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### **U.S. to Discuss Climate Change, Poverty with Pacific Islands**



Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell says that following the trip to the Pacific Islands, he will hold talks with China in Hawaii about developments in the region.

Washington — The Obama administration is sending a high-level delegation to the Pacific Islands to engage governments in the region on climate change, the welfare of Pacific Islanders and U.S. assistance to the region.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell told reporters June 24 that he and U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Patrick Walsh will lead an interagency team from the State Department, the Defense Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on a June 26–July 1 trip to Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. That will be followed by a stop in Hawaii for a meeting with a Chinese delegation.

“We recognize that the challenges affecting the Pacific, ranging from climate change to endemic poverty, are important to address, and the United States wants to be in the forefront of that effort, bringing together a range of international actors that care about developments there,” Campbell said.

The U.S. delegation underscores “our whole-of-government commitment by the United States to fulfill our moral, strategic and political, and indeed long-standing interests in the Pacific,” he said.

At each stop, the delegation will “articulate specific steps on assistance, on dealing with climate change, on dealing with the welfare of the people of the Pacific Islands,” Campbell said, adding that the United States will also seek to coordinate closely with countries such as Australia and New Zealand that have deep interests in the Pacific.

Following the trip, Campbell said, he and a U.S. team in Honolulu will hold an Asia-Pacific consultation meeting with Chinese representatives as part of the continuing U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue.

The talks will focus specifically on the Asia-Pacific region, Campbell said, and are designed to “increase transparency, predictability and build trust and confidence” between the United States and China.

The Obama administration wants to ensure that close consultation and dialogue will help both countries move forward with “a greater degree of confidence about developments in the Asian-Pacific region,” he said.

The U.S. team plans to ask specific questions about the direction of Chinese military developments, as well as “their diplomacy with North Korea, with Burma, with other players in the Asia-Pacific region,” Campbell said. “I imagine the Chinese interlocutors will ask us about our plans for force posture, modernization and some of our engagements with our friends and others in the region.”

Campbell said he will also raise the issue of human rights with the Chinese delegation. The United States is pleased with the recent release of the artist Ai Weiwei, but is concerned over what Campbell described as a “trend of forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions and convictions of public interest lawyers, writers, artists, intellectuals and activists” who are being targeted for “exercising their internationally recognized human rights.”

Asked about the U.S. position on the dispute between China and several of its neighbors over the South China Sea, Campbell said the United States is not taking a position on the sovereignty of the area, but stands for principles such as maintaining “freedom of navigation, and free and unimpeded legal commerce, and the maintenance of peace and stability.”

“The United States has no intention to fan the flames in the South China Sea,” Campbell said. “We want recent tensions to subside and cooler heads to prevail.”

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