



Interview With Latin American Journalists

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

June 6, 2005

QUESTION: (In Spanish)

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, thank you very much. The mechanisms that we're talking about — first of all, I don't believe we're ever going to have a single mechanism, or perhaps a better word would be a set of tools that could be available to the Organization of American States, principally through its Secretary General, to try and help to prevent crises in fragile democracies. We know we've had a history recently of a number of problems in some of our democracies where the institutions are not so strong and where there is a need for help and dialogue between society and the government, or sometimes even between members of the government.

Now, the question I would have is: Why wouldn't the Organization of American States have some means to try and help with the sorts of situations that we are facing, a situation like Ecuador, which was already out of control by the time anybody was able to try and do something about it? And in talking with Mr. Insulza he told me, he said, "You know, the Ecuadorians have been saying for months" — this was when we talked back in Chile — "for months that there was a problem brewing, and we did nothing."

And so if we are going to be an organization that doesn't just talk, that we don't just meet every year and say, all right, how many more crises have we had, then we're going to have to be an organization that tries to help. This isn't to be punitive. This is not to even judge. But it is to try and intervene when there are large elements of a society or parts of a society that are having difficulty because we have institutions that are new and therefore fragile.

QUESTION: I am Jean Pierre Leroy from Haiti.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, down here.

QUESTION: It is a great honor for the opportunity that I am granted this morning. And you know that the election process in Haiti is in a gridlocked due to the violence and terrorism action on a daily basis and we know that the UN mandate in Haiti is also gridlocked at the UN Security Council due to the old diplomatic conflict between China and Taiwan.

So my question is: Is the U.S. Administration really concerned about that matter, election matter, coming in November? How do you plan to help? Because we are running out of time for the November election.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. We have a three-pronged strategy, three-part strategy for trying to help the people of Haiti finally gain stability and then, from that stability, a democratic and prosperous future.

The first is, obviously, the security situation has been more difficult over the last few weeks. The armed gangs are causing multiple problems. We are talking with the UN and with the MINUSTAH mission about how it can be more effective in dealing with that. I think it's extremely important that that mission succeed because it was a real breakthrough for this hemisphere to have Brazil in the lead and then to have other Western Hemisphere states actually engaged in peacekeeping. So we are devoted to making that mechanism work and so we are talking with the UN about what more needs to be done.

Secondly, we do need to perhaps accelerate our economic development efforts so that the people of Haiti know that there is an economic future.

And third, as you mentioned, the political side, really we've got to have some strengthening of the political dialogue among the various parties so that the elections can go forward. And again, the UN is a key to that but also Assistant Secretary of State Noriega is going down to Haiti after this meeting to see if he can help and we are talking here with the Haitian delegation but also with the Brazilian delegation and with other interested parties to see if we can get ready for these elections. We have now several months — not very long, but several months — to really get ready so that these elections are a success, and I think we now really need to focus in on making those elections a success in security terms and in political terms.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, my name is Andrew Johnson. I represent a newspaper and a television station in Trinidad and Tobago, and I speak for my colleague, who is from Jamaica. We wanted to ask about the Bush Administration's current feeling about countries who have, in general, and then particularly, in relation to those countries dealings with Cuba and Haiti.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, we have very good relations with the CARICOM countries. The President has met with the ministers of — I mean the heads of state of CARICOM. I'm going to meet with the ministers of CARICOM while I am here. We, of course, have been active through the Caribbean Basin Initiative in trying to help on the economic development side. And generally, we've had good relations. We've not always agreed, but that's all right. That's going to happen. These are democratic states that will have their own views. We have no problem with that.

As to Cuba, I would just hope that there would be a recognition that anyone who deals with Cuba, in any way that they choose, need to keep in mind the Cuban people, and that is that this is the one country that cannot even sit at the table at the OAS because it is not democratic. This is the 21st century. There aren't that many places in the world anymore where people don't get to choose their leaders. And in Cuba, we have had this condition for too many years.

Now, a number of years ago — sorry, two years ago, the President offered a new way to the Cuban Government. He said just have transparent parliamentary elections, just start the process, and the United States is prepared to change the way that it deals with Cuba. The Cuban Government responded with a roundup and arrest of their opposition leaders. What are we doing in this hemisphere if people can't speak out about the Cuban people? We all know what the conditions are in Cuba. And so I just hope people will speak out.

As to Haiti, there, I hope CARICOM will be more helpful and more active. I know we had some differences about the Aristide period but I don't think there was any doubt that the Aristide government had lost its ability to govern democratically, and so we now need to help the Haitian people get to democratic elections. And CARICOM has a responsibility to care about the Haitian people and to help them get to these democratic elections and I will talk with the CARICOM's leaders when I meet with them — the CARICOM foreign ministers when I meet with them later today.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you. First of all, we have to do this in partnership, of course, with the elected governments in these countries because the United States can help through trade. We believe that when you have free trade, that that improves the chances for economic growth and then for the resources that are available for development. We are trying, for instance, to get the Central American Free Trade and Dominican Republic agreement through the Congress because we believe that will improve the chances for a better economic performance of Central America.

But we also then need to support and are trying to support efforts at education. I believe strongly, as an educator, that there is no greater way to empower people than to educate them, to educate their children, so that one generation is not condemned to — does not watch its children condemned to the same poverty that it has experienced. When I teach at Stanford, one of the great things about being there is that next to a kid who is a fourth generation Stanford legatee is a kid who's a first generation college student or who might be an itinerant farm worker whose parents never even finished high school, and there they are both in college. That's the kind of upward mobility that we need to see. And I've been impressed, for instance, with President Lula in Brazil for his emphasis on education.

There is another sometimes unspoken element in Latin America. We have a lack of inclusion of people from different ethnic backgrounds in Latin America. I understand this myself because I come from a country in which I grew up in a segregated Birmingham, Alabama where it was not until 1964 that we had a Voting Rights Act so that everybody could vote. The United States is not one to judge on these issues. We've been through our own struggles. But we are — I am here to say that unless democracy includes peoples who have been marginalized, then you don't have true democracy.

So we are trying to help in these ways, but the — I want to say that while we talk about development and including people, let's remember that it starts with the human dignity that comes from democracy. It starts with being able to choose your leaders. It starts with being able to hold your leaders accountable. That's where it starts, and then the benefits of democracy can be.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. This is the question of what does it mean to govern democratically after having been elected democratically, and to me — and I think most people would agree — it means that the opposition has an opportunity to organize, the opposition has an opportunity to be on television, to be on the radio, to be in the newspapers with their platform; it means they have the ability to associate freely; it means that no one intimidates the opposition, tries to threaten the opposition in some way; it means that there are civil society groups that can freely associate and can freely take their cases to the people; it means that there are independent trade unions, for instance, that can protect the rights of workers. The government can say everything that it wants to about protecting the rights of workers, but trade unions are also an important part of protecting the rights of workers.

And so I don't believe that there are different kinds of democracy. I've heard this argument. Now, it may be that I'm suspicious of this because I was a Soviet specialist and the word "democracy" was used cynically. The German Democratic Republic. Who ever thought that East Germany was democratic? It was not. And so when people talk about different kinds of democracy, I say let's go back to the basics of democracy. That means people can say what they think, people can educate their children freely — boys and girls; it means that they can worship as they please; it means that they can be free from the arbitrary knock of the secret police at night because the justice system is independent; and it means that they can organize themselves politically to oppose the existing government.

So those are the basics of democracy and I don't think we need a new definition of democracy. We know it when we see it.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't know how much resonance the anti-American rhetoric has. My view is that this is not an issue about the United States; this is an issue about the region and about democracy in the region, and that's what we need to focus on.

I would be the first to say that we have to think in a different phase and differently about what democracies now need to do. That is why the Monterrey Consensus was so important about development needing new resources, but also countries that will receive development governing wisely, governing transparently, fighting corruption, not allowing political leaders to enrich themselves at the expense of their countries. These are important elements of democracy, just as voting as an important element of democracy.

It's also true that we need, as I said — and maybe the United States has not spoken out enough about it — we need to worry about marginalized people. We need to be concerned that all ethnic groups and people of all kinds of backgrounds are represented and that their governments are held accountable for them.

Yes, I accept that perhaps we haven't talked enough about these things in the region, but I would also say that anyone who wants to be critical of the United States in this way needs to look at what they're talking about. And again, when you talk about Cuba, you're talking about a place where people have had no say in who governs them for more than — for 45 years. That's a very long time to have no say in who governs you.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are in discussion with the government of President Bolaños. We are also trying very hard, as I said, to get CAFTA passed. We think that this will help to strengthen the economy of Nicaragua and the other Central American states. But I would hope that this would be a discussion here at the OAS as to how, now knowing that there are danger signs in Nicaragua, how are we as a hemisphere going to respond to those danger signs, how are we as democracies in the hemisphere going to help the Nicaraguan presidency, its government, to deal with threats to it, to means that while they may be marginally legal would have an anti-democratic effect because it needs to be constitutional. These means, they need to — the Nicaraguan people need to know that they have elected a government and that they're getting the government that they elected.

That is my concern in Nicaragua and I think we need to have a discussion of that as a region. But we are in discussions with the government there. We are trying to help on the economic side. We are trying to help politically. But I really do think that this is a perfect example of why the OAS needs to do more than talk.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Well, the Government of El Salvador and the people of El Salvador have been so supportive of what the Iraqi people are trying to achieve now in their march to democracy and we're just very, very grateful for that. And if they choose to extend, and it's for El Salvador to decide — if they choose to extend, I hope that they will because the Iraqis now have to write a constitution and then they have elections to take place at the end of the year.

But, of course, the CAFTA we are doing because we believe it is good for the region, we believe it's good for El Salvador, we believe it's good for the United States. And we couldn't work any harder than we're working to try to get CAFTA passed.

Similarly, on the immigration policies, the President has said that we do need to revise our immigration policies in the United States to take note of the fact that there is an economic side to this, that willing workers and willing employers need to have a better relationship where they can find each other. We believe strongly that people have to respect our laws and so any changes to our policies — for instance, a temporary worker program of the kind the President has talked about — should not advantage people who broke our laws to get into the country. And so we don't believe in amnesty, but we do believe strongly that we need a system that is more humane. People shouldn't have to live in the shadows the way that many people do currently. And it would be good if they could go home. It would be good if people could keep some of what they have earned in our pension system.

And so these are all things that we are working on in the United States and we're going to continue to work on them whatever happens in terms of the troop deployment.

But we are in conversation with the Salvadoran Government and I've seen such strong support for the Iraqi people from the Salvadoran people that I'm confident that El Salvador will try to continue to help in whatever way that it can.

QUESTION: Dionne Jackson Miller, Radio Jamaica. The State Department recently issued a report on human trafficking in which it stated that Jamaica is not doing enough to combat that. The Jamaican Government has taken issue with that position, saying that there's not enough proof of that. Is that kind of conclusion something the State Department will stand by unequivocally or will it revisit its position in light of objections from Jamaica?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we certainly, of course, take into consideration the government's — a government's view of its own situation, but we're pretty careful in our examination of the basis for any determination. There are criteria that are transparent to everybody as to what constitutes a problem in trafficking.

But let me just say, this report is not meant to punish or to embarrass. It's meant to raise the light on what is a really very awful problem, and this is a modern-day problem that shouldn't exist in a world where we care about human rights and where we care about what is happening to women and children in the world. And so we're more than prepared to work with the Jamaican Government on this issue. We spent last year \$96 million to help with technical assistance for issues associated with trafficking, whether it was technical assistance on legal reform or on support for victims, and we're prepared to help in the future.

But it is a serious problem and, by the way, the United States is by no means blameless in this regard. Not only do we provide an environment in which some people take advantage of trafficked people, we are a country that sees that trafficking can place in the United States as well. And that's why first Attorney General John Ashcroft and now Attorney General Gonzalez are working so hard to make sure that the United States cleans up its act when it comes to this matter of trafficking. So we internationally — all of us — need to be concerned about this.

QUESTION: Can I make one more?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. Yes, yes.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: I'm sorry, I missed the first part.

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Okay, right. I'm sure we've made many. You know, these are big historical circumstances and change does not come without a lot of difficulty. I've often said that one day people will write dissertations about what the Bush Administration could have done differently. I will probably oversee some of these dissertations when I go back to teach so I'm quite certain we've made many.

The problem with trying to judge too early what you've done right and what you've done wrong is that history unfolds in big sweeps, not in small increments. If I take you back to 1945 or 1946 or 1947 after the defeat of Hitler's Germany and fascist Japan, you would read story after story after story about how badly the reconstruction was going in Germany, you would read story after story about how Japan could, of course, never have institutions that were democratic. Now, all that matters is that Japan became democratic and prosperous, Germany became democratic and prosperous, so democratic and prosperous that it became an anchor for the demise, the defeat, of communism throughout Europe.

So I ask everyone to just step back and let's let history decide about what has been done right and what has been done wrong. Of course, we make adjustments along the way. I think that we have been as good as we should be in dealing with the fact that the terrorism problem is not really a war on terrorism; that's a method, terrorism is a method. It is an ideology of hatred that is so great, principally in the Middle East but not just in the Middle East, that people strap suicide bombs onto themselves and blow up innocent people and fly airplanes into buildings. This isn't normal. This isn't what parents want for their children. This isn't what is happening in most of the world.

And so I think we've come to an understanding that in the Middle East, in particular, the absence of freedom, the absence of democratic governments, the 60 years when the United States and others didn't speak out about the absence of democracy, has caused this malignancy to grow up, this abnormality to grow up underneath, and that we now need to deal with the freedom deficit. And so that's why you hear the President talking about the importance of the spread of democracy in the Middle East and I think that's been the major change in our thinking as the war on terrorism has unfolded.

SECRETARY RICE: Last question?

QUESTION: (In Spanish.)

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, let me say first that it is a broad agenda. We also have doubled development assistance in this President's time. The United States development assistance was essentially flat and now, under this President, it has doubled over the last four years. So we understand that it is not just free trade, it is also development assistance. But what free trade does is to give opportunities to export product to places like the United States.

Now let me address the various elements of this. Subsidies. You're right, subsidies have grown up too much in the developed world. But the President has said we are — we favor the reduction of subsidies, we just can't do it unilaterally and disadvantage American farmers vis-à-vis, for instance, European farmers. So in the WTO we are trying to reduce subsidies in the WTO structure and we would be very much for doing that, for ultimately eliminating those subsidies, if it were a worldwide program to do that.

When it comes to the support for anti-drug efforts, we have had a real strong focus on Colombia and the Andean region and that is because the situation had gotten so bad in the Andean region that it was really threatening governments in a very fundamental way. When you look at the fact that the Colombian Government actually didn't control much of its own territory because of narco-trafficking, that's an enormously serious problem. Now, we are — we believe we're making some progress. The Uribe Government has reestablished control in most of Colombia. But that region still has a terrible problem in coca production. We do some anti-drug work in other parts but we don't have limitless resources and we do have to make choices of what we're going to do, and the situation in the Andean had just gotten so bad.

What we are trying to do is to help in other countries, including, I believe, in Paraguay, with regional efforts at law enforcement, regional efforts at anti-corruption. You know, one of the things we're learning, for instance, is that the same corrupt practices, the same corrupt institutions that allow terrorists to transit, allow drug traffickers to transit and allow arms dealers to transit, because it's the same corrupt policeman or judge or border guard. He doesn't care whether it is drugs or arms or terrorism. It's just corruption. And so the efforts that we're making in law enforcement improvements, in legal reform and in anti-corruption, I think even help a problem like this.

But we understand that free trade — there are responsibilities on both sides. I think you will find the United States is, by far, the most open economy in the world, by far. But we could be more open if the WTO does its work.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Good to be with you.

2005/T9-3

Released on June 7, 2005

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.