

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Congratulating the Liberian People on Their Elections

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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Elections in Liberia

On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I want to congratulate the Liberian people for exercising their right to vote in last week's presidential and legislative elections. These historic elections are important milestones on Liberia's path toward democratic reconciliation. The United States congratulates President Sirleaf on her re-election and we will continue to work with her and all elected officials to advance democracy, and promote peace and prosperity.

The United States commends the National Elections Commission for conducting free, fair, and transparent elections. We applaud the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and others for sending observers to monitor the elections, as well as the UN Mission in Liberia for promoting security during the electoral process.

The violence on November 7th marred this otherwise peaceful process, so we welcome the creation of a Special Independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate the incident. We are also deeply disappointed by the Congress for Democratic Change's decision to boycott the run-off election in an attempt to delegitimize the election. We urge all political parties to respect the election results and resolve their differences peacefully.

The United States is a long standing friend of the Liberian people and we are committed to their future. Congratulations on this momentous occasion.

Mobile Phone: Convenient Communication or Tracking Device?

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The computer age has come and gone. We are now living in the era of the mobile Internet, says Morgan Stanley tech analyst Mary Meeker, who has predicted that by 2015 more people will be connecting to the Internet with their mobile devices than with their PCs. Considering how the tech capabilities of pocket-sized iPhones, Androids and similar devices are skyrocketing

even as they maintain their relative affordability, this is not surprising news.

But people who use mobile technology to connect and share information may be more at risk if their governments are taking an interest in their activities. While computer users can make use of Internet cafes, anonymizers and other tools to help them hide their identity, mobile phones cannot offer the same level of protection.

"Usually, that phone is linked to an individual person for billing reasons or because the government requires registration of SIM cards," said a State Department official who asked not to be identified. The device "sends location information as well, which is very different from a computer," the official said.

To help promote the ability of all people to freely speak their minds and associate with whomever they want, the State Department created the Internet Freedom Program office, where officials work with many local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide information on online risks and the ability to make smarter decisions about online activities.

The threats people face from governments seeking to monitor or block online activities are growing, the official said. Repressive governments are increasingly able to do this with "greater sophistication" and "it's even more worrisome when we start talking about mobile. The ability to track what people are doing with mobile phones is far greater."

Even where people have been able to purchase prepaid SIM cards for their phones to help hide their identity, "increasingly, countries are requiring individuals to register SIM cards so they know who exactly is affiliated with what SIM card. So that information allows them to track at an individual level what messages people are sending and what information they are accessing and exactly where they are," the official said.

"There are a lot of challenges for us to work on," he said.

The Egyptian government made the drastic decision to shut down the Internet and phone services in response to massive protests against Hosni Mubarak's regime. In the future, mobile "mesh networking" technology developed by the NGO New America Foundation will allow mobile users to create local telecommunications networks that the authorities can't shut down.

Using that technology and existing transmitters, people can connect and pass information to each other even if they cannot access the global phone network.

"You could have people putting their videos in a sort of municipal repository somewhere and then there's someone who knows how to access that and who also knows how to access a VSAT [satellite ground station]," the official said.

Mobile technology also means users don't have to reveal their identity by physically passing along a CD or USB drive with data that they want posted online. Through the local network, a mobile phone video showing a human rights violation could be passed from phone to phone until it reaches someone with access to the Internet, and "no one even has to know who [the source] is," the official said.

Local mobile networks are also useful for community organizing and for building morale. By connecting people to each other, "I can feel confident that if I go out in the square today that I'm not the only one. There are a lot of other people who are going to be there as well," the official said.

ENCOURAGING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

The State Department is reaching out to companies as they develop new products to make them more aware of how their technologies may be used against their customers by those who want to track their online activities. The nature of the relationship is developing with the changing role of technology in promoting human rights and democracy.

While companies like YouTube and Facebook have enjoyed credit for how their products have been used to help people share information and connect with each other, "now we're seeing the other side of that, where companies are now realizing how their tools are being used also in more and more sophisticated ways by countries that want to repress people, and they're recognizing more starkly what their responsibilities are to keep the users safe who are using these sorts of tools," the official said.

Many companies are trying to do the right thing, he said. Some are working with the Global Network Initiative (GNI), an NGO founded in 2008 that is dedicated to preventing Internet censorship and protecting privacy rights. The GNI brings company representatives together with human rights organizations and academics to find solutions, and their efforts are already seeing results.

For example, when Microsoft Corporation heard that a Russian NGO risked having its computers taken away and its data confiscated on the grounds that it was using an unlicensed version of Windows, the company quickly issued a blanket license for the program that covered all Russian NGOs.

Facebook has come under criticism for preventing users from making anonymous profiles, since it sees the use of real names as a core aspect of the network. But the official said the company has been very helpful when online activists get hacked or into trouble, and is "making sure systems are set up so governments can't just complain that they don't like that, this is abusive, and have opposition or activist sites taken down."

Some companies are better than others, but the official said the more the U.S. government and others work to show why products should take human rights considerations into account, "the easier it will be for people who want to do the right thing within those companies to say yes, we really need to do this."

Thanksgiving: A Favorite U.S. Holiday

By Louise Fenner | Staff Writer

Washington – Thanksgiving in the United States is a time to gather with family and friends, share a traditional meal and express gratitude for the good things in life. It can also be a time of service to others in the community.

Celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November, Thanksgiving traces its origins to harvest festivals. It was customary to express gratitude for a bountiful harvest in the cultures of both the Pilgrims who sailed from England in 1620 and the Native Americans they encountered.

A three-day harvest celebration held in 1621 in Plymouth Colony (part of today's Massachusetts) is generally considered to be the first American Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims had arrived the year before on the ship *The Mayflower*. They hadn't brought enough food, and it was too late to plant crops. Half the colony died during the winter of 1620-1621. In the spring, local Wampanoag Indians taught the colonists how to grow corn (maize) and other crops, and helped them master hunting and fishing. They also showed the colonists how to cook cranberries, corn and squash.

The colonists had bountiful crops in the fall of 1621. They invited their Wampanoag benefactors to feast on wild turkeys, duck, geese, fish and shellfish, corn, green vegetables and dried fruits. Wampanoag Chief Massasoit and his tribe brought venison.

Harvest festivals became a regular affair in New England. Thanksgiving was observed on various dates in the states until 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as the national Thanksgiving holiday. In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt signed a law fixing Thanksgiving on the fourth (not always the last) Thursday in November.

GATHERING TOGETHER AND HELPING OUT

Many Thanksgiving traditions come from that 1621 harvest celebration. Sheaves of wheat or corn are often used as decorations. Roast turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie are commonly served at Thanksgiving dinner. But as the U.S. population becomes more diverse, so does the Thanksgiving meal. Nowadays, sitting next to the turkey might be a dish of tamales, tabbouleh, couscous or sauerkraut.

Colleges serve a special meal for students remaining on campus during Thanksgiving, and international students are often invited to share Thanksgiving with local families. U.S. troops stationed overseas are served a Thanksgiving meal. When Americans at home sit down at the table and give thanks, they often express gratitude for their freedom and the sacrifices made to preserve it.

Many people prepare Thanksgiving meals and serve them to the needy. Others donate to food drives, work at food warehouses or deliver groceries to soup kitchens, churches and other charitable groups.

Thanksgiving is the busiest travel period of the year because families make a special effort to be together. Some favorite pastimes include watching television coverage of the annual Macy's Department Store parade in New York and of American football games played around the country. The day after Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the Christmas shopping season, an important time for U.S. retailers.

One whimsical Thanksgiving tradition is the annual "pardoning" of a turkey by the U.S. president, who spares the bird from the dinner table. The bird goes on to live out its life at a petting zoo.

NATIVE AMERICANS

The harvest celebration of 1621 was followed by a long period of injustice and conflict between Native Americans and Europeans. Many Native Americans in the United States see Thanksgiving as a "National Day of Mourning." However, others enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal at home or in large community gatherings, taking the opportunity to spend a day with family and friends. Each year in southern California, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians donates thousands of turkeys to charities and families in need.

Native American history and culture are frequently discussed in schools around the Thanksgiving holiday and during November, which is National Native American Heritage Month.

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