



Joint Press Availability with African Great Lakes State Leaders

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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Secretary Rice:And the Great Lakes region by the presidents of Burundi, of Rwanda, of Uganda and the foreign minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have just had a very extensive discussion, largely just the heads of state in a very small format, about the challenges in Eastern Congo and in the Great Lakes region more broadly. There is a joint communiqué that should be available to you. The presidents also, the heads of state also agreed on some additional steps that they would like to take, but before I summarize those additional steps, let me turn to each of them for a few remarks. President Museveni.

Ugandan President Museveni: I would like to thank President Bush for agreeing to send Secretary Rice to come and convene this meeting so that we deal with the residual problems in the Great Lakes region. Some of the problems have been dealt with. There are, however, some residual problems which need to be dealt with, and we had a very thorough discussion. Part of the danger for Africa is handling issues in a superficial way, and I am glad that Secretary Rice agreed to stay in the conclave. When you are electing the Pope, you don't elect him in public -- you first have a conclave. So we had a conclave of only the leaders, and we had a very thorough discussion. We could not conclude everything, but the three point plan which she will summarize, I think is a good restatement of what we have talked about before but this time with more vigor. So I thank her very much and President Bush for agreeing to come here and be with us. I thank you very much.

Secretary Rice: President Kagame.

President Kagame: Thank you very much Secretary of State, thank you for your time and your country's commitment and engagement to continue supporting countries in the region to find a resolution to the problems that are gathered, that we want to continue finding solutions for.. And we have committed, recommitted ourselves in discussions of our work to continue moving forward in finding appropriate solutions to what we face in terms of these problems. So I just wanted to thank you and the rest you will see in the communiqué. Thank you

Secretary Rice: President Nkurunziza.

[Comments spoken in French by Burundi President Nkurunziza]

[Comments spoken in French by DRC Minister of Interior]

Secretary Rice: Thank you very much minister. I will briefly summarize. In addition to the joint communiqué, out of the, as President Museveni put it conclave, that we held among the heads of state, they decided to take the following steps. First of all, to commit to the rapid strengthening of, particularly, security institutions of the DROC and to ask for international help in doing so. I think that everyone believes that the strengthening of the security institutions of the DROC is a prerequisite for the long term solution to the problems of the Congo and to the problems that are therefore affecting the entire Great Lakes region. Secondly, they committed again not to harbor negative forces -- the illegal groups, militias and armed groups that are causing destabilization -- and there was a promise not to harbor. And third, to recommit to all existing agreements including the Nairobi Accord, as well as to ask their officials to seek additional measures that might deal with the near-term problem as well as the long term problem. There was also a long discussion of how to make the joint verification mechanism more effective and to renew that mechanism, but to renew it with a new set of rules and a new set of measures that could be taken and to perhaps seek third-party help in the joint verification mechanism. Those were the conclusions, in addition to those conclusions that are in the joint communiqué, and now we would be happy to take on a few questions. Sean, would you please call on a couple of people?

Question: Can each of you explain what diplomatic action you've used to remove the negative forces -- the LRA, General Nkunda, and the FDLR? And have these diplomatic actions come up short and you're really now faced with a military solution, and what kinds of military solutions do you envision? Would the U.S. Government be supporting with the equipment and training and other ways?

Secretary Rice: Well, perhaps I can speak to the U.S. Government part of this. The United States has long supported first of all the efforts of the DROC, or the transitional government to go then to an elected government and now the strengthening of the security institutions of the DRC, which is going to be a large part of the answer here. Also, we are very involved in the evaluation and restructuring of the mandate of MONUC. There was a representative of MONUC here who spoke about the importance of the international effort until the DROC forces are capable on their own. I would just say that I think the diplomatic efforts are still underway and I might note that there are also UN Security Council sanctions against some of these leaders of these irregular groups and perhaps more can be looked at there, but the efforts have to be for greater diplomacy for greater consequences for the illegals and for very strong efforts so that they cannot be harbored and supported in any way, and that was the context of our discussion. Anyone else wish to comment?

Question: (Inaudible) My question has to do with Somalia and about peacekeeping (inaudible).

Secretary Rice: Thank you. The question was about Somalia for those of you who could not hear the question. Indeed, I will very shortly have a ministerial here on Somalia, here at the African Union, because the United States continues to believe that there are really two steps that need to be taken in order to bring peace to Somalia. First, obviously, there is a political element that needs to be pursued, and I am looking forward to meeting the Prime Minister of Somalia, the new Prime Minister of Somalia, to encourage the broadest possible engagement with forces that are not associated with terrorism, but might be a part of a political solution for the Somali people. There needs to be a broad basis across lines in Somalia, so that is extremely important and I will discuss that with the Prime Minister. Secondly, we do believe that peace keeping efforts need to take place in Somalia. We appreciate very much the Ugandan forces that are there. They frankly need to be joined soon by other forces. We look forward to the deployment of Burundi's forces. I spoke to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon just before I left Washington and we talked about the need to try to get this peacekeeping force in place. So, that is part of why I am here. We do believe that Ethiopian forces should not have to stay in Somalia past a certain point, but it is going to require peacekeeping forces -- indeed, fairly robust peace keeping forces -- so that will be part of my discussion here.

Question: Uganda (inaudible) come to the region to deal with (inaudible) DRC (inaudible).

Secretary Rice: Well, first of all, I had a conversation with President Kabila just a few weeks ago when he was in Washington. And so, I am quite aware of his efforts and quite aware that the DROC believes it very important that its territory not be used against any of its neighbors. What we have tried to do here is to put some life into the joint verification mechanisms, which can help to both to dispel rumor and spread accurate information and can, we hope, build some elements of trust. We also talked about MONUC and what MONUC can do. But, frankly, no country should have to suffer attacks from one (inaudible) and that is (inaudible).

Question: I hope you will forgive one off-topic question here today.

Secretary Rice: Always happens.

Question: Madame Secretary, shortly after you landed, President Ahmadi-nejad of Iran has come out and said that the national intelligence estimate that was released on Monday on his country's nuclear weapons program was a declaration of victory for the Iranian nation against the world powers who are conspiring against him. Do you agree with these comments and if not, why not?

Secretary Rice: Well first of all, I am not going to comment on that comment, except to say that what the national intelligence estimate shows and the transparency with which the administration released it is what it means to live in a democracy. And I hope one day that the people of Iran will live in a democracy too. Secondly, as to the national intelligence estimate on the Iranian program, it is the very strong view of the administration that the Iranian regime remains a problematic and dangerous regime and that the international community must continue to unite around the Security Council resolutions that it has passed that Iran needs to stop enriching and reprocessing activities, because those enriching and reprocessing activities permit, if they are perfected, a state to acquire fissile material for a nuclear weapon. What the national intelligence estimate said is that it is the assessment of the intelligence community that since 2003 the Iranians have not had an active weaponization program. That is, a program devoted to actually weaponizing for a nuclear weapon. There are of course other elements to a nuclear program that also they are watching. One is the means to deliver any weapon -- missile delivery -- and there continues to be an active Iranian missile program and a third -- the ability to get fissile material which is of course the long goal and intent, in getting a nuclear weapon. And so I believe what this does is first of all, good news that there is not apparently an active weaponization program, but it really suggests that the Iranians have been susceptible to international pressure in the past, that they can be induced to change course, that they can look at costs and benefits, and the two-track approach that the international community has been pursuing is precisely that -- it is a cost and benefit analysis for the Iranian regime. On the one hand it imposes cost through Security Council resolutions if Iran will not stop its enrichment and reprocessing activities. On the other hand it lays out a series of benefits that would accrue to Iran should it decide to agree to accede to the commitments that the international community requires. And so I think it is in that sense a very strong affirmation that diplomacy can work and that the diplomacy in this case is structured properly.

Question: But not a declaration of Victory?

Question: Can you say something about H.R. 2003?

Secretary Rice: The administration does not support this particular house resolution.

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