

Remarks at Alliance Membership Dinner

Judith A. McHale

Under Secretary, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

Remarks at Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange Membership Dinner

Washington, DC

October 21, 2009

* * *

Thank you, Elizabeth, [Chazottes] for your warm introduction.

And congratulations to you Sharon.

And I want to thank you and your colleagues for the invitation to be here with you today.

I rarely get an opportunity in one setting to express appreciation to so many of the Department's partners—so I certainly welcome this occasion.

* * *

One of the most exciting things about working in this administration is that President Obama and Secretary Clinton truly have public diplomacy in their DNA. They not only speak the language of public diplomacy, they deliver.

From Cairo to Accra to the UN, we have heard President Obama talk about America's renewed commitment to energetic engagement, both government-to-people, and people-to-people.

In Cairo, for example, he made an explicit commitment to "expand exchange programs, and increase scholarships" for public diplomacy.

He has also pledged to "match promising Muslim students with internships in America [and] invest in online learning for teachers and students around the world." All of these were early and emphatic messages to those within and outside of our government.

Secretary Clinton, likewise, has ensured that public diplomacy is a prominent part of her portfolio during trips ranging from East Asia and Pacific to Africa.

During a recent cultural exchange event in Pittsburgh—with participants ranging from Trisha Yearwood to Yo-Yo Ma, among others—she noted that “It’s through this constant exchange—this process of taking and giving, this process of borrowing and creating—that we learn from each other and inspire each other.”

While there is no question that we are off to a very fast start, there is an extraordinary amount of work to do.

And that starts with the vision that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have provided for our public diplomacy.

We must recognize that without long-term, stable relationships with people and institutions around the world, we will have a limited ability to endure the inevitable ups and downs in our government-to-government relations and to partner to solve mutual problems.

We must recognize that myths and misconceptions held by people in other nations—if left unchallenged—constrain our nation’s capacity to act, individually or in concert with other nations.

We must begin public diplomacy by engaging others and listening to them with respect, not simply dictating to them.

We must continue to use our exchange programs as powerful, peaceful, and wide-ranging levers to support our long-term foreign policy goals and national security objectives.

These goals—these aspirations—are what the Nobel Committee had in mind when they awarded the Peace Prize to President Obama. They noted, in particular, his efforts to “...strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.”

I've been in this job for four months, and I can tell you that my meetings with exchange participants have been some of my most rewarding experiences.

I've met with them in the U.S., Pakistan, Germany, Lebanon, and South Korea, among other locations.

And, in every case, I have been struck by how poignant and inspiring their stories are. Just two weeks ago in Hawaii I met with students participating in our Youth Exchange Study and Future Leaders Exchange programs.

They have been here only a few months, but were already losing the stereotypes they held of Americans and each other.

One Muslim student from Lebanon, living with a Jewish host family, said that the experience had thoroughly changed his outlook. And this will have a multiplier effect because he also noted that his family back in Lebanon is very supportive of his experience.

But this, of course, is a microcosm of what needs to happen.

I had lunch with former Prime Minister Lee in South Korea, and he shared his perspective that both the U.S. and South Korea are going through generational changes.

He said the new generation in Korea needs to be informed of the special political and economic relationship the U.S. has with Korea. They need to know about the positive, diverse roles we have had there.

More broadly, he noted that a generational change is taking place around the world. He could not be more correct. Today, **45%** of the world's population is under the age of 25.

That's an astounding figure, and it means that we will need all hands on deck if we are to reach a significant portion of this generation.

Of course, the younger generation that we see is by no means monolithic. In many countries, there is a generational rebellion of sorts: the opinions of younger generations are often the inverse of their parents' opinions. In nations once hostile to the U.S., many youth are now enthusiastic about us. In nations that were once favorable toward America, many youth are now indifferent or hostile. We must do better in engaging them.

One of the answers begins right in this room. Exchange programs that operate from a business perspective—ranging from internships and au pairs to camp counselors—are a key tool for reaching younger people and helping to shape their views.

Indeed, in the U.S. this activity represents hundreds of millions of dollars that contribute directly to improving mutual understanding, building good will, and establishing lifelong ties among participants. So we deeply appreciate the impact of your efforts.

Let me say just a few words about some of the specific things we are doing at State.

With robust support from Congress, our flagship program, the Fulbright program, is now serving historically high numbers of both U.S. and foreign students.

More than 7,000 participants from the U.S. and more than 150 countries, are now being provided with opportunities to study, teach, conduct research, and exchange ideas.

We could not achieve this without the tremendous partnership we enjoy with the U.S. higher education community.

The Gilman Scholarship program this year will send more than 1,700 American undergraduate students with limited finances to study abroad, many of them first generation college students.

At the same time, the Department is working hard to attract talented students from overseas to come here for study. Our network of more than 450 EducationUSA centers is providing accurate, balanced, and comprehensive information to students and their parents about such opportunities.

In many countries, our Opportunity Scholarships are investing in talented disadvantaged students to cover the upfront costs of applying for U.S. study. Through our English Access Microscholarship Program for less affluent 14-18 year olds and our other English-language programs, we are deepening the pool of students who are capable, engaged, and may aspire to study here.

English-language training, of course, is absolutely critical because it can open up the pathway to prosperity by broadening the number of jobs available at home and abroad. That, in turn, means more than a better income, it means hope for a better future and connection to a broader world of ideas.

In addition to 3,500 Fulbright students, we are bringing more than 1,300 undergraduate students to the U.S. for a summer, semester, or year-long academic experience. In this effort, U.S. community colleges are becoming a significant partner in providing international students with career-relevant skills while increasing their understanding of the United States.

Across our academic exchanges, we are increasing our focus on the sciences. We recognize that solutions to the global challenges we face, from food security to climate change, depend on robust collaboration across sectors and nations. Nearly 40% of all Fulbright awards are made in the sciences. We are supporting Lab-to-Market seminars for Fulbrighters while they are in the U.S., and organizing summer leadership institutes in the sciences for aspiring foreign undergraduate students.

Through the Gilman Program, we are opening up summer study abroad opportunities for American undergraduate students in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.

We've found that beginning the process of engagement and exchange of ideas through these relatively apolitical fields can be tremendously useful in establishing a base of mutual trust for broader engagement in subsequent years.

We are also grateful for our partnership with Alliance members on a number of professional exchanges, including the International Visitor Leadership Program, Legislative Fellows Program, and those that support collaboration between leaders in government, business, journalism, and other fields both in the United States and abroad.

Many of you have a long-standing commitment to several of our high school academic and short term exchanges, including the Future Leaders Exchange and Youth Exchange Study programs that bring international students to the United States, as well as the National Security Language Initiative for Youth, which provides opportunities for Americans to study critical languages overseas.

As you know, these exchanges are key to our ability to reach out to younger audiences.

Alliance members have also been instrumental in working with the Department to develop and take advantage of technology, so that the exchange of ideas can happen even when people are not physically together.

Through programs such as the Global Connections and Exchange, students throughout the United States are able to share ideas and work on projects through the Internet with schools overseas.

* * *

This is an impressive array of programs and partnerships. It is one that I, as Under Secretary, feel very strongly about. And it is one that we at State are committed to supporting vigorously. Finally, Let me say thank you again for your extraordinary work on behalf of all the exchange participants that we work with—here and abroad. Your efforts truly change lives, and are helping to transform our world..

Thank you for the invitation to join you tonight.