

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller of Jamaica and an Exchange With Reporters in Kingston, Jamaica

April 9, 2015

[Prime Minister Simpson-Miller's remarks were joined in progress.]

Prime Minister Simpson-Miller. —both local and overseas. Thank you for being with us today to witness this memorable chapter in Jamaica-U.S. relations.

The historic meeting held today with the Honorable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, sends a positive signal of the strong bilateral relationship that exists between Jamaica and the United States of America. These relations are anchored in our strong democratic traditions and the historical and cultural bonds that unite our peoples.

The importance of—to Jamaica of our relations with the United States of America must be clearly understood. The U.S.A. is Jamaica's leading trading partner, main tourism market, and a chief source of foreign direct investment. The U.S.A. is home to the largest Jamaican diaspora. The main aim of our dialogue, therefore, was to further strengthen a partnership that existed long before the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1962.

During our bilateral meeting, I renewed the high levels of regard which Jamaica has for the United States of America. I also expressed to President Obama and the Government of the United States, on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica, our gratitude for the high levels of support provided by the United States to Jamaica over the years.

Central to our discussions were the elements of Jamaica's performance under the current extended fund facility with the IMF and the positive outlook for the future. As Jamaica builds on the gains made so far under the program with the Fund, we recognize that we renew our commitment to the economic reform program going forward.

We also discussed strengthening our cooperation in the areas of security and human resource development. We explored additional ways of improving our trade and economic relations, including through capacity building for our private sector as well as in the areas of energy security and renewable energy.

One of the outcomes of the President's visit is the signing by our respective Ministers of Energy of a statement of intent between Jamaica and the United States of America to pursue the development and deployment of energy-related technologies. And I want to thank you, Mr. President, so much and your Government.

Through this statement of intent we aim to encourage increased bilateral trade, boost the development of emerging technologies and industries, and pave the way for future innovation in energy-related fields.

Other areas of our deliberations centered on regional and hemispheric developments, including relations with our closest neighbor, Cuba, and our expectations for the Summit of the Americas. And here again, I want to thank the President of the United States for action taken in terms of Cuba and to say to the President we're very happy and to say to you, Mr. President, you are on the right side of history.

The President and I and our teams also used the opportunity to have brief exchanges on multilateral development issues. And he has some serious concern, as well as Jamaica, in terms of climate change and financing for development and post-'15 development agenda.

I want to once again thank you, Mr. President, for visiting with us. And I just want to say to you, you might not know, but you're very loved in this country, Jamaica. And I just want to indicate to you that last night, while I was getting back home, the streets—people had lined the streets on the route they thought that you would be driving last night. [Laughter] So I had to give all the waves for you and threw the kisses—[laughter]—to all the people that were out at that time, just waiting to get a glimpse of your vehicle. So I just want to say you're well loved in Jamaica.

Well, first of all, I can say to you publicly, I love you, and ask for you to pass on my best wishes to your beautiful wife. And I'm sorry she was not able to make the—this visit with you—but to thank you so much. And you might not understand how important this is for us as a country and, certainly, will be important for our CARICOM region. And I thank you very much.

President Obama. Good. Well, thank you so much.

Let me just, first of all, say it is an extraordinary pleasure to be in beautiful Jamaica. There is a long history between our two peoples. It is not just a deep friendship between states, but it is also a family bond that exists, as represented by the many Americans who come here to visit and enjoy Jamaican hospitality, but also the extraordinary Jamaican American community that has done so much to contribute to the growth and development of our country.

And I want to thank Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller for her hospitality and her team. I know it's always a lot of work when I come to visit someplace, and I think that everybody has treated us with wonderful hospitality. And we very, very much appreciate that.

I assure you that Michelle wishes she was on this trip—[laughter]—although, she would insist that I stay longer than one day. [Laughter] And so we'll have to return with the girls sometime in the future. [Applause] She would also applaud for that. [Laughter]

As Madam Prime Minister indicated, we had a lot to talk about. First and foremost, we discussed how much we support the ongoing reform efforts in Jamaica to deal with its public debt while still making investments in youth and the people of Jamaica, which ultimately will determine long-term growth, to strengthen good governance and rule of law.

And I want to thank Prime Minister Simpson-Miller for the hospitality when the CARICOM leaders come today. Many of the issues that Jamaica deals with are issues that exist across the Caribbean. And so what we want to do is find out how we can be an even more constructive partner in addressing some of these issues.

One area that we've spent a lot of time focusing on and will discuss further with the other CARICOM leaders is the area of energy, where oftentimes, people of the Caribbean, despite having less resources, are paying significantly higher prices for energy. And if we can lower those costs through the development of clean energy and increased energy efficiency, we could unleash, I think, a whole host of additional investment and growth. And I think there are going to be a whole host of areas where the United States can be helpful.

We also addressed the issue of climate change, which obviously many island nations are most concerned about. And we have an important conference in Paris later this year. We began

to discuss how we can cooperate further to deal with this issue that will affect generations of Jamaicans and Americans for years to come.

We spent time talking about trade and how we can expand trade in the region and internationally. And we spent a lot of time talking about young people, because one of the best ways to ensure growth and prosperity is by empowering more of our citizens. Today's town hall meeting that I'll be having with young people from the region, we're going to be discussing how we can support entrepreneurship, more student exchanges, more effective job training, and at the same time, how we can support human rights, equality, and the dignity of all people.

And finally, we spent some time talking about security cooperation. Jamaica, historically, has had a very capable security effort, but strains are being placed on Jamaica, just like is true across the Caribbean, as the transnational drug trade continues to make moves to try to expand its reach or where it feels displaced from other areas. And so strengthening our cooperation, making sure that training, equipment, coordination, intelligence—that we are in sync, I think, is going to be very important. And I look forward to our efforts there as well.

So, in summary, it's been an excellent discussion. And I want to thank the people of Jamaica for their outstanding hospitality. I will say that the quick trip that I made last night to Bob Marley's house was one of the more fun meetings that I've had since I've been President, as a big fan since I was in high school, and is indicative of the incredible spirit of the Jamaican people.

So thank you very much, Madam Prime Minister. And with that, I know we're going to take a question from each delegation.

Prime Minister Simpson-Miller. Yes, yes. Can we—Mr. Earl Maxom [RJR Communications Group]. Yes.

Q. Thank you very much, Prime Minister. Earl Maxom of the RJR Communications Group. [*Inaudible*] Prime Minister, did you explore with President Obama some of the measures that might be pursued to ensure that Jamaica does not suffer any negative consequences from that which it has long advocated: the easing and ultimate lifting of the American embargo on Cuba? And, furthermore, are there going to be any specific new measures in stemming the flow of American guns into Jamaica, which has negative consequences?

Prime Minister Simpson-Miller. Well, we—as the President indicated, we discussed national security, and all of those things—that would be included in the discussion in terms of our national security. Both the U.S. and Jamaica, we're very concerned. The United States of America would not want for illegal guns to be entering our airports, our seaports, or by any other means. And in the same way, Jamaica would not want to have guns coming into our country—illegal guns coming into our country. And we've always been united against guns, illegal weapons entering our country and coming from any other country. So there's no need for us to worry about that, only to continue our serious monitoring of our borders, our airports, and our seaports.

But I was very satisfied with the discussion that I had in that area with the President.

U.S. Department of State's List of State Sponsors of Terrorism/Cuba/Iran

President Obama. Okay. Julie Davis [New York Times].

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, is it your view that it's time for Cuba to be removed from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism? Have you gotten that recommendation from the State Department, and are you planning to act on it while you're in the region? And beyond that, if I might, how confident are you that you're going to be able to push forward with this opening with Cuba at the same time that you're trying to make the case for the nuclear deal with Iran?

President Obama. As you know, there's a process involved in reviewing whether or not a country should be on the State Sponsor of Terrorism list. That review has been completed at the State Department. It is now forwarded to the White House. Our interagency team will go through the entire thing and then present it to me with a recommendation. That hasn't happened yet.

The one thing I will say is that throughout this process, our emphasis has been on the facts. So we want to make sure that given that this is a powerful tool to isolate those countries that genuinely do support terrorism, that when we make those designations we've got strong evidence that, in fact, that's the case. And as circumstances change, then, that list will change as well. So I won't make a formal announcement today about what those recommendations are. I'll wait until I've received them.

In terms of the overall process of establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, I think that they are proceeding as I expected. I never foresaw that immediately overnight, everything would transform itself, that suddenly Cuba became a partner diplomatically with us the way Jamaica is, for example. That's going to take some time.

I do think that we'll be in a position to move forward on the opening of Embassies in respective countries. There are details and negotiations around that. Cuba has moved forward in the negotiations that they've had with our State Department, consistent with what we announced back in December.

And so my expectation is, is that during the course of this year and into next year, you'll see a series of steps and measures that are taken to build trust and to establish genuine dialogue. There will still be significant differences given their system of government, given their positions on some of the issues in the region. But we're confident that this process of engagement will ultimately lead to not just improved diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, but will also end up being beneficial for the Cuban people and give them the kinds of opportunities that they might not have in the past.

I—there was an interesting poll that was released just over the last several days showing overwhelming support within Cuba for this process. I think there is a great interest among ordinary Cubans to be able to put one era behind them and to be able to move forward and have the kinds of relationships with the United States and the rest of the world that is reflective of the fact that we have an integrated, 21st-century global economy and that they have to be a part of it.

I don't think that will have an impact on Iran. I think people recognize those are two separate issues. The issue with respect to Iran is very focused on a particular problem, and that is making sure that Iran doesn't possess nuclear weapons and that the Middle East doesn't embark on a nuclear arms race. That's in everybody's interest. As I said before, I am confident that the framework that was established, thanks to the hard work of our negotiating team and serious concessions on the part of the Iranians, and the unity of the P-5-plus-1 and the world community behind sanctions, all give us now the possibility of achieving our goal without potential military conflict.

But as I've said from the start, this is not done until it's done. And the next two to three months in negotiations are going to be absolutely critical for making sure that we are memorializing an agreement that gives us confidence and gives the world confidence that Iran, in fact, is not pursuing a nuclear weapon. If that is the case, then Iran, I think, will benefit from its economy being open to the global economy.

And ultimately, what we want to see is prosperity for the Iranian people, but we also want to make sure that our allies in the region have confidence that they're not going to be threatened by the looming cloud of a nuclear Iran. And we're going to make sure that that happens, hopefully, through diplomatic means.

All right? Thank you so much, everybody.

Prime Minister Simpson-Miller. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 10:44 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at Jamaica House. In her remarks, Prime Minister Simpson-Miller referred to Minister of Science, Technology, Energy, and Mining Phillip Paulwell of Jamaica.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Kingston, Jamaica; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Jamaica, Prime Minister Simpson-Miller.

Locations: Kingston, Jamaica.

Names: Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Simpson-Miller, Portia.

Subjects: Caribbean nations : Energy cooperation with U.S.; Caribbean nations : Regional security cooperation; Caribbean nations : Regional trade, promotion efforts; Caribbean nations : Relations with U.S.; Cuba : Relations with U.S.; Environment : Climate change; Iran : International and U.S. sanctions; Iran : International diplomatic efforts; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Jamaica : Economic growth and development; Jamaica : President Obama's visit; Jamaica : Prime Minister; Jamaica : Relations with U.S.; Jamaica: President Obama's visit; Terrorism : Global threat.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500247.