

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Weekly Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

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**May 3, 2013**

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## President Obama Heads for Summits with Mexican, Central American Leaders

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 02 May 2013

Washington — President Obama travels to Mexico and Costa Rica May 2-4 to meet with his counterparts from Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic to talk about strengthening ties, especially economic ones.

When he sits down with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico City May 2, U.S.-Mexican trade will occupy a big part of the discussions.

“This is a massive trading partner responsible for huge amounts of commerce and huge numbers of jobs on both sides of the border. We want to see how we can deepen that, how we can improve that and maintain that economic dialogue over a long period of time,” Obama said April 30.

The president said security cooperation, which has dominated the U.S.-Mexico relationship in recent years, will continue to be a key issue. Peña Nieto “indicated to me that he very much continues to be concerned about how we can work together to deal with transnational drug cartels,” Obama said.

U.S. officials briefing reporters about the president’s trip said Obama will bring up education and energy as specific areas to deepen cooperation. On May 3, Obama will address a gathering of Mexican university students on economic ties as well as educational, cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

“There are so many ties of family and culture and commerce across the border, and the president will be speaking to how both nations benefit from those ties,” according to Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes.

Obama is traveling at a time when the U.S. Congress is engaged in a debate about reforming the U.S. immigration system, which affects many people in the United States with ties to Mexico and Central America. Rhodes said the president will address the immigration issue from both economic and legal perspectives.

“Economic development in Mexico will also ultimately get at the root cause of illegal immigration to the United States, so that’s another benefit of the economic growth underway in Mexico. Similarly, both the United States and Mexico benefit from the legal immigration that is a hallmark of the relationship between our two countries,” Rhodes said.

When Obama arrives in San Jose, Costa Rica, May 3, he

will confer at a summit with the presidents of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

In his April 30 press conference, Obama said those countries are important partners for the United States because they share the vision “that we want to make sure that our hemisphere is more effectively integrated to improve the economy and security of all people.”

Similar to his talks in Mexico, Obama will emphasize economic issues.

Ricardo Zuniga, a special assistant to the president for Western Hemisphere affairs, said in addition to trade and investment among the countries in the Dominican Republic–Central America–United States Free Trade Agreement, Obama will press for economic integration within that region. He said the president will address that issue from the energy angle.

“Energy costs in Central America are about two to three times higher than they are in the United States, for example, and one objective of those governments is to try to reduce those costs to be more competitive. So we want to talk about what we can do on that front,” Zuniga said.

The economic trends in Mexico and Central America as well as in all of Latin America are on the upswing, Zuniga said.

“It’s a region that’s seen a 50 percent increase in the middle classes over the last 10 years, 50 percent decrease in severe poverty,” he said. “It’s a very positive thing, and we want to encourage those trends as much as we can.”

## Advice to Citizen Journalists: Tell the Truth, Be Yourself

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 02 May 2013

Washington — Social media users, sometimes called citizen journalists, bring fresh new voices to the daily commentary on world events. But a question is circulating in journalistic circles on World Press Freedom Day 2013, May 3: Do citizen journalists report with integrity and standards that serve their audiences?

The April 15 terrorist bombing at the Boston Marathon provides examples of both the best and worst trends occurring in social media, according to one expert who has watched the evolution of these media from the Cable News Network (CNN). Lila King, senior director for social news at the international channel, said social media users who were close to the site of the bombing did what citizen journalists can do best: They provided eyewitness accounts of what happened, conveying the atmosphere in the midst of chaos and the visceral feelings at such an

event.

As the hours passed, King said, “some of the dangers” of social media also emerged. Users engaged in speculation, lacking facts, with some even attempting to act like law enforcement investigators and identifying suspects. King likened that trend to a “digital witch hunt,” which can become “incredibly dangerous.”

Speaking on a May 2 CO.NX program, a digital diplomacy channel of the State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs, King said professional, traditional media have a public responsibility in the midst of a crisis. They must verify what circulates in social media, separating the true from the false, teasing out the likely from the highly improbable.

King discussed these issues with Sharon Moshavi, a vice president at the International Center for Journalists, as audiences watched at U.S. embassies around the world. A viewer from Dhaka asked whether citizen journalists need a code of ethics.

“When we are all documenting our world,” King responded, “it just means we bear a shared responsibility to maintain ethics.”

Professional journalists have long tried to abide by a code that requires telling the truth, presenting opposing sides of a story with fairness and balance. King said the code for citizen journalists should be similar.

Citizen journalism is at its strongest, King said, when it offers a personal angle on a story that will connect with the audience. King helped establish and now maintains a CNN community called iReport, a platform for citizen journalism, which she also calls participatory storytelling.

The strengths of personal storytelling emerged on another occasion in April, Autism Awareness Month in the United States. IReport received many submissions from people with this brain disorder and their families and caregivers.

“They shared very personal stories about what it is like in the workplace or in the family or dealing with schools, parenting,” she said. “Those kinds of stories tend to shed light about health care and how we work with, and understand, one another.”

These reports unveil a personal dimension to a story that professional journalists usually have a difficult time reaching, King added.

What advice does King offer for would-be citizen journalists? Get started. Now. The media are moving and changing all the time, so aspiring storytellers need to

begin to understand the form as it is evolving, King said, even if they start with something as simple as a tweet, the 140-character messages exchanged on the Twitter platform.

King also advised citizen journalists to be themselves, not the TV newsreader with perfect hair and clothes. The strength of the medium is that it allows each individual to broadcast their personal, unique view of the world.

Think about how you would tell a story to a friend over dinner or a coffee, King said, and deliver that voice and perspective to an audience awaiting you online.

### **Arab League, U.S. Officials Reaffirm Peace Initiative**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |  
30 April 2013

Washington – Vice President Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry met with senior Arab League officials to discuss the 10-year-old Arab Peace Initiative’s role in helping to resolve the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict.

“During the course of those discussions, on behalf of the president of the United States, I underscored the Arab League’s very important role that it is playing and has determined to play in bringing about a peace to the Middle East and specifically by reaffirming the Arab Peace Initiative ... with a view to ending the conflict,” Kerry said at an April 29 press conference following their meeting.

Biden and Kerry met with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani, chairman of the Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee; Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby; and senior officials from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Saudi Arabia at Blair House, across from the White House.

The Arab Peace Initiative was proposed as a comprehensive plan at the 2002 Beirut Summit of the Arab League by the then crown prince, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It was re-endorsed at the 2007 Riyadh Arab League Summit.

The initiative calls for the following:

- An end to the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- The 22-member Arab League to provide full normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal to its June 4, 1967, borders, including East Jerusalem.
- A “just settlement” of the Palestinian refugee crisis based on U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194, which ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and which resolves that any refugees desiring to return to their homes and living

in peace be able to do so or be offered compensation.

At the Blair House conference, Prime Minister Hamad told journalists that the league reaffirmed its peace initiative based on a two-state solution. Hamad also said that they agreed to a modification to the peace initiative which allows for a “comparable and mutual agreed minor swap of the land” between the Israelis and Palestinians recognizing the reality of burgeoning communities that have grown up in the years since.

Kerry told journalists after the meeting: “We’ve had a very positive, very constructive discussion in the course of the afternoon with positive results.”

President Obama had outlined in May 2011 his vision of Middle East peace with the two states – Israel and a Palestinian state – living side by side in peace and security brought about through direct negotiations between the two parties. Obama also stressed that the 1967 borders were part of the basis for an Arab-Israeli settlement.

The Arab Peace Initiative has the support of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

Kerry said that U.S. officials and the Arab League delegation “agreed that peace between Israelis and Palestinians would advance security, prosperity and stability in the Middle East.” They also agreed to continue with the peace consultations.

### **Weather, Climate Forecasts Help Farmers Worldwide**

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 01 May 2013

Washington – The U.S. agency responsible for daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings and climate monitoring is using freely available satellite imagery and scientific analysis to help farmers around the world make decisions about what crops to plant and how to allocate their water and land resources.

“The agriculture community depends on accurate and timely weather and climate information to make informed decisions. The 10- to 14-day forecast is as critical today as it has ever been,” said Kathryn Sullivan, acting administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

NOAA describes weather as atmospheric conditions over a short period and climate as how the atmosphere behaves over longer periods.

“Long-range forecasts can help [people in farm communities] anticipate, prepare for and respond to drought, heat waves and other extremes,” Sullivan said

April 30 in opening the second and last day of the G8 International Conference on Open Data for Agriculture at the World Bank in Washington.

Sullivan said NOAA wants to broaden timely access to data through international and multilateral venues. Primary is the 89-member Group on Earth Observations, or GEO, which brings together data providers, scientists and users from governments, universities and organizations interested in making data “openly discoverable, accessible and operable,” Sullivan said.

GEO’s agriculture initiative, called the GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring Initiative (GEOGLAM), cross references data across multiple projects and shares timely and long-term information used to monitor crop condition and agricultural drought, she said.

“Sharing the timely, high-quality, long-term information on water quantity and quality is a key principle in GEO’s approach to addressing a 21st century challenge of water resource management,” she said. This “open data” is provided without charge.

Sullivan said one GEO international cooperative venture in which NOAA participates is the Asia Water Cycle Initiative. The initiative is a cooperative effort of 20 countries that aims to improve the understanding of the variability of Asia’s waters. Ultimately, the goals are to be able to predict and mitigate water-related disasters and improve the effective use of water resources, she said.

After a devastating earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, open data from satellite imagery and radar posted on GEO’s website helped geologists assess future quake risks and recommend reconstruction options, Sullivan said.

NOAA leads the U.S. representation to the World Meteorological Association (WMA) Global Framework for Climate Services, Sullivan said. The WMA is the United Nations’ voice on the state of the Earth’s atmosphere, its interaction with oceans and water resources.

Working with the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the WMA is training “on-the-ground” users so they can best extract data from numerous data sets. The WMA wants to improve communication among climate scientists, climate and agricultural researchers, agriculture extension agents and communities, Sullivan said.

Through the International Research Institute for Climate and Society, NOAA has helped the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies monitor climate trends and regional vulnerabilities, and use the information to preposition emergency aid as needed. The institute is a partnership with New York’s

Columbia University.

One example of NOAA's partnership with the Red Cross could be seen in 2008 after flooding in one region. Red Cross needed just 24 to 48 hours to respond, compared to 40 days after flooding in the same region a year earlier. The 2008 response also cost one-third less than it did in 2007, Sullivan said.

Sullivan, whose earlier career was as an astronaut with NASA, said cooperation among countries and between governments and the private sector is essential to make full use of open data.

During her three flights in outer space, she said, "What you see of Earth from space are swaths of blue, green and brown. The signs of our planet's life support systems that transcend social and political concerns.

"Each space traveler is struck by how dependent we all are on the workings of this planet and how tightly linked is our shared fate. With the conversations and actions that come out of this conference on open data are deep commitments to helping each other live wisely and well on this planet," she said.

### **World Health Agencies Alert for Dangerous Malaria Strain**

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 29 April 2013

Washington — Health authorities in Southeast Asia have detected a strain of the malaria-causing parasite that is resistant to the best medicines available to treat the disease. The urgency for action to contain that strain of the disease from spreading is being felt as far away as Geneva, Washington and Atlanta.

In Geneva and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the launch of an emergency response to scale up measures to combat what could become a serious global health threat.

The most effective treatment known today is artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACTs). Resistance to artemisinins — the core component of the combination — has now been identified in Cambodia, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam.

Health authorities in Southeast Asia have attempted to contain the resistant strains, but the WHO announcement April 24 declared a need for urgent action to fully eliminate the resistant strains. The action is especially important to preserve ACTs as an effective treatment for the estimated 220 million cases occurring in about 100 countries where malaria is found.

"The consequences of widespread resistance to

artemisinins would be catastrophic," said Dr. Robert Newman, director of WHO's Global Malaria Programme. "We must act now to protect Southeast Asia today and sub-Saharan Africa tomorrow."

Artemisinin is derived from an herb native to China. It was developed as an effective treatment for malaria in 1965 after the disease-causing parasite carried by mosquitoes became immune to the most frequently used drug of the time, chloroquine. ACTs are now used in a cocktail of drugs as a means to decrease the risk of resistance.

While research for alternate malaria treatments is underway, ACTs remain the "last, best drug we have available," said Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The action plan the WHO is launching in affected countries will urge governments to pull poor-quality antimalarial drugs from circulation. The use of such drugs can reduce the effectiveness of ACTs, yet they remain in circulation in some regions lacking strict pharmaceutical regulation.

The WHO plan also calls for a thorough assessment of what has been done to contain resistant strains so far and identify what else is necessary.

Frieden's remarks about the importance of artemisinin came as he testified April 23 before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Global Health.

The subcommittee convened the hearing with a special focus on drug-resistant diseases as a threat to developing countries and to the United States as well. Frieden told the committee that 12 million Americans travel each year to countries where malaria is a health threat.

"If these resistant strains spread, the risk to people in this country will be substantial, in addition to the number of deaths and the amount of suffering and economic hardship that will cause around the world," said Frieden.

The CDC head said his agency is "quite concerned" about the ACT-resistant strains of malaria, telling the committee that 30 percent of the cases being diagnosed among the people living on the Cambodia-Thailand border are caused by this dangerous strain.

Frieden said stopping the dangerous malaria strain depends on "stopping the mosquito [and] treating effectively, diagnosing and treating well." The CDC director also said that persistence is critical in malaria control, that is, maintaining mosquito-control efforts even after it seems the disease has declined.

Representative Christopher Smith, a Republican from New Jersey and chairman of the Global Health Subcommittee, pointed out that U.S. contributions to worldwide malaria control efforts have increased from \$100 million per year in 2000 to \$1.8 billion in 2012.

WHO estimates that 3.3 billion people worldwide are at risk of exposure to malaria every day. Malaria kills about 660,000 people each year, most of them small children in Africa.

### **Top U.S. Trade Official Seeks Expanded Commercial Ties in Burma**

29 April 2013

Washington – Acting U.S. Trade Representative Demetrios Marantis expressed in Rangoon April 26 the United States' continuing support for economic reforms in Burma through renewed trade and investment and expanded commercial ties.

Marantis, the first American trade minister to visit the country, explored with senior government officials opportunities to rebuild production and trade capacity in Burma through mechanisms such as a potential trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA), which would formalize bilateral dialogue on trade and investment issues. Marantis also discussed the possible reinstatement of benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which allows for the duty-free entry into the United States of many goods from beneficiary countries, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) said.

“This is a country experiencing great changes and challenges, and trade and investment can help to support the reforms that will ultimately grow employment and raise the living standards here,” said Marantis. “Working together, we can create opportunities bilaterally and regionally that will benefit both our economies – including the people of this country who need the benefits of economic growth and development.”

In Burma, Marantis met with Senior Economic Minister U Soe Thane, Commerce Minister U Win Myint, Deputy Labor Minister U Myint Thein, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, whose views he sought on the potential role of trade in improving daily life for citizens.

Both the possibility of the TIFA and GSP figured prominently in discussions. Burma's GSP eligibility was revoked in 1989 because of concerns about workers' rights, including with regard to forced labor. In addition to the government meetings in which the U.S. statutory requirements for GSP eligibility were discussed, officials from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative met separately with the local International Labour Organization representative to discuss current steps to

advance labor reforms, including issues of forced labor and freedom to associate, USTR said.

In a speech at the American Center in Rangoon, Marantis encouraged an audience of students and professors to prepare for the opportunities that greater trade and investment openness will bring. Marantis also sought the views of U.S. businesses on the challenges and opportunities for doing business in Burma.

“Trade and investment are something we all need, something we can all do together,” Marantis said in remarks prepared for delivery at the American Center. “And there are so many ways that America wants to work with you – bilaterally, in the region, and where it all began for you, in the halls of multilateral global trade.”

“Your position at the crossroads of Asia makes you a very attractive partner to the United States. And you are poised for leadership in the region,” Marantis also said.

On April 16, USTR began the process of seeking public comments on Burma's GSP eligibility (and the eligibility of Laos) and will continue to consult with Congress in this regard. A public hearing on this issue will take place at USTR on June 4. More information on the public comments for this issue and the rulemaking process in the United States is available on a multiagency U.S. government website.

### **U.S. Presses for Corroborating Facts on Chemical Weapons in Syria**

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 26 April 2013

Washington – The U.S. government says its intelligence assessments indicate “with varying degrees of confidence” that the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad has used chemical weapons against the Syrian people, according to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.

“The intelligence community has been assessing information for some time on this issue,” Hagel said, briefing reporters in Abu Dhabi April 25. He added that any use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime would “violate every convention of warfare.”

A White House official, who did not allow reporters to use his name, said the Obama administration is pressing for a comprehensive U.N. investigation to gather “credible and corroborated facts” regarding the accuracy of the intelligence assessments.

“Intelligence assessments are not alone sufficient,” the official said. “We are continuing to do further work to establish a definitive judgment as to whether or not the red line has been crossed and to inform our decisionmaking about what to do next.”

The intelligence assessments indicate that the Syrian regime has used sarin gas on a small scale, the official said.

“We are going to be methodical, rigorous and relentless in gathering the relevant information and putting it together so we can establish exactly what happened around those reports of chemical weapons use,” the official said. “Bashar al-Assad and his regime will be held accountable for these types of actions.”

In 2012, President Obama said if the Syrian regime uses chemical weapons or puts them in the hands of terrorist groups, then it will have crossed a “red line” with “enormous consequences.”

“All options are on the table” in terms of what the U.S. response would be, the official said.

He said the United States is prepared to consult and coordinate with friends and allies, such as Britain, France, Turkey, Jordan and the Gulf countries, in deciding the next steps in dealing with the regime in Damascus.

The United States has refrained from a military response to the Syrian civil war, which is estimated to have claimed the lives of 70,000 people since it began in March 2011. The United States considers the Syrian Opposition Coalition the legitimate government of Syria and has offered it \$250 million in nonlethal assistance such as meals, medical equipment and body armor. The United States also is providing more than \$400 million in humanitarian assistance to Syrians inside Syria and in neighboring countries who have been harmed by the Assad regime.

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