



Briefing at Airport in Cote d'Ivoire

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

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(16:50 GMT)

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to be here in Cote d'Ivoire and I have had very good meetings during my stay.

Today, I met with President Laurent Gbagbo and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, as well as with former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara and PDCI Secretary General Professor Alphonse Djedje Mady. I also met with United Nations officials and representatives of civil society, many of whom are involved in promoting democracy.

I stressed to everyone I met that the United States wants to see Cote d'Ivoire regain peace and prosperity. We believe that the Ouagadougou Political Agreement offers a very good path to recovery and for that reason we support its implementation as soon as possible. I heard about the actions the government has already taken and I want to acknowledge that some progress has indeed been made since the agreement was signed in March.

The United States also recognizes that implementing the Agreement is not a simple task. Beyond the technical and logistical issues that have to be addressed, implementation will require courage and -- willingness to move beyond the disagreements that have kept Cote d'Ivoire divided. In my meetings today, I urged Ivorian leaders from across the spectrum to take the steps they know are necessary to implement the Agreement and to work together to improve Cote d'Ivoire's prospects for the future.

I was pleased to see that there is widespread recognition of the damage that the political crisis has done to the Ivorian people and to the country's standing in the region. There is a strong desire on the part of all parties to move beyond crisis mode. We hope that this recognition of the need to move forward will result in implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement without delay.

The United States has had warm relations with the Government and people of Cote d'Ivoire for many years and I expect that to continue. We have strong commercial ties and many exchanges in the areas of health, education, and cultural affairs.

We look forward to a peaceful, prosperous future for Cote d'Ivoire. In my conversations today I heard a great deal about the obstacles that stand in the way of new voter registrations, of disarmament, of the rule of law, and of economic progress. The road ahead will be a difficult one -- but it is not impossible. There will be difficult choices that only Ivorians can make and I encouraged your leaders today to address these issues in as open a manner as possible so that all points of view are heard.

With the Ouagadougou Agreement as the framework, now is the time to make real progress on the critical issues of identification, elections planning, and disarmament and reintegration of the military. And I wish the Ivorian people and government the very best as you tackle these issues. And I want to thank our hosts once again for their warm reception. I will return to the United States with a deeper understanding of this country, its people and the issue they confront.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Progress has been made with the Ouagadougou Agreement. What is the United States doing to help lift or alleviate the sanctions on Cote d'Ivoire, namely the arms embargo and the ban of certain individuals?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I think that first of all what I would like to say in general terms is that we support the Cote d'Ivoire and the peace process principally by supporting the United Nations presence here; the peacekeeping force which is maintained here at the cost of literally hundreds of millions of dollars every year. So I think it is a very important general contribution that we make, and as you know we are the largest single nation state contributor to the United Nations.

As far as the question of sanctions are concerned, it is my understanding that those sanctions continue to remain in place although if there are some exceptional reasons to consider an exception to those sanctions, before the peace process has been completed, I am sure that the international community might be willing to consider that.

QUESTION: So far, the United States has stood afar from the peace process in Cote d'Ivoire. What is the purpose of your visit? How will the United States participate more actively in the peace process? What can the United States do to help the peace process in Cote d'Ivoire?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: First of all, with regard to my visit, the United States and the Cote d'Ivoire have a long-standing friendship and I believe that I can say that there is a reservoir of friendship towards each other, in both the United States and in the Cote d'Ivoire. And I have come to visit in that spirit.

As far as the peace process is concerned, the "sortie de la crise" -- which I think is the expression here -- of course as members -- permanent members of the Security Council, the United States has consistently followed this situation with great interest and with great care. My most important message to the government and the people of the Cote d'Ivoire is that we strongly support and encourage the rapid implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement -- "dans le délai le plus bref possible."

QUESTION: You have said that during your meetings with the Ivorian government, political leaders, and with representatives of civil society involved in the democratic process, you have heard of obstacles about voter registration, disarmament and rule of law. Have precise facts been brought up to your attention?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I think that it is for the Ivorian politicians, the Ivorian government leaders, and for the Ivorian civil society to describe these issues in detail. But my point in mentioning that was that these were subjects that were discussed in our meetings. I don't think any of the obstacles that were mentioned are insuperable. I think that they can be dealt with. I think that the important thing is a commitment on the part of everyone to overcome these challenges as quickly as possible. And we think that can be accomplished.

QUESTION: You have talked of the identification issue but we must add the civic service program. We know these two programs require a lot of funding. Many promises have been made but nothing delivered. What will the United States do to assist Cote d'Ivoire? My second question is about the peace process. What will be the United States' role in reconstruction?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: First of all, I will agree with you that the issue of disarmament, demobilization and civic service is a very, very important part of carrying the Ouagadougou Process forward. To this end, there are some resources available through the international financial institutions to support this effort. And of

course, we are strong contributors to the international financial institutions just like we are strong supporters of the United Nations.

I think first of all that the priority at the moment is the peace process and implementing the terms of the Ouagadougou Agreement. That's the priority as I understand it. Once that has been accomplished, I would think that the conditions of peace themselves will commit the people and the government of Cote d'Ivoire to improve their economic plans. Conditions for trade and investment will improve. And I think that if the terms of the Ouagadougou Agreement are fulfilled and democratic elections take place in the near future, that will also create, in my view, the conditions for even more extensive collaboration between the United States and Cote d'Ivoire. If the Ouagadougou Agreement is well implemented and as soon as possible, we, the United States and Cote d'Ivoire, will be in a better position to fully realize the potential of our bilateral relationships.

I would like to thank all of you for offering me this opportunity.

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