

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama on Observance of Diwali

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of Press Secretary
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Statement by the President on the Observance of Diwali

Today, here in America and around the world, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and some Buddhists will celebrate the holiday of Diwali – the festival of lights. Many who observe this holiday do so by lighting the Diya, or lamp, which symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. I was proud to be the first President to mark Diwali and light the Diya at the White House, and last year Michelle and I were honored to join in Diwali celebrations during our visit to India.

Diwali is a time for gathering with family and friends and – as we experienced in India – celebrating with good food and dancing. It is also a time for contemplation and prayer that serves as a reminder of our obligations to our fellow human beings, especially the less fortunate. To all who are observing this sacred holiday here and around the world, Happy Diwali and Saal Mubarak.

Secretary Panetta: U.S.-Japan Is An Enduring 21st Century Alliance

The following commentary by Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta was published by the Daily Yomiuri Shimbun Online on October 24. There are no republication restrictions.

The United States and Japan: An Enduring 21st Century Alliance

By Leon E. Panetta

On the eve of my first visit to Japan as United States Secretary of Defense, I've had the opportunity to reflect on the enduring nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance that has been the cornerstone of stability and security in the Asia Pacific region for more than 50 years. Our partnership is based on more than just shared security and economic interests – its true strength comes from the common values our two peoples hold dear, a belief in democratic ideals, and the rule of law. That is why I'm convinced the ties between our countries will only grow and deepen as America increases its engagement in the Asia Pacific region.

The Japanese people demonstrated the strength of their national character in the face of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March of this year. Out of that tragedy came new evidence of the strength of our alliance, as American troops worked tirelessly in support of Japanese forces to speed relief to the suffering. And it is in that

spirit of cooperation that we now turn our efforts to address a range of common challenges that abound across the region.

These include North Korea, which continues to engage in reckless and provocative behavior and is developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, which pose a threat not just to Japan, but to the entire region. China is rapidly modernizing its military, but with a troubling lack of transparency, coupled with increasingly assertive activity in the East and South China Seas. Together, the U.S. and Japan will work to bring North Korea back to the Six Party Talks, and encourage China to play a responsible role in the international community.

We continue to make good progress on the ambitious goals laid out for our Alliance at the June 2011 "2+2" meeting. We are furthering interoperability as the Self Defense Force evolves into a "Dynamic Defense" force, bringing together complementary capabilities to solve common problems. We are jointly developing high-tech capabilities, including the next generation missile defense interceptor, and exploring new areas of cooperation, including in space and cyberspace.

As a Pacific power, the United States remains committed to a robust forward presence in Asia. Realigning the U.S. military footprint in Japan will make our Alliance more effective while reducing the impact of our presence on local populations. Moving forward with the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Camp Schwab is a core part of this effort; doing so as soon as possible will be good for the Alliance, for the people of Okinawa, and for regional peace and stability.

In this emerging Pacific Century, I see the U.S.-Japan alliance as an indispensable pillar of regional and global security. Drawing strength from our shared values, we will work to uphold the international order and ensure the continued peace and prosperity of our people in the 21st century.

New Arms-Reduction Treaty Builds U.S., Russian Confidence

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington – The New START arms-reduction treaty, an agreement between the United States and Russia to reduce each nation's nuclear arsenals to their lowest levels in more than a half century, has been "a great success" since its February implementation, according to a senior U.S. diplomat.

"It really does provide both of us, both Russia and the United States, a good day-to-day insight into the operations of our mutual strategic forces," Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller said. The deal is

“great for mutual confidence and predictability.” Gottemoeller spoke about the treaty at a briefing on nuclear arms control at the Foreign Press Center in New York October 20.

Since the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) entered into force February 5, the assistant secretary said, the two sides have exchanged full data about their strategic nuclear forces. As of September 1, the United States reported 1,790 nuclear warheads while Russia reported 1,566.

The new treaty requires each country to reduce its forces during the next seven years to 1,550 nuclear warheads, down from the current limit of 2,000 warheads and 700 launchers.

In addition to trading data, the United States and Russia have conducted thorough on-site inspections of each other’s nuclear facilities, including both deployed and nondeployed weapons. Gottemoeller, who is the assistant secretary for arms control, verification and compliance, said these inspections have taken place on operational bases as well as at maintenance, repair and testing facilities and have gone “very smoothly.” She added that the checks have gotten off to a quick start, with the United States conducting 12 inspections and Russia 11 since the treaty’s implementation.

The assistant secretary also stressed the success of the treaty’s notification system.

Every time a missile moves, even in the course of routine deployments, such as going for maintenance or repair, notification is shared. Gottemoeller said there have been 1,500 notifications since the treaty’s implementation, which has helped to build mutual respect and confidence between the two countries.

The assistant secretary also highlighted the importance of the Bilateral Consultative Commission, which comprises U.S. and Russian nuclear experts who meet twice each year to discuss compliance issues and other routine questions. The commission met for the first time in April and gathered again October 19 for a two-week meeting in Geneva to work out basic treaty issues that have emerged since implementation.

Gottemoeller said the treaty speaks to “the accomplishments of the broader U.S.-Russian relationship over the last couple of years” and is a “great story in terms of our efforts to move toward elimination of nuclear weapons.”

The treaty, which replaces the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the 2002 Moscow Treaty, will remain in force 10 years after ratification. It does not block

efforts to create missile defense systems.

President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the New START agreement April 8, 2010. The treaty is a critical centerpiece in President Obama’s foreign policy program and reflects his broader world view. Obama was awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to foster arms control and nuclear nonproliferation efforts worldwide.

U.S. Works for Reform of Nationality Laws That Hurt Women

By Jane A Morse | Staff Writer

Washington – The United States is working for reform of nationality laws that hurt women, says Maria Otero, the State Department’s under secretary for democracy and global affairs.

Nationality laws discriminate against women in at least 30 countries, Otero said at a Refugees International event October 25 at the U.S. Institute of Peace. These laws, she said, limit women’s ability to acquire, retain and transmit citizenship to their children.

“In many cases, nationality laws permit only the father to transmit citizenship to his child,” Otero said. “And in still other cases, nationality laws strip women of their citizenship upon marriage to a foreign spouse, or prohibit women’s foreign spouses from naturalization.”

The result is that hundreds of thousands of women are left without legal protection or a social safety net, she said.

“Stateless persons typically lack identity documentation and cannot register births, marriages or deaths. They often cannot work legally or travel freely. They cannot vote, open a bank account, or own property and they often lack access to health care and other public services,” Otero said.

Lack of citizenship contributes to cycles of poverty and vulnerability, Otero said. Without a birth registration or a citizenship document, children are barred from attending school. They may fall victim to abuse and exploitation, including gender-based violence, trafficking in persons and arbitrary arrest and detention.

Otero acknowledged that there is little research on the issue of statelessness and even less on gender discrimination in nationality laws.

To try to understand the impact of statelessness better, the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration recently funded a study by Kingston University in the United Kingdom to examine its costs. The study

used quantitative and qualitative methods to compare the livelihoods of stateless persons with those of citizens in four countries. Among its most striking findings was that statelessness reduces household income by a third and reduces the odds of owning one's home by nearly 60 percent. The average education level of members of stateless households is lower than that of citizens by at least one year and in some cases as many as six years. The study also demonstrated disadvantages for stateless people in terms of health status and access to justice and law enforcement.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has identified statelessness and women's nationality rights as important areas of work for the State Department. Under her leadership, U.S. diplomats around the world are working to generate local political will to reform discriminatory nationality laws, Otero said.

"We want to persuade government officials to amend nationality laws that discriminate against women," Otero said. "We want to ensure universal birth registration, and we want to establish procedures and systems that help stateless people acquire citizenship."

"Statelessness," Otero said, "is not just a humanitarian or human rights issue — it is a matter of human security and the protection of individuals."

Lady Liberty: 125 Years as Icon of Freedom

By Louise Fenner | Staff Writer

Washington — "Over the years, the meanings of the [Statue of Liberty] have grown until she has become an international icon of freedom and liberty, the most recognizable symbol of democracy in the world," says the National Park Service, which has responsibility for both the statue and Ellis Island.

America will mark the 125th anniversary of the dedication of the Statue of Liberty on October 28 with a huge birthday party. The statue will be honored with a flotilla of ships in New York Harbor, musical performances, speeches, a cake and a massive fireworks display. There will also be a naturalization ceremony welcoming 125 people as U.S. citizens.

The 93-meter-high copper beauty was a gift from the people of France in 1886, in recognition of the friendship established during the American Revolution. Completed in France in 1884, the statue was disassembled, shipped to New York, and reassembled. On October 28, 1886, it was dedicated in front of thousands of cheering spectators.

The idea of the statue originated around 1865 with Édouard de Laboulaye, a French law professor, politician and writer who wanted to foster the bond between the

United States and France with a monument dedicated to their shared ideals of freedom and independence.

Artist Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, who was known for large-scale work, was commissioned to design the sculpture. Bartholdi traveled to the United States to look for a location for the monument and decided on a small island in New York Harbor called Bedloe's Island (renamed Liberty Island in 1956).

Since the statue was a joint effort between America and France, it was agreed that the American people would build the pedestal while the French people would be responsible for the statue and assembly. In France, funds came in from city governments, sales of miniature statues, a lottery, and contributions from French schoolchildren and others. Some 2 million francs were raised (about \$400,000 in U.S. dollars of the time). But fundraising was more difficult in the United States. Publisher Joseph Pulitzer stepped in and started a drive for donations using his newspaper the New York World. He printed the names of every donor, including schoolchildren who donated pennies. The fund drive drew more than 120,000 contributions, most of them less than a dollar; thus Americans were able to contribute about \$250,000 for the statue's pedestal.

Bartholdi fashioned the statue — whose full name is "Liberty Enlightening the World" — from copper hammered out until it was just 2.4 millimeters thick. French engineer Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (designer of the Eiffel Tower) built a skeleton for the statue, designed so that the statue's copper skin moves independently yet can stand upright. This flexibility allows the statue to sway in the harbor winds.

The statue, often called Lady Liberty, is 93 meters from the base of the pedestal to the tip of the torch. From her heel to the top of her head, she is 34 meters. Over the years the copper has turned green because of a chemical reaction called patination.

The United Nations designated the Statue of Liberty as a World Heritage Site in 1984. The statue was closed for a two-year restoration project and reopened in 1986, in time for her 100th birthday. During that project, the new torch was carefully covered with thin sheets of 24k gold. Visitors are able to climb to the top of the pedestal and the crown in recent years by making a reservation. Starting October 29, the inside of the statue will be closed for a year for additional restoration, but Liberty Island will remain open to visitors and their cameras.

The Statue of Liberty welcomed more than 12 million immigrants who entered the United States through the federal immigration station on nearby Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. The old immigration station is

now a museum. Ferries take visitors to both Ellis Island and Liberty Island, where the Statue of Liberty stands.

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