

Other State

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Joint Press Availability With the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom Jack Straw

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
Oak Mountain Hurricane Katrina Relief Site
Birmingham, Alabama
October 23, 2005

(2:30 p.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we're at the end of our trip to Alabama and we wanted to come here and, first of all, thank the people of Alabama for the tremendous outpouring of help and sympathy that they've had for the folks here, but they put it into actions and obviously Alabama was the state that was hit by Hurricane Katrina but responded by being able to help those who were hit harder. And I've talked to a lot of the folks here who all say thanks to Alabama for what they've done. We just wanted to come and say to the people who are here that everybody's continuing to think about them and try to help them.

I'd like to particularly thank all the volunteers and Superintendent Shivers who's been showing us around. Obviously the Park Service has done a great job of putting this all together, but everybody hopes that these folks will find a permanent home, but for the time being they've got people who care a lot about them and I see that the kids are in school and that's terrific. And so that's really what we wanted to do on our last leg of our trip.

Jack.

FOREIGN SECRETARY STRAW: Thank you. Well, Secretary and I attended a reception for all the volunteers in the state of Alabama on Friday night and it was really striking there, the spirit and determination of volunteers from across the state of Alabama to help people outside the state and the way in which they had joined together to assist the many, many people who suffered in Alabama. But in addition, as the Secretary said, they found the resources to other (inaudible). And also very striking talking to those who had been evacuated out here, just how deeply grateful they are. But the thing that (inaudible) is the human spirit and fortitude which the evacuees themselves are showing in the face of this astonishing adversity, their determination to see this through.

SECRETARY RICE: All right.

QUESTION: Thank you. (Inaudible) I know you talked to some of the evacuees today. Are there any stories that kind of stick in your mind that you heard?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there are a couple. There's one lady who apparently just got here yesterday. She said she had been wandering for nine weeks, had been homeless and she's just feeling really good to be here now where she can have a more permanent kind of life. And then I met a woman and her sister. The woman is from Alabama; her sister is from Louisiana and she said, "We're just hanging out together," which I thought was great. It shows how good it is to have family. And I think that Superintendent Shivers was telling us that there are a number of families here who have found themselves in the same place, so family and prayer and the people of the state that draw together.

I was saying to the Katrina volunteers the other night that we always talk about -- when we talk about democracy, we talk about individual rights and individual liberty, but sometimes the best thing is when you see communities pull together and help others more in need. And so Alabama should really be congratulated for --

QUESTION: Secretary, if you can't get what you want from the --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) campaigning, any thoughts on that?

SECRETARY RICE: I can assure you that, first of all, Alabama is my home and I wanted to come to Alabama and bring my good friend, Jack Straw, with me. I've wanted to take foreign ministers outside of Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C. is not all that there is to the United States of America. And foreign ministers when they come to the United States, they see Washington and maybe they see New York for the United Nations General Assembly. Maybe they see a little bit of the West Coast, but it's rare that they get to the South or to the middle of the country or, for that matter, to the northwest. And I would hope that I could get the foreign ministers out to different parts of the country. It's awfully important to understand how complex America is and how different it is than just the East Coast. So that's our reason for being here and to give also speeches on democracy. And I was fortunate to have a chance to honor the four little girls yesterday, which was very moving.

QUESTION: Secretary, are you considering --

QUESTION: What's it's been like being treated like a rock star?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, this is home and you know how it is when you go home, you're always -- when you go home, everybody's glad to see you, so it's great to be here.

QUESTION: Secretary, are you -- what unilateral options could be open to the United States if you can't get a collective response in the United Nations with respect to Syria?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm actually confident that we are going to get a response from the international system and by the way, not us, it is the international system that mandated in Resolution 1559 that Syria withdraw from Lebanon. It was the international community that supported the Mehlis investigation, and I think that it is extremely important that we do get back together at the level of ministers to talk about the very serious implications of the Mehlis report. But when the international community is united, we get the kind of response that we need to deal with serious problems. And so I'm confident that we are going to -- Jack and I have had a lot of time to talk about the aftermath of the Mehlis report. I've been on the telephone with colleagues from around the world.

And Jack, do you want to say a word about that?

FOREIGN SECRETARY STRAW: Well, why shouldn't we have an international consensus? After all, the Secretary has said 1559 and 1595 were unanimous resolutions from the Security Council. Prosecutor Mehlis's program was established by the Security Council, not by the United States or the United Kingdom. There has to be a consensus and this is a report of a set of circumstances that the international community simply cannot ignore and that's why I'm looking forward to the ministerial meeting of the Security Council coming up in a few days.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Thank you.

QUESTION: (inaudible) many of your admirers want you to run for President. They even tell us tell her to run for President. Now, you've (inaudible) the fact that -- so far you haven't come up with a formula to say categorically that you wouldn't. How about this, are you prepared to say that I will never ever (laughter) run for elected office (inaudible) never, ever run for elected office?

SECRETARY RICE: Paul, I've said in every way that I know how that my goal is to be a good Secretary of State for a President who has an ambitious agenda with our friends around the world. And as I said on a show just last week, I don't know how many ways to say no.

QUESTION: How about definite?

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