

May 11, 2011

Friends and Colleagues:

The pace of global events over the last several weeks and months has been breathtaking. From ongoing efforts to protect civilians in Libya and the continuing political evolution across North Africa and the Middle East, to major breakthroughs in the fight against terrorism and questions about global food security, we are living through remarkable times. It is an era that further illuminates the world's interdependence and the crucial leadership role the United States must play and is playing on the international stage.

In this vein, I wanted to share some thoughts on a series of recent travels aimed at enhancing our multilateral cooperation with the international community and helping coordinate our response to the pressing issues unfolding worldwide. Just last week, I traveled with Secretary Clinton to Rome, where she represented the United States in meetings of the Libya Contact Group and delivered an important address at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the state of global food security and food price volatility.

Addressing an audience which included leadership from FAO, the World Food Program, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Secretary Clinton reinforced U.S. calls for continued international attention to and investment in country-led agricultural development. In her [remarks](#), she outlined three key ways the international community can collaborate to minimize short-term harms caused by rising food prices while maximizing the impact of our long-term agriculture development efforts. She said, "First, we must embrace smart policy responses to protect the most vulnerable among us. Second, we must redouble our commitment to sustainable agriculture and food security. And third, we must improve our coordination within and across all organizations so that everything we do can be more effective."



*Group photo from left: FAO Deputy Director-General Changchui He; U.S. Ambassador Ertharin Cousin; U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf; Assistant Secretary of State Esther Brimmer; and FAO Deputy Director-General Ann Tutwiler.
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Last month, I traveled to Geneva, Nairobi, and Addis Ababa, to discuss UN management and budget reforms, shared the U.S. vision for UN-Habitat, and deepened linkages between multilateral and regional diplomacy.

In Geneva, I was honored to co-chair a meeting of the Geneva Group, which is comprised of the sixteen largest likeminded contributors to the UN budget. I used this opportunity to continue the conversation about the U.S. vision for working with the United Nations to further advance our shared goals of improved transparency, efficiency and effectiveness across the UN system.

From Geneva, I traveled to Nairobi to visit the U.S. Mission to the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat). It was my first visit to the Mission, where I held a series of consultations with UN counterparts, but most importantly [spoke](#) at the Governing Council meeting of UN-HABITAT. In my remarks, I stressed that despite financial and other challenges, the present era's challenges are ripe for contributions by UN-Habitat. I called for the agency to refocus itself on its unique mandate, set clear priorities, and concentrate on its normative work, continuing to both document and analyze the pace of urbanization and explore responses for its many consequences.



DCM Lee Brudvig and Dr. Brimmer visit with refugees living in spontaneous settlements on the outside of the Ifo camp boundaries. April 2011. IO Photo.

While in Kenya, I also visited the Dadaab refugee camp in Northern Kenya, the largest refugee camp in the world, with approximately 160,000 refugees mostly from neighboring Somalia. It was impressive to witness firsthand the remarkable efforts at coordination needed by the myriad UN and other international organizations to address the enormous humanitarian challenges, including the need for food, clean water, and sanitation systems.

My visit to Ethiopia, though brief, allowed me to meet with officials of the African Union, resident UN agencies, and the

Ethiopian government, to explore avenues for strengthened collaboration. The African Union is playing an increasingly active and vocal role on some of the continent's pressing challenges, and the United States is deeply engaged with the AU to define and explore shared priorities.

Aside from my travels and consultations, there has been important recent activity at the UN Human Rights Council that I wanted to especially mention. In late April, the United States led a concerted effort to call a special session to consider the human rights situation in Syria. That [session](#), held on April 29th, resulted in a powerful [resolution](#) which condemned the ongoing human rights abuses by the Syrian government, and authorized the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish an urgent fact-finding mission to investigate human rights violations and ensure accountability. We hope to see that fact-finding mission take shape very soon.

Finally, I'd like to note the recent official celebration of UNESCO World Press Freedom Day on May 3, hosted for the first time this year by the United States. The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organizes World Press Freedom Day commemorations to underscore the principles of media freedom, assess long-standing and emerging threats to that freedom, and pay tribute to journalists and activists who have risked their own safety to advance the public's access to news and information.

As a part of World Press Freedom Day events, the U.S. Department of State hosted a [Global Conference](#) entitled *21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers*. The conference

convened hundreds of journalists, activists, and members of the government and NGO community who support international press freedom. The three day conference featured dynamic conversations, informative presentations and commemorative events. I participated in several events to highlight how the United States is working with international partners to support freedom of the press and to engage members of congress, NGO representatives, and journalists on the most significant challenges they face. As President Obama has said, our foreign policy and multilateral engagement aims in part “to see that the principles of justice and human dignity are upheld by all.” Indeed, our work in the United Nations and other multilateral bodies does more than just contribute to U.S. national security, or help generate shared responses to common threats and challenges. It is also a critical avenue for promoting global respect for universal values, which is an enduring American interest and one we pursue across the UN system – including at UNESCO.



Assistant Secretary Brimmer (center) participating in a panel event at the 2011 WPF Global Conference with DRL Assistant Secretary Michael Posner (left) and Director General of UNESCO Irina Bokova. Washington, DC. IO Photo.

Once again, my sincerest appreciation to all for your interest in and commitment to multilateral engagement and foreign affairs. If you have yet to [register for](#) our IO updates, I invite you to do so, and as always, I welcome your [comments and feedback](#).

Esther Brimmer