

PRESS CONFERENCE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2016

(ON THE RECORD)

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

11:45 a.m. Kinshasa, DRC

SEGL: Thank you very much for coming today and thank you for being patient. We are sorry to begin a bit behind schedule. I will be speaking in English, and we will be translating and so I will just have a few remarks here at the top and most of the time will be spent trying to answer your questions as best I can. It's been a pleasure to spend a week here in Kinshasa and in particular to attend the private sector investment conference. This has been a great opportunity to showcase the opportunities for the Great Lakes region to be defined not by the worst of its past but the best of its future. We thought it was a great indication that the Secretary General of the United Nations attended this event and along with other stops in the Great Lakes was able to emphasize not just the importance of private sector development but the fundamentals of good governance and accountability that are crucial to allow that kind of regional economic development and we will continue to focus on opportunities to have the three legs of the stool, capital, corruption, constitutionalism. And capital includes both human capital investments like education and financial capital. In addition to the conference, I was able to meet again with senior officials in the government, in the political opposition and civil society to discuss the ongoing political issues related to holding constitutional elections and having the first peaceful transition of power here in the DRC. We continue to believe that the fundamentals of democracy and development here in the DRC are strong and that the key is to build on those foundations, not to turn back the clock. We recognize that there is not consensus on the path forward but one element that should be fundamental is the right of Congolese voices to express themselves free of fear and intimidation, whether that's government or opposition, whether that's journalists or civil society or the average vendor in the street. And with that I will turn to your questions and elaborate on these subjects.

Jeune Afrique: Question

SEGL: Well first of all, of course, I'm very familiar with Jeune Afrique, so thank you for the question. The United States is deeply disappointed in sentences of those LUCHA activists in Goma and continue to be deeply concerned about the charges against those here in the West as well. I had a chance to meet with some of the LUCHA activists as well as other civil society leaders and I know the Secretary General did so as well during his visit. I also formally requested the opportunity to visit the detained activists in jail and was disappointed that that

permission did not come through. We see the creation or emergence of some of these movements really as being a compliment to the kind of democracy and free space that President Kabila and others have helped to create and it would be a tremendous dent in that legacy to see a backsliding of freedoms that this government has helped to make frankly a model for the region. Having travelled around the region for much of the year, I think overreactions like this are certainly read as weakness not as strength in terms of where the government feels like it sits. (It takes a village to hold a press conference today.) But it's also important to note that we have not seen any points of no return passed. There is still more than enough opportunity for the government to continue its legacy of protecting human rights and for the opposition to show that it is committed to non-violent participation in the process going forward.

Agence Presse: Question

SEGL: We believe one of the great accomplishments of President Kabila and of the Congolese people has been to come out of a brutal civil war and produce a constitutional democracy and that the people and the government should be extremely proud of that constitution. We believe that it is the best thing for stability, for investment and for democracy that the constitution be respected including with regards to elections. We understand that there will be technical budget and security challenges for any election in any country but the question underneath that is whether the social contract is respected and that people will remain committed to this constitution.

Radio Okapi: Question

SEGL: We believe that it's important for the people of Congo to determine the right way to resolve these very important questions. We believe that maintaining lines of communication whether you call that dialogue or negotiation or conversation is going to be essential for resolving any of the questions that remain on the table. We have encouraged the opposition to meet with Prime Minister Kodjo. We will respect the decision of all people to decide whether or not to participate in dialogue but we see no good argument for not expressing your point-of-view to a representative of the African Union who is looking at this question.

BBC: Question

SEGL: Again we have a great deal of confidence in the Congolese people to find a peaceful way forward to constitutional elections. We have a great deal of confidence in the Congolese people across the political spectrum to find a peaceful way to solve, to figure out the path forward. We believe that it is important to learn lessons from history here in DRC and across the Great Lakes. And one of those lessons is that when citizen space begins to shrink, the potential for peaceful resolution also shrinks. We believe that Congolese voices should be respected across the political spectrum and that tactics that are used to criminalize legitimate opposition tend to embolden more radical opposition and that begins a cycle that we know nobody in the government or opposition wants to see. We think that efforts across the Great

Lakes to criminalize legitimate opposition tends to have the effect of emboldening radical opposition and we believe that's a cycle that neither the government nor the opposition leaders want to see. As to the question of sanctions, I think it is important to note that we have raised the possibility of using these, but also equally important to note that we have not yet issued any sanctions in the case of DRC. We absolutely believe that the opportunity remains open for finding resolution of these questions and for making this a historic year for the Democratic Republic of Congo that all sides will see as a great legacy. Some people have focused on the fact that other leaders in the region are staying in power and noted it as a reason perhaps to see a similar pattern here but we see this distinction as being a badge of honor for the Democratic Republic of Congo that it may be the country that succeeds in showing it is ready to go to the next level and that is one of the main things we heard from the private sector at this conference was the question of which countries in the region are ready to move beyond the idea that every ten years there's a crisis to the kinds of places you make investments over a 30-50 year period.

Top Congo FM: Question

SEGL: Well, on the question about President Roosevelt, we changed our constitution afterwards to make sure it never happened again. I was asked earlier today to make predictions about the American elections and I said that all of my predictions had been wrong about the American elections, but there's one thing I guarantee, which is that there will be elections in November and there will be a peaceful transfer of power in January. On the question of the region, I would say that there may have been some misunderstanding about our commitment on constitutions. The idea was never that we want to or get to dictate terms to other countries. The point was that President Obama wanted to give his best advice and note that U.S. policy would reflect our belief that respecting constitutions, including democratic transfers of power, and protection of citizen space, is the best way to ensure peace and ensure shared economic development going forward. And we believe the events of this year, particularly in Burundi, prove that that policy is correct. When individuals try to hold power, and change the rules it destabilizes countries and wrecks the economy. On the other hand, when people commit to constitutions, investors can begin to understand that there's not going to be a new crisis every five years or ten years, but can start to see a longer term view in the country. That's been our best advice, and we will continue to ensure that our policy reflects that.

RTGA: Question

SEGL: I did not have the opportunity to meet with President Kabila on this visit, though I've certainly reached out for the opportunity to do so. Obviously there was a lot going on with the investment conference and the visit of Ban Ki Moon, but we do hope to have the chance to speak again soon. We continue to believe that keeping lines of communication open is important but that discussion has to happen in an environment of good faith from all sides about a desire to find resolution. As some of you know, before I was in diplomacy, I was in politics and I have rarely seen the opposition come together with the majority in any country without some sign of good

faith that this is genuinely meant to be an opportunity to find resolution. The form, the direction of the path forward is one that only the Congolese people both in the majority and the opposition can forge, can pave, but there are many of us in the international community who stand ready to be helpful if that path is found. I think it was seen by many, sorry, the decision of the opposition to shift their tactics from a mass mobilization to a ville-morte was seen by many observers as one of de-escalation and of trying to continue maximum space for finding a political resolution. So again, I think that there remains room for this to be a great story of success, but it is going to require some acts of confidence building and faith by the various sides.

Africa Television: Question

SEGL: We think there are many challenges but also many opportunities for regional economic development across the Great Lakes. There are many different legal systems, but underneath it there is a common interest in every country, which is strong economic development. This is not just a shared interest of the governments but of the peoples across the Great Lakes in shared prosperity, in access to water, and electricity, and the kind of security and rule of law that would allow them to their children a better life than they experienced.

RTV (?): Question

SEGL: The first thing I would say to the people of the DRC is congratulations, not just on the football victory, but on doing the difficult work for 15 years of building a constitutional democracy and putting behind them so many negative forces that they have suffered in the past. As I have explained here before, the mandate limit is not America's mandate limit; it is the Congolese people's. The constitution belongs to the Congolese people. The peace belongs to the Congolese people. In the same way that the constitution that protects citizens' space and independent journalism belongs to the Congolese people. It is not just a right for you as journalists; it's the right of every Congolese person to have access to diverse and independent media. Yesterday I had the privilege of visiting a fistula clinic at St. Joseph's hospital where Congolese surgeons who happen to be women are doing some of the most complicated surgeries in the world to transform the lives of women here in Congo every day. Every day that I spend in Congo, I am incredibly impressed by the creativity and courage of the Congolese people, whether it is the surgeons or whether it's people as artists or activists willing to risk jail time to stand for their constitution. But while the ultimate responsibility for this progress lies with the Congolese people, it is important to recognize the historic role President Kabila has played in creating and leading a Democratic Republic of Congo that allows this creativity and diversity of opinions. And we hope that will be a legacy that is only strengthened in the months ahead.

So, as I conclude I just want to be clear that we think the people of Congo as well as its leaders, including President Kabila deserve incredible congratulations for the progress that has been made over the last 15 years, and we believe the key is for that to be only the beginning of what the people here in this country are capable of in the future.