



Remarks With New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Government House
Auckland, New Zealand
July 26, 2008

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Ladies and gentlemen, it's indeed an enormous pleasure to have Secretary of State Rice here in New Zealand, and tomorrow to go to the Pacific. And our discussions today have been extraordinarily profitable. I think that they will be the same with the Prime Minister this afternoon.

We, of course, owe the Secretary a great debt in the way that she's conducted our recent relationships between the other two countries, and I think our relationship is better today than it's been for a long, long time, and much of that tribute goes to the Secretary of State. We talked about, obviously, the Pacific and the issues that concern us both. And we're highly engaged with the United States there, also across subjects like Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, and in particular, something that, again, a lot of work has been done by the Secretary, and that is the question of North Korea and the nuclear issue, on which we have made, I think, some decisive progress.

So again, it's a privilege to have you here, Secretary. I'm in debt to you to agree to come to New Zealand and I would like you, then, to address the media here.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you, Winston, for the very warm welcome and for the really fruitful contacts, the relationship that we've had over these last few years. I do think the relationship between the United States and New Zealand is in very good shape. We are cooperating across a vast number of issue areas. I appreciate very much New Zealand's contribution in Bamyán Province in Afghanistan. The First Lady was there. She came back with really glowing reports of the work that New Zealand is doing in Bamyán.

We also cooperate on a wide range of global issues. On North Korea, it's perhaps not as well-known, the role that New Zealand has played. First of all, after the North Korean nuclear test in 2006, I think one of my first phone calls was to you. And you were quick to help support the Six Parties in trying to resolve that moment of crisis, but also visiting in 2007 to press the agenda of denuclearization, and you continue to be a strong supporter of the Six Party process, including during our recent meetings at the ASEAN Regional Forum.

I want also to thank you very much for the work that you're doing on proliferation through the Proliferation Security Initiative. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but clearly, the relationship between the United States and New Zealand is on very good footing. I look forward to accompanying you to the Pacific Island foreign Ministers meeting. I believe that the leadership role that New Zealand, along with Australia, has taken in the multiple crises that really have arisen there over the last couple of years, really, with better outcomes in the Solomon Islands, but still with a lot of work to do, for instance, in Fiji.

I look forward to working with you and to meeting with those leaders to advance our common agenda. So it's a relationship that is a good one, it is one that is based on strong common values and strong common interests that we are working together to address the 21st century challenges that we face. So thank you very much and thanks for the invitation here.

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Thank you. It's question time.

MR. MCCORMACK: The first one to Sue Fleming from Reuters.

QUESTION: Where's the microphone?

MR. MCCORMACK: The microphone is going to be right here.

QUESTION: How are discussions coming along for a free trade deal, either by the P-4 or bilaterally? And will the longstanding nuclear dispute sort of hold that up, or is it a relic, as Chris Hill said a couple of years ago?

SECRETARY RICE: Sue, those are two questions, but I'll take them anyway. (Laughter.)

First of all, on free trade, we had a very good discussion. And obviously, the United States and President Bush are committed to an active free trade agenda. I believe that the P-4 has been a useful forum (inaudible) to advance that agenda. And we are always looking to see what else can be achieved on the free trade front. Susan Schwab had a discussion with the Prime Minister when she was in the United States on this issue. And I just said to Winston that I'll take back the considerable interest that continues to be there on a free trade agreement. The United States should be committed to free trade agreements. This President has signed a record number of them, and we continue to look – look favorably to see what more we can do.

As to past disputes, the United States and New Zealand have, I think, moved on. And if there are remaining issues to be addressed, then we should try to address them. But when you look at the range of cooperation that we now enjoy, whether it is in Afghanistan and, as I've just mentioned, in Bamyán Province, whether it is the Proliferation Security Initiative where New Zealand has been one of the most active members of that, and given its geographic position, a very important member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, whether it is – one looks to the work that we're doing on the Six Parties or the work that we're doing together in the Pacific, it's the year of the Pacific, and that's more than just a phrase.

The United States and New Zealand have been active on questions of protection of fisheries. We've been active on environmental issues. This is a very broad and deepening relationship and it's going to continue to be so, and it is by no means a relationship that is somehow harnessed to or constrained by the past.

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Well, obviously, talks regarding what the Secretary of State. We've got the P-4 going. We've got a host of initiatives, many of which are not public knowledge at the moment because they're – we're in preparation. But frankly, I think the response to the Secretary today is

there's no more worthy country for free trade agreement than the country that has the freest trade in the world.

And right now, we don't have a free trade agreement with the United States, and that they have every access to New Zealand, and we have not got the reciprocal access to the United States. But we believe that if we're positive about this 21st century relationship, we will get there one day, and sooner than people think.

QUESTION: Dr. Rice, you mentioned Afghanistan, the work that New Zealand has done. Isn't it time that the two countries' military were allowed to trying to get your agreement? Isn't it time that the U.S. lifted, essentially, its ban on formal military training exercises with New Zealand?

SECRETARY RICE: As I've said, the relationship is not stuck in the past, and there have been a lot of changes in the world since that time. And if there are remaining issues to be addressed, then I think we ought to find a way to address them. The – because the relationship between New Zealand and the United States is such a beneficial one and such a fruitful one for cooperation along a wide range of issues.

These – and what are the issues today as opposed to the issues of the past? The issues of today include the proliferation of dangerous weapons by dangerous states. That's probably the number one problem that we all face, and particularly if one were to see the proliferation of those dangerous weapons link up with terrorism. We have very strong counterterrorism cooperation as well. And so this is one of the real issues facing us.

What is the second issue? Maritime security, trying to deal with issues like port security and the security at sea; environmental degradation, that's a major issue. We had a long discussion of disaster relief, and obviously, civil military cooperation in disaster relief is yet another area that is a 21st century question. And so it would be the spirit, I hope, of both the United States and New Zealand that we ought to look for ways to enhance our cooperation in order to support that agenda, and we ought to look at what outstanding, remaining obstacles there are from the past to addressing those issues.

MR. MCCORMACK: Lachlan Carmichael.

QUESTION: Both Madame Secretary and Foreign Minister Peters, you mentioned the Fiji tomorrow – or Saturday, it will be in – somewhat. What steps do you plan to take with the Pacific Island leaders to get democracy back on track for the elections for March next year?

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Well, we take the view that we, as a region, have taken with respect to the forum, that there is no limit, logistical or otherwise, to a free and fair and open election in Fiji by March 2009. A recent conversation from the interim Prime Minister, talking about constitutional and electoral change was not a precondition that he stressed to the foreign leaders meeting in Parma last year.

This is new. And our report from – the ministerial contact was – recently was in Fiji to the foreign leaders meeting in (inaudible) shortly, was specifically set out that view. I'm not able to give you the full comprehensive report on this, because it's for the leaders to endorse before it was made public, but that is the trend and the frame and the nuances – nuance of this report, and that was a report prepared by the five – sorry, six foreign ministers. And we're encouraging other international organizations and groupings, political or otherwise, to maintain this stance.

We know and believe that Fiji's only future lies in a democratic outcome and that's what we're going to work towards.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, there's very little that I can add. Obviously, the United States has added its voice to this consensus among the Pacific nations. We will – I will do that in person when I'm with the foreign ministers. But what we've really appreciated here is the leadership that New Zealand, Australia have given, along with other countries of the Pacific Islands to try and resolve – to try to resolve these difficult issues. But clearly, the return to – of democracy in Fiji, clearly, elections are the way to do that. And I'll try to lend my voice to what have been very strong regional efforts.

QUESTION: And Minister Peters, what are your – what is your response this morning to claims by Sir Robert Jones that you blatantly lied about soliciting funds (inaudible) trust and that the police --

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: I can't wait --

QUESTION: -- and that the police should now be involved?

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: I can't wait to get down to parliament next week and to deal with the three versions of Bob Jones' stories from Bob Jones. But I want to deal with this matter today, which is so much more important.

QUESTION: Did you solicit those funds to --

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Next week – next week – next week, and you'll get all the answers you need. But all I would ask you to do in the meantime is, find out which of the three versions that Bob Jones has given you that you believe, and today I'd like to concentrate on this very, very serious visit to this country, and on important issues throughout – with our relationship in the 21st century.

I don't speak to (inaudible). (Laughter.) I did notice, of course, that they put it in inverted comments. That of course, is not saving the defamation rhetoric.

Next question, please.

SECRETARY RICE: Is that it? Do you want to do – or did Matt – no?

QUESTION: Well, I'll ask a question.

MR. MCCORMACK: Matt wants to --

QUESTION: Are we going to slow down anytime soon?

SECRETARY RICE: Excuse me? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Well, I'm just saying --

SECRETARY RICE: January 20th, 12:01. (Laughter.) Thanks, everybody.

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Thank you very much.
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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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