training and assisting medical professionals in the developing world for some time. Notably, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains a network of Global Disease Detection Centers throughout the world to work directly with countries and the WHO to bolster capacities for disease surveillance and response. The U.S. Navy medical research unit in Cairo brought in teams of specialists from many African countries during the avian influenza scare to provide training in detection of the disease.

"The [Department of Defense] labs alone have provided an enormous amount of support generally to countries and institutions," Fernandez said. But the newly signed memorandum of understanding reaches for new levels in "successfully improving, enhancing and protecting global health security."

This new level of commitment to the International Health Regulations comes as the Obama administration is implementing its Global Health Initiative, which strives to invest in the most effective health care programs. Fernandez said helping countries build greater capability to meet the responsibilities of the IHR is compatible with the Obama initiative.

"When we do these capacity-building activities, there has to be country ownership, it has to be sustainable, and that means it needs to address day-to-day public health needs," Fernandez said.

The WHO is striving to upgrade the capabilities of all nations to assess, notify and respond to infectious disease threats, and is working toward achieving that level of competence by 2012.

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