

PRESS CONFERENCE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2015

(ON THE RECORD)

Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa (SEGL) Thomas Perriello

4:40 p.m. Kinshasa, DRC

SEGL: Thank you so much Mr. Ambassador and thanks to all of you for being here today. I am honored to have begun this new post. It is an honor that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have asked me to pick up from the leadership of Senator Feingold in serving as Special Envoy for the Great Lakes. We have had a very constructive couple of days including a very important introductory conversation with President Kabila. Just concluded on a range of important issues related to the great lakes. In our two initial tours of the region, we have been able to not only visit Kinshasa and Goma, but also Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and will be continuing on to Angola and Geneva. In the meeting with President Kabila, we were able to have a very constructive exchange about issues including armed groups and refugees in the east, timely and peaceful elections, as well as the situation in Burundi and the issue of adoptions. And I reinforced the United States' deep commitment to the DRC and the Great Lakes, and our commitment to working on both root causes of trouble but also great opportunities that lie ahead. And I was able to learn a great deal from the President, the Foreign Minister, as well as meetings with civil society and others. So with that, I will take your questions.

Habibou Bagre, Agence France Press: How do you respond to the fact that MONUSCO has announced that it will end its food assistance to former FDLR rebels for lack of funds.

SEGL: We have had conversations with MONUSCO and the government about this. We must ensure humanitarian protection of the vulnerable but there is a viable path for refugees to return to Rwanda. This must be a process that involves good faith engagement from all actors including the United States as we continue to see the return and the disarmament in progress on the issue of the FDLR. We have been frustrated that there has not been more progress made in some of these areas. We will continue to work with all partners to address the long-standing issue of the FDLR presence and its negative impact on the DRC and the region.

Aaron Ross (Reuters): You were part of the diplomatic push in Burundi to try and persuade President Nkurunziza not to seek a third term. The international pressure in that case ultimately failed. What lessons did you take from that experience and what makes you think that in the case of Congo, international pressure can succeed in persuading President Kabila not to hang on to power beyond 2016.

SEGL: The United States is deeply concerned about the humanitarian and political crisis in Burundi, and we believe that it tragically proves that what President Obama said is true, which is when leaders try to change the rules to stay in power, it can be deeply destabilizing not just for democracy but for security and economic development. I was able to visit both the transit camp in Rwanda and one of the refugee camps in Tanzania and unfortunately the refugee flows are increasing significantly. So we do not see this yet as a crisis that is nearing resolution but rather one that continues to be extremely precarious. But we had very positive conversations with President Kikwete and other leaders in the region about the importance of the east african community immediately resuming political dialogue, and President Museveni has promised to send Minister Kiyanga as soon as possible on the ground in Bujumbura for a true dialogue that engages with all sides and attempts to find a peaceful resolution.

Le Potentiel: We know that the restoration of peace and stability greatly depend on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement. We know that the United States has been one of the nations that involved itself in the Addis Ababa process. We would like to know exactly what is the status regarding the need to implement this accord?

SEGL: What we are looking for and discussed with the government, many ways we can move forward on a number of areas. Looking at the importance, again, both of the peace and security but also opportunities for regional economic development. In partnership with the United States, being a positive presence in resuming this process. As I said before our priorities remain the issue of addressing armed groups and refugee issues in the east, the timely and democratic elections, and again the crisis in Burundi continues to be something that has moved to the forefront of everyone's mind as well. But in all of these issues, we want the focus to be on results. How can we get the focus on producing results that improve the conditions and lives for people throughout DRC and the region.

L'Avenir: You just mentioned that there is no progress as far as the return of FDLR members. I would like to know exactly what the United States government intends to do? Are there any concrete actions you will consider taking to move that process forward?

SEGL: We will continue to use whatever diplomatic pressure we can bring to bear but also support we can bring to bear to move forward on this issue that has continued to be a serious cause of trouble in the country and throughout the region. And we want to focus again on what moves us forward with concrete results. The resumption of joint operations against the FDLR, as well as the acceleration of the return of those FDLR who have agreed to enter a DDRRR or other process. We have visited that process on the Rwanda side. There is a credible and peaceful path forward. So we want to make sure that all partners in this process are engaged and that we are able to identify the barriers to that progress and make sure that this important issue is not in some way held hostage to, or limited by, other dynamics that are going on. So we really want to be focused on how we move forward on these issues. It is something that has been a cause of trouble for too long and we would like to see a greater progress made by all sides.

Malou Mbela, RTNC: The United States is very much engaged in the fight against terrorism and against cyber criminality but what can the DRC authorities expect from the United States? Can we expect to receive substantial assistance regarding the fight against a certain number of diseases including Ebola and monkey pox and also assistance to help the DRC authorities to effectively fight poverty and unemployment? What can the U.S. government possibly do in this respect?

SEGL: Certainly the United States wants to remain an important partner working with the government on the issues related to terrorism as well as cybersecurity. As I discussed with president Kabila today, we want to keep a keen focus on issues related to economic development, and particularly regional economic development. So I have also in my early weeks taken time to meet with the World Bank and others to discuss regional economic development opportunities, and both affordable cyberaccess and cybersecurity are certainly elements of creating not just a safe area but a good business climate. And the United States will continue to work on a bilateral basis through the great leadership of Ambassador Swan, one of the true all stars of the Foreign Service, in addressing issues like the health issues and continuing to work in partnership on fighting disease and building up health infrastructure. As I have said throughout this trip, the next couple of years is a tremendous opportunity for the Great Lakes to be increasingly defined by its bright future and not some of the challenges of its past. When we look at the opportunities that have been missed in Burundi, and opportunities that are still present here, we are sincerely hopeful that both the partnership with the United States and the perception around the world coming out of the next couple of years will be of a truly secure, democratic, and vibrant Great Lakes region.

Tom Wilson, Bloomberg: You mentioned earlier, Special Envoy, discussing timing for the next election with President Kabila. I wanted to ask if you can give us any more details about that conversation and tell us how as a representative of the international community you might try to encourage respect for constitutional term limits here in the Congo?

SEGL: President Obama has spoken in Addis and elsewhere of his deep belief and our deep belief as a country in constitutionalism and rule of law and believe that, in both the medium and long term, the issue of respecting constitutions and rule of law is absolutely essential for stability as well as development and that policy has not changed. The conversation with President Kabila on the electoral calendar and other issues was very constructive and I am sure we will continue to have many discussions between ourselves and others with the goal, of course, of meeting, of a particular importance of the presidential and legislative elections slated for the end of next year. We also shared a discussion about the importance of elections not just being seen as what happens on election-day but the entire process and that many partners must be involved in ensuring a truly free and transparent election cycle here. People have been skeptical of Congolese democracy in the past and been proven wrong, and we choose to be hopeful.