

American

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President Obama Says Asia-Pacific Region Is Engine for Growth	1
Encouraging Signs in Burma, but Concerns Remain, Secretary Clinton Says	1
Empower Women and See Economic Growth, Secretary Clinton Says	2
U.S. Committed to Positive, Cooperative Relations with China.....	3

President Obama Says Asia-Pacific Region Is Engine for Growth

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama told business executives from across the Asia-Pacific region November 12 that the United States sees the region “as an extraordinary engine for growth.”

Obama — who is on a nine-day trip that takes him to Hawaii, Australia and Indonesia — said November 12 in Honolulu that the economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum represent nearly half of the world’s trade and half of the world’s output of goods and services. He met with business leaders at the APEC CEO Business Summit before the main meeting of the leaders from the 21 APEC economies on November 13.

After the APEC meetings in Honolulu, Obama travels to Canberra and Darwin to celebrate the 60th year of the U.S.-Australian alliance and to conduct bilateral talks with Australian leaders before attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit and the East Asia Summit, both Bali, Indonesia, before returning to Washington on November 20.

“The whole goal of APEC is to ensure that we are reducing barriers to trade and investment that can translate into concrete jobs here in the United States and all around the world,” Obama told business leaders. “If we’re going to grow it’s going to be because of exports.”

One of the crucial items on the agenda for the leaders’ meeting is reducing barriers to trade and commerce to hasten the flow of goods and services. Obama made strengthening U.S. exports an essential economic objective and he is seeking to double U.S. exports by 2015. This is part of a broad effort to rebalance the U.S. economy from one that is consumer driven to one that is a blend and more likely to weather downturns in the global economy. The United States and most advanced economies are still recovering from the 2007–2009 economic recession that was the most severe since the Great Depression of the early 1930s.

“We represent close to 3 billion people, from different continents and cultures,” Obama told APEC leaders before a dinner November 12. “Our citizens have sent us here with a common task: to bring our economies closer together, to cooperate, to create jobs and prosperity that our people deserve so that they can provide for their families.”

Obama also stressed in meeting with business executives that the United States is pivoting from a decade focused on post-9/11 conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq to one

focused more broadly as a major Asia-Pacific power.

“We’ve turned our attention back to the Asia-Pacific region, and I think that it’s paying off immediately in a whole range of improved relations with countries, and businesses are starting to see more opportunities as a consequence,” Obama said.

A component of that effort is development of the nine-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an initiative to create a free trade agreement among the nations of the Pacific Rim. The TPP nations are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States and Vietnam. Japan also announced it is interested in joining the partnership.

Negotiators announced November 12 that they have reached the broad outlines of a Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement among the nine countries. “We are confident that this agreement will be a model for ambition for other free trade agreements in the future, forging close linkages among our economies, enhancing our competitiveness, benefitting our consumers and supporting the creation and retention of jobs, higher living standards, and the reduction of poverty in our countries,” the group said.

The TPP countries also said country negotiating teams will work out the remaining details of the trade agreement over the next year. Obama said the way ahead will involve some “hard negotiations and some tough work,” adding that the negotiations with South Korea for the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement serve as a model for prioritizing trade with a key partner.

Encouraging Signs in Burma, but Concerns Remain, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Real changes appear to be taking place on the ground in Burma, but Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for the Burmese government to pursue further human rights and democratic reforms, pledging that it will find a partner in the United States as its citizens enjoy genuine and lasting freedoms.

“We believe that the Burmese people share the same universal values that all people are entitled to, and therefore we want to see the encouraging signs continue and strengthen a transition to a broader political dialogue and eventually the kind of democratic and open society that we think would benefit the people of Burma,” Clinton said.

The secretary was speaking in a November 11 press availability that took place after ministerial-level meetings were held at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hawaii.

Clinton cited reports that there is “a substantive dialogue under way” between the Burmese government and Nobel Peace Prize laureate and democratic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. She also said the Burmese government is taking important legislative initiatives, including a new labor law that will allow unions to be formed and workers to strike, and changing its political party registration law to permit opposition parties, including Suu Kyi’s formerly banned National League for Democracy (NLD).

“It appears that there are real changes taking place on the ground, and we support these early efforts at reform. We want to see the people of Burma able to participate fully in the political life of their own country,” she said.

But Clinton said “there must be much more done.” The United States remains concerned over the human rights situation in the country, she said, including the fate of political prisoners who have been held in long-term detention.

“We continue to call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners and an end to the violence in ethnic minority areas,” she said.

She also called upon Burma’s Naypyidaw-based government to “be more transparent in its relationship and dealings with North Korea.” The United States and Burma’s neighbors have had long-standing concerns over reports of military cooperation between Burma and Pyongyang, which has an active nuclear weapons program.

Both Special Representative for Burma Derek Mitchell and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Posner visited Naypyidaw and Rangoon in early November, and Clinton said they had been able to meet with senior government officials, opposition leaders and representatives of civil society.

“We are encouraging Naypyidaw to take steps toward political reform, to bring more openness and transparency,” she said.

In a November 10 speech to the East-West Center in Hawaii, the secretary said people are “witnessing the first stirrings of change in decades” in Burma, and that if the government pursues “genuine and lasting reform for the benefits of its citizens, it will find a partner in the United States.”

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified told reporters November 10 that Clinton and Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd had met earlier in the day and “compared notes on our respective approaches to Burma” and “how far the initial reforms

have gone.”

U.S. and Australian officials “talked a little bit about the dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, some of the discussions about political developments inside the country, and what was the appropriate kinds of responses to encourage these efforts that could be taken by international partners and others,” the official said.

Both ministers “underscored that we thought some of the changes taking place were real and significant” and “need to be continued.”

The official also said if there is “a real determination to see reform through in Naypyidaw,” then “both Australia and the United States would be there to support that process going forward.”

Empower Women and See Economic Growth, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Give women greater access to jobs and economic opportunities and your entire economy will improve, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told corporate executives on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hawaii.

“At a time when the global economy is still struggling, we cannot afford to ignore this potential. ...When we liberate the economic potential of women, we elevate the economic performance of communities, nations and, indeed, the world,” Clinton said November 11.

The secretary cited a recent World Bank report that found that the more fully women can participate in their country’s economy, the more likely it is that overall economic productivity will rise, development outcomes will improve, and institutions will be more representative.

Allowing half of the population the same economic opportunities as men will bring businesses more consumers and will result in more spending and saving by families, more food production, improved education and political stability.

“This is simply smart economics,” Clinton said.

But despite improvements over recent years, women still face an “economic glass ceiling” in many places, including in Pacific countries, because of existing laws, customs and values.

“Too many women in APEC countries don’t have the same inheritance rights as men, so they can’t inherit property or businesses owned by fathers and spouses. Some don’t have the right to confer citizenship on their

children, so their families have less access to housing and education. And they must constantly renew residency permits, making it harder for them to work," Clinton said.

"Some are even subject to different taxes than men. And too often, they are denied access to credit, and may even be prohibited from opening bank accounts, signing contracts, purchasing property, incorporating a business or filing a lawsuit without a male guardian. And women entrepreneurs are still more likely to face higher interest rates, be required to collateralize a higher share of any loan, and have shorter-term loans," she said.

Women also have significantly less participation in the world's largest firms than their male colleagues, particularly at the highest levels, Clinton said, noting that only about 3 percent of the CEOs in Fortune Global 500 companies are women.

"These aren't just obstacles to prosperity for individual women; they are obstacles to prosperity for every business and every economy," she said.

Clinton's remarks followed on the APEC Women and the Economy Summit (WES), which took place in San Francisco September 13-16. Speaking in Hawaii, Clinton said APEC representatives there had agreed on a path forward to reduce the obstacles women are facing.

"We must commit to giving women entrepreneurs more access to capital so they can start and grow their own businesses. We must examine and reform our legal and regulatory systems so women can avail themselves of the full range of financial services. We must improve women's access to markets, so those who start businesses can keep them open," she said.

Women need to be better informed about opportunities for trade, and technical assistance needs to be better oriented to serve women as well as men, Clinton said, and "of course ... we must support the rise of women leaders in the public and private sector so they can use their own unique experiences and perspectives."

Thanks to technological advances, the world has now entered an age where every person, regardless of gender, is posed to contribute to their societies and to the global marketplace, and the economies and political systems that are making that shift more effectively and rapidly "are dramatically outperforming those that are not," she said.

"At this particular time in the global economy ... we can't leave anybody behind, and we can't leave any opportunity untapped," Clinton said.

If human rights and equality concerns are not enough to motivate societies to offer greater opportunities for

women, "we just have to hope that people will act in their own self-interest," she said.

"Don't do it because you think it's a charitable action to take, do it because it'll strengthen the economic base of a community and a country," Clinton said.

U.S. Committed to Positive, Cooperative Relations with China

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — A thriving China is good for the Chinese and is good for the United States, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says, but China must embrace political, economic and human rights reforms, which will provide "a stronger foundation for stability and growth both for China and for everyone else."

"Our most complex and consequential relationships with an emerging power is ... with China," Clinton said during an hourlong speech at the East-West Center November 10 ahead of the weekend Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in Honolulu. The annual meeting is being hosted by President Obama, who arrived November 12 for two days of meetings with the 21 APEC leaders that will also include individual meetings with some of the leaders. One of those meetings will be with Chinese President Hu Jintao, according to the White House.

"President Obama and I have made very clear that the United States is fundamentally committed to developing a positive and cooperative relationship with China," she added.

The United States believes that expanding areas of common interest is essential, and to achieve that Clinton and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner hold annual meetings with their Chinese counterparts through the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, which was begun in 2009. "These are the most intensive and expansive talks ever conducted between our governments, and we look forward to traveling to Beijing this spring for the fourth round," she said.

Coupled with the Strategic and Economic Dialogue are a series of meetings between civilian and military officials through the Strategic Security Dialogue, which provides a means for open and direct talks on some of the most sensitive issues between the United States and China, including maritime security and cybersecurity, Clinton said.

"On the economic front, the United States and China have to work together — there is no choice — to ensure strong, sustained, balanced future global growth," Clinton said.

U.S. businesses have pressed the federal government to secure fair opportunities to export goods and services to China's vast consumer markets and a level commercial and trading relationship for competition. Chinese firms want to have access to buy high-tech products from American businesses, make more investments in the U.S. economy, and have the same commercial terms that other market-driven economies have, she said. But to achieve these objectives will require that China take steps for economic reforms, including currency reforms, she added. In addition to being members of APEC, the United States and China are also members of the Group of 20 advanced and emerging economies, which has become the premier forum for global economic coordination.

"China must allow its currency to appreciate more rapidly and end the measures that disadvantage or pirate foreign intellectual property," Clinton said. "Respect for international law and a more open political system would also strengthen China's foundation, while at the same time increasing the confidence of China's partners."

Clinton said that in talks with the Chinese government, "we have made very clear our serious concerns about China's record on human rights." And the secretary said that the United States remains committed to the "One-China" policy and the preservation of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

At a press briefing on November 11, a senior State Department official discussed the results of a series of individual meetings Clinton held with other foreign ministers in Hawaii to also attend the APEC meetings. Her meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was her ninth. The senior official said that in her meeting with Yang she underscored the U.S. determination to make progress on a range of economic issues, and making it clear that the Obama administration has to report to the American people that the relationship with China is working.

"And I think we made very clear the areas that we'd like to see progress on, ranging from macroeconomic policy to issues associated to intellectual property rights and also to questions related to the treatment of human rights inside China," the senior State Department official said.

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