

American

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Human Rights Linked to Economic Growth and Security, Secretary Clinton Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 06 December 2012

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said religious freedom, the right to free use of the Internet, the ability to participate in civil society groups and the need to respect and protect the rights of women and girls are four “frontlines” in the modern struggle to expand human rights around the world.

Speaking at Dublin City University in Ireland December 6, Clinton said human rights are “at the center of some of the most significant challenges to global security and stability,” and their promotion “must remain a central goal of those of us who believe in the dignity of every person.”

The secretary said freedoms guaranteed under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights have offered “a time-tested blueprint” for successful societies.

“It is not a coincidence that virtually every country that threatens regional and global peace is a place where human rights are in peril,” she said, and a country’s human rights situation is of concern to its neighbors because it “impacts the security of the entire region around it.”

EMPOWERING WOMEN BRINGS PROSPERITY AND STABILITY

Clinton said the promotion of women’s rights is “the unfinished business of the 21st century,” noting that it is “just foolish to try and build a strong economy or a stable democracy while treating half the population as second-class citizens at best, as some other species at worst.”

Treating women with equal rights and the dignity shown to men would allow their full participation in their country’s economy and politics, and bring increased economic growth and good governance as well as a decrease in violence, she said.

But she said there will be “many sacrifices and losses until we finally reach a point where daughters are valued as sons, where girls as educated as boys, where women are encouraged and permitted to make their contributions to their families, to their societies just as the men are.”

Along with encouraging laws and practices that would help empower women, Clinton said, the United States has also made the elimination of child marriage one of its top priorities. In 2013, the State Department will begin tracking every country’s legal minimum age of marriage and the rate of marriage for underage girls and boys, she

said.

The Obama administration is also developing a new initiative to “provide emergency support to survivors of gender-based violence, those under credible threat of imminent attack due to their gender, and organizations that may need protection,” she said.

CIVIL SOCIETY BRINGS DURABLE CHANGE FROM WITHIN

The secretary said the role of civil society – including journalists, religious and citizen’s groups and other organizations – is especially important and needs to be supported in transitioning countries because of their role in influencing political reforms and the rule of law.

“We know that durable change is most likely to come from within, and that it takes everyone – journalists and activists, business people and teachers, religious leaders and labor leaders – pointing out the need for change, providing the ideas for change, and then reinforcing and supporting the political actions that will produce change,” she said.

Civil society groups are being increasingly targeted by governments because, by their very nature, they represent a threat to governmental oppression, and can organize people to improve their lives without a government’s direction or permission, she said.

“There are few things repressive governments fear more than citizens banding together with a common purpose. And it reflects a belief that people do not exist to serve their governments; rather, governments exist to serve their people,” Clinton said.

She said civil society activists have courageously mobilized to pressure governments and other influential organizations on issues ranging from climate change and health care to corruption and the protection of minorities, and they deserve support.

They are “doing what they know is best for their people and society but which is rejected by elites and governments afraid to cede one ounce of their power,” she said.

Clinton said that in some transitioning societies, old hatreds against minority groups have flared and threatened the ability of society to deliver justice “not just for the powerful, but also for the vulnerable.”

Religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities are not only human rights, but they are also part of the broader right for people to think and say what they want, and to peacefully associate with whom they want

“without the state looking over their shoulders or prohibiting them from doing so,” she said.

She also said the right of Internet freedom is essential because the online world has become “the public space of the 21st century,” where people can discuss issues of importance to them and can criticize, question or debate their authorities. That, in turn, can lead to constructive reforms that would help reinforce economic and political stability.

“Freedom is freedom, online or off,” Clinton said.

“The rights of individuals to express their views, petition their leaders, freely associate with others are universal, whether they are exercised on a university campus or a university’s Facebook page,” she said.

U.S. Holiday Shoppers Support Continued Economic Recovery

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 05 December 2012

Washington — More people than ever before kicked off the holiday shopping season in the United States, offering a welcome boost to businesses continuing to recover from economic recession.

The nationwide shopping spree began November 23, the day after Thanksgiving, known as “Black Friday” for its role in helping businesses turn a profit and move “into the black” for the year. For many retailers, sales on this day account for a substantial portion of annual profits and indicate consumer spending trends from late November through the end of December.

This year, the National Retail Federation reported that 89 million people braved the crowds on Black Friday alone, up from 86 million in 2011. According to the federation’s survey, traffic and spending grew from there. A record 247 million shoppers visited stores and websites during Black Friday weekend, up from 226 million in 2011.

Spending was also up, with the average holiday shopper dropping \$423 during the weekend, an increase from \$398 in 2011. Total spending reached an estimated \$59.1 billion.

Consumers spent more of their holiday budget online than in years past, with the average person spending \$174.42 over the weekend. This 40.7 percent chunk of total weekend spending was an increase from 37.8 percent in 2011. Nearly half of holiday shoppers made online purchases on Black Friday, and more than one-quarter did the same on Thanksgiving Day.

Nearly six in 10 shoppers purchased clothing and clothing accessories, up from 51 percent in 2011. Gift buyers also bought toys (34.6 percent), books, CDs, DVDs, video

games (39.8 percent), electronics (37.7 percent) and jewelry (15.2 percent). Roughly one in three consumers bought gift cards during the weekend, up nearly 10 percentage points from the 23.1 percent who did so in 2011.

Mostly drawn in by limited-time price reductions, more than half of the weekend’s consumers flocked to department stores, up from 48.7 percent last year. Large numbers of shoppers also visited discount stores (39.4 percent), clothing stores (29 percent), electronics stores (33 percent), grocery stores (21.7 percent) and drugstores (12.7 percent).

Many consumers shopped for gifts in preparation for Christmas, a Christian holiday celebrated in the United States December 25, and Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday observed for eight days, which in 2012 begins on December 8.

Contributing about \$2.5 trillion to the U.S. annual gross domestic product (GDP), retail is a daily barometer for the nation’s economy. Retailers in the United States currently operate more than 3.6 million establishments that support one in five U.S. jobs, or about 42 million working Americans.

U.S. economic activity significantly affects the economies of other nations. The U.S. GDP stood at \$15 trillion in 2011. Measured by purchasing power parity exchange rates (equalizing what people can buy with different currencies), that came to about 1.3 times the size of the second-largest economy, that of China (whose population is more than four times that of the United States) and more than three times the GDP of third-ranked Japan. With just 4.5 percent of the world’s population, the United States was responsible for 19 percent of total economic output.

Secretary Clinton Applauds NATO for Global Security Cooperation

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 05 December 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and her counterparts from the NATO alliance discussed a wide range of global economic, security and political issues during a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels.

“The alliance has made great strides and we’ve seen, just in the past 24 hours, how much ground member states can cover when we are working together,” Clinton said at NATO headquarters December 5. “It proves once again why this alliance is one of the greatest forces for security and stability in history.”

The secretary said the 28-member organization dealt with

issues affecting every corner of the globe during the two-day ministerial.

During a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, the principal political decision-making body within NATO, members agreed to augment Turkey's air defenses to protect against the threat of missiles from Syria. Clinton said the United States expects to make a contribution to the NATO mission.

The December 4 meeting of the NATO-Russia Council covered the group's extensive cooperation with Russia in places like Afghanistan. Clinton said members also spoke frankly about areas of disagreement between NATO and Russia, including Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the need for a political transition in Syria.

The secretary said members also met with their non-NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners to review the situation in Afghanistan as the transition to 2014 continues, when Afghan forces will have full responsibility for Afghanistan's security and U.S. and ISAF forces will take a supporting role.

"We discussed the need for an efficient, transparent, accountable mechanism to channel the international community's contributions to the Afghan forces," Clinton added.

She said the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting offered a chance to continue the conversation with Georgia about progress it needs to make to join NATO, including continuing to strengthen democratic institutions, reforming the armed forces and contributing to global security.

"When you take a step back and consider all the important issues that we covered in a single ministerial meeting here at NATO, it reveals, again, how critical our alliance is," Clinton said. The U.S. finds it "extremely valuable to be able to consult closely with our European allies on challenges from Syria to the Middle East to North Korea."

Since its start more than 60 years ago, Clinton said, NATO continues to keep the world safe and to project security and stability around the world.

"We believe it's needed more than ever, and, therefore, we believe we all must continue to invest in it politically, financially, diplomatically ... because these investments are worth it," the secretary said.

Clinton's attendance at the meeting was her last as secretary, as she plans to step down from her post early in 2013.

EU, U.S. to Boost Efforts on Small Business Trade Promotion

05 December 2012

Washington — The U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA) and the European Commission Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry (DGE) have agreed to work together to support and promote trans-Atlantic trade among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

At the fourth U.S.-EU SME Workshop December 3, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Market Access and Compliance Michael Camuñez and Director-General for Enterprise and Industry Daniel Calleja Crespo signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize efforts between ITA and DGE to collaborate on a wide range of trade promotion, information sharing and policy initiatives that will boost the ability of SMEs to access EU, U.S. and third-country markets.

"While an important focus of our efforts under the MOU will be exploring how to better collaborate on sector-specific and other trade promotion initiatives, we envision a comprehensive effort that will endeavor to address a wide range of concerns affecting SME trade," Camuñez said December 3.

Camuñez said both sides want to work closely with the private sector to better understand the trade promotion, trade finance and market access challenges SMEs are facing. "We realize that SMEs do not have the resources nor the time to wait for what has become an increasingly slow and sometimes lethargic process for handling issues in our respective bureaucracies and regulatory bodies," Camuñez added. "SMEs need governments to provide solutions to their market access problems in terms of months, not years. If we want to effectively help SMEs, we need to find ways to obtain results more quickly than many current processes allow."

The enhancement of U.S.-EU trade among SMEs has been a priority for the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC), the principal bilateral economic platform between the United States and the European Union. As a result, the SME Workshop was launched in 2011 by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration.

"The MOU we signed this week reflects a concrete commitment on the part of our governments to support SMEs as they engage in trans-Atlantic trade," Camuñez said. "It also further advances a TEC priority to better address the particular challenges SMEs face in our respective markets and globally."

Among other things, the MOU between ITA and the

DGE's Enterprise Europe Network is intended to facilitate the exchange of information about SMEs and promote international trade and business cooperation between U.S. and European SMEs. In addition, the MOU will facilitate the undertaking of specific initiatives to address market access and other barriers that constrain the growth of SME trade and investment.

Participants in the U.S.-EU workshop also discussed intellectual property rights protection for small business, the impact of standards on small business access to markets, SME financing tools, geographic clusters with a specific industry focus (including SME suppliers), and best practices in entrepreneurial programs for women and youth.

Snow Leopard Conservation Plays Part in Asia Development Project

05 December 2012

Washington — Snow leopard conservation will play a key role in a unique four-year water security and sustainable development project across Asia being launched by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The Conservation and Adaptation in Asia's High Mountain Landscapes and Communities Project will be implemented in Bhutan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal and Pakistan and build alliances across all countries with snow leopards, USAID said in a December 4 press release. The project aims to stimulate greater understanding and action at local, national and regional levels across these snow leopard-range countries to help conserve this iconic and endangered species. The project also will connect snow leopard conservation to the broader set of environmental, economic and social issues.

"USAID recognizes the complex relationship between climate change, a healthy environment and water supplies, so this program integrates both climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation approaches. It focuses on reducing the climate-related vulnerabilities that affect both mountain communities and species such as snow leopards, while improving the water supply and biodiversity of South and Central Asia," said Mary Melnyk, USAID's environment officer for Asia.

WWF Program Manager John Farrington said, "Temperatures in the high mountains of Asia are increasing at a faster rate than in adjacent low-elevation areas. Consequently, poor high-mountain communities suffer disproportionately from climate change impacts and are at greater risk. This innovative project will be the first of its kind to address wildlife conservation in these mountain communities in the context of a comprehensive, climate-smart program for improving local natural

resource management, livelihoods, and water security — and it will do so in a manner that builds transnational cooperation among project nations to tackle these issues."

The project will help motivate local communities to engage in both the conservation of snow leopards and prey species as well as sustainable management of high mountain landscapes, USAID said. It will also support alternative livelihoods, such as ecotourism development, to reduce dependence on natural resources, helping empower indigenous, poor, marginalized and vulnerable communities (especially women) whose incomes often are closely linked to natural resources.

20-Year-Old Law Expands Fight Against Weapons of Mass Destruction

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 04 December 2012

Washington — President Obama marked the 20th anniversary of landmark legislation to dismantle weapons of mass destruction and said the prevention of nuclear terrorism around the world will remain one of his top national security priorities as the U.S. commander-in-chief.

Speaking at the National Defense University in Washington December 3, Obama said the 1992 Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, named for former Georgia Senator Sam Nunn and Indiana Senator Richard Lugar, has set an example of partnership between the United States and other countries in securing all nuclear, biological and chemical materials that could otherwise be used in a terrorist attack.

Originally a partnership between the United States and countries of the former Soviet Union, the CTR program has since expanded to include more than 80 nations.

"Missile by missile, warhead by warhead, shell by shell, we're putting a bygone era behind us. ... We're moving closer to the future that we seek, a future where these weapons never threaten our children again, a future where we know the security and peace of a world without nuclear weapons," Obama said.

The president said it took "decades and extraordinary sums of money to build those arsenals. And it's going to take decades and continued investments to dismantle them," while they continue to pose a threat to the public.

"There are still terrorists and criminal gangs doing everything they can to get their hands on them. And make no mistake: If they get it, they will use it, potentially killing hundreds of thousands of innocent people, perhaps triggering a global crisis," he said.

Speaking earlier in the day, former Senator Nunn warned

that “complacency is the biggest danger we face,” and people around the world need to recognize the continued threats they face and the need to resolve them.

“I think we all have to back up and ask a question. If a nuclear weapon went off in a city in America or anywhere else on the globe, two questions: What would we wish we'd done to prevent it, and the second, why don't we do it now? And that's the kind of framework I think we have to keep emphasizing because of the stakes involved. But we have to have a lot of other countries asking the same question,” he said.

The challenge posed by weapons of mass destruction “is going to be with us for a long, long time. ... It's a dynamic subject that we have to respond to and we have to get partnerships all over the globe,” Nunn said.

Senator Lugar said the United States is working with governments around the world in setting up networks among military and government officials, laboratories and other experts to cooperate in areas of surveillance and research and in “anticipation of things that may occur.”

“This is an ongoing process in the world, for our safety, for the safety of the world,” he said.

Czech Republic, U.S. United Against Syrian Chemical Weapons

03 December 2012

Washington — The United States is “certainly planning to take action” if Syria’s government uses chemical weapons to subdue rebellion, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said December 3 while in Prague.

Questioned about media reports suggesting increased activity at Syrian chemical weapons sites, Clinton declined any direct comment. But she did repeat the administration’s earlier warning that “This is a redline for the United States.”

Speaking in broader terms about the almost two-year-old civil uprising in Syria, Clinton said the actions of the Syrian government have been “reprehensible” and “tragic” for Syria’s people.

Clinton was appearing at a press conference with Czech Republic Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg in her first stop on a four-nation European trip. The situation in Syria was among the issues discussed by the two diplomats.

“We are certainly united in our warning and condemnation, and will stand with the international community in a united way should there be any evidence that the Assad regime has ignored international opinion

on this important matter,” Clinton said.

On bilateral issues, Clinton said she and Schwarzenberg also discussed the two countries' shared commitment to promoting democracy and human rights around the world, security cooperation in Afghanistan, and collaboration in energy security and energy diversification.

“Czech and American scientists are already collaborating extensively in this field, including our effort to develop the first joint civil nuclear center that the United States will have with a NATO ally,” Clinton said.

With a broader perspective, Clinton said, the U.S. and European Union cooperation on energy matters can have an impact on issues from security to climate change.

Belgium, Ireland and Northern Ireland are the next stops on Clinton’s itinerary. She remains in Europe through December 7.

Foreign Visitors to U.S. Expected to Increase over Next 5 Years

03 December 2012

Washington — The United States can expect 3.6 percent to 4.3 percent average annual growth in foreign visitors over the next five years, the U.S. Department of Commerce says.

This year, more than 66 million international travelers are projected to visit the United States, the department said, an increase of 6 percent over 2011 visitor volume.

“Last year, our nation hosted a record-breaking number of international visitors, and the future looks even brighter,” Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Francisco Sánchez said.

In 2011, some 62.7 million international visitors traveled to the United States, generating \$153 billion in receipts and a \$43 billion trade surplus, the Commerce Department’ International Trade Administration (ITA) said November 30.

Visitors to the United States from all world regions are forecast to grow over the period from 2011 through 2017, ranging from a modest increase for the Caribbean (+3 percent) to a high for Asia (+64 percent), South America (+60 percent), and Oceania (+41 percent). Countries with the largest predicted growth percentages are China (+259 percent), Brazil (+83 percent), Argentina (+67 percent), South Korea (+51 percent), India (+47 percent), Australia (+46 percent), and Venezuela (+45 percent).

The North America region will account for the largest

proportion of the total visitor growth of nearly 18 million visitors (42 percent). Asia (26 percent), South America (13 percent), and Western Europe (12 percent) will account for the bulk of the remaining 58 percent of total growth in visitor volume forecast in 2017, ITA said. Countries producing the largest increases in visitors are Canada (29 percent of total growth), China (16 percent), Mexico (13 percent), Brazil (7 percent), United Kingdom (4 percent), and Japan (4 percent).

The new forecast supports the goals of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy, which the U.S. departments of Commerce and Interior presented to the president in May as a blueprint to increase international travel to the United States.

Secretary Clinton: U.S. Remains Engaged in Middle East Peace Efforts

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
01 December 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a November 30 address in Washington, stressed the importance of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians and steps forward in those negotiations as crucial elements for Middle East peace.

“We have to convince Palestinians that direct negotiations with Israel represent not just the best but the only path to the independent state they deserve,” Clinton said in a speech at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, a Washington-based public policy research center.

“America supports the goal of a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. But this week’s vote at the U.N. won’t bring Palestinians any closer. It may bring new challenges for the United Nations system and for Israel,” she said.

On November 29, the U.N. General Assembly voted to upgrade the status of the Palestinian Authority from nonmember observer entity to nonmember observer state. The tally was 138 members voting yes, nine members (including the United States) voting no and 41 members abstaining.

Clinton cautioned that all sides engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process need to consider carefully the path ahead. Palestinian leaders, Clinton added, must ask what unilateral action can really accomplish for their people in the drive to create a secure, democratic Palestinian state.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas took a step in the wrong direction at the U.N. General Assembly on November 29, Clinton said. “We opposed his resolution. But we also need to see that the Palestinian

Authority in the West Bank still offers the most compelling alternative to rockets and permanent resistance,” she added.

Clinton said Israel needs to help those committed to peace deliver for their people “in the here and now.” Clinton also praised President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for their achievements in the West Bank — making the streets safe, bringing a measure of peace and overhauling governing institutions.

And Clinton said the announcement by Israeli leaders on November 30 that construction of additional settlements and housing in the East Jerusalem would commence “set back the cause of a negotiated peace.”

Israelis, Palestinians, the United States and those partners engaged in the peace process “need to work together to find a path forward in negotiations that can finally deliver on a two-state solution. That must remain our goal,” she said.

Clinton said the United States is hoping that a brokered cease-fire between the Israelis and Hamas in the Gaza Strip will hold as this would lessen tensions across the region. The equation for peace, Clinton said, includes demonstrating the benefits of cooperation and coexistence for everyone.

And on other challenges confronting the broader Middle East, Clinton said the nations of the region and the entire international community must prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

“This is a commitment that President Obama has made and repeated because we know very well the Iranian regime already exports terrorism, not only to Israel’s doorstep, but across the world,” she said.

The United States sees Iran bringing repression to Syria, which has become embroiled in protracted civil strife, she said, and “we see Iran brutalizing their own people.”

A nuclear Iran is a threat not only to Israel, but to all nations, and risks “opening the floodgates” on nuclear proliferation around the world, Clinton added.

“When it comes to Iran’s nuclear threat, the United States does not have a policy of containment. We have a policy of prevention, built on the dual tracks of pressure and engagement, while keeping all options on the table,” she said.

U.S. Opposes Attempts to Limit Communications Freedom

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 30 November 2012

Washington – The United States will support expanded availability of Internet access and affordable broadband service when the World Conference on International Telecommunications convenes in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, December 3–14.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has called the conference for review of the International Telecommunication Regulations, a 1988 treaty that supports the international connection of information and communications services.

The "growth opportunity [in mobile and Internet communications] is a very global one, one that's interconnected in nature," said Terry Kramer, who will head the U.S. delegation to the conference. "Supporting that, we think, is absolutely critical."

Kramer suggests that conference delegates focus on the users of the Internet and telecommunication services – citizens, consumers and societies – and how to best serve their needs. Citizens need the Internet and information services to research topics of interest, and then to debate and discuss those with others for the benefit of democratic societies. Consumers use these services to conduct business, shop and develop new opportunities for personal and financial growth. Societies benefit with increased economic growth when consumers have those freedoms.

Kramer says the conference should respect the interests of those constituencies and avoid proposals that might inhibit economic and democratic activity. He says the United States is advocating proposals that allow for "more flexibility for future innovation," liberalized markets and incentives for the creation of a range of services.

The International Telecommunication Union has not called for a review of the International Telecommunication Regulations since the treaty was written in 1988, when this economic sector was much smaller, and when the Internet was in an early form. The conference is supposed to be limited to the governance of telecommunications, and the ITU director has said the meeting is not intended to focus on Internet governance. Regardless, it is expected that some member nations will try to gain greater control over Internet activity.

Some nations have made advance proposals suggesting the ITU should become an Internet governance body, or that governments should manage the Internet, or manage the content on the Internet. These proposals are

"alarming," Kramer said.

"These fundamentally violate everything that we believe in terms of democracy and opportunities for individuals," Kramer said.

The United States advocates continued reliance on "multistakeholder organizations," the Internet governance bodies giving voice to governments, industry and civil society.

Other advance proposals relate to pricing structures, which, for example, might make content developers pay fees to have their content delivered to Internet users. Considering that so much useful information is available for free on the Internet, Kramer said, the United States can't support "any new payment regimes that would undermine Internet traffic."

Kramer said the United States will oppose policies "where everybody develops their own approach, their own standards, their own sets of rules."

A final report on those lines would "reduce dramatically" the free flow of information, commerce and economic opportunity, Kramer said.

Kramer spent 25 years in international telecommunications before President Obama appointed him to lead U.S. negotiations at the World Conference on International Telecommunications. Stepping into the position in June 2012, he devoted time to building alliances on information technology issues with other countries throughout the Americas and in Europe. The United States also has strong Asian allies on these issues in Japan, Australia and New Zealand. These partner nations share U.S. values about liberalized markets and the need to prevent Internet content censorship, Kramer said.

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