

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Kerry Says He Will Keep America's Promise of Democracy

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 07 February 2013

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry has vowed to do the hard work necessary “to keep the promise of our democracy” for the next generation of Americans and for the rest of the world.

After taking the ceremonial oath of office in Washington February 6, Kerry said as secretary of state, he will support democracy in “quiet corners of the globe” as well as in tumultuous places such as Tahrir Square in Cairo and South Sudan.

He said his experience in war has given him an understanding of the human costs of failed diplomacy and the cost of conflict.

“But I make clear today to those listening, while my preference is for a peaceful resolution to conflict, my journey has also taught me that when remedies are exhausted, we must be prepared to defend our cause and do what is necessary to stand up to extremism, terrorism, chaos and evil, and we will continue to do so,” Kerry said.

Kerry, a decorated combat veteran of the Vietnam War, invited several soldiers who fought with him in Vietnam to attend his swearing-in.

Kerry said the State Department has a broad range of diplomatic actions it can take to reduce conditions that lead to war. As examples, he cited the U.S. program to fight HIV/AIDS, particularly in Africa, that has saved the lives of millions of people, and helping young girls to pursue their dreams of education in Afghanistan and other places.

As he starts his new job, Kerry said, the world is undergoing big changes brought on by new technologies, unprecedented growth in the numbers of young people, sectarian strife and religious extremism. “These forces threaten to unravel whole nation-states and create greater pockets of instability than we have seen in recent times,” Kerry said. “All of us need to do better at inviting people to embrace the values that have always inspired us.”

Speaking to young foreign service officers at the State Department on February 7, Kerry said in countries including Egypt and Syria, about 50 percent of the population is under the age of 21.

“If they don't have jobs, and they don't have an education and they don't see much of a future, and the governance of their country is suppressing their aspirations in a world where they can tweet and Facebook and connect to

everybody else, you're going to get what you got in Tahrir Square, and you're going to see more energy released that way,” he said.

He added that the United States has a responsibility for world leadership despite its budgetary constraints.

U.S. Iran Sanctions Exempt Food, Medicine, Remittances

07 February 2013

Washington — U.S. sanctions have been steadily tightening on Iran as a result of the Iranian government's continued failure to live up to its international obligations regarding its nuclear and ballistic missile activities. However, Americans have remained free to send humanitarian assistance to help the Iranian people, including food, medicine and money, according to the U.S. Treasury Department.

According to a February 6 press release from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), under U.S. law the sale and export of nearly all types of food and medicine, as well as basic medical supplies, are “broadly authorized,” and other types of U.S. humanitarian exports can gain authorization through a license from OFAC.

“OFAC administers U.S. laws and regulations in a way that allows Americans to continue their humanitarian support of the Iranian people without providing support to the Government of Iran. The U.S. Government's commitment to facilitating humanitarian engagement with the Iranian people is manifest in its longstanding policy to authorize exports or re-exports of humanitarian goods, such as agricultural commodities, medicine, and medical devices, to Iran,” OFAC said.

Under U.S. law, there is a general authorization for Americans to freely send certain humanitarian items, with specific OFAC authorization available for other items.

“Donations of food and medicine by U.S. persons intended to relieve human suffering are exempt from the sanctions on trade between the United States and Iran, provided such donations are not to the Government of Iran, Iranian financial institutions, or any other person whose property and interests in property are blocked,” OFAC said. The organizations, institutions and individuals who have been designated for U.S. sanctions have mostly been linked to the Iranian government and its illicit activities, as well as its curtailment of Iranian human rights.

In addition, U.S. financial institutions are allowed to process “noncommercial, personal remittances to Iran,” allowing individuals inside the United States to “assist a

family member or friend" so long as the payment is processed through a third-country financial institution and not directly transferred from an American bank to an Iranian bank, which is currently prohibited under U.S. law.

OFAC also says it administers a "favorable licensing policy" for projects and activities that are designed to benefit democracy and human rights in Iran, as well as for academic and cultural exchange programs. It has also adopted an expedited application process for those "seeking to engage in certain human rights-, humanitarian- and democracy-related activities with respect to Iran."

Over the past decade Iran has suffered two devastating earthquakes; OFAC said that at times of crisis and tragedy the U.S. government has facilitated expedited humanitarian assistance to Iran. Following the devastating Bam earthquake in December 2003, the United States airlifted pre-positioned emergency supplies to help the thousands of victims, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sent a Disaster Assistance Relief Team that assisted with rescue efforts and deployed a mobile hospital unit with medical supplies.

In the aftermath of the Bam earthquake, OFAC also issued a temporary authorization to allow people living in the United States to make donations to nongovernmental organizations working to aid the victims. The office followed up with a similar authorization allowing U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations to "transfer funds related to earthquake relief efforts to or for the benefit of persons in Iran" following an earthquake in August 2012.

U.S. sanctions are "intended to impose consequences on Iran's leadership for their failure to adhere to their obligations and alter their dangerous course," and they have had "a tangible impact on the Government of Iran's ability to engage in illicit activities, making concrete the costs and isolation that the Government of Iran will continue to face so long as its leadership chooses to ignore their international obligations," OFAC said.

At the same time, food and medicine intended to relieve the suffering of the Iranian people are exempt from U.S. sanctions, OFAC said.

Syrian Humanitarian Effort Strives to Meet Need, U.S. Says

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 06 February 2013

Washington — The international humanitarian community is using every available channel to assist more than 760,000 refugees who have fled violence in their country and some 2.5 million others who remain in Syria,

displaced from their homes, facing shortages and hardship wrought by the almost 2-year-old uprising.

U.S. officials involved in the effort briefed reporters February 6 on the U.S. contribution of \$365 million to the relief effort.

"What will be important going forward is that we ensure we have the access that we need to reach people throughout Syria, especially in those hard-to-reach conflict-affected areas," said Nancy Lindborg, assistant administrator for humanitarian assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). "And that's why we're using all the channels we can to get there."

Humanitarian assistance is reaching all 14 governorates in Syria, but it is not reaching all the people who really need it, said Lindborg's colleague, Anne Richard, assistant secretary of state for population, refugees and migration. In late January the two were in the region visiting refugee camps and assessing the state of the relief effort.

While there, Richard said, they were in touch with a convoy on a "risky venture" arranged by the U.N. refugee agency. Trucks full of aid supplies were on a mission to reach a corner of northern Syria in need of winter supplies. The trucks went through territory held by the opposition movement and by the Syrian government, Richard said.

"It took a lot of coordination for their route to actually open up and be able to get this very large convoy on its way," said Richard.

The U.N. Refugee Agency reported that 200 metric tons of tents and blankets were airlifted from a warehouse in Copenhagen to a civilian airport on the Syrian coast. From there, an eight-truck convoy carried the aid shipment to an area between Aleppo and the Syrian-Turkish border.

Richard expressed hope that such an effort can be repeated and scaled up to deliver more aid in the future.

Allegations and rumors are circulating in the region that humanitarian aid has been given to, or seized by, the Syrian government. Richard heard such assertions while visiting the camps, and she described it as "misinformation" that the U.S. delegation refuted. Aid going into Syria is benefiting those for whom it is intended.

"We know that health supplies are getting into clinics that are overseen by the Ministry of Health, but the supplies are not benefiting the ministry," Richard said. "They are benefiting the patients in those clinics."

The Department of State official said the U.S. humanitarian team remains watchful for signs that aid is being diverted to the government or the black market. But as of now, "it is not happening," Richard said.

The aid effort has been further criticized because assistance is not being extended directly to humanitarian groups backed by the Syrian Opposition Council (SOC). Lindborg said the relief effort is best managed by the established U.N. agencies and associated organizations that have long-term experience in the delivery of humanitarian aid on the basis of need rather than politics.

Lindborg said the information these groups can provide about areas of need is very helpful to the humanitarian effort, and SOC-related groups will continue to play a role in the campaign.

In related developments, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced February 5 a scale-up of feeding programs targeting Syria. WFP is providing food to 1.5 million people now, and plans to escalate its efforts in order to reach 2.5 million people in the next three months.

UNICEF announced February 4 that it is beginning to ship water chlorination supplies into Syria, addressing the concern that water purification facilities have been greatly damaged in the conflict.

At an international conference in Kuwait January 30, attending countries pledged more than \$1.5 billion to help Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and those displaced within the embattled country.

Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon are host to the 760,000 Syrians who have fled the fighting. The U.S. officials say two-thirds of that number are not in refugee camps, as organized by the U.N. and regional governments. They are staying in villages and schools, and in the homes of relatives and friends, in widely varying circumstances.

Secretary Kerry on 2013 Lunar New Year

06 February 2013

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
February 6, 2013

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY KERRY

2013 Lunar New Year

On behalf of the American people, I am delighted to send my heartfelt wishes for good health, good fortune, happiness, and prosperity to all those around the world celebrating the arrival of the Lunar New Year this

February 10.

This week, millions of people will make the journey – some across great distances – to reunite with their loved ones to mark the Lunar New Year. Here in the United States, many families will likewise gather to welcome the New Year. These public and private celebrations, held by multigenerational immigrant communities, highlight the diversity of American society and the deep and complex bonds that link the American people with peoples from around the world. President Obama and I look forward to strengthening our commitment to building ever-stronger relations with the people of the Asia-Pacific through initiatives that foster economic growth, improve regional security, and advance cooperative friendships among our peoples.

In this festive time, I would like to wish all great success in the coming year as we continue to work together to deepen partnerships and find solutions to the challenges we face.

Assistant Secretary of State Ann Stock to Travel to Bangladesh and Burma

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC
February 6, 2013

Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Ann Stock will travel to Bangladesh and Burma February 9-14, 2013 to engage with youth, civil society and promote academic and cultural exchange opportunities in the United States. She will also meet with State Department program alumni to hear about their experiences in the United States and what they are doing with the skills they acquired.

In Bangladesh, Assistant Secretary Stock will lead a conversation at the new Edward M. Kennedy Center with State Department exchange alumni who established Jaago, Bangladesh's largest youth volunteer organization. They will discuss how youth are transforming their societies. She will also meet with EducationUSA advising staff and students, as well as participants of the English Access Microscholarship Program in Dhaka.

While in Burma, Assistant Secretary Stock will open the first-ever EducationUSA-sponsored University Fair in Rangoon. She will meet with civil society and youth to explore new opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges between the United States and Burma. Assistant Secretary Stock will also travel to Naypyitaw for meetings with the Minister of Education and other government officials.

International Treaty Puts Free Internet in Jeopardy

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 05 February 2013

Washington — The head of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) warned U.S. lawmakers that the Internet “is under assault” following a United Nations telecommunications treaty that was adopted in December 2012 by the U.N.’s International Telecommunications Union (ITU) at an international conference in Dubai.

In his prepared remarks to a February 5 joint hearing of the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce subpanel on communications and technology and the House Foreign Affairs subcommittees on terrorism and human rights, FCC Commissioner Robert McDowell said measures such as the ability of governments to decide what constitutes unsolicited Internet content, known as spam, have effectively “ended the era of an international consensus to keep intergovernmental hands off of the Internet in dramatic fashion.”

With the new regulation, under “flimsy pretexts” such as a stated desire to deal with network congestion, governments can inspect the content of Internet communications to determine if they can be blocked as spam, he said. That could be used to censor dissent, democracy and free speech.

Since the Internet became available for public use, it has relied upon “multi-stakeholder organizations,” including governments, the private sector and civil society groups, to make consensus decisions, rather than regulations, over its use and the promotion of best practices.

However, the 89-55 vote to approve a new telecommunications treaty that would go into effect in 2015 changed critical definitions that have helped to insulate Internet service providers, Internet content and application providers from intergovernmental control. The vote has in effect given the ITU “unprecedented authority over the economics and content of key aspects of the Internet,” McDowell said.

“Freedom, prosperity and the potential to improve the human condition across the globe are at risk. Any questions regarding these assertions are now settled,” he said.

McDowell urged dialogue among governments, civil society, the private sector, nonprofit organizations and the ITU designed at broadening the multi-stakeholder structure to allow those who feel disenfranchised, including many developing countries, to play a meaningful role in shaping the Internet’s evolution.

“Primarily due to economic and logistical reasons, many

developing world countries are not able to play a role in the multi-stakeholder process. This is unacceptable and should change immediately,” he said.

“Developing nations stand to gain the most from unfettered Internet connectivity, and they will be injured the most by centralized multilateral control of its operations and content,” McDowell said.

The new treaty came despite assurances ahead of the Dubai conference that no votes would be taken there, a new treaty would be adopted only by the unanimous consent of participants, and any new treaty “would not touch the Internet,” but “all three promises were resoundingly broken,” McDowell said.

The December conference was meant to renegotiate a 1988 treaty that governs international phone calls. However, the FCC commissioner said, the conference instead “became the perfect opportunity for proponents of expanded regulation to extend the ITU’s reach into the Internet’s affairs.”

McDowell said the experience in Dubai offers “a chilling foreshadow of how international Internet regulatory policy could expand at an accelerating pace.”

He warned that time “is of the essence” and that those who cherish the current freedom of the Internet “must immediately redouble their efforts to prevent further expansions of government control of the Internet” ahead of an important ITU meeting that will be held in Korea in 2014.

That meeting is expected to result in a new constitution that “will define the ITU’s mission for years to come,” he said. McDowell warned that in the current climate, “the momentum favors those pushing for more Internet regulation.”

“While we debate what to do next, Internet freedom’s foes around the globe are working hard to exploit a treaty negotiation that dwarfs the importance of the [Dubai conference] by orders of magnitude,” the FCC commissioner said.

“Two years hence, let us not look back at this moment and lament how we did not do enough. We have but one chance. Let us tell the world that we will be resolute and stand strong for Internet freedom. All nations should join us,” McDowell said.

Alliance Gives At-Risk Girls Vaccine Against Cancer-Causing Virus

05 February 2013

Washington — An international alliance to broaden the

availability of immunizations announced a plan February 4 to distribute vaccine to protect girls from human papillomavirus (HPV) in eight developing world nations.

The GAVI Alliance announced the campaign to offer disease protection to more than 180,000 girls on World Cancer Day. HPV is a primary cause of cervical cancer, which kills 275,000 women each year, 85 percent of them in the world's poorest nations.

But the campaign aims to do more than prevent cancer, according to a press release from the Geneva-based GAVI Alliance, which is backed with U.S. and international funding. The campaign will also give the countries involved the opportunity to scale up health care capabilities they'll need to roll out the HPV vaccine on a national basis in the future.

"Introducing the HPV vaccine in developing countries is the start of a global effort to protect all girls against cervical cancer," said Dr. Seth Berkley, the chief executive officer at GAVI. "Cervical cancer is one of the leading cancer killers of women in the developing world."

The HPV vaccine campaign targets Ghana, Kenya, Laos, Madagascar, Malawi, Niger, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. But GAVI proposes a rapid scale-up, intending by 2015 to support 20 countries in the distribution of vaccine to 1 million girls. By 2020, the alliance plans to support efforts to vaccinate 30 million girls in 40 countries.

"It is imperative that young women and girls be protected against cervical cancer, the leading cause of cancer deaths in women in our region," said Minister of Health Catherine Gotani Hara of Malawi. "The HPV vaccine is our best hope at protecting girls against this deadly disease."

GAVI reports in a press release that cervical cancer kills more women worldwide each year than childbirth. Without the introduction of greater control measures, the disease is on a track to become more deadly, with deaths expected to reach 430,000 by 2020.

Vaccination programs are targeted to girls between the ages of 9 and 13 to give them protection before they become sexually active and risk exposure to HPV.

Most of the eight countries involved in the GAVI program will begin vaccinations in 2013, mainly through schools and community health programs.

The program targets girls because the consequences of HPV infection for them are far greater than in boys. Most men never develop any symptoms or health problems if exposed to HPV. Some forms of genital cancer will develop from HPV in men, but they are extremely rare.

Now supported by governments, corporations, foundations and private individuals, the GAVI Alliance formed in 2000 in response to declining rates of child immunization in the developing world. The United States is a major donor, along with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Rajiv Shah has said that GAVI "is just an absolutely outstanding example of the future of development policy and implementation."

UNICEF, the European Commission, other Western European governments, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Russia are also GAVI donors.

Vice President Biden: U.S. Will Handle Economic Challenges "Just Fine"

04 February 2013

Washington — Vice President Biden said economic conditions in the United States are improving, and he urged European countries to resolve their economic crisis, saying a "strong and capable Europe" is in the interests of the United States and the rest of the global community.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference in Germany February 2, Biden said the United States is taking "difficult but critical steps to put ourselves on a sounder economic footing" in the aftermath of the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

U.S. policymakers are determined to continue cutting the country's debt in a balanced way in the coming years, Biden said. He noted an agreement between the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress to reduce federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion over the next 10 years. In addition, the vice president said lawmakers made significant compromises on the U.S. tax code at the end of 2012 that will raise an additional \$600 billion in revenue.

There is more work to be done, he said, but "we're going to do just fine in terms of our economic 'crisis' and the cliffs that are about to approach," referring to recent disagreements over raising the national debt ceiling and the possibility of mandatory federal spending cuts known as "sequestration" that will begin March 1 unless the U.S. Congress comes to an agreement that would avoid them.

"The strength of our economy at home is the most fundamental source of our power and influence in the world," Biden said, and U.S. economic well-being is among the country's "strategic obligations to the rest of the world."

The U.S. economy is a crucial engine for growth in the global economy, and movements in its gross domestic

product, international trade levels, employment and monetary policy are closely monitored by world governments and international financial markets. World currency markets also monitor U.S. economic activity because the U.S. dollar acts as the reserve global currency that underpins the 24-hour-a-day foreign exchange market that links to the flow of global investments.

Biden said the United States has increased its engagement with developing countries, particularly in Asia, but that it “does not come at Europe’s expense.”

Greater peace and stability in the region and U.S. advocacy of greater market access and fairer trading rules also benefit European customers and companies. “It is profoundly in Europe’s interest for America to engage more broadly with the world, and we should be doing it more fully together,” he said.

Europe’s contributions to global stability and prosperity are also critical and depend on the strengths of its economy and its financial commitment to security. The vice president acknowledged that Europe’s economic recession and the temptation to back away from defense spending commitments make its situation difficult, but said that “maintaining our capabilities is what enables us to advance our common global agenda.”

Biden said there have been positive steps taken to address the crisis in the eurozone, with the European Central Bank pledging to back countries willing to launch reforms, and actions taken by Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy to put their economies on a sounder path.

“Governments across the eurozone must also remain focused on growth and jobs. These may be fundamentally European problems, requiring European solutions, but their resolution has tremendous impact on the United States of America and on the global economy,” he said.

Looking ahead, Biden said Europe and the United States have great potential to expand their economic relationship “as we get our respective houses in order.” Europe is already America’s largest economic partner, with more than \$600 billion in trade every year that creates and sustains millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as a \$5 trillion overall commercial relationship.

He urged European and American policymakers to overcome differences on regulations and standards so they can approve a comprehensive trans-Atlantic trade and investment agreement.

“The question now is whether the political will exists to resolve those long-standing differences. And if so, we should pursue a trans-Atlantic partnership. And if we go

down that road, we should try to do it on one tank of gas and avoid protracted rounds of negotiations,” he said.

Such an agreement is not a new idea; it is “within our reach” and would yield “almost boundless” rewards, he said.

“It would be good for growth, job creation, and be good on both sides of the Atlantic; it would strengthen our global trading system; and it would, importantly, help us ... add another element of our trans-Atlantic alliance,” Biden said.

U.S. Education Official Highlights Benefits of Special Olympics

04 February 2013

This blog post by Michael Yudin, acting assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, originally appeared on the official blog of the U.S. Department of Education on February 1.

Kicking Off the Special Olympics Winter Games in South Korea

By Michael Yudin

Participating in sports – through both training and competition – promotes physical, psychological, and social well-being. Special Olympics not only provides the opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities to realize these benefits, but promotes dignity, respect, and the opportunity for fuller social inclusion.

Over the past several days, I’ve been fortunate to join more than 2,300 athletes and their coaches from over 110 countries in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, for the 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games. The Games, which include competition in events such as skiing, skating, snowboarding, and floor hockey, is also a celebration of the spirit of the Special Olympics.

I have had the privilege to meet athletes and their families from towns and cities across the United States, as well as athletes from Morocco, New Zealand, Egypt, Uzbekistan, South Africa, and of course Korea.

One athlete here in Korea is Chase from Salt Lake City. Chase, from the day he was born, wanted to play sports, yearned to achieve and excel in sports. But the community programs just didn’t cut it for him. According to his mom, with Special Olympics, his whole life changed. He has far exceeded her expectations and truly is a “rock star,” she said.

Vivienne from Montana is also representing the United States during the Games. Vivienne’s parents set the bar high for their daughter. The phrase “can’t” was simply

not acceptable. As the Olympic torch made its way toward Yongpyong Dome for the Games' opening ceremonies, Vivienne was there to carry the torch on one of the final legs of the flame's journey.

While sports provide great benefits, Special Olympics is much more. Special Olympics' Project UNIFY supports schools in becoming more inclusive to those with disabilities through athletics and other activities. The U.S. Department of Education reinforced this mission last week with new guidance clarifying a school's existing obligations to provide students with disabilities opportunities to participate alongside their peers in after-school athletics and clubs.

Here in Korea, thousands of athletes, families, students, educators, advocates, and politicians convened to do more than just play sports. It's a call to action.

It's estimated that there are approximately 200 million people with intellectual disabilities globally – and too many of them experience poverty and exclusion.

World leaders, such as Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi from Burma and President Joyce Banda from Malawi, addressed barriers and social hurdles people with intellectual disabilities face, and importantly, solutions to end the cycle of poverty and exclusion that they and their families face.

During the Global Youth Summit that accompanied the Games, we learned about the latest developments in innovative sports programming for young children with intellectual disabilities ages 2-7, helping these children strengthen physical development and self-esteem. I am truly inspired by the young people from around the world, both with and without intellectual disabilities, who are committed to inclusion and acceptance in schools and communities.

The Summit provided youth with opportunities to acquire and enhance leadership and advocacy skills for themselves, their peers, their schools, and their communities. The summit also included a rally with over 900 young people from Korea and around the world celebrating Special Olympic athletes, and children with and without disabilities around the world.

In a moving speech during the Summit, Rahma Aly, a Special Olympics athlete from Egypt, summed up the spirit of the games and the mission of the Special Olympics. "Love, understanding, believing and willing to accept others, no matter how different they are is my message," Aly said. "Don't consider us different, we are part of this society, we can help, participate and succeed."

(Michael Yudin is acting assistant secretary for ED's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.)

Health Leaders Warn of Greatest Disease Risks

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 04 February 2013

Washington — Both U.S. and international health institutions use the month of February as an opportunity to raise awareness about diseases that are among the greatest causes of premature death.

In the United States, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) promotes February as American Heart Month with the support of other nongovernmental organizations. One main theme of the event is to drive home the message to women that they face a serious risk of heart disease despite a widely held but erroneous impression in the lay public that men are much more vulnerable to the condition.

NHLBI, one of the National Institutes of Health, is promoting The Heart Truth, a campaign based on real-life stories of women who have become proactive in protecting their heart health at the same time they inspire and motivate others to make heart-healthy lifestyle changes.

"Over the past 11 years, The Heart Truth campaign has raised awareness that heart disease is the leading killer of women in the United States," said Dr. Gary H. Gibbons, director of the NHLBI. "Closing the gap between awareness and prevention of heart disease remains a critical public health imperative, and with the information, tools and support offered by The Heart Truth, women have tremendous power to create change."

Managing cholesterol levels, controlling blood pressure and not smoking are among the key strategies for reducing the risk of heart disease for both women and men. Lifestyle habits such as a balanced diet, physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight also minimize the prospect of heart disease and other cardiovascular diseases (CVDs).

While the NHLBI's campaign is directed toward U.S. women, the message is an important one for people everywhere. The World Health Organization (WHO), cites CVDs — to include heart attacks, stroke, high blood pressure, peripheral artery disease and heart failure — as the Number 1 cause of death for people worldwide.

WHO estimates that CVDs were the cause of death for 17.3 million people in 2008, the most recent year for which the data has been analyzed. The greatest burden of CVDs is carried by low- and middle-income countries, where 80 percent of all deaths occur.

The healthy habits promoted by the U.S. Heart Truth campaign are the same ones that WHO advises to reduce CVDs worldwide. The Geneva-based organization reports

that 80 percent of heart disease and stroke stems from high-risk lifestyles.

WHO joins the Union for International Cancer Control February 4 in recognizing World Cancer Day. As with American Heart Month, the purpose of marking this disease on the calendar is to raise awareness about the dangers and to promote the message that proper lifestyle choices are a strong defense against cancer.

Cancer is a broad term that describes a large group of diseases that can affect any part of the body. The common characteristic is the rapid creation of abnormal cells that begins in one area of the body but then invades adjoining tissues and spreads to other organs.

Cancer took about 7.6 million lives in 2008, accounting for 13 percent of all deaths. Lung, stomach and liver cancers are the most frequently occurring. WHO cites tobacco as the single most important risk factor, causing 22 percent of global cancer deaths and 71 percent of lung cancer deaths.

WHO reports that more than 30 percent of cancer deaths could be avoided by reducing the lifestyle risk factors of tobacco use, alcohol use, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.

Vice President Biden Addresses Europe, Iran, Syria in Munich Security Speech

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
02 February 2013

Washington — Vice President Biden, in his second appearance at the annual Munich Security Conference, says neither the United States nor any other country can address the security and economic challenges that the world faces alone.

“We need to work together, we need to stick together,” Biden told conference delegates gathered at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof Munich. He addressed the same security conference four years ago, shortly after he and President Obama took office. It is the first international trip for Biden since beginning a second term of office January 20.

A crucial aspect of the Obama administration’s foreign policies is built on the belief that multilateral relations are essential in accomplishing long-range goals and objectives.

“President Obama and I continue to believe that Europe is the cornerstone of our engagement with the rest of the world and is the catalyst for our global cooperation,” Biden said. “This European alliance is critical to our interests.”

Europe, Biden said, remains America’s indispensable partner in global affairs.

“I stand before you as a proud Atlanticist for my entire career and a firm believer in the trans-Atlantic ties that have never been deeper ... broader or more important at any time since I was elected as a kid in 1972,” he said.

Four years ago the discussion between the United States and Europe was dominated by Iraq and Afghanistan, but today “we’re in the process of turning the page on more than a decade of conflict following the September 11, 2001, attack, and we ended the war in Iraq responsibly.”

The United States and Europe are drawing down operations in Afghanistan, and by the end of 2014 the transition will be completed, he said.

But Biden also told the conference that four years ago Iran had effectively divided the international community over how best to address its illicit and destabilizing nuclear weapons development program. The United States offered to talk with the Iranian leadership then to offer a clear choice: continue a nuclear development program and there would be continued pressure and isolation; or abandon the illicit nuclear program and support for terrorism, and there would be meaningful incentives.

“We know what path Iran has chosen,” Biden said. “And so the international community came together, and the United States, the European Union and the United Nations imposed what the Iranian leaders are acknowledging to be the most robust sanctions in history.”

Biden said President Obama has made it clear to the Iranian leadership that the United States policy is not containment, but to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them.

But Biden said there is still time, “there is still space for diplomacy, backed by pressure, to succeed. The ball is in the government of Iran’s court, and it’s well past time for Tehran to adopt a serious, good-faith approach to negotiations with the [permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany].”

And four years ago, the world was mired in one of the deepest economic recessions since the Great Depression, but today conditions are improving, he said. The United States has been working at rebalancing its economy to put itself on a sounder economic footing, he added.

“We’re determined to continue in a balanced way to cut our debt in the coming years and have made significant strides towards that goal,” Biden told the conference. The Congress and White House have agreed to trim nearly \$1

trillion from the debt over the next 10 years, and at the end of 2012 agreed to make reforms in the U.S. tax code, raising another \$600 billion and making crucial compromises in spending, he said.

Biden said four years ago many nations had been scarred by the recent memory of international terrorism: 9/11 in the United States, 7/7 in Britain, 3/11 in Spain.

"Now, as a result of the joint efforts of all of our countries and renewed and relentless focus on counterterrorism, the cooperation of our law enforcement agencies, and President Obama's unflinching determination to bring Osama bin Laden to justice, we've made progress," Biden said.

"We've dealt that organization, al-Qaida, a crippling blow, made all our homelands more secure," he said.

While in Munich Biden met with the leaders of the Syrian opposition coalition.

"Just this week the international community came together ... to pledge \$1.5 billion in pledges for humanitarian support for the Syrian people and refugees fleeing the violence," Biden told the conference.

The United States recently announced that it was contributing another \$155 million, bringing its total humanitarian aid for Syria to \$365 million – the largest contribution of any nation, Biden said.

"We also provided more than \$50 million in nonlethal assistance to the Syrian opposition and are working alongside our partners to help them become more inclusive and cohesive," he added.

Biden said the United States, Europe and the United Nations are under no illusions. But the Syrian opposition grows stronger, and as the Syrian people take their chance to forge their own future, "they will continue to find a partner in the United States of America."

While in Munich, Biden met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss the importance of the two nations working cooperatively in the interests of peace and security, including in Syria, the White House said after Biden's speech.

Biden, who met February 1 with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, is scheduled to meet with French President François Hollande in Paris and in London with British Prime Minister David Cameron.

Science and Technology Achievers Win Presidential Honors

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 01 February 2013

Washington – In a White House ceremony February 1, President Obama paid honor to some of the country's greatest minds. He presented the National Medal of Science and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, the U.S. government's highest honors for scientists, engineers and inventors.

A White House announcement in December named "12 eminent researchers" to receive the National Medal of Science and "11 extraordinary inventors" to win the National Medal of Technology and Innovation.

"They remind us of the enormous impact a few good ideas can have when these creative qualities are unleashed in an entrepreneurial environment," Obama said.

The work of these honorees is diverse and comes out of institutions known to nurture many of the United States' best ideas. Collectively, their discoveries improve our understanding of ocean depths and the farthest corners of the universe. The achievements of "these extraordinary Americans" – as Obama called them – give us new insights on the internal mechanics of the human brain and the means to manufacture the tiny rechargeable batteries running the electronic devices so much a part of 21st-century lives.

A few of the winners of the science medals and their achievements are summarized below, based on information from the National Science Foundation.

Biological oceanographer Sallie Chisholm from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology focused her early work on marine phytoplankton. Her research led to the realization that plankton account for a larger part of marine productivity than previously understood, and that an even greater amount of global carbon cycles through the ocean's mass of unicellular plants than previously thought.

Astronomer Sandra Faber, University of California, Santa Cruz, turns her sights to the stars to understand the formation and evolution of galaxies and structures in the universe. Her work has had a great influence on how cosmologists now model the universe. She leads a project on the Hubble Space Telescope designed to give scientists a view of galaxy formation nearly as far back as the Big Bang. One of her other projects is to measure the total mass density of the universe.

Solid-state physicist John Goodenough at the University of Texas at Austin pursued research that led to the

development of the first commercial lithium-ion battery. Private-sector adoption of his work led to “the commercialization of technology for lightweight rechargeable batteries now ubiquitous in today’s portable electronic devices,” according to the National Science Foundation. “Goodenough is widely credited for [the battery’s] original identification and development,” the foundation said.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office provided information on the recipients of the National Medal of Technology and Innovation.

George Carruthers of the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory invented the tools for us to see objects in space not visible to the eye alone. The Far Ultraviolet Camera Spectrograph he developed went to the moon aboard the Apollo 16 mission in 1972. The device helps scientists understand space objects, providing views of stars and solar systems light-years away. On board the space shuttle, “Carruthers’ instruments measured the Earth’s ozone layer and upper atmosphere, and sent back images of distant stars and planets for analysis,” according to the Patent Office.

Gholam Peyman was honored for what he has allowed us to see. This Iranian-born ophthalmologist invented laser eye surgery, known as LASIK, which corrects vision and ends a reliance on glasses. He has developed a number of other instruments and techniques that advance ophthalmology, notably a method to administer medications in the eye, “which has since become the basis for management of many otherwise blinding diseases that affect very large numbers of patients,” the Patent Office reports.

Jan Vilcek is an immigrant to the United States who escaped capture by Nazi armies as a child and then fled communist Czechoslovakia as a young man. He received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation for his contributions to the development of monoclonal antibodies. These are laboratory-produced molecules engineered to attach themselves to a patient’s cancer cells. The antibody then acts as a marker on the cancer cell, becoming an easier target for the immune system to find.

At the White House ceremony, Obama said the medals “celebrate and spotlight” these talented citizens, who helped move the United States into the 21st century. The president said he hopes young people are watching and “will make it their goal to stand in this place one day.”

Clinton Says Both Hard and Soft Power Needed for Diplomacy

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 01 February 2013

Washington — The United States needs both "soft power" and "hard power" to deal with a world populated by

nonstate actors and transnational threats that defy unilateral solutions, according to outgoing Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

“More countries than ever have a voice in global debates. We see more paths to power opening up as nations gain influence through the strength of their economies rather than their militaries. And political and technological changes are empowering nonstate actors, like activists, corporations and terrorist networks,” Clinton said in remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations January 31, the second-to-last day on her job.

She said that U.S. military and economic strength will remain the foundation of U.S. global leadership, which supports the spread of universal values. American hard power was used to good effect to stop Libya’s former dictator Muammar Qadhafi from massacring his people and to hunt down and bring to justice Osama bin Laden, she said.

“America’s ability to project power all over the globe remains essential,” she said. “We will ensure freedom of navigation in all the world’s seas. We will relentlessly go after al-Qaida, its affiliates and its wannabes. We will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” she said.

But for other issues, she said, complex approaches are required. As the United States expands its engagement with Asia, she said, Washington has sent Marines to Australia and at the same time signed a treaty with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that could prove instrumental in defusing tensions in the South China Sea.

“How could we approach an issue as thorny and dangerous as the territorial disputes in the South China Sea without a deep understanding of energy politics, subtle multilateral diplomacy, smart economic statecraft and a firm adherence to universal norms?” she said.

She said the way the United States handles its relationship with China will have global consequences. “We are trying to write a new answer to the age-old question of what happens when an established power and a rising power meet,” she said. The United States is using every lever at its disposal covering traditional strategic issues such as North Korea, maritime security and human rights and emerging challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and intellectual property protection, she said.

“The Pacific is big enough for all of us, and we will continue to welcome China’s rise if it chooses to play a constructive role in the region. For both of us, the future of this relationship depends on our ability to engage across all these issues at once,” she said.

While consolidating its engagement with Asia, the United States will not take its eyes off the Middle East and North Africa, Clinton said. The United States will have to use “every single tool in our toolkit” to address both the active conflicts and the underlying causes, she added.

One particular tool, improving the lives of women and children, is exceptionally important. “The evidence is absolutely indisputable. If women and girls everywhere were treated as equal to men in rights, dignity and opportunity, we would see political and economic progress everywhere,” she said.

Asked about where U.S. diplomacy could improve, she said the U.S. government could do a better job communicating with the rest of the world. “We have basically abdicated ... the broadcast media,” she said. She said the U.S. government should modernize its broadcasting services to better undermine and rebut extremist messaging.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)