Narrator:

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Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recently traveled to Moscow for talks on Middle East peace and on a proposed U.S.-Russian strategic arms treaty.

The secretary and Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell participated in a meeting of the Quartet for Middle East Peace in Moscow March 18th and 19th. The Quartet includes the European Union, United Nations, Russia and the United States. Clinton said in a recent interview that the United States remains committed to the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Talks had been stalled until only recently, when Mitchell successfully persuaded the two sides to renew contact to help reduce the level of mistrust between them and lead to a solution that gives both sides peace and secure, recognized borders. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu isin Washington the week of March 22nd to attend the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee meeting, and is expected to speak with the secretary while in town, according to State Department officials.

As part of the trip, Clinton met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to discuss the current negotiations for a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, also known as START I, the State Department said in an announcement. Negotiators from the United States and Russia have been working since early in 2009 to draw up a new treaty. The 1991 treaty expired in December 2009. When President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev held their first face-to-face meeting in April 2009, the two leaders agreed to reduce the number of nuclear warheads each possesses to a range of 1,500 to 1,675 over seven years.

As part of America's continuing support for the devastated population of Haiti, more than 60 officials and medical-education experts from Haiti and the United States met in Washington March 15th to plan a strategy for rebuilding Haiti's medical-education system. Among the more than 250,000 who died as a result of the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck near Port-au-Prince January 12 were 73 doctors, nurses and other health care providers. Thirty of Haiti’s 62 hospitals were severely damaged and more than 500 medical students are unable to finish their studies.

Experts shared recent experiences and explored short- and long-term needs and strategies. Participants agreed to form steering work groups for undergraduate education, graduate

education and systems and infrastructure building. As part of a collaborative approach to rebuilding across schools of medicine, public health and allied health professions such as nursing and pharmacy, the group agreed on the need to engage other nongovernmental and philanthropic organizations for resource support.

The top U.S. envoy to Africa says U.S. policy toward the war-torn country of Somalia is guided by its support for the peace process. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson told reporters in Washington March 12th that media accusations of U.S. military advisers in Somalia to aid the Transitional Federal Government are incorrect.

According to Carson, the United States has provided limited military support through the Africa Union Mission in Somalia to the governments of Burundi and to Uganda. That support has included non-lethal equipment such as communications equipment, uniforms, and transportation. The United States does not plan, direct, or coordinate military operations, and is not providing nor paying for military advisers.

The United States calls for “an inclusive political solution” to resolve the conflict, and urges Somalis to reject violence and “participate in the hard work of stabilizing the country” that will benefit the whole population. Carson added that there is no desire to Americanize the conflict in Somalia.

Since September 2009, Michael Posner, the U.S. State Department's Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor has led the collection, assembly and distribution of human rights information on more than 190 governments. For more than 30 years, that information has been published in the State Department's annual Human Rights Report. The 2009 report was recently released on March 11th. For many years, Posner was a consumer and critic of the report — first as the executive director and then as the president of Human Rights First, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization based in New York and Washington.

The Department of State prepares the report using information from U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, foreign government officials, nongovernmental and international organizations, and published reports. Initial drafts of the individual country reports are prepared by U.S. diplomatic missions abroad based on information they gathered throughout the previous year.

Assistant Secretary Michael Posner:

The human rights report serves many purposes. It was originally created by Congress to inform policy, to inform aid and trade policies of the federal government, but it's become much bigger than that. It is the single most comprehensive look at human rights around the world done by anyone. In many countries where there are no Amnesty International or

Human Rights Watch reports or reports by others, there's a State Department report, so it's a baseline of information about what's going on in the world every year. I spent more than a few hours looking at the reports themselves, the methodology, the findings, and the evolution of the reports and one of the things that was really striking was the extent to which the reports have become more comprehensive and better over the years. They were created by Congress in the mid-1970s. The initial report is a very thin book, and it covers only a few handfuls of countries that were getting U.S. aid. And over the course of the first 10 years even, Congress extended the mandates, that it has to include every country. Now we have a really radically different product. It's thousands of pages long and it reflects a much more sophisticated fact-gathering approach both at the embassy level and here in Washington. So it's a much – it really is a quite extraordinary document in terms of its comprehensiveness and detail.

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Although the report originally focused on countries receiving U.S. foreign aid, it has steadily grown to include more comprehensive reviews on the practices of a greater number of governments on a greater range of human rights practices. This year the report has been expanded. More information is reported on workers' rights, child soldiers, reproductive rights, practices that endanger indigenous people, and discrimination against homosexuals and victims of HIV/AIDS.

According to Posner, human rights activity is increasing within societies throughout the world, and this is a signal of great hope going forward. The increase in creativity, the willingness of people to take risks, and their determination to form organizations fighting for women's rights, children's rights, and the environment drives the State Department's commitment to addressing even more human rights issues in the future.

Assistant Secretary Michael Posner:

As the report becomes more important and more cited, members of Congress and the public interest groups are constantly saying we need to do more, we need to focus on other issues, or we need to add new categories. We try to balance those desires with a commitment to making the report readable and comprehensible. So there is a little bit of back-and-forth always about how much can we do and how much can you fit in to one report. We're looking at all of those things now, but for example Congress has mandated we focus more on prison conditions. We've always had that in the report, but we're going to in the next year take a special look at that and see if there's somewhere to break that out. There's more attention to women's issues, there's more attention to LGBT issues. There are a whole range of subjects as the world evolves and the debate about human rights evolves, inevitably these sorts of things are going to be added to the mix.

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