



Interview By Rotchild Francois Jr. of Radio Metropole

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Port-au-Prince, Haiti
September 27, 2005

QUESTION: Ms. Rice, thank you very much for affording me this interview and the opportunity (inaudible) the Voice of America. So you just met the President and the Prime Minister and the electoral councils. Could you tell us an assessment about the electoral process?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. I came to Haiti because this is a very important time for the Haitian people. These elections can be a turning point for the Haitian people. And in my conversations with all of the government leaders and also with the electoral council, I just talked about the importance of celebrating preparations. I will talk later on today with MINUSTAH about security for the elections. But the key is to have elections so that the transfer of powers can take place on the 7th of February.

QUESTION: So it's clear that the next President will take office on February 7th?

SECRETARY RICE: Everyone with whom I've talked said that that was very important, that the 7th of February, there has to be a new President. The issue is to make certain that the elections can take place because there are several that have to take place in time to make the transfer of power on the 7th of February. And so I came to talk about electoral preparations. I've been briefed on those electoral preparations. And now I can help in the international community to support Haiti as it gets ready for these very important elections.

QUESTION: So you think the process is on track?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the process is going well in many ways. The registration is continuing, but there are a number of technical issues that need to be worked out, polling places need to be identified. It's important that polling places be throughout the country, so that people all over the country can take place. It is important to firm up the electoral calendar leading up to February 7th. So there's a lot of work to do and I came really to encourage the President and Prime Minister, but also the electoral council to take the decisions that are necessary so that the elections can take place on time.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, there is some concern about the security. Do you have a positive message for people who might try to disrupt and to undermine the process like that in the Baghdad liberation?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. I hope that all Haitian people will use the power of the vote to express their views. It is not fair to your fellow Haitian citizens to use violence. We believe that the process that Haiti has now embarked on, this electoral process, can change the course of history for Haiti. It can make for so much better future for the Haitian people. There is an international presence here. There's a police presence, there is a peacekeeping presence. The Haitian police have been retrained and reformed. And so I am quite certain that violence will be dealt with through the -- those who are in authority to deal with violence, because no one should be allowed to disrupt the elections of their fellow citizens.

QUESTION: Did the Bush Administration (inaudible) in terms of security for the elections?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have already -- at first, we were here early to help stabilize the situation and we are supporting now the UN initiative in which I think is the right way to do this. I had a chance yesterday to talk with my Brazilian counterpart, the Foreign Minister of Brazil, because Brazil is leading MINUSTAH and we believe that MINUSTAH is very capable, along with the civilian police force and also with the Haitian police of providing security throughout the country.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary Rice, do you have a message for the people, for the government and for the electoral council?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the message that I gave to the government and to the electoral council is that is important now to accelerate the preparation for the elections. You always think that you have more time than you do. And everybody is very focused on February 7th, but they need to focus now on each and every day making the decisions that are necessary.

But I do have a message for the Haitian people as well. There is no more powerful weapon than the right to vote. People over the centuries have fought for the right to vote, some have died trying to vote. In my own country, my own people, American blacks had a very difficult time voting in the South and many people had to struggle to get the vote. The people of Haiti are going to have this opportunity to vote. And so those who have registered, I will hope that they will go out and vote on the day of the election. For those who have not registered, I hope that they take advantage of this time to go and register, to reclaim the right for a democratic Haiti and to elect their own leaders. There is no more powerful weapon than in the vote and I hope that the Haitian people will exercise that vote.

QUESTION: Two quick questions. One -- of the Bush Administration, one of -- intend to work with the new elected President and do you have a message for the women? Because as you know, 52 percent of the Haitian population are women, so if you have a message for them for the elections?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. The Bush Administration stands ready to work with the newly elected Government of Haiti to address the question of poverty here in Haiti and to try to bring about a better life.

And for the women of Haiti, half a democracy is no democracy. And so women need to participate. They need to go to the polls, they need to vote in large numbers because women can make a difference in any society and so I would especially urge the women of this country to go and vote.

QUESTION: So you encourage them to vote and also to be part in the elections?

SECRETARY RICE: They should vote, they should be candidates for the elections. Hopefully, they will be ministers in the new government. Women can play a very positive role. And I've met today women who are active in the government, a woman is on the electoral commission. So yes, women have every opportunity, they should exercise it.

QUESTION: And since you were here the last time, a message for the people? The last message for the Haitian people before the election?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. The last message for the Haitian people is don't miss this chance to go out and vote and to decide your own future. There is nothing more important to a human being than to control his own future and the vote is the way to begin to control your own future.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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