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Secretary Clinton's Remarks on Middle East Protests and Video

We are closely watching what is happening in Yemen and elsewhere, and we certainly hope and expect that there will be steps taken to avoid violence and prevent the escalation of protests into violence.

I also want to take a moment to address the video circulating on the internet that has led to these protests in a number of countries. Let me state very clearly – and I hope it is obvious – that the United States Government had absolutely nothing to do with this video. We absolutely reject its content and message. America's commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation. And as you know, we are home to people of all religions, many of whom came to this country seeking the right to exercise their own religion, including, of course, millions of Muslims. And we have the greatest respect for people of faith.

To us, to me personally, this video is disgusting and reprehensible. It appears to have a deeply cynical purpose: to denigrate a great religion and to provoke rage. But as I said yesterday, there is no justification, none at all, for responding to this video with violence. We condemn the violence that has resulted in the strongest terms, and we greatly appreciate that many Muslims in the United States and around the world have spoken out on this issue.

Violence, we believe, has no place in religion and is no way to honor religion. Islam, like other religions, respects the fundamental dignity of human beings, and it is a violation of that fundamental dignity to wage attacks on innocents. As long as there are those who are willing to shed blood and take innocent life in the name of religion, the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace. It is especially wrong for violence to be directed against diplomatic missions. These are places whose very purpose is peaceful: to promote better understanding across countries and cultures. All governments have a responsibility to protect those spaces and people, because to attack an embassy is to attack the idea that we can work together to build understanding and a better future.

Now, I know it is hard for some people to understand why the United States cannot or does not just prevent these kinds of reprehensible videos from ever seeing the light of day. Now, I would note that in today's world with today's technologies, that is impossible. But even if it were possible, our country does have a long tradition of free expression which is enshrined in our Constitution and our law, and we do not stop individual citizens from expressing their views no matter how distasteful they may be.

There are, of course, different views around the world about the outer limits of free speech and free expression, but there should be no debate about the simple proposition that violence in response to speech is not acceptable. We all – whether we are leaders in government, leaders in civil society or religious leaders – must draw the line at violence. And any responsible leader should be standing up now and drawing that line.

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