

September 15, 2011

Friends and Colleagues:

September is already in full swing, and I would like to take this opportunity to preview some of the important issues that we will focus on during the 66th session of the UN General Assembly.

One of the most important challenges that we currently face is calls to withhold our funding to the United Nations. Any such action would severely undermine our credibility and ability to get things done at the U.N. We accept that there is room for improvement in the UN system and we are at the forefront of efforts to increase transparency and accountability to see those reforms through. That said, the answer is not to walk away. The concrete benefits of our robust multilateral engagement vastly outweigh the challenges.



Esther Brimmer at the U.S. Institute of Peace outlining UNGA goals and priorities and underscoring the need for sustained US global leadership. September 7, 2011. State Dept Photo.

That is why, over the past few weeks you have seen me become increasingly vocal about how successful we have been in addressing global challenges through U.S. multilateral engagement. Too many of our most pressing foreign policy challenges require shared multilateral solutions for us to undercut our global influence by withholding our UN dues. I explained this in my [address](#) at the U.S. Institute of Peace, last week and in my [remarks](#) at the Center for American Progress today.

The key issues which are likely to define the upcoming 66th Session of the UN General Assembly are very much in today's headlines: the ongoing transition in Libya; the mounting humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa; peace and security in Sudan and South Sudan. There are also issues which at times fall below the fold - the global public health challenges posed by non-communicable diseases; desertification; nuclear safety – but on which we remain an important, influential voice.

In Libya, the United States has worked across the UN system to marshal a robust international response to the crisis and shaped a mandate to protect civilians there. Over the past few months, Libyans have stood up to Qadhafi and established a credible transition process, and are working with the international community – including the UN – to prepare for a stable and prosperous post-Qadhafi Libya.

Of course we remain seized with the humanitarian emergency in the Horn of Africa, the famine that is occurring in parts of Somalia, the ongoing conflict within that country, and the escalating refugee crisis across the region. The U.S. is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the region, now providing over \$600 million in life-saving humanitarian assistance to those in need. This support funds protection and assistance for refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, as well as the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR). It also sustains crucial food assistance activities in Ethiopia and Kenya, and will enable the World Food Program (WFP) to expand geographic coverage and scale up feeding programs in drought-affected areas of those nations.

On global health, we long have worked through the World Health Organization to provide technical support and guidance on responding to infectious disease outbreaks and pandemic threats. But there is a growing, urgent need for international collaboration to address the global public health emergency posed by non-communicable diseases, including cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. That is why we will devote high-level attention to the urgent global public health challenges posed by non-communicable diseases at this General Assembly.

The UN also plays a central role in global efforts to combat nuclear proliferation. Security Council sanctions on Iran have hampered that regime's efforts to develop nuclear weapons. Tough sanctions against North Korea allowed cargo vessels to be inspected and illegal arms shipments seized. The work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, too, has been invaluable in sounding the alarm on illicit nuclear activities in Iran, Syria, and elsewhere, and is a reminder of the value of investment in international institutions.

Additionally, our participation on the UN Human Rights Council over the past two years has resulted in dramatic improvement in that body's effectiveness. This is an institution that has been rightly criticized for failing to meet its mandate. With renewed U.S. leadership, the Council has turned an important corner, responding to pressing human rights situations in real time, with concrete action and a unified voice. We've seen proof of this through the Council's special sessions and the establishment of international commissions of inquiry to investigate human rights violations in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, and Syria.

These are just a few examples of how our engagement at the United Nations is paying very real dividends. This is also why I continue to travel internationally and domestically to forge closer relationships with our international and civil society partners. At the end of August, I made a short trip to Uruguay and Colombia, two of our strong partners in multilateral fora. During consultations with my counterparts in Uruguay, I underscored the need for close and continued cooperation as they assume the presidency of the Human Rights Council through 2012 - particularly on issues such as Syria, Sudan and protecting freedom of expression around the

world. Uruguay's vote on LGBT rights helped pass the first ever UN resolution on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. I think we have set the bar very high in terms of what we can accomplish there and fully expect to do even more this year.

In Colombia, I encouraged continued cooperation on the crucial issues that we will undoubtedly face at the Security Council. I also thanked my counterparts in Colombia and Uruguay for their contributions to peacekeeping operations. Finally, in both countries, I took the opportunity to highlight one particular issue of shared concern - defending the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against would-be reforms that might weaken its mandate or cripple its ability to operate.



Nevada Congresswoman Shelley Berkley, Dr. Joanne Goodwin, Director of the Women's Research Institute of Nevada, and Esther Brimmer at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas for a panel discussion on women's empowerment. September 2, 2011. State Department Photo.

politically, economically, and socially. Examples of this effort abound, and include Secretary Clinton's launch of the Global Partnership for Girl's and Women's Education with UN Women at UNESCO last May, our efforts at UN Women, and our deep commitment to increase women's representation at all levels of conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

I also made a very quick trip to Las Vegas earlier this month, where I participated in a series of public programs hosted by the World Affairs Council of Las Vegas and the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. One of the cornerstone programs of this visit was a public panel event in which I discussed women's empowerment. The program also featured Nevada Congresswoman Shelley Berkley and Dr. Joanne Goodwin of the Women's Research Institute of Nevada. That event was a great opportunity for me to [highlight](#) the United States' invigorated global efforts to empower women and girls

As this most busy of seasons gets under way, I welcome your thoughts on the issues of the day and how we can further strengthen our multilateral engagement.

With Highest Regards,

Esther Brimmer