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Clinton Lauds Vietnam Relationship

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By Jay Solomon

22 July 2010

10:50

The Wall Street Journal (Online and Print)

WSJO

World News

English

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HANOI—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hailed the advancement of U.S.-Vietnam relations as a model for reconciliation among former wartime foes during her first visit to Hanoi as Washington's chief diplomat.

But the former First Lady was blunt Thursday in pressing the Southeast Asian country to improve its respect for human rights amid signs its communist leaders are intensifying a crackdown on democracy advocates, Internet bloggers and religious leaders.

"It is true that profound differences exist, particularly over the question of political freedoms," Mrs. Clinton told a luncheon on Thursday honoring the restoration of U.S.-Vietnam relations 15 years ago. "The United States will continue to urge Vietnam to strengthen its commitment to human rights and give its people an even greater say over the direction of their own lives."

Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem, appearing alongside Mrs. Clinton at a press event earlier Thursday, praised U.S.-Vietnam cooperation on a growing range of bilateral issues. But the politburo member and deputy prime minister pushed back on Washington's criticism of Hanoi's respect for civil liberties, saying countries develop on different paths.

"Human rights have common values but ... it depends a lot on the cultural and historical background," Mr. Khiem told reporters gathered at Hanoi's Foreign Ministry. "Human rights can not be imposed from the outside."

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers pressed Mrs. Clinton in a letter this month to publicly raise Hanoi's human-rights record during her two-day visit. Democracy advocates charge the Vietnamese leadership is cracking down on the Internet, jailing prominent dissidents and suppressing religious freedoms.

Mrs. Clinton is visiting Hanoi both to meet Vietnamese leaders and to take part in a regional security conference involving Southeast Asian countries, China and Japan. It's her first visit to Hanoi since she accompanied her husband, former U.S. President Bill Clinton, on a tour of Vietnam in 2000.

Mr. Clinton restored diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995 in one of his administration's signature foreign-policy achievements. More than 50,000 Americans, and an estimated one million Vietnamese, died during the decade-long Vietnam war that ended in 1975.

Mrs. Clinton, despite her remarks on Hanoi's human-right record, lauded Vietnam's economic growth and its commitment to cooperating with Washington on key financial, strategic and environmental issues. She visited an AIDS clinic funded by the U.S. government in Hanoi and was scheduled to take part in a regional development forum later in

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the day.

"We have learned to see each other not as former enemies but as actual and potential partners, colleagues and friends," she said in referring to the improving U.S.-Vietnam relationship. "We will continue to choose engagement and cooperation over escalation and division."

Bilateral trade between the U.S. and Vietnam has blossomed in recent years and stood at over \$15 billion in 2009. The Southeast Asian country is the U.S.'s second-largest supplier of clothing.

Issues related to the Vietnam War, however, continue to impact the relationship. A Vietnamese journalist Thursday pushed Mrs. Clinton to do more to address the continuing health effects on the Vietnamese people from the 11 million gallons of Agent Orange and other toxins dropped on South Vietnam from 1962-1971.

"We have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange," Mrs. Clinton said. "[We plan to] increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together."

Write to Jay Solomon at jay.solomon@wsj.com

Clinton raises concern over Vietnam's rights record
By Andrew Quinn

22 July 2010
08:08
Reuters News
LBA
English
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HANOI, July 22 (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed concern on Thursday over Vietnam's arrests of dissidents, attacks on religious groups and curbs on Internet freedom, but said the countries remained friends.

The United States and Communist-run Vietnam marked 15 years of diplomatic ties this month and Clinton said the two countries had "learned to see each other not as former enemies but as actual and potential partners, colleagues and friends".

The relationship has blossomed in recent years. Trade between the former enemies has risen in value more than eightfold under a trade pact that went into force in 2001. It totalled nearly \$16 billion last year.

The United States was Vietnam's biggest source of new foreign investment last year.

"We have consistently moved in the direction of engagement and cooperation, even on those issues where we disagree," Clinton said during a two-day visit to Hanoi for the Asia-Pacific region's biggest security dialogue.

She said Vietnam was on the path to becoming "a great nation with unlimited potential".

"That is the reason we express concern about arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups and curbs on Internet freedoms," she told reporters.

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Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem rebutted by saying each country interpreted human rights differently according to its cultural background.

"President Obama said there is no perfect way and each country should select their own way depending on the circumstances of the nation, and the human rights values shouldn't be imposed from the outside," he told a news conference alongside Clinton.

Vietnam's one-party state has come under fire from rights groups and Western governments for arrests and detentions of advocates of greater political freedom or discussion of politically sensitive topics.

The government has also blocked certain websites, including Facebook, and has curbs on religious freedom.

Clinton said the United States supported Vietnam's participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a proposed trade pact spanning eight countries in the Pacific Ocean that Washington wants completed by November 2011.

She also pledged to work with Hanoi on a lingering source of friction -- the legacy of Agent Orange, a dioxin-laced defoliant sprayed by U.S. troops in the 1965-75 Vietnam War to destroy crops and jungle cover shielding guerrillas.

U.S. government-supported projects have started work on land where U.S. troops stored the defoliant, which critics have linked to cancers, birth defects and other ailments. (Writing by John Ruwitch; Editing by Jason Szep and Ron Popeski)

Clinton pushes Vietnam on human rights progress

22 July 2010

06:12

Associated Press Newswires

APRS

English

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HANOI, Vietnam (AP) - U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Thursday urged Vietnam to improve its human rights record but also pledged greater cooperation in dealing with the lingering impact of Agent Orange from the Vietnam War.

In Hanoi to mark the 15th anniversary of normalized U.S.-Vietnam relations, Clinton praised her hosts for their "extraordinary, dynamic population" and said it "is on the path to becoming a great nation with an unlimited potential." To fulfill that promise, though, she said the communist government must ease curbs on free speech and political activity.

"That is among the reasons we expressed concern about arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups and curbs on Internet freedom," she said in her opening comments at a joint news conference with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem.

Ahead of her visit, human rights groups and U.S. lawmakers called on Clinton to raise the cases of jailed imprisoned dissidents, democratic and religious activists and bloggers with Vietnamese officials.

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"The government of Vietnam's desire to reap the benefits of the global economy must be matched by efforts to respect comprehensive human rights," a bipartisan group of 19 members of Congress wrote to Clinton on July 15.

Clinton did not say if she had raised those cases but said the Obama administration wanted to work with Vietnam "to support efforts to pursue reforms and protect basic rights and freedoms."

But how much Vietnam is willing to cooperate on that was unclear as Khiem said he thought the subject is "a difference between Vietnam and the U.S."

"Human rights have common values but ... it depends a lot on the cultural and historical background," he said. He noted that President Barack Obama has said human rights values shouldn't be imposed from the outside.

Later, at a lunch hosted by the local American Chamber of Commerce, Clinton raised human rights again, calling it a "profound difference" between the U.S. and Vietnam even as trade and commerce have increased exponentially since relations were normalized in 1995, during her husband's administration.

"It is true that profound differences exist, particularly over the question of political freedoms," she told the audience. "The United States will continue to urge Vietnam to strengthen its commitment to human rights and give its people an even greater say over the direction of their own lives."

At the same time, Clinton said the U.S. does not see its relationship with Vietnam as rooted in differences or in memories of the past.

"We have learned to see each other not as former enemies but as actual and potential partners, colleagues and friends," she said. "We will continue to choose engagement and cooperation over escalation and division."

Clinton recalled her first visit to Vietnam in 2000, when she accompanied then-President Bill Clinton on a trip shortly before he left office. That trip was the first by a sitting U.S. president to Vietnam since the war ended in 1975.

She said they had not known what to expect but were overwhelmed by the friendly welcome they received from the Vietnamese people. "Everywhere we went we felt the warmth and hospitality of the Vietnamese people. For us, it had a profound impact," she said.

In her comments with Khiem, Clinton also promised to continue working with Vietnam on the consequences of Agent Orange. The U.S. military sprayed roughly 11 million gallons of the defoliant over large swaths of southern Vietnam between 1962 and 1971. Dioxin, a toxic chemical used in the herbicide, has been linked to cancers, birth defects and other ailments.

Vietnam says as many as 4 million of its citizens were exposed to the herbicide and as many as 3 million have suffered illnesses caused by it. A joint panel of U.S. and Vietnamese policymakers, citizens and scientists has urged Washington and other donors to provide \$30 million annually over 10 years to clean up sites still contaminated by dioxin.

Clinton said she and Khiem had discussed "the concern that both Vietnam and the United States have about Agent Orange and the consequences it produced in the people here."

"We have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange," Clinton said. She promised to "increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together."

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Clinton seeks rights progress in Vietnam

AP

501 words

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AAP Bulletins

AAPBLT

English

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US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Thursday urged Vietnam to improve its human rights record and pledged greater cooperation in dealing with the lingering impact of Agent Orange from the Vietnam War.

In Hanoi for events marking the 15th anniversary of normalised US-Vietnam relations, Clinton said, "Vietnam, with its extraordinary, dynamic population, is on the path to becoming a great nation with an unlimited potential".

However, she said: "That is among the reasons we expressed concern about arrest and conviction of people for peaceful dissent, attacks on religious groups and curbs on internet freedom."

Clinton also promised to continue working with Vietnam on the consequences of Agent Orange.

Between 1962 and 1971, the US military sprayed roughly 41-1/2 million litres of Agent Orange across large swaths of southern Vietnam. Dioxin, a toxic chemical used in the herbicide, has been linked to cancers, birth defects and other ailments.

Vietnam says as many as 4 million of its citizens were exposed to the herbicide and as many as 3 million have suffered illnesses caused by it.

"We have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange," Clinton said during a joint press conference with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem. She promised to "increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together."

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At the same time, however, Clinton said the US does not see its relationship with Vietnam as rooted in differences or in memories of the past.

"We have learned to see each other not as former enemies but as actual and potential partners, colleagues and friends," she said. "We will continue to choose engagement and cooperation over escalation and division."

Clinton recalled her first visit to Vietnam more than a decade ago when she accompanied her husband, former President Bill Clinton, on a trip here shortly after his administration restored diplomatic relations with Hanoi.

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Clinton arrived in Hanoi on Thursday for two days of talks that will also include a regional security forum with senior officials from around South-East Asia. Those discussions are expected to focus largely on the threat posed by North Korea.

Clinton came to Hanoi from Seoul, where she announced new US sanctions against North Korea and, with Defence Secretary Robert Gates, offered strong support for South Korea.

Clinton seeks human rights progress in Vietnam, vows more co-operation on Agent Orange impact
AP

22 July 2010

03:50

The Canadian Press

CPR

English

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