

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

March 5, 2009

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Time Is of the Essence for Palestinian State, Says Secretary Clinton

America will engage a new Israeli government to further peace process

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — America strongly supports the creation of a future Palestinian state, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says, pledging to work for peace by engaging a new Israeli government on halting settlement expansion and easing border restrictions.

“Time is of the essence. We cannot afford more delays,” Clinton said in a joint press conference with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah March 4. “The Obama administration will be vigorously engaged in efforts to forge a lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians, and all of the Arab neighbors.”

America’s support for the Palestinians is much more than words, Clinton said following meetings with Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, as seen in \$900 million in new U.S. humanitarian aid for Palestinians she announced at an international donors’ conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

“We will work with President Abbas, Prime Minister Fayyad, and the government of the Palestinian Authority to address critical humanitarian, budgetary, security, and infrastructure needs, both in Gaza and in the West Bank,” Clinton said. “The United States aims to foster conditions in which a Palestinian state can be fully realized, a state that can provide opportunities, a state that is a responsible partner, is at peace with Israel and its Arab neighbors, and is accountable to its people.”

As Israel works to form a new government following recent elections, Clinton criticized plans to demolish more than 80 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem. “Clearly, this kind of activity is unhelpful and not in keeping with the obligations entered into under the road map,” she said.

Clinton also pledged to engage the new Israeli government on its expansion of settlements into the occupied territories, a major stumbling block in the peace process. “I think at this time, we should wait until we have a new Israeli government. That will be soon and then we will look at whatever tools are available.”

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks were revived following the

U.S.-sponsored Annapolis Conference in 2007, but have since stalled following an Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip in December 2008 aimed at halting rocket attacks by the terrorist group Hamas, which seized control of Gaza from the ruling Palestinian Authority in 2007.

In meetings with Israeli officials March 3, Clinton said she urged easing of border crossing restrictions into Gaza to facilitate international assistance and rebuilding.

“We want humanitarian aid to get into Gaza in sufficient amounts to be able to alleviate the suffering of the people in Gaza,” Clinton said. “We are trying to express constructive ideas that we think will, on the one hand, alleviate the immediate crisis in Gaza, and on the other, give us an opportunity to set the table for a constructive and eventually successful resolution.”

Clinton is continuing on to Brussels, Belgium, where she will meet with European Union leaders and attend a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. Clinton will complete her first official trip to the Middle East and Europe following talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva and consultations with Turkish leaders in Ankara, Turkey.

State Department on ICC Arrest Warrant for Sudanese President

United States urges concerned parties to “exercise restraint in responding”

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
March 4, 2009

STATEMENT BY GORDON DUGUID, ACTING DEPUTY SPOKESMAN

ICC Arrest Warrant Issued For Sudanese President Bashir

The United States is strongly committed to the pursuit of peace in Sudan and believes those who have committed atrocities should be held accountable for their crimes.

We urge the Government of Sudan, armed rebel groups, and all other concerned parties to exercise restraint in responding to this development and to ensure the safety and security of vulnerable Sudanese populations, international civilians, and peacekeepers on the ground.

The United States will continue to support efforts to ease

the suffering of the Sudanese people and to promote a just and durable peace. We remain committed to full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that brought an end to the conflict between North and South Sudan. We will also continue to support UN/AU Mediator Bassole's efforts to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities and a political settlement that will end the humanitarian crisis and bring lasting peace to Darfur.

Former Child Soldier Uses Music as a Weapon Against Violence

Emmanuel Jal channels his passion to give voice to ongoing crisis in Sudan

By Crystal Ofori
Staff Writer

Washington — A former child soldier in the Sudanese civil war has turned rapper/activist, using his story, told in his music and in a documentary called *War Child*, to touch lives and promote peace and education in his homeland.

During a book-signing event in February at Howard University in Washington, curious students peppered Emmanuel Jal with questions about his life as a child soldier and were rewarded with an impromptu performance of his song "Emma" from his newest album.

At the age of 6, Jal was sent to Ethiopia for school but instead was trained as child soldier for the Sudan People's Liberation Army. Many children, bitter and hoping to seek revenge, took part in the training to fight their Muslim/Arab counterparts in the North, who were viewed as the enemy.

Seven years later, he and other child soldiers left the camp and journeyed to Waat, Sudan, where he met his "angel," British aid worker Emma McCune. Rescued, he left with her to start a new life, but that opportunity was cut short when McCune died in a car accident. In the wake of that tragedy, he found a new inspiration.

"Music was therapeutic for me and to me. I was writing history," Jal told America.gov. "I didn't know that it was going to be received."

A decade later, after studying in Kenya and moving to Britain, Jal is singing songs that oppose violence, reject tribalism, promote peace and endorse education.

Still a soldier at heart, Jal has a new war: fighting violence

with music.

"Music is the only thing that can speak to your mind, your heart and your soul system, your cells, and influence you without any hard work," said Jal of his newest weapon. "I put my fight into music, for two reasons: to cool down my anger, transforming that anger to positivity, and because I want to pass a message to people. At first I was doing it because it's fun [and] it's healthy; now it goes to the people."

In 2005, he teamed with singer Abdel Gadir Salim for his *Ceasefire* album, which included a remake of his hit song "Gua." This album was the first to team a young hip-hop Christian artist with a traditional Muslim Arab singer, two people who represented the opposing sides of the war. The album, sung in six different languages, combined old and new to urge a fresh beginning.

On the songs "Gua" and "Elengwen," Jal pleads for togetherness, for the cessation of violence and the growth of peace. He said he does not believe individual Sudanese are the source of the violence; rather, "What we have [rich oil deposits] is what's killing us."

PATIENCE AND HOPE

Jal's journey has been a test of patience and a lesson of acceptance.

"Ceasefire was a chance to practice forgiving the Northern people as well as a chance to exercise working with Muslims," Jal said. "Now I became more open with Muslims because I realized that the war in Sudan wasn't about Muslims and Christians. Religion is what they used as a tool to oppress people."

The album was a huge hit, especially in Sudan. The reason for his success? "It's because I mentioned the truth," Jal said. "The things that I've seen are what I was talking about," he said, and people could relate to what he was saying.

He also promotes education, citing ignorance as another obstacle to peace.

"Education is very important. When you are educated, you're being taught so many things that you can use to make choices and build your life." With this in mind, Jal plans to fund construction of a school in his hometown of Leer in honor of McCune, and he is fasting to help raise the necessary funding. "I'm not eating breakfast or lunch until I raise \$300,000 to build a school in Sudan. All the meals that

I skip [money saved] are used to buy bricks for the school. It costs \$3 a brick."

Ultimately, Jal wants his music to offer an alternative to violence, and to inspire hope.

"What I have is a message of hope, and I'm preaching a message of peace using my experiences and using the existing problems happening in my country. I want to offer hope to the people who are struggling, that everything is possible [and also] to at least inspire someone to at least invest in somebody's life. It took a simple British aid worker to invest in me, and here I am today."

Jal is currently on tour, promoting his CD, book and documentary – all entitled *War Child* – as well as raising funds for his school. He said he hopes this will help bring his message to mainstream America.

Movable Exhibit Displays Images of Iranians in Everyday Life

U.S. photographer hopes "Pictures of You" influences attitudes in America

By Sonya Weakley
Staff Writer

Washington – If his latest project sparks debate and discussion in America, photographer Tom Loughlin will believe it is a success.

By that measure, "Pictures of You: Images from Iran," described by Loughlin as a "traveling multimedia installation featuring portraits of Iranian citizens printed on translucent fabric," has done well. Comments on the project's Web site and in other publications range from reverent to resentful.

Loughlin, a former product liability and intellectual property lawyer, is the architect and public face behind the project, which is housed in a massive assembly of aluminum rods draped with silk. The frame is 90 feet (27 meters) long, 28 feet (8.5 meters) at its widest point and 27 feet (8.25 meters) high.

Inside and outside, hanging fabric panels – four that are 15 feet (4.5 meters) high and 14 feet (4.25 meters) wide – display photographs that Loughlin, who became a full-time photographer in 2005, and others took in Iran. The exhibit has 10 six feet (1.8 meters) by nine feet (2.75 meters) panels and 12 that are two feet (0.6 meters) by three feet (0.9 meters).

Loughlin said he modeled the structure's wings on a traditional indoor bazaar in Iran. A central circular area, which he said often is mistaken for a mosque, is a common gathering area such as might be found in a Persian home.

A visitor entering the giant tent immediately encounters the suspended textiles emblazoned with the faces of Iranians posing or going about daily life. Sometimes the viewer must brush against the panels to get by them. "I wanted Americans to be able to look Iranians in the eye and see ourselves."

The objective of the show, he said, is to convey "the simple reality that we all are human beings."

THE GLARE OF PUBLICITY

"Pictures of You" debuted in spring 2008 in Loughlin's hometown of Crested Butte, Colorado. It entered the international spotlight in August 2008 at the U.S. Democratic National Convention in Denver, where it was a striking fixture in a designated "free speech" area.

Comments appeared in national and international print and electronic publications and on the project's Web site. In September 2008, a visitor wrote: "Art should always have the ability to rise above politics and propaganda in search of our collective soul."

Politics, however, was the focus of other comments, such as those of activist Ana K. Sami in a guest editorial on *DenverPost.com*. "Loughlin's unbalanced view of the reality of the Iranian people undoubtedly plays directly into the hands of Iran's ruling elite."

Loughlin said he embraces the discussion. "I recognize that it has political impact," he said, "but the debate starts with simple reality that we're all human beings."

Carl W. Ernst, director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, welcomes the humanistic portrayal of Iranians through art.

"American media and popular entertainment typically ... dehumanize Iranians in [a] ... hostile manner," said Ernst, author of *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*.

He questioned, however, the mix of art and politics and "the extent to which you can pursue this project if the humanizing aspect is to be subordinated to policy

objectives. That seems to be a potentially major contradiction."

AN OBLIGATION TO ACT

Loughlin said he developed a curiosity about Iran as a young teenager witnessing Iranian students holding Americans hostage in the U.S. Embassy there. He couldn't accept that Iranians were somehow different. "It's always been part of my makeup – the presumption that we are all human beings."

In fall 2006, he visited the country. "I wanted to see it for myself," he said. "I took my camera, but I didn't have any idea it would turn into what it turned into; I thought I might come back with a beautiful sunrise."

What he experienced, he said, was remarkable generosity and kindness. "In traditional Persian hospitality, they are extremely welcoming to guests. A guest is a gift. They want to connect with you."

Through that bond, he perceived a feeling of impending disaster and experienced a sense of urgency to take action. "There was a sense that being bombed was a very real possibility," he said.

He returned to the U.S. feeling compelled to share his experience. "I felt like it was both an opportunity and an obligation to tell a story as a citizen of the U.S., where we have a democracy" that allows free expression.

The challenge was how to tell it. "I knew it wouldn't work as a gallery show. I wanted people to turn toward each other, to be more intimate."

That accessibility also leaves the exhibit vulnerable to vandalism. "It must be powerful if it would make someone do that," he said. "Part of me would be tempted to leave it. Someone carrying so much anger and not being changed by the beauty would become part of the experience."

Loughlin hopes to tour the country and is raising money through his organization, the Manjushri Project, and Fractured Atlas, a private fundraising group. He said he and his wife, Laurie Kindel, invested "more than six figures" to develop the project, and he believes it simply was the right thing to do.

"My sense is that it works exactly the way I hoped it would. I can't think of another way I would do it."

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)