



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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Partnership Improves Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Ethiopia

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Coca-Cola Africa Foundation on Saturday, October 24 announced the completion of several water facilities in Ethiopia, which provide safe drinking water to over 46,000 Ethiopians.



Tangut, age 37, Tej-Atel community member, collecting water from one of the water development facilities.

The project -- executed under the Water and Development Alliance (WADA) initiative by the Millennium Water Alliance -- included the rehabilitation and construction of water systems

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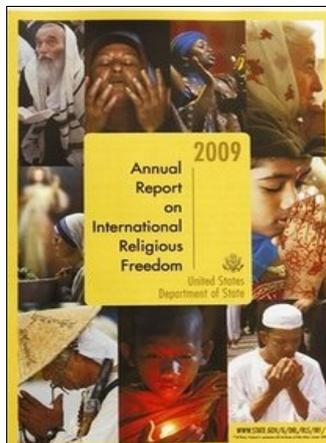
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Freedom of Speech and Religion Must Be Balanced, Clinton Says

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — There must be a sensible balance between freedom of religion and freedom of speech, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

"An individual's ability to practice his or her religion has no bearing on others' freedom of speech," Clinton said at a special brief-



The cover of the 2009 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom

ing October 26 marking the release of the 2009 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

"The protection of speech about religion is particularly important since persons of different faiths will inevitably hold divergent views on religious questions," she said.

"These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression

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and improved pit latrines fit with hand washing facilities. To enhance the health impact of the project and to multiply the use of water, cattle troughs, public showers and clothes washing basins were also constructed. Educational materials on hygiene were developed and distributed to schools and communities. Hygiene and sanitation training was also provided for beneficiaries, local government staff, and school teachers in communities within the project area. Moreover, to ensure sustainability, capacity building training was provided to local government community health extension agents and development agents, Water and Sanitation Committee members, and Watershed Management Committee members.

"This public-private partnership has been tremendously successful. Now, tens of thousands of Ethiopians in the Amhara region have access to safe drinking water," Thomas H. Staal, USAID Mission Director stated. "It is now up to the communities to take ownership and sustain these efforts."

WADA is a joint initiative between USAID and The Coca-Cola Company that currently operates in 23 countries worldwide (19 of these in Africa) to protect and improve the sustainability of watersheds, increase access to water supply and sanitation services for the world's poor, and enhance productive uses of water. In Ethiopia, WADA, through Millennium Water Alliance

and its implementing partners, Catholic Relief Service, Food for the Hungry, and World Vision International, expanded sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation services to more than 46,000 Ethiopians in the Amhara region. All the water supply and sanitation

made an impact on her life: "I am at school regularly because of the private toilets we girls have. The boys do not come to our side of the toilets and we are not afraid to use our toilets any time of the day."

These water and sanitation projects

will also reduce incidences of related diseases in the communities and improve environmental conditions by creating access to a safe water supply year-round. To ensure sustainability, Water and Sanitation Committees have been created and partnerships among water sector institutions have been promoted



Greg Insein, Managing Director of the East African Bottling Share Company, and Ato Asnakew Akalneh, representative of the regional water bureau, at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

systems are technologically simple, low cost and able to be managed by the community.

The completed water facilities were formally entrusted to beneficiary communities in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia at a ceremony conducted by the Regional Water and Health Bureau. Officials from USAID/Ethiopia, the East African Bottling S.C. based in Addis Ababa, local government authorities, traditional rulers, and other dignitaries participated in the event.

Dasash Bililgn, a 13 year-old grade 5 student of Danbola School in Amhara, explained how the project has

in the communities.

Since March 2004, the Millennium Water Alliance and its partners have implemented more than 800 safe water supply systems in Ethiopia. More than 421,000 Ethiopians now have access to clean water due to these efforts. The Alliance has also constructed ventilated improved pit latrines in schools and public institutions and taught households how to construct their own latrines. Additionally, 458,000 Ethiopians have received hygiene and sanitation education. ♦

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of discourse.”

The best antidote to intolerance, Clinton said, is a combination of robust legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes, government outreach to minority religious groups, and the vigorous defense of both freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

“Some claim that the best way to protect the freedom of religion is to implement so-called anti-defamation policies that would restrict freedom of expression and the freedom of religion. I strongly disagree,” she said, referring to efforts by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to advance within the United Nations the concept of “defamation of religions.” (The OIC is an intergovernmental organization comprising 57 states with significant Muslim populations.)

“The United States,” the secretary said, “will always seek to counter negative stereotypes of individuals based on their religion and will stand against discrimination and persecution.”

Freedom of religion is a founding principle of the United States — but it is a universal value, not just an American value, Clinton said. “It is a freedom guaranteed to all people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” she said.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION PROMOTES NATIONAL SECURITY

According to Clinton, freedom of religion “allows nations that uphold it to become more stable, secure and prosperous.” It was a message echoed by Michael Posner, assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor.



Freedom of religion, a founding principle of the United States, is a universal value, Secretary Clinton says in releasing the annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

In his introduction to the report, he writes: “Authoritarian regimes that repress religious groups and ideas in the name of stability create the very conditions that subvert their stated goals. Repression radicalizes. Coercive and arbitrary interference in peaceful religious practice can harden resentment against the state and lead some to separatism or insurgency.”

Linking extremism and terrorism, Posner cautioned that “governments must ensure that their policies on religion do not have negative international consequences.”

The United States, Clinton said, is expanding programs that work to bridge the divide between religious

groups. “These important efforts build on the shared values and common concerns of faith communities to sow the seeds of lasting peace,” she said.

Although the report shines a spotlight on abuses by states and societies, it also seeks to draw attention to positive steps many countries and organizations are taking to pro-

mote freedom and interreligious harmony, Clinton said.

In her remarks, Clinton commended the leadership of the Philippines in the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace at the United Nations, as well as Jordan’s role in initiating the “A Common Word” dialogue and many other international and domestic initiatives.

This year’s report contains assessments of 198 countries and territories, making it one of the most comprehensive reports available. Eight countries “of particular concern” were identified by the State Department as having serious religious freedom violations. They are: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North

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U.S. Mission to African Union Shows Commitment to Africa

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States was the first major non-African country to appoint a full-time ambassador to the African Union (AU), and that shows the importance the people of the United States attach to their partnership with the people of Africa, says the U.S. ambassador to the African Union, Michael Battle.

In an October 26 interview with America.gov, Battle said the United States Mission to the African Union is “very significant” for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the U.S. government sees the African Union as being critically important to the development of its policy toward the African continent.

Second, Battle said, President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton see Africa “as having the capacity to function with a single voice on continentwide issues, like the European Union acts as a single voice on issues that affect Europe.”

Once the AU gets beyond dealing with the immediate peace and security concerns of Somalia and Sudan, Battle said, it will be free to focus on economic integration, health and the social issues that affect the continent.

“So much of the AU’s time is spent on peace and security because of crises the continent is facing. I am looking forward to the day when the continent would not be catastrophe- and crisis-oriented but

would be able to focus long-term on its development, role and interaction with the world community,” he said. ([3352625.html](http://www.america.gov/st/africa-english/2009/October/20091007110943esnamfuak03352625.html)).”

Battle said the African Union and the U.S. mission there are focused on promoting regional peace and security throughout the continent,

[The United States has urged Captain Dadis Camara and the ruling junta to recognize that they cannot remain in power and must allow the people of Guinea to choose their own rulers. It has also urged the junta to stand by its promise to hold



USAU Ambassador Michael Battle (C) at a media training workshop which was held at the AU headquarters from October 13-16, 2009. The workshop was hosted by the AU in collaboration with the USAU.

especially in hot spots such as Guinea, where Presidential Guard troops are reported to have opened fire and killed more than 150 pro-democracy demonstrators and injured more than 1,200. The military also stands accused of carrying out brutal rapes and sexual assaults on women demonstrators and bystanders. (See “Guinea Violence a ‘Vile Violation’ of Human Rights, Clinton Says (<http://www.america.gov/st/africa-english/2009/October/20091007110943esnamfuak0>

free, fair, timely and transparent elections that will ensure a return to stability, economic progress and democratic rule.]

Battle said he has coordinated closely with the U.S. ambassador in Guinea to make the U.S. voice known at the AU. He added, however, that the United States was pleased that the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) both had “very strongly” called for free, fair

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and democratic elections to be held in Guinea.

On October 26 at the United Nations, the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Susan Rice, commended the African Union and efforts of African nations for their peacekeeping roles throughout the continent.

The African Union is also important to the United States, Battle said, because the continent of Africa is confronting so many of the major issues that the world will be facing in the future. One such issue, he said, is food security. That issue is more important in Africa than any other place on the globe because there has been a record of food deprivation in Africa and also because there is an abundance of land that can and should be cultivated.

"We have to strengthen the African Union's capacity through agricultural technology to cultivate land, like other parts of the world," he said. "Our objective is to try to encourage the kind of agricultural technology that will cultivate lands on the continent that will empower Africa not only to feed itself but to

be able to export food to other parts of the world."

The U.S. Mission to the African Union, Battle said, is "working collaboratively" to help Africa deal with that problem. Other issues of major concern to Africa and the world include: energy and oil; climate change; and the integration of sound economic policies throughout the African continent, he added.

"At this point there are five different regions on the continent and each one has its own policies. What the African Union is strongly encouraging is to develop a set of economic policies that can be used across the continent to facilitate greater trade and commodity exchange throughout the continent."

That is important, Battle said, "because you can go from one African nation to the next and end up paying three or four different levels of tariffs ... simply to trade commodities. A streamlined, integrated economic approach will work much better."

The African Union and the U.S. mission there are also focusing on health issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and other health issues that

often result from poverty and deprivation, he said.

Battle, who was appointed by President Obama, said he is now the third U.S. ambassador to the African Union and heads a diverse mission concerned with a broad array of issues including development, conflict resolution, democracy and electoral assistance, the U.S. Africa Command (Africom) and the African Union Mission to Somalia (Amisom).

Before becoming ambassador, Battle was the president of a consortium of six theological seminaries in Atlanta and a former vice chairman of the American Committee on Africa, also known as African Action.

A longtime admirer of President Obama and Secretary Clinton, Battle said, "Being the U.S. ambassador to the African Union gives me an opportunity to work with and for persons who have demonstrated absolute excellence and an absolute commitment to the people of Africa."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

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Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan. Twenty-nine countries had violations "of substantial interest." Twenty-one countries — some of which are also on the list "of particular concern" or "of substantial interest" — were found to have made specific improvements in religious freedom conditions.

The International Religious Freedom

Act of 1998 designates the promotion of religious freedom for all persons as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. The act also provides the mandate for the annual religious freedom report produced by the State Department. U.S. embassies around the world gather information for the annual report from a variety of sources, including government and religious officials, nongovernmental organizations,

journalists, human rights monitors, religious groups and academics.

Learn more:

U.S. Emphasizes Freedom of Expression at Human Rights Council (<http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2009/September/20090915123614ajesrom0.9471704.html>) ♦

Social Networking Unites African Activists

By Laura Henderson
Staff Writer

Washington — “Africa’s future is up to Africans,” President Obama told an audience in Accra, Ghana, on July 11. A global audience, including many members from Africa, has responded to that statement on the Department of State’s America.gov eJournal Facebook site (<http://www.facebook.com/ejournalUSA>).

“You have the power to hold your leaders accountable, and to build institutions that serve the people,” Obama said. In Africa as elsewhere, social networks are providing an opportunity for people to work together to do just that.

During Obama’s and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s separate trips to sub-Saharan Africa, and at the president’s meeting with African leaders at the United Nations in New York, the message about the importance of good governance, and the conviction that Africa’s future is up to Africans, were central. In August, Clinton made her way across sub-Saharan Africa, meeting with leaders of seven African nations, and telling audiences in Kenya, “The U.S. cannot solve Kenya’s problems. ... We cannot dictate to you how to run this government; it is not up to us. ... The answers to Kenya’s challenges lie with Kenyans.”

Internet users from across the globe followed the progress of Clinton’s tour through the America.gov Facebook page, taking part in a worldwide conversation on the most significant challenges facing Africa



urged the United States to pressure their governments to curb corruption and promote greater transparency. They also discussed the economic and social implications of more open governments, free and fair elections, and stable regimes.

The conversation was lively and pointed. In answer to the question “What is good governance?” participants responded:



“Good governance depends on transparency, accountability, and equality in ways that are responsive to the needs of the people.”

“Good governance to me is the act of living in peace of the people, having the heart of the people you are leading, thinking about what to do that other who are under your power may benefit from it.”

“Good governance means the greatest good for the greatest number.”

“Good governance begins with me.”

today. Throughout the month, fans of eJournal USA posted more than 700 comments, responding to questions about the roles of U.S. citizens and Africans in the continent’s development.

Of those participating in the conversation on the site, 57 percent said that the most important challenge Africans face is establishing good governance. Many participants

The full conversation, gathered in an online publication, can be viewed at http://bit.ly/AF_Comments (PDF, 2.4MB).

EXPANDING CIVIL SOCIETY INTO CYBERSPACE

Many credit Obama’s ability to galvanize grass-roots support via online tools as an important factor

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Burkinabé American Uses Cycling to Aid Burkina Faso Flood Victims

By Laura Henderson
Staff Writer

Washington — When Eric Tiéno, a Burkinabé American and avid cyclist based in New York City, learned that devastating flooding in West Africa had killed at least 150 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more, he knew he could help.

Seeing the flood devastation online, Tiéno searched for a quick and innovative way to help. On his bicycle in Central Park in New York City, he realized that two wheels and a laptop could help him raise awareness in the United States about the tragedy — and help the most vulnerable flood victims in Burkina Faso.

Tiéno signed up to ride in the New York Cycle Club's 15th Annual Escape New York ride on September 26 for a 105-kilometer ride. With less than three weeks to prepare, he researched charities on his laptop, selecting the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies appeal in support of the Burkinabé Red Cross Society. Using e-mail and Facebook postings, Tiéno reached out to "people from different stages of my life — from elementary school to investment banking colleagues." He used the I love Burkina Faso Facebook group site to reach potential donors and to publicize his effort. Messages about his initiative were also posted on the Friends of Burkina Faso Web site.

Within two weeks, he had raised \$3,700 for flood relief. The funds will go toward water sanitation and hygiene kits, blankets, insecticide-treated nets, sleeping mats and tents.

Before moving to the United States as a child, Tiéno had lived in Burkina Faso and many of his relatives still reside there. "For me, it shows the importance of Burkinabé-American individuals showing people in Burkina that we are proud of where we came from, and that we can help. It also helps people in the U.S. to be informed about the flooding, to understand that something severe happened, even though it did not get a lot of news coverage here."



Eric Tiéno combines cycling, social networking and fundraising to help Burkina Faso flood victims.

Raising funds for Burkina Faso through a bike ride made sense, he said, because "Burkina Faso is the two-wheel capital of the world." Bicycles, motorcycles and mopeds outnumber cars by more than 2-to-1, and for 23 years Burkina Faso

has hosted the Tour du Faso, a 10-day bike race organized by the Burkinabé Cycling Association in conjunction with the same group that operates the Tour de France.

While the 23rd Tour du Faso began October 23, the recent floods have made biking in the capital city Ouagadougou nearly impossible. The flooding destroyed roads, bridges, buildings and dams. "This has been a tough year for the African continent in terms of weather," Tiéno said. "In the East there are terrible droughts and in the West there has been tremendous rain."

West Africans are used to the rain, as the monsoon season traditionally lasts from June into October, but the floods this year have been more severe than usual, with almost a third of a meter of rain falling in Ouagadougou in a 12-hour period. "It was an extreme amount of rain for a city in the Sahel," Tiéno said.

Burkina Faso is considered one of the poorest countries in the world, with half of the population living under the poverty line. Most people are dependent on agriculture as their major means of survival. The flooding has left the poor even more vulnerable, severely affecting Burkina Faso's agricultural production capabilities, leaving thousands without shelter, and threatening the contamination of the water supply.

Tiéno rode in support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies appeal for assistance to the Burkinabé Red

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Mideast Peace Requires Taking Risks, Rice Tells Israelis

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The days when countries could pursue their own interests in isolation from the needs of the global community are over, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice told an Israeli audience, and she also called for a relaunch of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians “without preconditions” to resolve permanent-status issues between the two sides.

“We all must decide whether we are serious about peace or whether we will lend it only lip service,” Rice said October 21 at a conference organized by Israeli President Shimon Peres in Jerusalem.

“As President Peres always reminds us, being serious about peace means taking risks for peace. Being serious about peace means understanding that tomorrow need not look like yesterday,” Rice said.

The goal of negotiations over security, borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem is a comprehensive peace agreement: “a Jewish state of Israel, with true security for all Israelis, and a viable, independent Palestinian state with contiguous territory that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and realizes the potential of the Palestinian people,” she said.

This is the path for Israel’s ability to “truly and fully take its rightful place among the nations,” and for Palestinians to “at last enjoy the dignity and blessings of freedom in an independent state of their own,” she said.



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice visits the Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2009. Rice is visiting Israel to attend the three day conference hosted by Peres. (AP Photo/Sebastian Scheiner)

ZERO-SUM POLITICS

Under President Obama, the United States is pursuing a “principled and pragmatic” foreign policy based on a vision of a world it seeks for succeeding generations, and which is in the common interest.

“Our view of that world is rooted in a truth that my nation has long held to be self-evident, and that is that all people are created equal — of equal worth, of equal consequence and with equal rights,” Rice said.

“The days when we could view our own interests in isolation are over. The days when we could focus on our own security and prosperity without regard for that of others are

past,” she said. With common challenges such as climate change, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the advancement of human rights, and the danger of violent extremism, the United States acknowledges that the fate of the world’s people is becoming ever more closely bound together.

“More and more, we live in a world where we rise and fall together, where zero-sum politics no longer fit today’s hard realities, where what’s good for others is often good for us,” she said.

Failure to take bold action to solve common problems will leave everyone on Earth in greater peril. The nations of the world must choose between inertia and “a vain attempt to withstand the whirlwind,” or cooperation “to seize this rare

chance for deep and lasting change,” Rice said.

The advancement of human rights and improving the lives of the world’s poor are areas where the interests and values of the United States converge, she said.

Reflecting that she and President Obama are part of “the first generation of African Americans whose dreams were not immediately circumscribed by institutionalized racism and legalized segregation,” Rice said all children should be able to receive a good education and to “forge a dignified future, unbound by the accidental circumstances of their birth.”

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Mideast Peace Requires Taking Risks, Rice Tells Israelis . . .

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The United States seeks a world “where a child can grow up in Gaza, in Tel Aviv, in Baghdad, in Bamako, or in Kabul, free of fear, free of want, and with the opportunity to live their dreams,” and where women and girls “fulfill their own potential and are indispensable to national growth and development,” she said.

A nation’s government should be “a means to advance human rights, not a tool to suppress them,” and along with rejecting violent extremism, there should finally be an end to genocide and incitement, including school textbooks with “slurs

about Zionism, the Jewish people or any religious, racial and ethnic group.”

“We will always stand for the student who hungers to be taught, for the voter who demands to be heard, for the innocent who longs to be free,” she said.

Ambassador Rice also called on ordinary citizens to play their part in bringing about a better world.

“No climate pact will make the difference if consumers do not change the cars they drive or the way they insulate their homes. No peace will truly last if leaders are not held accountable for faithful implementa-

tion of their obligations and if citizens lose heart in the promise of a brighter future. Shared security rests on public resolve, common understanding and united will,” she said.

There will always be those who scoff, do not make choices and will prefer not to take action, but, the ambassador said, “History is made by those on the playing field, not those sitting in the cheap seats.”

At the current historic moment facing the world, future generations will remember those leaders who “took responsibility for our shared destiny” and “citizens who refused to allow differences to define them,” Rice said. ♦

Social Networking Unites African Activists . . .

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in his primary and general election victories in 2008. As president, he continues to use Internet forums and inspire a social movement in which citizens can discuss policy and government actions. Civil society has expanded into cyberspace, helping democratize political debate.

The use of new communication technologies and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube and MySpace is gaining ground in Africa, and Africans have discovered that social networks are useful tools for promoting change.

One Facebook group, This Africa Can (<http://www.facebook.com/search?q=this+africa+can&init=quick#/group.php?gid=86081867615&ref=ts>), connects Africans to other Africans to exchange ideas and encourage active participation in the develop-

ment process. The group posts discussions on such topics as

“informing your city mayor, state governor or local governor,” “developing strategic relationships” and “submitting business ideas,” and members share African blogs and Internet resources.

The creator of the group, Kim Hannah Moran, said, “I believe and rely on what Africans do best naturally, and that is networking. ... This is a natural thing with Africans; cyberspace has just made it simpler, better and faster for them.”

A recent campaign by Nigerians, “Light Up Nigeria,” used social networks to reach the Nigerian diaspora to bring attention to inadequate electrical infrastructure and to demand change. Through a Facebook site, Twitter and blogs, they assembled a virtual global community to take action on an issue. Find out more about this effort on the America.gov blog entry “Can Nigeria Live Up To Its Promise?” (<http://blogs.america.gov/>

bythepeople/2009/08/13/can-nigeria-live-up-to-its-promise/)”

Social network platforms have learned that they can adapt to low-bandwidth environments. According to data collected by O’Reilly Media Inc., from January to April, the number of African Facebook users grew by 86.9 percent. In August, Facebook launched Facebook Lite, a version for users with less reliable Internet connections, offering the potential to open up many low-bandwidth areas to the opportunities that Facebook offers for hosting intra-African and cross-border dialogues. Facebook also recently introduced a Swahili version of its site.

The discussion on democracy, good governance and related issues continues on the Department of State Facebook page and on America.gov blogs, where all ideas are welcome. ♦

Iran Delays Answer on Draft Enrichment Proposal

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

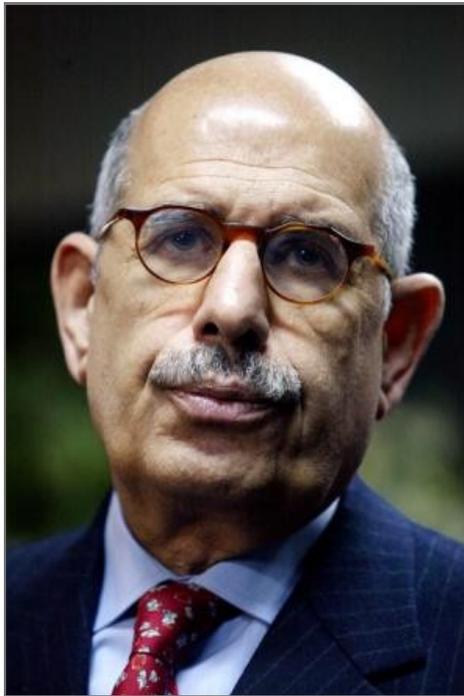
Washington — The United States, France and Russia have given the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a “positive response” to a draft proposal to supply Iran with nuclear fuel for a medical research reactor, but Iran has asked for a few more days to consider the arrangement.

“This is a real opportunity for Iran to help address some of the real concerns of the international community about its nuclear program, and at the same time still provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iranian people,” State Department spokesman Ian Kelly told reporters October 23.

According to news reports, the proposal involves having Iran send its low-enriched uranium to the IAEA, which then would bring it to Russia to be enriched to a higher grade, but not high enough for the production of weapons. The IAEA then would transport the enriched uranium to France, which has the technology to add the “cell elements” needed for Iran’s medical-research reactor.

In an October 23 statement, IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei said Iran had informed him that “it is considering the proposal in depth and in a favorable light, but it needs time until the middle of next week to provide a response.” ElBaradei added that he hopes Iran will respond positively “since approval of this agreement will signal a new era of cooperation.”

Originally, ElBaradei had asked all four countries to respond by October 23.



IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei says Iran's agreement to the draft proposal would "signal a new era of cooperation."

“The international community has been waiting a long time for Iran to address some of our real concerns about their intentions. But all along we have said the IAEA is taking the lead on this and we hope there are no more delays than these next few days,” Kelly said.

Concerns over Iran’s nuclear activities were heightened in September by the disclosure that Iran had concealed its construction of a nuclear facility near Qom that could be used to produce highly enriched uranium needed for nuclear weapons. (See “United States Has Known of Iranian Facility ‘for Several Years’ (<http://www.america.gov/st/mena-english/2009/September/20090925155924esnamfuak4.726809e-02.html>).”)

Kelly said IAEA inspectors may be granted access to the facility on October 25. “A lot of the preparatory work has been done, so we expect it will happen on Sunday,” he said.

The United States and its partners in the P5 + 1 grouping — Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany — are working to hold a meeting with Iran before the end of October that would follow up on their October 1 session in Geneva in which the proposal to provide fuel for its medical-research facility was first discussed. (See “Obama Says Iran Talks ‘Constructive’ but Need Follow-Up Action (<http://www.america.gov/st/mena-english/2009/October/20091001165145esnamfuak0.969494.html>).”)

The ultimate goal driving the engagement with Iran is “to raise the international community’s confidence in its nuclear program,” Kelly said. “The P5 + 1 is the forum for that.”

The United States views Iran’s agreement to open up the Qom facility to IAEA inspectors and to work out a procedure for getting its low-enriched uranium reprocessed in another country as a positive sign, Kelly said.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

United States Anticipates Smoother Runoff Vote in Afghanistan

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan says Afghanistan's runoff election likely will have fewer irregularities than the August 20 presidential and provincial council vote, and added it should be acknowledged that the electoral system set up under the country's laws and constitution has worked in the face of serious challenges.

Speaking in Washington October 23, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke said that in the November 7 runoff between incumbent President Hamid Karzai and his top challenger, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, it is "reasonable to hope that there will be less irregularities" than in August.

"One, there are only two candidates. Two, there's the experience factor," he said. In addition, there have been additional international forces deployed to Afghanistan, who are now ready to provide assistance, and international observers, including from the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, are being invited to participate.

"So, we're hopeful," Holbrooke said.

But the special representative said that despite the irregularities that accompanied the August 20 vote, "where we are is right where the process dictated it should be," after election authorities declared that none of the president candidates received more than 50 percent of



Ambassador Holbrooke says there should be greater acknowledgement that the Afghan electoral system has worked.

the vote, necessitating a runoff election.

"A lot of people went out to vote. Millions of people risked their lives in the face of an overt threat against them, if they voted, by the Taliban. They deserve great credit," Holbrooke said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has said "she can't think of a country in that stage of development, in those conditions of warfare, which had ever attempted an election under more difficult circumstances," he said.

"In the end, the system worked. It was difficult, it was complicated, it took longer than people expected; but we came out of it with an acknowledgment that no one got 50 percent, and then the constitution and the laws of the country were respected. And I think that deserves acknowledgement," he said.

Holbrooke also praised the recent diplomatic efforts of Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who held talks with both Karzai and Abdullah prior to their agreeing to participate in the runoff vote. Kerry had done "a phenomenal job," Holbrooke said.

CLINTON VISITING PAKISTAN SOON

State Department Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley told reporters before Holbrooke's briefing that Secretary of State Clinton hopes to visit Pakistan soon, but did not announce specific travel dates due to security reasons.

Holbrooke said the secretary would meet with "the leadership of the country, the leading members of the opposition, civic society, businessmen and as many people as she can in a limited period of time."

Clinton will also discuss the ongoing Pakistani military operations against Taliban elements in South Waziristan. Holbrooke said he did not have any specific information on how the offensive was going, but said U.S. officials are "very impressed with the Pakistani resolve" in the struggle against violent extremists.

"They know what the stakes are. And having spent a lot of time with General [Ashfaq Parvez] Kayani and his colleagues, I know how determined they are," he said. Kayani is Pakistan's chief of army staff. ♦

U.S., South Korea Reaffirm Timetable for Command Hand-Over

By Kurt Achin
VOA News

The United States and South Korea have wrapped up an annual security meeting with assurances that South Korea is on track to assume more autonomy over its defense in the next few years. Officials from both sides say they are committed to getting rid of North Korea's nuclear weapons, and are planning for any scenarios that could destabilize the North.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates says he and his South Korean counterpart, Defense Minister Kim Tae-young, reaffirmed the two countries' alliance this week during consultations in Seoul.

"I reinforced once more the unwavering commitment of the United States to the defense of the Republic of Korea," Gates said.

The two officials said October 22 the full array of U.S. military might, including what is known as the "nuclear umbrella," is available to South Korea to defend itself against attack. North and South Korea remain technically at war. The United States deploys about 28,000 troops here to help deter North Korea from



U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates (L) walk with South Korea's Defence Minister Kim Tae-young after arriving at South Korea's defence ministry in Seoul October 21, 2009. REUTERS/Kim Jae-hwan/Pool

repeating its 1950 invasion.

Under the present agreement between the two alliance partners, the United States would command South Korean forces if the Korean War ever re-ignited. That is to change in 2012, when Seoul will regain wartime command of its

armed forces.

Gates says the hand-over process is on schedule.

"I have full confidence in the ROK military's ability to take the lead in the combined defense of this peninsula," Gates said.

South Korean Minister Kim says the two also discussed contingency plans in the event of instability inside North Korea.

He says details are being looked at very closely. The two countries are planning for "all possible scenarios," he says, to make sure there are no negative effects from possible events inside North Korea. Kim says the U.S. and South Korean interest in the matter is very serious.

Gates moves next to Eastern Europe. He has been consulting with international partners on contributions to stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. Gates said October 22 he did not make any specific request of South Korea, leaving the matter to Seoul's discretion. This report was provided by VOA News (<http://www.voanews.com/>). ♦

Burkinabé American Uses Cycling to Aid Burkina Faso Flood Victims . . .

(Continued from page 7)

Cross Society. In early September, the Red Cross asked the international community for food, emergency shelter, medical care, water and sanitation.

Tiénou collected his donations using firstgiving (http://www.firstgiving.com/eric_tienou), a Web site that makes it easy for individual donors to contribute di-

rectly to charities. Today, it is easier for individuals like Tiénou to use social networking tools and Internet resources to directly benefit the lives of people in need thousands of kilometers away.

On the day of the race, Tiénou rode with the cycling team from Hope for New York (<http://hfny.org/>), a group that works to serve the poor and marginalized of New York City. Raising funds for those in need in

the United States, and – in Tiénou's case – in Burkina Faso, the riders embarked on their 105-kilometer journey. "It turned out really well," Tiénou said. "I did it in about four-and-a-half hours, which I was happy about."

In addition to individual donations to Burkina Faso flood victims, since September the U.S. government has provided more than \$2 million in flood relief for Burkina Faso. ♦

Fuel-Cycle Options Can Safely Increase Access to Nuclear Energy

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — At a time when nuclear activities by North Korea and Iran underscore the danger of weapons proliferation, the international community is increasingly looking to nuclear power as a means of addressing its energy needs and an alternative to carbon-based fuel sources, which contribute to global warming, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said.

Speaking October 21 at the Washington-based U.S. Institute of Peace, Clinton said a reinvigorated Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will better help realize the twin goals of guaranteeing that all countries have access to nuclear fuel and “the peaceful benefits of nuclear energy,” while also “providing incentives for them not to build their own enrichment or reprocessing facilities,” which could also produce nuclear weapons. Clinton also proposed expanding fuel-cycle options, in which institutions such as fuel banks and spent fuel repositories provide and store the nuclear fuel needed for energy reactors, while keeping the material from being diverted for weapons production.

STRONGER MEASURES NEEDED TO REDUCE PROLIFERATION RISKS

“The range and intensity of current nuclear proliferation challenges is alarming,” the secretary said, citing North Korea’s success at developing nuclear weapons and Iran’s continued efforts to acquire them in violation of its international commitments.



Secretary Clinton says international cooperation will reduce the shared nuclear threat while permitting more access to nuclear energy.

“We do need to continue to facilitate the legitimate peaceful use of nuclear energy,” she said, but the increased demand “has not been accompanied by corresponding measures that could reduce the risks of nuclear weapons proliferation.”

Also, “illicit states and nonstate proliferation networks are engaging in sensitive nuclear trade and circumventing laws designed to protect us against the export and import of nuclear materials,” she said. Although the United States and others have been working to deactivate or destroy thousands of weapons, “vast stocks of potentially dangerous nuclear materials remain vulnerable to theft or diversion.”

Unless the situation is reversed soon, “we will find ourselves in a world with a steadily growing num-

ber of nuclear-armed states and an increasing likelihood of terrorists getting their hands on nuclear weapons,” Clinton warned.

It is a problem for nuclear and non-nuclear nations alike. Nuclear weapons states must work to “stop the erosion of the nonproliferation regime and to address the current crisis of compliance,” which has led countries to flout their international obligations without feeling they will be held accountable. They also have a responsibility to protect nuclear materials and technology against theft or illicit transfer, she said.

Countries without nuclear weapons need not only to forgo ambitions to acquire them and to accept nuclear safeguards, but also to actively participate in efforts to prevent other nations from obtaining them. Clinton said the nuclear threat is a shared danger. “Indeed, the non-nuclear weapon states have as much or more to lose if these weapons spread or are ever used again,” she said. The secretary called for the strengthening of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to enhance its capability to verify whether countries are engaging in illicit nuclear activities. This includes persuading “key holdout states” to join IAEA’s additional protocol, which allows it to conduct aggressive, short-notice inspections of nuclear sites.

Along with existing special inspections, Clinton said, the IAEA should be allowed new authorities to “investigate suspected nuclear-weapons-related activities, even when no nuclear materials are present.”

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Press Freedom Group Concerned over Europe, Welcomes U.S. Progress

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — In its eighth annual world press freedom index, the watchdog group Reporters Without Borders warns that Europe, which largely has led the world in free press standards, has seen individual declines over the past year. Also, while the United States has increased its standing, Israel and Iran have both scored much lower marks than in 2008 because of press freedom violations, the organization says.

Reporters Without Borders (also known by the acronym RSF for its name in French) released its country press freedom rankings of 175 nations and political entities on October 20, and the organization's secretary-general, Jean-François Julliard, said he was disturbed to see European democracies such as France, Italy and Slovakia "fall steadily in rankings year after year."

The report, which covers the period between September 1, 2008, and August 31, 2009, bases its findings on questionnaires sent to journalists and media experts around the world. The questions are designed to gather information on direct and indirect attacks on press freedom, censorship and other sources of pressure against the media in each country or governmental entity.

The 2009 report said Slovakia's fall to 44th place was largely due to "government meddling in media activities and the adoption in 2008 of a law imposing an automatic right of response in the press." Italy (49), as well as Bulgaria (68), fell in rank because of the impact of organized crime on the media, including the targeting of journalists. Also, Italian

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's "harassment" and "increased meddling" and "a bill that would drastically curb the media's ability to publish official phone tap transcripts" helped to explain Italy's slide, the RSF report said.

France (43) continued to fall in the rankings "because of judicial investigations and arrests of journalists and raids on news media, and also because of meddling in the media by politicians, including President Nicolas Sarkozy," according to the report.

Secretary-General Julliard said: "Europe should be setting an example as regards civil liberties. How can you condemn human rights violations abroad if you do not behave irreproachably at home?"

The report said younger democracies such as Mali (31), South Africa (33) and Ghana (27) in Africa, as well as Uruguay (29) and Trinidad and Tobago (28) in the Western Hemisphere, have been making improvements in press freedom and moving past some of the European countries.

However, RSF's index shows that the first 13 spots are still held by other European countries, with Denmark, Finland and Ireland considered the top three places where journalists can freely do their jobs.

U.S. ADVANCES; ISRAEL AND IRAN DECLINE

The United States advanced 16 places from number 36 to number 20, and the report cited reforms under President Obama. "The judicial authorities are no longer jailing journalists and violating civil liberties in the name of national security

as they were in the Bush era. So the U.S. is back in the press freedom top 20," the RSF report said. But at the same time, the report said that despite some improvement, "the attitude of the United States towards the media in Iraq and Afghanistan is worrying," citing the U.S. military's arrest of several journalists during the past year and the continued incarceration of photojournalist Ibrahim Jassam in Iraq.

Israel fell sharply to number 93, below some others in the Middle East region such as Kuwait (60), Lebanon (61) and the United Arab Emirates (86). RSF said Israel's January military offensive in Gaza had a negative effect on the media, with three journalists killed and 20 injured while covering the conflict.

In addition, "Israel has begun to use the same methods internally as it does outside its own territory. Reporters Without Borders registered five arrests of journalists, some of them completely illegal, and three cases of imprisonment. The military censorship applied to all the media is also posing a threat to journalists," the report said.

But Iran, which has consistently ranked at the lower end of the spectrum, fell to 172, and RSF cited the crisis stemming from the disputed June 13 presidential elections as having "fostered regime paranoia about journalists and bloggers."

RSF said the state of press freedom in Iran is now only better than in Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea, "where the media are so suppressed they are nonexistent."

The past year of press freedom in

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Fuel-Cycle Options Can Safely Increase Access to Nuclear Energy . . .

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The agency also needs more resources and greater coercive power to enforce compliance with international obligations. "We should consider adopting automatic penalties for violation of safeguards agreements — for example, suspending all international nuclear cooperation or IAEA technical cooperation projects until compliance has been restored," she said.

To combat illicit proliferation, controls on transshipments need to be tightened and the Nuclear Suppliers Group restrictions on transferring enrichment and reprocessing technology need to be strengthened.

U.S. REEVALUATING STRATEGIC ROLE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Obama administration's focus on nuclear nonproliferation stems from its acceptance of a responsibility both to prevent the use of the world's most dangerous weapons and to hold other countries accountable for their own nuclear ac-

tivities, Clinton said.

The United States and Russia are working to negotiate a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) to further reduce their nuclear arsenals and to "set the stage for even deeper cuts in the future."

The secretary said the reduction of nuclear weapons does not negatively affect the security of the United States or its allies, and the failure to reduce such weapons "gives other countries the motivation or the excuse to pursue their own nuclear options."

The new START agreement "will demonstrate that the United States is living up to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligation to work toward nuclear disarmament," she said, along with helping to motivate others to cooperate on nonproliferation.

The Obama administration is also conducting a "nuclear posture review," which is assessing the role

of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security.

"We believe now is the time for a look — a fresh look — at the views on the role of the United States' nuclear weapons arsenal. We can't afford to continue relying on recycled Cold War thinking," she said.

The administration is also preparing to secure U.S. Senate approval for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Although the United States has observed a moratorium on nuclear testing for nearly 20 years, ratification of the CTBT will "will strengthen and reenergize the global nonproliferation regime and, in doing so, enhance our own security." It also "sets out a global standard that we would like to be part of," she said.

The global nuclear threat cannot be checked by the United States alone, Clinton said, but the Obama administration is "committed to seeing this through. And we believe the world is depending on our success." ♦

Press Freedom Group Concerned over Europe, . . .

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Iran has been characterized by "automatic prior censorship, state surveillance of journalists, mistreatment, journalists forced to flee the country, illegal arrests and imprisonment," the RSF report said.

FREE PRESS IS ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The United States has "a strong commitment to media freedom worldwide," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a

May 1 statement marking World Press Freedom Day.

In today's world, the free flow of information and ideas offers "a powerful force for progress," Clinton said.

"Independent print, broadcast and online media outlets are more than sources of news and opinion. They also expose abuses of power, fight corruption, challenge assumptions, and provide constructive outlets for new ideas and dissent," Clinton said.

The secretary said that press freedom is an essential component of democracy and economic development, and wherever it is jeopardized, "all other human rights are also under threat."

More information on the press freedom index (<http://www.rsf.org/en-classement1003-2009.html>) is available on the Reporters Without Borders Web site. ♦

Muslim Prayer Day Illustrates Dynamics of Free Speech in U.S.

By Howard Cincotta
Staff Writer

Washington — On the scale of public events at the U.S. Capitol, it was unremarkable: several thousand Americans from throughout the country participating in an outdoor day of prayer.

But in another sense, the Muslim prayer service September 25 served as a microcosm of how the principles of free speech and the right of protest function daily in American society, and most visibly in the nation's capital.

"ISLAM ON CAPITOL HILL"

The daylong prayer service — officially called "Islam on Capitol Hill" — was initiated by Hassen Abdullah, a lawyer and president of the Dar-ul-Islam mosque in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Abdullah, who converted to Islam in college, said he was inspired by the words of President Obama.

"For the first time in my lifetime, I heard someone of his stature speaking about Islam and Muslims ... being welcoming and acknowledging we are integral citizens in the society," he told the New Jersey Star Ledger newspaper.

Abdullah and other organizers, including Imam Abdul Malik of New York, began planning the Muslim day of prayer shortly after President Obama's Cairo address to the Muslim world in June. (See "Obama



Thousands of Muslims gathered Sept. 25 on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol for prayer in what may have been the first such event of its kind at the site.

Calls for a New Beginning with Muslims Around the World (<http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2009/June/20090603172847dmslahrelleko.882641.html>).")

A month later, after organizers completed a simple one-page form requesting permission to hold the service, the U.S. Capitol Police gave Islam on Capitol Hill its permit.

PRAYERS AND PROTEST

The prayer service might have drawn only modest attention from the press except that it attracted opposition from a small group of demonstrators.

Some demonstrators criticized the lack of religious freedom in Muslim-majority countries. Others were motivated more by opposition to the policies of the Obama administration than by the event itself. No national religious or political figures joined or publicly supported the protest.

Inevitably, the Internet and the blogosphere served up information and opinion that was fast but sometimes inaccurate or distorted.

An independent Web site, FactCheck.com, provided corrections to much of this misinfor-

mation — such as that the government had declared an official "Muslim Day," or that Christians and other non-Muslims do not have their own day of prayer.

In fact, Islam on Capitol Hill was an unofficial event without any government sponsorship. In terms of government sanctioning, a National Day of Prayer first was designated in 1952. In 1988, the first Thursday in May was set as a National Day of

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Muslim Prayer Day Illustrates Dynamics of Free Speech in U.S. . . .

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Prayer for all faiths.

Islam on Capitol Hill ran smoothly, with speeches and readings from the Quran as well as prayers. "A service that was part religion and part pep rally," the Washington Post newspaper reported.

The Fox News television network described the worshippers as "voicing their religious fervor and solidarity with American values while ignoring protesters."

"This is not a protest," declared Malik. "It is a day of prayer, of devotion, hoping that we can work ... for the betterment of the world community."

When the protesters, although few in number, became too loud, Abdullah admonished them.

"We would never come to a prayer meeting that you have to make a disturbance," he said. "Please show us some respect. Just as your Sunday is sacred, our Friday is sacred."

There were no further incidents, and the Washington Post reported that the noise from protesters faded during the last part of the two-hour service.

Muslim prayer services take place routinely in the Capitol building. The Congressional Muslim Staffers Association conducts regular Friday services that are often attended by visiting officials and diplomats.

Association members could not attend Islam on Capitol Hill because many of them were participating in a service for the Congressional



Black Caucus — comprising African-American members of Congress — in another part of Washington.

About 3,000 attended the day of prayer, a somewhat lower number than the organizers had hoped would attend. Lower turnout was attributed in part to the fact that the event was held without the participation of national Muslim organizations. Some popular commentators and bloggers, such as Zahed Amanullah of the Web site *altmuslim* and Aziz Poonawalla of the blog *City of Brass*, were critical of its timing, coming so close to the end of Ramadan and Eid celebrations.

SPEECH AND DEMONSTRATIONS

In holding a public event on Capitol Hill, Muslim Americans were participating in a tradition of public speech by U.S. citizens that is as old as the nation itself. In fact, it would be impossible to identify any significant religious, ethnic, politi-

cal, social or cultural group in the United States that has not conducted rallies, demonstrations, prayer services, picket lines, or protests in Washington.

In 2008, for example, the Capitol Police issued 145 permits for demonstrations and marches on U.S. Capitol grounds. This year, they exceeded that number by October, according to a spokesman.

Among the 2009 demonstrations were March and October protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a march and demonstration against the Obama administration's health care program in September.

Smaller demonstrations held throughout Washington during the year reflected a wide range of issues: a rally for Palestinian rights in Gaza (January), demands for swift action on global warming (March), a rally for democracy in Iran (June), a protest against the military overthrow of the Honduran president (July), and a demonstration for human rights timed to the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (September).

Virtually all these public demonstrations were held without serious confrontations or arrests.

SPEECH AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Islam on Capitol Hill raises the question of the government's role concerning free speech and public dissent — often referred to as "First Amendment rights" of the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights.

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Education, Economic Opportunity Help Curb Violence Against Women

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Education and economic empowerment are among the most important tools to prevent the victimization of millions of women around the world who are suffering from violence, experts told members of the U.S. Congress.

“When you look at violence against women, it’s not that there’s one magic program that makes all the difference; but it is critical that education and economic viability are absolutely important tools to address this problem,” said Melanne Verveer, the State Department’s ambassador-at-large for global women’s issues.

Speaking at an October 21 hearing before the International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Verveer noted that there is a very close relationship between poverty, lack of opportunity, desperation and the low status of women.

She shared heartbreaking stories of women and girls who have been victimized.

“The current scale, savagery and extent of violence against women and girls is enormous,” she said. “It affects girls and women at every point of their lives, from sex-selective abortion — which has culled as much as 100 million girls — to withholding adequate nutrition, to FGM [female genital mutilation], to child marriage, to rape as a weapon of war, to human trafficking, to so-called ‘honor killings,’ to



Melanne Verveer, the State Department's ambassador-at-large for global women's issues.

dowry-related murders and so much more.”

“There is a common thread” among these stories, Verveer said. “Each of them is fundamentally a manifestation of the low status of women and girls around the world. Ending the violence requires elevating their status and freeing their potential to become agents of change for good in their communities.”

One successful tool in giving women economic opportunities — and greater status in their societies — is microcredit programs that allow women to develop their own businesses, Verveer said.

Training and capacity-building programs for women are also vital to

ending their low status and helping them contribute to their families and the economic lives of their communities. There are additional benefits as well, she said: “Where there is any contribution to the economic life, women are less put in situations where they are abused.”

Economic interventions are important, too, in protecting women, Verveer said. These include providing incentives to parents to keep their daughters in school, such as ending school fees; providing families with commodities, like a bag of flour, a can of oil or other necessary staples; or feeding children in school.

Representative Janice Schakowsky, co-chair of the House Women’s Caucus, said she will be joining Representative Bill DeLahunt, chair of the subcommittee, in reintroducing the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA).

IVAWA authorizes a multiyear, comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to violence against women in targeted countries, Schakowsky said. The funding would cover a full spectrum of programs, including judicial reform, health care, education, economic empowerment and changing social norms. It includes tools to ensure accountability and oversight to determine the effectiveness of U.S. efforts.

IVAWA recognizes the particular dangers faced by women in conflict and post-conflict situations and authorizes training for military and police forces operating in these dangerous zones to address violence

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See also

<http://www.america.gov/>

Telling America's story

Muslim Prayer Day Illustrates Dynamics of Free . . .

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The First Amendment does not protect only polite speech, it protects all speech, especially speech and writing dealing with public issues and figures. (Laws dealing with libel and slander apply most often to private citizens.)

In short, Americans can publicly disagree with each other, or can call their political leaders and public figures just about anything they want — short of specific threats of violence — without fear of legal consequences.

The question of civility in public debate — as raised by Hassen Abdullah during the prayer service — is an important but different issue, and

one which is hotly debated.

Did a small number of protesters say and write misguided or inaccurate things about Islam on Capitol Hill? They probably did.

But many more Americans supported the right to a public Muslim day of prayer. In doing so, they shrugged off the demonstrators — knowing that the right to pray and protest was being protected for all Americans.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Education, Economic Opportunity Help Curb Violence . . .

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against women and girls. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Schakowsky said, "the systematic use of rape as a low-tech, low-cost weapon of war has become a defining characteristic of the long-standing conflict in the east. Hundreds of thousands of women have been raped. Rape is used to destroy communities and to instill a sense of despair within a population."

According to Schakowsky, IVAWA is "unprecedented legislation" that "firmly establishes the preference of [eliminating] violence against women as a foreign policy priority, and it requires the integration of this goal into every aspect of our diplomatic and developmental policy."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has said that women's issues will be at the center of her foreign policy. And President Obama created the position of ambassador-at-large for global women's issues — now held by Verveer — as well as the White House Council on Women and Girls to study the domestic situation.

Likening violence against women to a "global pandemic," Verveer urged the development of a "new era of international cooperation" and creating partnerships among governments, multilateral institutions, the private sector, civil society and individuals.

Verveer noted a connection between national security and women's safety. "Around the world," she said, "the places that

are the most dangerous for women also pose the greatest threat to international peace and security. The correlation is clear: Where women are oppressed, governance is weak and extremism is more likely to take hold."

The text of Verveer's prepared remarks (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/October/20091022114508ptellivremos0.7678295.html>) can be found on America.gov.

Learn more about this topic in "Women's Issues to Be Major Focus of U.S. Policy (<http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2009/September/20090925152715ajesrom0.1487042.html>)." ♦