

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions Down, Economy Up, Report Shows

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 26 September 2013

Washington – U.S. economic growth will be sustained in the years to come, even while the nation's carbon dioxide emissions decline, according to the 2014 Climate Action Report, issued in draft form by the U.S. State Department September 26.

The period of decline that slammed the economy starting in 2008 is one factor in decreasing greenhouse emissions (GHG) in recent years, the report said, but other factors also influence the trend.

"Investments in renewable energy have led to the rapid growth of wind, solar and geothermal power in the energy mix," the draft report says. A second significant factor is the adaptation of new drilling methods that have allowed cheaper access to natural gas deposits underground, thus displacing the use of coal, a more GHG-intense fuel.

GHG emissions have been reduced further by Obama administration actions taken since this presidency began in 2009, the report says. The adoption of more rigorous fuel-efficiency standards for cars and trucks is cited, along with greater energy-efficiency measures in U.S. homes and businesses.

From 1990 through 2011, the report tracks an average annual carbon dioxide emission increase of 0.5 percent. In that same period, the economy expanded by more than 65 percent and population increased by 25 percent. At the same time, U.S. emissions of another harmful GHG gas, methane, declined by 8 percent.

The absorption of carbon emissions from land use and forestry – a process known as sequestration – increased by 14 percent over that same 21-year period, preventing much carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. A strong international scientific consensus has concluded that human-made emissions surround the planet and retain its heat. The trend is expected to lead to rising sea levels, more violent weather and more extreme events such as drought and floods.

The State Department releases the report in keeping with the U.S. status as a signatory of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. That international agreement requires that member nations publish an accounting of this kind every four years, projecting their GHG output based on policies in place at the time.

Based on anticipated trends in more efficient technology, fuel-switching and other policies, "total gross U.S. GHG

emissions are projected to remain below the 2005 level through 2030." Given the possibilities for more rapid technology development or more reduction programs, the report suggests that emission levels could fall below this projection.

The future projections do include the expected results of 100 near-term policies and measures the federal government is pursuing to mitigate GHG emissions. The stricter auto fuel-efficiency standards, for example, are certain to deliver a greater dividend in GHG reduction.

President Obama announced a new Climate Action Plan in June 2013. That plan puts in motion other policies intended to further decrease GHG emissions, seeking to achieve a 2020 level that is 17 percent lower than that of 2005.

In the announcement, Obama said he hopes the plan will inspire similar action in other countries "by encouraging developing nations to transition to cleaner sources of energy, and by engaging our international partners in this fight – for while we compete for business, we also share a planet. And we must all shoulder the responsibility for its future together."

In addition, many U.S. states and localities, which have authority in their own jurisdictions and in the operations of their own infrastructure, are also implementing clean energy incentives and clean energy targets. These actions include voluntary emissions goals, green building standards and more fuel-efficient practices in government buildings and vehicles.

The report is released as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an authoritative panel of about 2,000 scientists, is preparing to unveil its latest observations on the status of the changing climate. The report is expected to offer new estimates on fluctuating temperatures, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and other climate change impacts.

## Japan, U.S. Streamline Organic Trade Across Pacific

26 September 2013

Washington – The United States and Japan announced September 26 that beginning on January 1, 2014, organic products certified in Japan or in the United States may be sold as organic in either country.

This partnership between two significant organic markets will allow the growing Japanese organic market access to quality organic products from the United States, benefiting the rapidly growing organic industry and supporting job creation and business growth on a global scale, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in a news release the same day.

“This partnership reflects the strength of the USDA organic standards, allowing American organic farmers, ranchers and businesses to access Asia’s largest organic market,” said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. The agreement “sets the foundation for additional organic agricultural trade agreements in Asia,” Vilsack said.

“Today’s agreement will streamline access to the growing Japanese organic market for U.S. farmers and processors and eliminate significant barriers for small and medium organic producers,” added U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman. He called the agreement “another key step in strengthening our economic relationship with Japan by boosting agriculture trade.”

The organics sector in the United States and Japan is valued at more than \$36 billion combined, and it is rising every year.

Formal letters creating the partnership were finalized September 26 in Baltimore. Signing the partnership were Anne L. Alonzo, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service administrator; Ambassador Islam Siddiqui, the U.S. trade representative’s chief agricultural negotiator; and Hiroyuki Kobayashi, director general of Japan’s Food Safety and Consumer Affairs Bureau. The announcement took place at Natural Products Expo East, one of the largest trade shows for organic products in the United States.

Without an equivalency arrangement in place, organic farmers and businesses wanting to sell products in either country have had to obtain separate certifications to meet each country’s organic standards. This typically has meant two sets of fees, inspections and paperwork. The new trade partnership eliminates significant barriers, especially for small and medium-sized organic producers. The United States has similar U.S. equivalency arrangements with Canada and the European Union.

Leading up to the announcement, U.S. and Japanese technical experts conducted thorough on-site audits to ensure that their programs’ regulations, quality control measures, certification requirements and labeling practices were compatible.

U.S. and Japanese organic standards cover the life cycle of the product, including allowed and prohibited substances and natural resources conservation requirements. Both parties individually determined that their programs were “equivalent,” with no restrictions for organic plants and plant products. This means that, for the first time, certified organic farmers and businesses in the United States do not have to prove that they did not use a specific substance or production method to gain access to the Japanese organic market. It will also provide American consumers with year-round access to a diverse array of

organic products from Japan.

Both parties are committed to ensuring that all traded organic products meet the terms of the partnership, retaining their organic integrity from farm to market, USDA said. Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries and USDA’s National Organic Program – which oversee organic products in their respective countries – will both take on key oversight roles.

The United States and Japan will continue to have regular discussions and will review each other’s programs periodically to verify that the terms of the partnership are being met, USDA said.

Representatives from the U.S. organic industry, including trade associations and organic producers, praised the U.S.-Japan partnership.

Christine Bushway, head of the Organic Trade Association, called it a “monumental agreement” that will “be mutually beneficial to producers both in the United States and Japan and to consumers who choose organic products.”

The chief certification officer for California Certified Organic Farmers, Jake Lewin, said the agreement will give U.S. organic producers access to the Japanese Agricultural Standard – or JAS – seal, the official mark of organic products in Japan.

“We increasingly live in a global economy. Any time countries can collaborate to eliminate or reduce trade barriers, the market is strengthened,” said Jenny Lester Moffitt, who handles sales and marketing for the organic producer Dixon Ridge Farms.

And Andy Berliner, founder of the popular organic producer Amy’s Kitchen, welcomed news of the U.S.-Japanese agreement, saying, “We are especially encouraged that the larger shared values and practices relative to organic and sustainable food production between us are no longer overshadowed by minor, technical differences.” The agreement, he said, will “[make] our organic offerings available to the many Japanese consumers who are seeking a higher-quality organic vegetarian meal option.”

### **Secretary Kerry Joins U.N. Talks on Development, HIV/AIDS**

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 25 September 2013

Washington – Advancing broad global goals for human development and health were important issues for U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on the third day of the opening week of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.

Kerry met with top officials from other nations to discuss adoption of a new global development plan to replace the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In a second session, the top U.S. diplomat met with leaders of nations participating in the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Though the two programs have different histories and different degrees of success, they both rest on the same moral obligation, Kerry said.

"Protecting people from poverty, hunger and disease, and protecting our planet from the threats that make all of those menaces even worse – dirty water, dangerous air, disappearing resources – these are challenges to all of us," he said at the MDG session.

The MDG campaign has successfully managed to lower the world level of extreme poverty since the eight goals were adopted by the international community in 2000. But hundreds of millions are still undernourished, Kerry pointed out as he emphasized the need for all nations to do more and try harder.

Improving the lives of people in the poorest regions remains a daunting task, but Kerry said the way to get there is well-known.

"Creating true opportunity for every member of society without discrimination, investing in health and education, creating the conditions for broad-based economic growth, and strengthening the core institutions of democratic and accountable governance, and also getting energy that works for everybody" are the paths to take.

But those goals can be pursued only in a climate of peace, Kerry said, so resolving conflict – even in areas where that is most difficult – is a prerequisite for development.

Success beyond expectation has been achieved by the U.S.-backed AIDS treatment plan PEPFAR. In a single decade, the largest campaign ever launched against a single disease has also become what Kerry calls the most successful foreign assistance program ever.

"And now a disease that at one time seemed to be unstoppable is actually in retreat," Kerry said.

Great progress has been achieved in understanding HIV, identifying successful treatments and controlling the virus sufficiently to allow normal life. Those advances bring the world to another threshold, Kerry said.

"Ten years after PEPFAR was launched, we are actually able to see and reach out and hopefully touch the prospect of an AIDS-free generation," Kerry said.

An AIDS-free generation depends on delivery of antiretroviral treatment to all HIV-infected pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Rwanda, Malawi and Uganda have implemented this method with great success and 15 other nations are attempting to phase in their prevention strategy, according to PEPFAR officials.

Future success in controlling the epidemic, Kerry said, will depend on donor nations sustaining the level of resources needed. Recipient nations must also expand their own medical capabilities and resources to the point where they no longer are dependent on outside assistance to treat and suppress HIV/AIDS.

The internationally created Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has also been a key mechanism for helping afflicted nations meet the needs of their people touched by the epidemic. Kerry announced that the United States, the largest donor to that fund, will host the upcoming conference where nations offer commitments for future investments in the Global Fund.

### **Secretary Kerry Signs Treaty to Halt Illicit Arms Trade**

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 25 September 2013

Washington – Secretary of State John Kerry has signed a treaty to reduce the risk of international transfer of conventional weapons used to fuel conflict, terrorism and human rights violations.

The treaty will establish an international standard for national regulation of the trade in conventional arms. Countries party to the treaty are required to establish controls for the export and import of combat vehicles and aircraft, warships, missile and artillery systems, small arms and light weapons.

"This is about promoting international peace and global security. And this is about advancing important humanitarian goals," Kerry said in signing the Arms Trade Treaty September 25 during the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The General Assembly adopted the treaty in April. The treaty opened for signature in June. The United States is the 92st state to sign it.

The treaty reaffirms the right of any nation to regulate arms within its territory in accordance with its legal system, the State Department said. It requires countries to create and enforce export controls similar to those the United States has in place. It also maintains the right of individuals and countries to obtain, possess and use arms for legitimate purposes, Kerry said.

The treaty recognizes that there are legitimate political,

security, economic and commercial purposes for international trade in conventional arms and allows each country to provide for its own defense. It also recognizes the legitimate trade and lawful ownership and use of certain arms for recreational, cultural, historical and sporting activities.

Following the signing, Kerry thanked international partners and citizen groups that helped win support for the treaty, which he said is an important step toward “a more peaceful world ... that also lives by international standards and rules.”

“This treaty strengthens [U.S.] security, builds global security without undermining the legitimate international trade in conventional arms,” he said.

### **President Obama Cites World’s Capacity to Reach Humanity’s Highest Ideals**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |  
24 September 2013

Washington — President Obama said in an address to the U.N. General Assembly that nations and people have shown the capacity to change and to live up to humanity’s highest ideals, and to choose a better history despite global challenges.

“While we need to be modest in our belief that we can remedy every evil, while we need to be mindful that the world is full of unintended consequences, should we really accept the notion that the world is powerless” in the face of repeated episodes of genocide and massacre, Obama asked during a wide-ranging speech to world leaders September 24 at the opening of the 68th session of the General Assembly.

“If that’s the world that people want to live in, they should say so and reckon with the cold logic of mass graves,” he said. “I believe we can embrace a different future.”

“If we don’t want to choose between inaction and war, we must get better, all of us, at the policies that prevent the breakdown of basic order, through respect for the responsibilities of nations and the rights of individuals, through meaningful sanctions for those who break the rules, through dogged diplomacy that resolves the root causes of conflict, not merely its aftermath, through development assistance that brings hope to the marginalized,” Obama said.

He also said that circumstances can require the use of multilateral military force to prevent the “very worst from occurring.”

Obama acknowledged that it is a world of imperfect

choices and that nations will not always agree on the need for multilateral action in every international instance. He also noted that sovereignty among nations is at the center of the international order.

“But sovereignty cannot be a shield for tyrants to commit wanton murder, or an excuse for the international community to turn a blind eye,” Obama said.

Obama addressed the first session of general debate at the United Nations, a tradition begun at the founding of the security organization on October 24, 1945. The leaders from most of the 193 member nations are given time through this week to speak before the General Assembly on a broad range of subjects related to global challenges and to individual concerns. The 2013 opening session is being held in a building next to the U.N. Headquarters because the ornate main hall is undergoing major renovations.

In a 40-minute speech, Obama spoke of U.S. efforts to address a myriad of issues, from improving U.S. economic health to the end of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the most recent violence in Kenya and Pakistan, and the challenge posed by the splintering of terrorist groups related to al-Qaida. Obama also spoke of the need to enforce the international ban on chemical weapons and the role of the U.N. Security Council in approving a resolution that requires verification and international control of Syria’s chemical weapons.

He spoke of the need for a diplomatic resolution to end the nuclear weapons program in Iran, but also noted that a peaceful resolution of the issue can become a major step toward a different relationship between the United States and Iran, “one based on mutual interests and mutual respect.”

He cited the need for a peaceful resolution between Israelis and Palestinians and a two-state solution, saying the time is ripe for the entire international community to get behind the pursuit of peace. Obama said Israeli and Palestinian leaders have demonstrated a willingness to take significant political risks on issues of borders and security, refugees and Jerusalem.

“Friends of Israel, including the United States, must recognize that Israel’s security as a Jewish and democratic state depends upon the realization of a Palestinian state, and we should say so clearly,” Obama said. “Arab states, and those who supported the Palestinians, must recognize that stability will only be served through a two-state solution and a secure Israel.”

Obama called on world leaders to support Israeli and Palestinian leaders “who are prepared to walk the difficult road to peace.”

## First Lady Hosts Spouses at African-American Cultural Center

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 24 September 2013

Washington — In hosting the spouses of chiefs of state and heads of government participating in the United Nations General Assembly, first lady Michelle Obama encouraged her guests to talk to each other about the work they are doing in their countries on behalf of children.

“We all have so much to offer one another, and so much to learn, and so much support we can gain from each other,” Obama told nearly 50 spouses at the September 24 event at the Studio Museum in Harlem, a neighborhood of New York City.

“Our young people will soon be leading the way,” she said. “They will soon be building the businesses, and making the scientific discoveries, and writing the laws that will move our world forward for decades to come.”

Obama said that in travelling around the world, she has met many girls “with so much promise, girls eager and desperate to learn, girls who just blossom when they get that one chance to go to school and to start scratching at the fulfillment of their potential.”

She added that “when both boys and girls have an equal opportunity to learn, we all know that’s not just good for our children, it’s also good for their families and it’s good for their countries as well.”

The first lady talked about the history of Harlem and about its place in American history. She called the New York neighborhood “quintessentially American.” She described how Harlem, as home to many African-American writers, artists and musicians in the early 20th century who depicted black subjects, was “the cultural heart of the African-American community.”

She added that these artists’ influence was felt beyond America. Jazz musicians Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong played on stages in Europe. Aaron Douglas’ artwork was viewed around the world. And young people worldwide have been inspired by the words of poet Langston Hughes, including “Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.”

At the museum, the spouses viewed an exhibition of works by American artist Robert Pruitt that “highlight the strength and dignity of women,” as the first lady described them.

The event also featured young performers from the Dance Theatre of Harlem, music from LaGuardia Arts High

School, and award-winning vocalist Audra McDonald.

Each guest received a jar of White House honey butter made with fresh honey from the White House beehive; two jars of White House-produced honey; a custom pewter honey pot made by Salisbury Pewter, a Maryland company; lemon verbena grown in the White House herb garden and used to create the aromatic tea sachets; and a cookbook, *New American Table*.

## International Partnership Defends Civil Society Worldwide

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 24 September 2013

Washington — The United States joined 23 other governments in issuing a joint statement September 23 affirming the important role that civil society organizations (CSOs) play in sustaining a vital nation and denouncing the “ongoing assault” that is challenging the existence of these groups in many countries.

The nations issued the statement as they participated in the Civil Society Roundtable held on the sidelines of the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly in New York. President Obama participated, reminding the audience that the right to peaceful assembly and association is a tenet of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“It’s my strong belief that the strength and success of all countries and all regions depends in part on protecting and supporting civil society,” Obama said at the gathering. He noted that the activities of civil society have given rise to the greatest social advances in the United States and elsewhere.

“Civil society led the fight to end apartheid in South Africa. It led the fight to bring freedom to Eastern Europe,” Obama said. “It helped to heal places divided by conflict, whether in Cambodia or Colombia.”

Governments from North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia support the statement on the protection of civil society, identifying an “alarming trend” of restrictions and constraints being placed upon CSO activities and the freedom of association in groups and online.

The declaration promises a number of actions to protect civil society, including:

- Enhanced support for the work of the U.N. special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.
- Promotion of laws and policies that provide a safe quarter for civil society groups to operate.
- Pursuit of joint diplomatic action to support threatened

civil society groups.

Obama said supportive governments should coordinate diplomatic action to ensure that governments repressing civil society will face consequences. New mechanisms are needed to spread good practices of civil society to countries where the sector is just beginning to emerge.

A White House fact sheet released in tandem with the joint statement said the action marks the beginning of a year-long effort to “further intensify our work to support and defend civil society from a rising tide of restrictions.”

The United States first stepped up its effort in this arena at the United Nations in 2010 when Obama challenged governments to become more open and accountable to their people. Brazil, the United States and six other heads of state formed the Open Government Partnership in 2011 devoted to this cause, and now the partnership counts 60 national governments, civil society groups and private-sector partners as members, working to improve citizen engagement in their societies.

Outreach to civil society groups has also become a mainstay in foreign policy activities. At more than 40 of its diplomatic posts around the world, the State Department has put civil society working groups in place to enhance CSO effectiveness. The United States is also devoted to tracking and monitoring legislative attempts to restrict the work of civil society in many countries.

The United States and international partners also provide financial assistance to help emerging civil society groups. Lifeline: Embattled CSOs Assistance Fund offers emergency financial assistance to besieged groups. In its two-year history, the fund has delivered help to almost 220 groups operating in 64 countries.

According to a State Department fact sheet, the fund extends help “to real people, in real time,” with targeted emergency grants that can help cover a wide range of needs, including medical expenses, legal representation, prison visits, trial monitoring, temporary relocation and security.

The United States has invested \$500 million in support to CSOs working in a variety of development areas, including the MENA Partnership helping to build the capabilities of civic groups in the Middle East and North Africa.

Obama explained U.S. motives in these activities: “We believe that governments that are representative and accountable to their people are going to be more peaceful, they’re going to be more prosperous, they’re going to be better partners for us.”

The latest initiative backed by the United States and other

partners is known as Making All Voices Count: A Grand Challenge for Development. With \$55 million in backing, the challenge is seeking proposals for innovative approaches that will improve the mechanisms people and their governments use to interact and exchange ideas to improve their societies.

### **HIV/AIDS Report: New Infections Down, Treatment Expands**

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 23 September 2013

Washington — The number of people newly infected with HIV declined by about one-third from 2001 to 2012, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported September 23, putting the world in reach of achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

UNAIDS released the report from Geneva as the U.N. General Assembly convened in New York with a discussion of the progress toward the MDGs on the agenda.

The eight MDGs, adopted by the international community in 2000, focus on these priorities: poverty and hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, environmental sustainability, and global partnership for development.

The UNAIDS report shows other positive trends: New HIV infections among children were down by 52 percent since 2000, and AIDS-related deaths dropped by 30 percent since the peak in 2005.

The decline in deaths is attributable to the increased distribution of lifesaving antiretroviral treatment in the developing world. The United States has taken a leading role in that campaign through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which marked its 10th anniversary in June 2013.

U.S. assistance distributed under the program has exceeded \$37 billion, officials said at anniversary commemoration events. Secretary of State John Kerry called PEPFAR one of the largest and most successful foreign assistance programs ever adopted.

In 2011, U.N. member states agreed to deliver treatment to 15 million people living with HIV/AIDS, a goal that now seems well within reach, according to UNAIDS.

“Not only can we meet the 2015 target of 15 million people on HIV treatment, we must also go beyond and have the vision and commitment to ensure no one is left behind,” said Michel Sidibé, executive director of UNAIDS.

MDG Target 6 did not focus on HIV/AIDS alone, but also on malaria, tuberculosis and other major diseases. Solid progress toward those goals was also reported. The UNAIDS report finds that TB-related deaths among people living with HIV have decreased by 36 percent since 2004, though TB remains the leading cause of death among people with the virus. In the broader population, 20 million lives were spared from TB between 1995 and 2011.

The global incidence of malaria is down by 17 percent since 2000, and mortality rates attributable to the mosquito-borne disease are down by 25 percent. The U.N. office monitoring MDG progress estimates that 1.1 million people avoided death from malaria because of the stronger prevention and treatment efforts initiated in those regions where the disease is most frequent.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hosted a September 23 event at U.N. headquarters to focus greater attention on how the remainder of the MDGs might be achieved by 2015 and how to shape a development agenda for the years beyond.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF also reported progress in MDG achievement earlier in September, with significant improvement in the survival of young children. Deaths among young children numbered 12 million in 1990, but were down to 6.6 million in 2012. However, WHO's September 13 announcement said greater strides must be taken in improving child survival if the 2015 target is to be met.

The MDG of reducing extreme poverty was partially met in 2010, when surveys found that the number of people with daily incomes below \$1.25 was down 50 percent since 1990.

### **Secretary Kerry Urges More Protections for People with Disabilities**

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 23 September 2013

Washington — The international community needs to do more to ensure that people with disabilities are protected from discrimination, Secretary of State John Kerry said in New York September 23 at a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on disability and development.

"All of our societies are stronger when every single one of our citizens, able bodied and disabled alike, all get to live up to their full potential," he told delegates to the meeting considering renewing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015 and beyond.

According to the United Nations, while the MDGs represent concerted efforts to address global poverty, they

do not include people with disabilities. Kerry noted that although disabled persons comprise 15 percent of the world, eight in 10 live in developing countries and that nine of 10 children with disabilities in those countries do not attend school.

He called protecting the rights of people with disabilities "as much an economic issue as it is a human rights issue."

Speaking to the assembly, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the International Labour Organization has found that excluding persons with disabilities from the labor market costs some countries as much as 7 percent of their gross domestic product.

"We must remove barriers to equality so that all people can be free from poverty and discrimination," Ban said.

Kerry encouraged countries to enact laws that emulate the U.S. Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects Americans with disabilities against discrimination. He said that thanks to the ADA and similar laws, nearly one in five Americans are protected from disability-based discrimination. "All Americans benefit from the contributions from our fellow citizens with disabilities," he said.

Because of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Kerry said, nearly 60 percent of U.S. students with disabilities are in general education classrooms for 80 percent or more of their school day. Because of the act, nearly 350,000 infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services.

Kerry also noted that the U.S. Federal Communications Commission has established a national program to distribute deaf-blind equipment to low-income deaf and blind people. Since, then, hundreds of disabled individuals have gained access to communications technologies that allow them to lead independent lives and stay connected with family and friends.

Kerry acknowledged that in recent years, more countries have passed laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and that require buildings to be accessible. "But all countries can work harder to enforce these laws and to ensure that disabled people have as much right and ability to access their local supermarket or the school or even election booths," he added.

"We mean it when we say we will not leave anyone behind," Kerry said.

## Global Challenges Require Investment in Multilateral Diplomacy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |  
20 September 2013

Washington — The global challenges that nations face today require a determined investment in multilateral diplomacy, and the United Nations system is the best place for it, Acting Assistant Secretary of State Dean Pittman says.

“As the president stated very clearly in 2009 when he made his first speech to the U.N. General Assembly, the U.S. sees great value in engaging on the multilateral stage,” Pittman said in a recent wide-ranging interview from his office at the State Department in Washington. “Not only to help join with our allies to provide global solutions to these global challenges, but also to help advance U.S. interests.”

“It is in our interests to build more secure, stable states overseas,” Pittman said. Providing better health care globally, protecting the environment and related issues are “all benefits to Americans as well as to the rest of the world.”

Pittman, who heads the State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs, noted that these are issues that the United States cannot resolve unilaterally or bilaterally, but must work in a “concerted effort with our global partners.”

“The U.N. system is the best place to do that,” he said.

What President Obama and the United States will do at the opening of the 68th session of the U.N. General Assembly September 23-27 and after will be to emphasize the importance of multilateral diplomacy and the U.S. commitment, Pittman said. General debate among the nations begins September 24. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will host a high-level meeting on disabilities on the opening day, September 23.

“There are challenges, but none represents a threat too dangerous to diminish our commitment to building and employing multilateral institutions that serve our national interests,” Pittman said in a recent speech at Georgetown University in Washington.

“In fact, in spite of these challenges there is more than ample evidence that U.S. leadership, in combination with efforts by our allies across the U.N. system, is making a critical, positive difference,” he said.

Traditionally, the U.S. president addresses the gathering of world leaders on the first Tuesday morning of general debate, and President Obama is scheduled to make his

address on September 24. The week of general debate is one of the more intriguing moments at the United Nations, because the leaders of the 193 member nations are invited to address the General Assembly. The subjects and themes presented are often as broad as the membership.

Pittman says the United States has three broad objectives for the new session:

- Fostering a more peaceful, secure world.
- Advancing efforts on sustainable development and human rights.
- Working “very hard” to make the U.N. a more effective system.

“One of the key elements that will be the focus for this year’s [General Assembly] will be the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals [MDG] agenda, which have been successful but not completed,” Pittman said.

“And so as we move forward with how we’re going to address sustainable development, environmental issues, global health, the whole range of issues to help improve the lives of people around the world, we’ll be looking at the framework of the 2015 agenda as a way to define that going forward,” he said. “It’s critical that we look at this in a holistic way, because there’s so much interconnection between development and stability and education and economic opportunity.”

Pittman noted in his Georgetown speech that the first MDG target of reducing extreme poverty rates by half was actually met and exceeded in 2010. Another example is an MDG goal of reducing the mortality of children under 5 from 12 million children in 1990 to 6.9 million in 2011, he said.

President Obama will participate in an event on civil society that emphasizes how the United States views the importance of individual citizens and nongovernmental organizations to the work that the United Nations and others do around the world. “It really is the involvement and engagement of civil society that is a critical element,” Pittman said.

He also noted that significant progress has been made across the MDG spectrum on access to education, combating HIV/AIDS and malaria, and reducing hunger.

Pittman said the United States strives to strengthen U.N. peacekeeping missions, working closely with the United Nations and troop-contributing nations to help improve their capacity, provide training and ensure that they have the tools and the mandate necessary to accomplish what is everyone’s objective. “And that’s really providing the space to build stable societies,” he said.

Pittman also said there is a noticeable increase in the meaningful voice of young people in foreign affairs. "I think we can safely say that every generation since the end of World War II has been more internationally engaged than the previous," he said.

"We know what is important to young people: opportunities for effective political engagement, access to education, the hope for meaningful employment, and the desire for a safe and healthy future for themselves and their families," Pittman said in his Georgetown speech.

For that reason the United States sponsors a U.S. Youth Observer program to amplify the youth voice in U.S. multilateral diplomacy efforts. Tiffany Taylor, a U.S. college student, will be traveling to the U.N. General Assembly, participating in meetings and events and engaging in other U.N. venues throughout a one-year period, he said.

The State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs is the U.S. government's primary representative in the United Nations and international organizations through a host of U.S. missions with teams of diplomats.

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