



Briefing on the Haiti Core Group Meeting

R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Haitian Foreign Minister Jean Reynald Clerisme

On-the-Record Briefing
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MR. GALLEGOS: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for coming. This afternoon we have R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and Haitian Foreign Minister Clerisme, who will be discussing a Haiti Core Group meeting that's just concluded.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. It's been a great pleasure for me to host the Foreign Minister of Haiti, Jean Reynald Clerisme here at the State Department today. And together we officiated together at a meeting of 21 countries and international institutions coming together, as we do twice annually, to try to give support to the Haitian Government and the Haitian people as they continue their reforms and as they continue to rebuild their democratic institutions.

And it was a very positive meeting today and it was held in an atmosphere of great hope, because as all of you know, Haiti has undergone a quite profound transformation over the last year where they've held elections at all levels, there is a new government in place, there is a government that's bringing stability to the country and a government that's working very well with the international community.

And I was impressed by the degree of unanimity around the table. We had all of the major countries of Latin America there. We had the major European countries there. We had the Secretary General of the Organization of American States. We had the Secretary General of the United Nations' personal representative in Haiti. And we had the World Bank and the IMF and the Inter-American Development Bank among others.

And we agreed on the following. We agreed that we support the program of the Government of Haiti to bring economic growth and greater prosperity to the people of Haiti. We agreed to support the process of reform that is underway that President Preval and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have put into place.

We agreed that all of us should support a renewal of the United Nations military mission, MINUSTAH, for a period of 12 months at current force levels. This is currently under debate at the United Nations and there's been some talk about whether or not it should be renewed for a short period of time or a longer period of time. It's the very strong view of the United States that this is a United Nations Military Mission that is making a great difference and a positive difference and the presence of that mission is essential for stability and peace and to deter crime in Haiti. And to renew it for anything less than 12 months would not be right, and so we will push very hard. And there was unanimity in the room today among all the countries that we should achieve that result.

There was also the suggestion that we need to help the Haitian Government and people in the fight against narcotics trafficking which has been a problem in the country. And it was good to hear from the representative of the World Bank the need for continued grant assistance to the Government of Haiti. And of course the World Bank has recently announced an \$80 million pledge to Haiti itself.

For our part, and I was joined in the meeting by our Assistant Secretary of State Tom Shannon who's with us today, for our part the United States has delivered over \$640 million in assistance to Haiti since 2004. And building on that, I'm pleased to announce today an additional grant of \$20 million to the Haitian Government and this is a program that will give direct assistance to one of the poorest and most troubled areas of Port au Prince, Cité Soleil. And this program will help to provide employment for young people in Cité Soleil and to provide the kind of encouragement through employment to help stabilize that part of Port au Prince. And I'm proud to announce that today. I think we have the details in a press release that we can give to you if you're interested. But in our view, it's the right thing to do to try to continue this effective international support for the Government of Haiti.

So I wanted to say those few words to summarize the meeting that we had. This meeting today follows a very good meeting that we had at the United Nations General Assembly in September. The United States has been proud to host these meetings and will be very happy to host the next meeting in about six months time.

So, Mr. Foreign Minister, it's been a pleasure to have you with us today. I invite you to take the floor and both of us will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Thank you. Thank you, Under Secretary Burns. It was really as you said the good meeting and I want to thank the Government of the United States and you -- through you to thank Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for the support that they are giving to Haiti. And I want to take this opportunity to congratulate your Ambassador in Haiti, Ambassador Janet Sandersen, who is really someone who tried to present to the Government of Haiti, to the people of Haiti, the love of the American government for Haiti.

As Under Secretary Burns said, it was a meeting where I think that it was consensus on what we want to do for Haiti. The 22 countries who are present, eight international organizations, all of them spoke in one voice to support what the government is doing and to help Haiti regain its dignity and sovereignty. And we are doing our best for the renewal of the MINUSTAH. We as a country are doing our best to solve the minor problems that remain to be solved so we could have the renewal for 12 months. Because Secretary General Kofi Annan asked it and I think that for us it would be better to have a renewal 12 months than to have it for six months or less.

And the -- as a question of the security, we recognize how MINUSTAH is helping the country, is helping us to control the gangs who are creating trouble and to control also the narco-traffic that goes through the country to harm the Dominican Republic and other countries. There will be a summit in the Dominican Republic on the 15 of March between the Haitian Government, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela and Jamaica, and maybe other countries. I hope that the U.S. will take part of it also because the U.S. is suffering over this narco-traffic that is going through Haiti.

And the meeting that with the support of the international community, with the support of our bilateral donor and the U.S. is an example of supporting a country, friendly, to help the country recover and we promise that we will fight against corruption, we will fight against any impunity in the country. We'll try to make order within our country. So in the next few years, let's say that we don't want to wait until five or six years, that Haiti can take the lead of its destiny and at that time, we don't even need to have MINUSTAH there at least we will have (inaudible) Haitian who are aboard that can come to help us because we have a problem of resources, human resources in the country because as you know, many Haitian intellectuals have left the country, lived outside. And now we would like to bring them back and create this base for investment. Haitian, the diaspora can come to invest and other investors can come also to help us develop. We ask that within the new mandate of MINUSTAH that we can link peacekeeping and peacebuilding together. So the development aspect can be addressed in the presence of MINUSTAH.

So I don't want to be too long. I want, again, to thank Under Secretary Burns, to thank the Government of the U.S., and to thank all of our friends nationally and international, and then the press who is here to spread the news, what Haiti is at, what we want to succeed for our country -- peace, development, and so Haitian can

stay in their country and to rebuild it. Thank you very much. We are open for questions.

QUESTION: Okay. Allow me to ask you the first question, Mr. Clerisme. Number one, let me welcome you back to the United States. Just a couple weeks ago, I was with you. And Mr. Ambassador, good to see you both, good to see you.

I have a question with three part and my last part might be in Creole. I hope you don't mind. After what happened with China, with the Chinese, do you still recognize Taiwan? That's number one.

I've seen President Preval, my president, taking a picture with the Iran president, President Ahmadi-Nejad. Can you describe your relationship with Iran? That's number two.

And number three, (in Creole).

And once again, I thank you very much for this answer.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: You are more than welcome.

QUESTION: By the way, (inaudible) from the Haiti (inaudible) as well as (inaudible) management.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: I know, I know, (inaudible). And thank you for the -- to report your sentiment, thank you after the meeting.

QUESTION: Yes, sir.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Yes, as far as -- I'm going to start for the last one. The government is doing its best to solve the problem between China and Taiwan. We have had diplomatic relation between -- with Taiwan for -- now for 51 years. We started in 1956. So it's -- the diplomatic relations and the (inaudible) in Taiwan is supporting the development of Haiti.

China is not asking us to break our relation, economic relation with Taiwan. What they want and what has been always the position of Haiti is to become neutral between the political (inaudible), that can be within China, we recognize there is only one China, so -- but Taiwan is, so far, our counterpart in diplomatic relation. We have an office commercial bureau in Beijing, as China has a commercial bureau in Haiti.

And now we -- and China doesn't ask us to break with Taiwan. They only think that we become neutral and that's the position of the government, that is, if there was a letter -- a messenger who was sent by the government to meet with the ambassador of China to discuss the issue and solve the -- I think that it's a minor tension and the government has done what it has to do.

The last question was?

QUESTION: The last question that --

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: The first one.

QUESTION: Actually, that's the second one. I've seen President Preval --

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Yes, okay, the relation with Iran. We don't have any diplomatic relation with Iran so far. We don't have. So they were at a meeting; they can be together and they took a picture, but we don't have a diplomatic relation with Iran so far.

QUESTION: I hope you don't send a signal to the people out there.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Okay. Sir, we don't have it.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you very much, sir.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Can I just say for the record we don't have diplomatic relations with Iran either.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: You want to talk about your one "One China" policy?

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: If I could just ask about the situation in Port-au-Prince? I mean, one of the main problems there has been the gangs, not only the security situation with them fighting amongst each other, but targeting of Americans for kidnapping, for ransom. I'm just wondering if you could talk about any efforts that the Government is taking to ensure that the security will be in place to protect against that. Also, the UN force down there has been very reluctant to take action until recently, when it itself was targeted. I'm wondering what you're going to -- what plans there might be to strengthen the mandate of that force, if both of you could address that.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Do you want to address it?

QUESTION: S'il vous plait.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Yes, and security has been a problem for us for the past -- I think the past two years. And the United Nations sends MINUSTAH in the country to help us control it. It has been difficult to reach a point, but if we look at Haiti, Port-au-Prince now, why -- what it was two years ago, where you could not go to Bel Air, you could not go to (inaudible), you would not go to Cité Soleil and lately you could not go to Gonaïves.

We have the support of MINUSTAH. Now all those place people can go and come, but -- we still continue to have some kidnapping. We still continue to have some gangs who operate, but the number has been reduced really to -- I don't see the minimum, but it has been reduced drastically. And the police force is support by the MINUSTAH. And lately, the Government has given -- with an order to MINUSTAH to intervene, to chase the gang leader and they have captured many of them. There are still some who are -- who are free, but the work of the MINUSTAH and the police is encouraging and I think that shortly, very shortly, we could have a peaceful Port-au-Prince.

And I want to mention that when you talk about UN security, people look at Port-au-Prince, but the rest of the country -- Port-au-Prince is only the capital region where you have two million there, but that (inaudible), across the country, we don't have the same security program. So now the focus is on Port-au-Prince and there is hope that we can create the stability and security space so -- and they still can come and people can come without any fear in Haiti.

QUESTION: And if you could talk about the illicit funding for these groups.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: For the?

QUESTION: The illicit funding through narco-trafficking and also through -- you know, kidnapping, ransoms, and so on for the gangs.

FOREIGN MINISTER CLERISME: Yes, that has been the commentings and sometime, you see the kidnapping is linked to the drug trafficking also. And sometimes, there are people who -- it's difficult to say because they're -- there are sometime auto kidnapping, people who make them kidnap in order to receive money. It's really -- becomes a game. So -- and when drug dealing is into it, it becomes more difficult. The government, with the police and MINUSTAH, are trying to disband this connection and create the space for security in the country.

MR. GALLEGOS: Last question.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I just wanted to add my --

QUESTION: If you could start with the UN mandate maybe.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, I just wanted to say that I think there is a recognition in the meeting today, as there have been in past meetings, that violence in Port-au-Prince is an important and very serious issue, particularly gang-related violence. And we understand that Cité Soleil, in particular, is a place of -- where there are many, many challenges for the Haitian Government.

We have, for a number of -- well, for well over a year now, been discussing the proper role for MINUSTAH in assisting the Government of Haiti and the Haitian National Police in trying to diminish the level of violence in Cité Soleil. And it is a challenge that MINUSTAH must meet, but in cooperation with the Haitian authorities, who after all, are sovereign.

And so we would hope that MINUSTAH could be renewed, could be renewed at its current force levels, and could help contribute to the improvement in the security situation in the country. And that was recognized in the discussion today. It was a big part of the discussion.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), a real quick question on the money. The 20 million, is that existing funding that's been reprogrammed or is it new money that you're seeking? If it's new money, is it in a supplemental or is it a new -- next -- the '08 budget request? Do you know?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHANNON: Existing money.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: It's existing money, yeah, and it's \$20 million grant money, and as I said, directed at trying to generate youth employment and jobs in Cité Soleil. But I think we have a -- we should have a press fact sheet on this. I hope we do. I have to give to you.

QUESTION: I have a -- may I have a question?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Very quickly, Nick. And -- yes, Lambros.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Is this a question about Haiti, Mr. Lambros?

QUESTION: It's (inaudible) --

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Haitian-Greek relations?

QUESTION: It's (inaudible) was brought today by the Defense Minister of FYROM who is in the town. Secretary Burns, the Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis made clear most recently that Greece is not going to support FYROM's application to become EU or NATO member unless Skopje first will reach an agreement with Athens on the dispute which should be dual due to the (inaudible) agreement of 1985. Could you please clarify the U.S. position, *vis-à-vis* to the Greek position, expressed so clearly by Minister Dora Bakoyannis?

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: I recall have colloquies with you on this question back in 1995 and '96, glad we could reprise it. You know, our position hasn't changed and we hope very much that under the good offices of Ambassador Nimitz it might be possible for the two governments to work out an appropriate solution to that problem.

Nick.

QUESTION: Thanks, Nick. Do you expect Haiti to be part of your conversations with Brazil when you go down next week? Is there anything that you would encourage Brazil -- anything more that you would want Brazil to do in Haiti? And if you can just tell us what other issues here might come up, like perhaps biodiesel and such? Thanks.

UNDER SECRETARY BURNS: Well, Assistant Secretary Shannon and I are going to travel together next week to both Brazil and Argentina. And I do expect that Haiti will be a subject in both countries because both Argentina and Brazil have been supporting MINUSTAH. In fact, they've been leading members of MINUSTAH. Both countries are important economic partners of Haiti. And as Secretary General Insulza said today, the Secretary General of the OAS, this is the only UN military force in the world that is now majority Latin. And it's very important that is has the continued support of the Latin American countries, particularly two of the regional leaders, like Argentina and Brazil. So that will certainly be an issue for us and we'll be looking of course to work with both governments to support Haiti.

We're going down to Latin America to Brazil and Argentina next week because we want to establish with both countries a stronger bilateral relationship and our ties are very good with both of them. We want to establish both a regional dialogue and a global dialogue with both countries. In Brazil of course, we have an excellent relationship between our two leaders, between President Lula and President Bush. The issue of biofuels is a very important issue because Brazil and the United States are the global leaders. And so we'll be taking with us Greg Manuel who is the Secretary of State's advisor on energy who's done a lot of work in this subject. And we look forward to very good and very detailed discussions with the Government of Brazil on biofuels, as well as all the other issues that are on our agenda and the same is true, of course, with Argentina. So Tom and I are looking forward to what will be a very good visit to both countries.

Thanks very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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