

Narrator:

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The U.S. policy opposing Israeli settlement activity has not changed, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says. The Obama administration does not accept the legitimacy of Israeli West Bank settlements and would like all current and planned Israeli settlement activity halted. The United States wants to see the establishment of a Palestinian state with borders based on territory that Israel has occupied since 1967, Clinton said following talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit November 4th in Cairo.

The Obama administration has been working to get peace negotiations restarted in hopes of achieving a comprehensive peace and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Clinton said the troubled history between the two sides should not be allowed to stand in the way of a more peaceful and prosperous future for both.

Clinton said resuming talks to discuss final status issues such as borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem will allow participants to bring an end to settlement activity because of movement toward the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The United States wants to see both the establishment of a Palestinian state and a situation in which Israelis can live in security. Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit said he and Clinton held clear and candid talks on the U.S. position toward Israeli settlements, and he said that while the United States rejects settlements, "Israel has not been responsive to the desires of the United States."

Shortly after his inauguration, President Obama called for the closure of the detention facility at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba within a year. Setting out the principles for a new Guantánamo policy has proven to be the easy part. Over the past nine months, the administration has had to move slowly in making legal determinations in each individual case.

On October 20th, the U.S. Senate marked a step forward in the process by voting to allow the government to transfer prisoners from Guantánamo to federal courts in the United States for prosecution. The legislation, already agreed to by the House of Representatives, now goes to the president for signature. The new provisions require the administration to submit a comprehensive plan before further transfers take place and prohibit any resettlement of prisoners in the United States.

Earlier in the year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that foreign nationals sent to Guantánamo have the right to challenge their detention under habeas corpus, meaning they are entitled to a hearing where the government must justify their incarceration. The United States has made progress in reducing the number of Guantánamo detainees. Since October 2001, when the war in Afghanistan began, 775 terrorist suspects have been brought to Guantánamo. More than 400 have been released. Most were returned to their home countries. Guantánamo held 245 detainees when the Obama administration took office in January; that number has dropped to just more than 220.

When Web-based activists from around the world convened in Mexico City October 14th through 16th at the second annual Alliance of Youth Movements Summit, they received welcoming messages from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and a host of other dignitaries – a sure sign of their growing clout as agents of social change.

The summit focused on the role of technology in connecting young people who seek positive social change around the world. Participants included individuals from the private sector, the nongovernmental community, and some of the most successful Internet-based movements around the world. The agendas of these so-called “digital revolutionaries” are varied, but all embrace the goal of improving their societies by leveraging the power of the Internet. Creating their own organizations and using social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, these young leaders are mobilizing thousands of like-minded citizens to join their movements.

Participants exchanged stories about their experiences and offered advice to peers. Sophie Lwin co-founded the Burma Global Action Network in response to the Burmese military regime’s September 2007 crackdown on peaceful anti-government protests led by monks. Her organization grew to 300,000 members within one week of starting the group on Facebook. Despite censorship in Burma, Lwin’s group posted photographs on Facebook that documented what was happening in the country. The photographs were broadcast on CNN, sparking widespread condemnation of the regime. Other participants shared stories of groups from Iran, Venezuela, and other countries.

Technology now facilitates civic involvement throughout the world, said State Department officials. One of the lessons of the conference is that this new ability to connect online is leveling the playing field and breaking down previous barriers due to age, gender, or socioeconomic circumstances. In his closing remarks at the conference, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual said the U.S. government now realizes that reaching out to young activists has to be part of the way that the United States engages as part of its diplomacy.

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