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REMARKS

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
Town Hall Meeting for Employees Marking One Year at State

January 26, 2010
Dean Acheson Auditorium
Washington, D.C.

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: Good morning, everyone. It has been one year since we welcomed the Secretary of State to the State Department, and one year since she held her very, very first town hall meeting with us. And it has certainly been an eventful year.

What I'd like to do is I'd like for all of you to please rise for a moment for a moment of silence for the thousands of Haitians who are lost and also for Victoria DeLong, a Cultural Affairs officer of the Department of State who was – who died in Haiti, as well as the wife and two children of Andrew Wyllie, an officer in the PRM Bureau who was on assignment in Haiti as well.

(A moment of silence was observed.)

Thank you very much. I know the Secretary of State will address many of these issues, but I'd like to thank all of you who have so generously committed your funds, your personal funds to the Haitian relief effort. And also, I'd like to note that we are also engaging in a separate and parallel effort to collect funds for what we call the Foreign Service National Relief Fund. We have a large number of Foreign Service National employees in Haiti, many of whom have suffered grievously, as have their counterparts. And the information is on the website and there is, every other day, a table outside the cafeteria, and I encourage you to be generous.

With that, as I believe I said a year ago when I was asked to introduce the Secretary of State for the first time, this is one of the easiest assignments of my life. Madame Secretary.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. (Applause.) Well, good morning. And I echo Pat's comments about the relief needs in Haiti, and I thank all of you from throughout the Department, our colleagues from AID who have been working literally around the clock since January 12th. The needs are overwhelming. We are trying to meet the humanitarian needs in this period, while at the same time working with the Haitian Government, the UN, and other countries and organizations to plan for the longer term.

When I spoke to family members who had lost loved ones – Victoria DeLong – and then I spoke with Andrew Wyllie – they both thanked me as Secretary for the outpouring of support that they had received from

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colleagues. In Victoria's case, from people who had served with her, who knew her, who had reached out to the family, who had really demonstrated the closeness of community that exists among us. And for Andrew Wyllie, who inconceivably, unimaginably lost his wife on her birthday and his seven-and-a-half and five-year-old children, he mentioned specifically the names of those who had been working with him in these very difficult days to recover the bodies of his wife and children. And again, the sense that it was not even just a community, but a large and extended family came through in everything he said to me.

That certainly is the way I feel after a year here, working with many of you, but of course, many, many more with whom I do not work on a daily or a weekly basis, but who I know are toiling in offices and posts and missions and projects across the world on behalf of our country, our values, our interests, our security, to build that better future that we think every person deserves and to create the opportunity for every child to live up to his or her God-given potential.

We've had a very active and challenging year that has tested many of us and forced some very difficult decisions upon the President and his team. But every step of the way, I feel very confident that as I go into any setting, I have all of you as part of the preparation and the backup. And that gives me the reassurance that we are prepared for whatever comes next.

With respect to Haiti, the challenges that we confront are really going to give us both the opportunity and the necessity of demonstrating what we mean by diplomacy and development working together. One without the other is truly inadequate. And my goal has been, among others, to elevate the role of diplomacy and development. And here we are with this terrible calamity that has forced us to do just that.

One example: Our AID workers under the newly sworn-in Dr. Raj Shah who – I don't know even how you say – had to hit the ground running, but he did, and of course, our team here at State were scrambling as quick as we could to do everything we needed in these past two weeks. And as is often the case, some of the international press either misunderstood or deliberately misconstrued what was a civilian and military response, both of them necessary in order to be able to deliver aid to the Haitians who desperately needed it.

We were able, working through Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and with the assistance of P and all of the regional bureaus, to begin to push back. I have absolutely no argument with anyone lodging a legitimate criticism against our country. I think we can learn from that. And we are foolish if we keep our head in the sand and pretend that we can't. On the other hand, I deeply resent those who attack our country, the generosity of our people, and the leadership of our President in trying to respond to historically disastrous conditions after the earthquake. So what we're asking for is that people view us fairly.

And we sent cables to all posts. We asked our entire teams to be prepared to respond to any misleading media report. And we stood up for who we are and what we represent. And we saw the change. We're not going to leave unanswered charges against the United States of America and the kind of work that we do every single day. That has to be, going forward, what becomes the norm, not the exception. We have a story to tell. We have an important message to deliver. And we need every single person to be part of that. So going forward, we're going to look in a very clear-eyed way at what we do well, what we could improve on, but to make sure that the extraordinary story that the United States has to tell is presented forcefully and effectively in every corner of the world.

Before I take your questions, I want to review a few important areas of progress since I first met with you a year ago over in the C Street foyer.

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We began with the idea of “smart power” and the goal of elevating diplomacy and development and making them equal partners with defense. I’m pleased at how far we’ve come in doing that. Our budgets demonstrate both the commitment of the Administration and the Congress to this vision. We’ve strengthened relationships with historic allies. We’ve reached out to emerging powers. We’ve pursued constructive dialogue, even with longtime adversaries. We’ve broadened our definition of diplomacy to extend beyond government-to-government engagement, and to include NGOs, the private sector, and citizens and media in nations across the world.

As we’ve worked together to bring governments, the private sector, and civil society together in cross-cutting partnerships, we’ve seen some exciting examples. One is the use of technology on behalf of diplomacy and development, a subject I discussed last week in my speech at the Newseum.

Our civilian experts from State and USAID are supporting the Afghan and Iraqi people as they work to build democratic institutions, functioning market economies, combat violent extremism, and strengthen civil society. And we are working to promote effective, democratic, transparent governance in both those nations.

We’re also redoubling our efforts to deal with the long-term issues like poverty and hunger, climate change, non-proliferation, and others. And the Department has played a central role in advancing President Obama’s vision of a world someday without nuclear weapons.

We’ve put forward a new development agenda for the 21st century. We’re pursuing a policy based on partnership, not patronage. That means working directly with developing countries to help them identify their own obstacles to growth, crafting solutions to overcome those obstacles, and implementing programs that can be held accountable for results.

In close partnership with USAID, we’re supporting investments to make agriculture more productive. We’re helping farmers produce more in a sustainable way that, in turn, promotes economic growth. And we’re seeing the impact of that approach in many countries around the world.

Now, there’s much else that we have been doing and we are doing, but we recognize we have a lot of challenges still on the horizon. So what was good enough in 2009 won’t be adequate in 2010. That’s why I’m pleased that we launched the QDDR last year to align our priorities and policies and to make sure that we were equipped with the tools and resources to do the jobs we’ve been asked to do. Over 400 State and USAID personnel thus far have participated in QDDR working groups, and many more have contributed online or in response to working group questionnaires.

With the appointment of our new USAID administrator, the QDDR is entering into its last phase of operation. Going forward, Jack Lew will chair the effort, Raj Shah will co-chair, Anne-Marie Slaughter will serve as executive director, and Karen Hanrahan will continue in her role as chief operating officer.

Now, I cannot promise you that next year – or I guess now this year – will be easy. But I can promise you that you will be working on important matters that really do affect the future of our country and the world. Now, wherever I go, I see results. I see lives saved, conflicts averted, partnerships strengthened, and the United States acting as a force for progress. I’m very proud to be a member of this team, and it is a tremendous privilege to work with you on behalf of the American people.

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So I am looking forward to an exciting year ahead. And I am very confident that we will continue to make progress together. Right now, I'm looking forward to your questions. So, I'll hand things back over to Pat to help moderate the discussion. But thank you all for everything you've done and everything you will do. (Applause.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: We have two microphones set up, one on each side, if there are any questions. This has never been a shy group.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) – vice president of AFSA. On behalf of AFSA and the Foreign Service, I would like to begin by thanking you for your leadership in fostering an environment of open communication with management and recognizing the value of the human resources of the State Department.

With your permission, I actually have two questions I would like to ask. The extension of comparability pay to the Foreign Service overseas is eliminating a major inequity in Foreign Service compensation, and has significant positive effects on morale. Can you just briefly describe the timeline for initiating the second and third phases of this process and ensuring that this compensation continues in perpetuity?

And then the --

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, let me take that one first, because --

QUESTION: Sure. Absolutely.

SECRETARY CLINTON: You ended on "perpetuity," which, you know – (laughter).

We are very pleased that we were able to obtain congressional support and funding for comparability pay. At this point, I don't want to make any predictions. We are going to work very, very hard to implement phase two and phase three. But I think you know that we're facing very tough budgetary times. It's anticipated that tomorrow the President will announce in the State of the Union a request for a three-year freeze on domestic spending. Thus far, he's exempted foreign aid, but not State operations.

So we really have to work hard to make the case. You made it succinctly and well; this was an injustice, it was a comparative disadvantage for people serving in overseas posts. So I think we have a strong argument and equity on our side, but I can't stand here today and guarantee to you what's going to happen in this budget process. So we're going to fight as hard as we can. We've been extremely successful in the last year and we're just going to redouble our efforts and try to make sure that we maintain that equitable posture going forward – in perpetuity. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you. And my second question is that employment opportunities for eligible family members overseas are an important factor in recruitment, retention, and post morale. Seventy-five percent of eligible family members have college degrees, of whom 50 percent have advanced degrees. Can you comment on the prospects for increasing eligible family member employment overseas and also address the possibility of increasing opportunities for employment through the use of teleworking?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, on the last one, teleworking, we are constantly exploring what more can be done. We think it has a lot of advantages. One that we have been promoting is more conferences by teleconference, SVTS, and the like. It saves money, it saves wear and tear, and it can often lead to the same or

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better outcome than you would get if people had to travel distances. On the teleworking side, similarly, we're going to explore all kinds of options. I mean, technology gives us the chance to do that.

With respect to family members, again, this is an area that we are constantly reevaluating. We know that when we send someone to serve in a post overseas, the family serves, whether the family accompanies the officer or stays behind. We know that there is a family that is involved in most cases. It really depends on a case-by-case analysis and a post-by-post situational analysis. Some posts, it's a lot easier. Some we have, as you know, reciprocal agreements with the host countries, others we don't. So we're working on this because we know it's an impediment for a lot of families, but I can't give you more than the commitment we've made to work through this and the fact that we are trying to push as hard as we can to provide opportunities for those who accompany the person who's assigned.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Good morning, my name is Jennifer King. I just wanted to ask what your stance is on pre-selection during the hiring process.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Do I have a stance on pre-selection? I'm opposed. (Laughter.) I'm sorry, I really – I don't understand that. I don't know. That's one thing that I – I get into a lot of the details. I don't know that. But I'll let the under secretary respond. Do you want to say a word? (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: We have a --

SECRETARY CLINTON: Come – yeah. (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: We have a hiring system at the State Department that jobs that come vacant in the State Department in the Civil Service are posted on our website. Applicants apply and it is a banned practice on the part of the myself, on the part of Director General Powell, Linda Tagliatela and the other senior leadership in HR. So if you have any reason to believe that there's pre-selection going on that inhibits a fair competition for jobs, please be in touch with the director general or Deputy Assistant Secretary Tagliatela. We will definitely want to look into that.

QUESTION: Okay, thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: I couldn't have said it better myself. That was -- (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: Madame Secretary, we have questions coming in from overseas over the internet.

MS. GREENBERG: Good morning. Our first question comes from Stephen Marquette, an RSO in Afghanistan. He says that Department facilities throughout the world are often in decay, overcrowded, or both, and our personnel lack the training, equipment, and logistical resources that our defense and other foreign affairs agencies seemingly have in abundance. Do you anticipate the Department will be afforded these human and capital resources in a timely manner and at adequate levels to complete our mission in areas like Iraq and Afghanistan, let alone worldwide?

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first of all, I'm well aware that in many posts, particularly very difficult ones in conflict situations, we often don't have everything that we need for those serving in the State Department and USAID. And we are working very hard to try to increase the equipment and respond to the specific needs. And also, on the building front, if he serves in Afghanistan, he knows that we've been scrambling to build enough facilities for people every year since 2002.

So we're doing as well as we can. Again, we often ask for a lot more than the Congress gives us because we know what the need is, and we go to bat to try to fill those needs. But it is not possible to compare us to the Defense Department. They have more than a 10-to-1 advantage on us in terms of budget. But it is fair to say that we have pushed very hard to increase our resources for facilities and equipment.

And if there are specific needs that really go to the heart of whether you can perform your mission, we want to know about that. We know that there's overcrowding in housing in Baghdad and Kabul and other places. There may not be anything we can do about that in the short run, but if there are other types of equipment or needs that are not being met, let us know about that.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madame Secretary, Larry Sperling from the OES Bureau. I want to applaud the efforts that you've launched with the QDDR, a much-needed look at the directions that we're going. I'm wondering if you can share any insights on the kinds of reforms that might occur as a result of that review, and particularly whether putting development and diplomacy on equal footing means greater integration or greater independence of decision making between State and AID, and also to what extent we might see streamlining of the various decision-making processes for planning and budgeting.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Larry, those are all very important questions. I'm not going to preempt or preview the QDDR. We will be having many meetings to explain what the proposed conclusions are and the policies that flow from them. But I think just your questions illustrate the need for this process.

I think you can do a lot by questioning assumptions and trying to understand, are we just doing the same thing we've always done because we're comfortable with it and we understand it; do we have evidence about what could actually make us more efficient and more effective? And every question you ask goes to the heart of how we best perform our jobs and fulfill our missions. So those are going to be addressed in the QDDR and you'll have to stay tuned. Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Brendan O'Connor. I work in the Office of Facility Management in the Overseas Building Operations Bureau. I have a great deal of respect for how you're leading the State Department, whether it's more recent stuff like the work in Haiti or internet freedom, speaking out on behalf of that, and I appreciate the town hall.

My question is on travel, which I think can feel like, very small in comparison to a lot of the big things you have on your plate, but seems pretty, you know, integral to just the work of the State Department. So 17 travelers, travel processors, managers and I who also process travel signed our names to two posts that went up on the sounding board at the end of November. And we formed the post collaboratively with actually more authors than any other sounding board ideas, deliberately making our suggestions constructive, but haven't had an official response yet.

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So we asked among other things for surveys, working groups, et cetera to reevaluate a travel system that seems to have really infuriated and demoralized travelers because of some inherent weaknesses and inefficiencies in the travel business processes. The suggestions also included recommendations for E2 and Carlson Wagonlit.

So my question on all this actually stems in part from something I saw recently on a recent White House forum on modernizing government. One recommendation from the forum was “To reengineer business processes before deploying technology, federal managers should only begin technology projects if the underlying business processes have been evaluated and streamlined first.”

So with all that said, big kind of lead-up to the question, but I want to ask if our fundamental business process is not only for our overall travel system, but as I think is kind of indicated with how I led into this, also for areas like the sounding board actually moving employees into potential – employee ideas into potential action, if those processes can be thoroughly reviewed and if our two sounding board posts can get comprehensive answers online.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, thank you for that and thank you for the thought that’s gone into it. And we do take the sounding board very seriously. We take these town halls very seriously. Some of you might remember my last town hall. And I’m proud to announce that next week, we will be cutting the ribbon on the free showers. (Laughter, applause.) So it does – it sometimes takes a while, but we take everything seriously and we work through it to the best of our ability.

I actually was briefed on your sounding board post related to streamlining travel procedures and E2 software. And let me just tell you that I am aware that there is frustration with the implementation of a number of standardized and automated administrative tools, including eTravel. There have been changes in this area. They are often difficult because, as it’s explained to me, we have these global operating platform and requirements that have to be met. So we’re trying to figure out how to best serve our diplomatic community while keeping track of travel, being able to answer IG questions and congressional questions and the like.

So I know that the management folks are really involved with Carlson, which is the group that was chosen to basically run the travel operations here, to try to make changes in their eTravel software that will facilitate the kinds of unique travel requirements that we have. I mean, it’s hard to compare us to many other government agencies. So we want to use satisfaction surveys and user groups and input, and Pat Kennedy will follow up with you to see what additional ideas – (laughter) – need to be explored.

Now, I am aware that a lot of glitches happen as you change systems, and the Department has implemented the GET, G-E-T, at those bureaus and posts that account for approximately 90 percent of the Department’s TDY travel, and that’s integrated with the financial system. All of USAID has been operating under the GET program.

So we need to be aware of any large problems, try to get on top of them as soon as we can. Your point about the business process approach is a good one, and that should be constantly done to see whether or not what we’re getting meets our requirements. It’s just complicated, and so I’m always interested in good ideas kind of coming up from the system. So we will certainly get back to you on the specific ideas that you and your colleagues posted. But we’ve paid attention; we’re just trying to follow through on them.

QUESTION: Thanks.

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UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes.

MS. GREENBERG: Our next sounding board entry comes from Selim Ariturk, an economic officer in Azerbaijan. He says, “Madame Secretary, gay and lesbian staff worldwide have been so heartened by the wonderful changes you have made since you took office. I can’t tell you how much it means to me when I look at my HR records and finally see the word ‘family member.’ More than any of the financial benefits, those two words say so much about the kind of atmosphere you have set. Thank you so much for all you have done. Many of us still face problems coming home to the U.S. with our partners, and I wonder if you could help us by talking to Congress about the challenges we face. Thank you for your consideration and thank you again for all you’ve done.”

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, and thanks to everyone who has supported and embraced this policy change. I’ve met with people across the world at every – just about every post I’ve visited, which are a lot by now. And we will continue to follow up on issues that arise, but we’re very proud that the State Department led the way on this.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, my name is Walter Bruce and it’s an honor and pleasure to be before you today. You and your husband is part of my family, has been for many years.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you, Walter.

QUESTION: I’ve looked forward for this opportunity. I’m also the president of AFGE 1534, the local here. I’ve got seven vice presidents across USAID and OPIC, Overseas Private Investment Contract. I’d like to compliment one of your officers for doing something that I consider to be outstanding. Her name is Susan Swart. She’s a CIO. I’ve been here for 14 years. I’m retired military. I spent 30 years in the Army. I have all my degrees except for Ph.D. I’ve experienced a lot of challenges and learned a lot of things over the years. And I remember on this floor in front of Madeleine Albright, I spoke to the issue about having minorities in the pipeline to be promoted to senior level officials. No one ever done anything about that until Susan Swart came aboard. She initiated an action to eliminate that pre-select program that you spoke – the young lady spoke about a while ago. Susan made sure that anybody going to senior level has to go in front of a board, something that wasn’t here before. I applaud her in that effort. Also, she put together a dialogue panel to discuss the issues and concerns of diversity, with the outstanding results that she published through this organization. And additionally, within her timeframe, under her watch, we have accumulated more minorities into senior level positions than there has ever been done in the history of this organization. And I wanted her to know and you to know how proud I am of her.

I have one other issue, and that is ombudsman. I sent Pat an email back in May of last year and I’ve known Pat for a long time and I know he supports everything that we possibly do *because it’s all in one accord. And I’m only concerned about what’s the status of the ombudsman program. That’s the guy or girl that’s supposed to be looking out for Civil Service employees. This is a Foreign Service organization. We got no doubts about that. But there should be an infrastructure in place that looks out for the interests and advances of those that we consider to be civil servants. (Applause.) I just wanted a status.

So, Madame Secretary, all I want to know is – and I’m sure Pat going to be able to tell me this – where we stand on it. (Laughter.) That’s all I have.

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you so much and thanks for your many years of service to our country, first in the military and now here. We're going to have that ombudsman, aren't we, Pat? (Laughter.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: Madame Secretary, yes, the law requires that the ombudsman must be a member of the Senior Executive Service. We have no other choice; it's written in the statute. So we are in the process in all this turnover of recruiting someone because we have to identify an SES position and recruit someone. That process is ongoing.

SECRETARY CLINTON: And there's no pre-selection? (Laughter and applause.)

Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: Go ahead, please.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yeah, we can hear you. I can hear you.

QUESTION: My name is Dorothy Burkette and I'm sort of coming behind Major Bruce in the sense that I am concerned that I've been here 11 years and I've never had a good supervisor. I've always had – (laughter).

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, shall we give equal time to your supervisors? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Oh, okay. I am concerned because they're not accountable to anyone. In fact, in the two bureaus I've worked in here, the particular supervisor is always supported by management all the way up to the assistant secretary. And whatever they do, as one assistant secretary told me, we don't ever tell any supervisor what they can do in their office. And so that is a very poor environment to work in and I have experienced that. I've been – every office I've been in, I've been discriminated against. In my present office, one low-line supervisor came in, a young 30-something-year-old, with people in my age group, and with a hard hand and decided to tell all of the supervisory people up to the assistant secretary that I was a terrible person. They accepted it. I had no redress. None of my rights were acknowledged. I was never able to give – I was never given a list of all charges against me. And there is a memo in your office about this, but I'm sure it didn't get to you. But – so that's the reason why I'm saying something today.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well --

QUESTION: But we need – as he's saying Civil Service employees, we need to have Civil Service supervisors. This was a Foreign Service person who knew nothing --

SECRETARY CLINTON: I'm sorry. I --

QUESTION: -- about Civil Service.

SECRETARY CLINTON: I'm sorry. I think that we have procedures inside the State Department that you can follow, and I would urge you to do so if you feel you've been unfairly treated or discriminated against. And I think that it would be appropriate for you to exhaust your remedies within the system.

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QUESTION: Which I have done. Which I have done.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, then there really is no – we will certainly pay attention to ensuring that people get their grievances heard. But this is a mixed workplace and Foreign Service officers have a lot of responsibility, Civil Service officers also have a lot of responsibility, and it's just not possible to say that you can only be supervised by one or the other. That just is not possible.

QUESTION: I just want you to know the organizations I've been to which were the Office of Civil Rights, which at one time was known as affirmative action. As you know now, they are – they have to take a neutral approach. So even if what I've told is – even if they see a problem, they can't speak to it.

SECRETARY CLINTON: That's just not the case.

QUESTION: So that was out with that.

SECRETARY CLINTON: That is not the case. I'm sorry, ma'am.

QUESTION: Well, I'm just telling you this is what happened.

SECRETARY CLINTON: No, I know. But I think we've heard that you have some questions that you feel strongly about, and I'm sorry that that's been your experience, but I think there are a lot of people in the Office of Civil Rights and in the management chain who can listen to that. That doesn't mean they're going to always side with you. I mean, just because someone feels --

QUESTION: Of course not. Of course not.

SECRETARY CLINTON: -- I mean, I've had more criticism in my life than probably whole countries have had. (Applause.) And it doesn't mean that I'm always right or I'm always wrong. But especially when we do have these systems for your grievances to be heard, I really urge you to do that and pursue those and do the best you can under the circumstances.

QUESTION: So what can I do if the union didn't help me and the Office of Civil Rights didn't help me?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I think you need to ask yourself why nobody is agreeing with you.

QUESTION: Okay. No, I'm not saying that's what the problem is. But thank you for listening.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Okay, thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes.

MS. GREENBERG: Yes. Our next overseas question comes from Jenny Bavisotto, a community liaison officer in Stockholm. She's asking, "What is being done about collaboration and communication with overseas family members who don't have access to OpenNet?"

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Pat? (Laughter.) We haven't had a lot of questions about foreign policy, so that's why I have him here.

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: I'll have to take that question. OpenNet, ma'am, is our technical name for our internet system. I'm just very surprised, frankly, that in a country as technologically advanced as Stockholm there is not an ability to get on the internet to reach the State Department's principal website from home, but I will speak to the Family Liaison Office about this. And I know, at least at posts I've served at when people could not get on at home, terminals were made available in the Family Liaison Office in the Embassy for family members to come in and use those so they could reach out. And I see Leslie Teixeira, the head of the Family Liaison Office, shaking her head in the audience.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I'm Hillary Aidun. I'm an intern in F. Following the UN Security Council resolution on gender-based violence and recent events such as the post-election violence in Conakry, which the Department reacted very strongly to, what can the Department do in the future to respond to gender-based violence around the world?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we are following up on the Security Council session and resolution. And this is a very high priority for me, not only personally but because I think it really speaks to our values. And also, where you find that level of gender and sexual-based violence, you will find other indicators of conflict and behavior that is inimical to our interests and, most importantly, our values.

So I think we are going to – this is going to be a constant priority in the Department and at USAID. We are looking for specific ways to address it when we deal with countries, whether it be Guinea or the Democratic Republic of Congo or anywhere else. We are putting more resources into that arena. As you know, we have the first-ever appointed ambassador for global women's affairs, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer. It is at the top of all of her interactions. I raise it with my – in my meetings with leaders. And it really comes down to attitudes. We are funding some programs to see whether they can work on trying to change attitudes about the treatment of women and girls.

And I was delighted to hear that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said she will stand for reelection. She's been one of the champions on this issue in her political and governmental career.

But it's a constant struggle. There are so many instances of it that go from the kind of cultural behavior that people just take for granted to the horrific abuses that we've seen.

So again, I invite people for your ideas about how best to try to have the United States, with the rest of the world, addressing this. We've made some good partnerships with some of our fellow colleagues and countries. The Dutch sponsored an event about this at the United Nations General Assembly, the first that we're aware of. And we want to just keep raising awareness. This year gives us a chance because it's the 15th anniversary of the UN Women's Conference in Beijing. So there will be a lot of activities around this.

So we're just going to do everything we can think of. But you and others, if you've got ideas, either in general or specific to certain countries or areas, please let us know.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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QUESTION: Hello, my name is Bahar Godani. I'm an intern at the State Department, and I would at the A bureau. I'm also an ethnic Kurd. And I heard that today you are meeting with the Kurdish President Masoud Barzani. And I was wondering what our State Department has to gain from not only just speaking to him, but specifically towards the elections that are coming up. I heard they were pushed back again, so what is it – what is our agenda and where have the talks led so far, since you're excellent at foreign policy?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, thank you. Right. Well, I will be meeting with President Barzani. He met with President Obama and Vice President Biden yesterday. Really, we have three messages.

One is to encourage the Kurdish leadership to work toward a peaceful resolution of some of the disputed boundaries, particularly around Kirkuk; to support the elections and the election of a legitimate government that can be put into place as soon as possible – the Kurds will have a major role in determining who ends up in those positions – and to reassure President Barzani and other Kurdish leaders that the United States is very supportive of Kurdish aspirations and the security of the Kurdish people, but we do expect that the Kurdish leadership will take an important role in trying to stabilize Iraq, trying to work with the Sunni and Shia leadership, for the betterment of the entire country. So working out the oil revenue law, for example, is something that is very important to all Iraqis. And it will benefit all Iraqis if it can be finalized.

So it'll be a message of both reassurance and requests about what we would like to see the Kurdish leadership do going forward.

QUESTION: Wonderful. Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, my name is Jean Pierre-Louis, and I --

SECRETARY CLINTON: You need to pick that up, sir, so you can – yeah, thank you.

QUESTION: My name is Jean Pierre-Louis and I am a Haitian American and a Foreign Service officer. And I'd like to thank you and Administrator Shah and also President Clinton for the work you've done in Haiti since the earthquake. I have lost some family members there. And when – soon after the earthquake, I went to my boss, Ambassador John Herbst – I'm his special assistant – and I said I'd like to – your permission, sir, to volunteer to go to Haiti if I may. And I was very appreciative that he said go ahead. Just to be sure, I checked with him again. (Laughter.) And he said absolutely, go ahead.

I volunteered. I'm a member of the stand-by – I'm a stand-by member of the Civilian Response Corps. Took my shots, four shots on a Monday, Martin Luther King birthday. I started my anti-malaria medications, and today I'm supposed to start my second dose, and I'm – but I'm not in Haiti, and I don't know that I'm close to going to Haiti. There are other options. I can take a leave of absence and go in my personal capacity. But I – my wife has told me she'd rather that I not do that because our children need milk. (Laughter.)

And I guess I'm asking – I know that we have done very good work in Haiti, and I'm appreciative of that, but I believe that I have skills that are relevant. I speak Haitian Creole, 5/4+ in State Department rankings, and I'm prepared to go.

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Good. Well, we need you, and if you will come and give us all of your details, because we need you in a number of capacities. Our Embassy in Port-au-Prince is overwhelmed. The need is so great.

And some of you may know that the Embassy, because of the way it was built – and it certainly withstood the earthquake – it became a gathering place for Americans, Haitian Americans, people who were seeking help, seeking medical care, seeking a visa. We had surgeries being performed in the conference room. I mean, this was a truly heroic effort.

And we're going to start rotating some of the people out because, frankly, they've been under intense pressure, literally not sleeping for two weeks. We have a task force that we're working with, as you know. So if you will talk to Pat after we break, we will get you to Haiti. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Thank you. And I'd like to make – and I'm sorry for following up, but I'd like to make also a more general point about perhaps a routinized way for volunteers to speak up in times of disaster, people who believe they have relevant skills. Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. And thank you also for being a stand-by member of the Civilian Response Corps. I see John Herbst sitting down here. This is a very important program.

MS. GREENBERG: Our next question comes from Andy Miller of Consular Affairs. He says they'll be too busy to watch, but please give a shout-out to our Embassy in Haiti and all the TDY help for their heroic work since the earthquake. The evacuation of thousands of American citizens on military flights with DHS clearance and HHS resettlement assistance is wonderful U.S. Government cooperation in the untold media story of this disaster.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I really appreciate that because it was a very difficult organizational challenge because we had to bring, as you say, from the field, DHS and HHS to work closely with Consular Affairs. I think we have evacuated – more than 11,000 at this point – more than 11,000 Americans. And we are dealing with a lot of very complicated issues, of people who are citizens with children who aren't, or vice versa. We have a lot of very difficult problems that the law doesn't give us a lot of leeway on, but our integrated teams are working hard to get answers for people.

So those of you who have been in the field, who have seen comparable – there's nothing comparable, but situations where we all had to quickly move into action – know how difficult this has been, and I appreciate the recognition for the team down on the ground. (Applause.)

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I'm so happy to be here. I've admired you for a long time. As an upstate New Yorker, I'm also one of your former constituents from the Albany area.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Great.

QUESTION: I am a college professor in my normal life and I am here as an American Academy for the Advancement of Sciences fellow on a sabbatical year. And when I arrived here only a few months ago, I was really pleased to discover that I was going to be in the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. And since then, I've been learning a great deal about Central and South Asia and working to promote human rights on that, and we are beginning – we're thick into human rights reporting season. And I'm starting to learn how

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challenging it is to balance human rights concerns against security concerns, concerns about Afghanistan and the other crises in the world. And yet, I'm very concerned about human rights. I'm delighted that we have this bureau. It's an important bureau.

But I sometimes worry that given the pressures of everything else, despite our wonderful assistant secretary's principled pragmatism, there are times I'm afraid the pragmatism sometimes outweighs the principle. And I think that that perception, despite your very effective Georgetown speech and the speech at Cairo, I think that that perception sometimes gets the people on the ground, in particular, that the pragmatism sometimes outweighs the principle. So I'm here to ask you and to encourage you to keep the principle to promote that as much as we possibly can, understanding that the pragmatic has to happen. But I very much worry about the loss of human rights.

Central Asia, in particular, is a place where I think this is going to become pressing. I've talked to people who are NGOs and activists, and their sense is concerns about Afghanistan can overwhelm everything else. These are countries where people are truly being abused in horrible ways in every part of their life. So I encourage you and everyone to really keep that principled in there and really advocate as strongly as you can so that people don't get rewarded for what we sometimes call just bad behavior, to put it mildly.

Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we certainly will. And I welcome you to the State Department. We're delighted to have these programs that bring people like yourself here.

It is a balancing act. And we start out and we try to end up as supportive and actually committed to the human rights of every individual, because that's one of our core principles. But it is also the case that, as you have found, these sometimes difficult decisions are affected by many other aspects of our foreign policy.

We are committed to protecting American lives from terrorism. And so how do we be effective doing that? I mean, if you had told me 20 years ago that people would taking shoes off and subjecting themselves to body scans, I would have not believed you. So there's a constant balance that has to go on all the time. And in a lot of the countries, not just in the region you mentioned but elsewhere, getting their cooperation while moving them toward more democracy, more openness, more recognition and protection of human rights, is a constant effort on our part.

So thanks for what you're doing to help.

QUESTION: Thank you.

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: This will have to our last question (inaudible).

QUESTION: Good morning, Madame Secretary. My name is Todd Woodard and I'm a contractor supporting the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.

Given the recent alleged attempted attack by the young Nigerian on Christmas Day and also the purported audio message from Usama bin Ladin heralding that attack and assuming responsibility for it, I'm curious to hear your thoughts regarding the connection between Islamist organizations and young Muslims in Western Africa,

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specifically Nigeria. I'm curious to hear what your opinion is regarding the driving factors for the youth accepting and embracing the Islamist ideology.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, it's an excellent question, and volumes have been written to try to answer that. But let me just briefly say that there is a connection between young people and the efforts to radicalize them that are promoted, sponsored, financed by al-Qaida and other extreme organizations with a very narrow definition of Islam. And they have been quite effective on the internet, as you know. We can track connections between not just the Christmas Day bomber but the Fort Hood shooter, the shooter at the Little Rock military recruitment station, and can see that they were at least listening to and interacting with very extreme voices on the side of Islamist ideology.

In Nigeria, which is, as you know, evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, about 75 million of each – Christians predominantly in the south, Muslims predominantly in the north – there has been an accommodation that has enabled Nigeria to survive politically. But the failure of the Nigerian leadership over many years to respond to the legitimate needs of their own young people, to have a government that promoted a meritocracy, that really understood that democracy can't just be given lip service, it has to be delivering services to the people, has meant there is a lot of alienation in that country and others.

Young people in the world today, they see other options. They're all interconnected through the internet. And the information we have on the Christmas Day bomber so far seems to suggest that he was disturbed by his father's wealth and the kind of living conditions that he viewed as being not Islamic enough and just the kinds of attitudes young people often portray toward their families as they go through their maturing. But in this case, and in so many others, such young people are targets for recruiters to extremism.

So I do think that Nigeria faces a threat from increasing radicalization that needs to be addressed, and not just by military means. There has to be a recognition that in the last 10 years, a lot of the indicators about quality of life in Nigeria have gone the wrong direction. The rate of illiteracy is growing, not falling, in a country that used to have a very high rate of literacy in Africa. The health statistics are going the wrong direction. The corruption is unbelievable. And when I did a town hall in Abuja, people were just literally standing and shouting about what it was like to live in a country where the elite was so dominant, where corruption was so rampant, where criminality was so pervasive.

And that is an opening for extremism that offers an alternative world view. You want to live in peace and safety and feel good about yourself and be part of a community that you can be proud of, then turn away from your society and your family and come with us. And that can be a powerful message, whether it's a gang in America or an extremist organization in Nigeria. And part of what I've been trying to tell leaders in all of my travels is that we're not just lecturing about human rights or good governance or anticorruption measures because they're our values; we think they are absolutely essential to the long-term survival of a lot of these governments and the societies and the political systems.

So this is – there are individual reasons why people get recruited and radicalized, but your question about Nigeria really raises all of the elements that make the circumstances ripe for people being targeted as they are, and they have to be addressed.

UNDER SECRETARY KENNEDY: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you all. (Applause.)

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