

Press Releases: Press Availability With Chadian Foreign Minister Mahamat Zene Cherif

Press Availability
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Presidential Palace
N'Djamena, Chad
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FOREIGN MINISTER CHERIF: (In French.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Foreign Minister Cherif, and I am pleased to return to Chad and to be making my first trip as the Secretary, the first such visit to Chad by any American Secretary of State.

I have known President Deby for many years and I appreciate him receiving me and his hospitality that he extended today. My visit follows the dedication of a new U.S. embassy building here in N'Djamena last October. This dedication and my visit both demonstrate the United States commitment to deepening our relationship with Chad. As I told President Deby, the United States values Chad as a strategic partner in this region.

We know that Chad faces many security threats on each of its borders. We appreciate Chad's important role in providing security for its own citizens and its contribution to the security of its neighbors as well. Chad plays a vital role in countering terrorism and violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin and the greater Sahel. Chad contributes more than 4,000 troops to regional forces who are protecting Chadians and other partner nations. And we honor the many sacrifices of many Chadian soldiers who have served with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the Multinational Joint Task Force as well as their commitments to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. These are all significant efforts to counter terrorism in Africa and promote greater stability.

Conflicts in the region have brought domestic demands on Chad as well as Chad hosts many refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the regional instability. During our conversations, President Deby and I discussed the importance of Chad's continued engagement in counterterrorism

efforts across the region and the United States commitment to strengthening our partnership with Chad.

We also discussed the United States commitment to democratic reforms. The Chadian constitution provides for freedom of speech and assembly. Peaceful gatherings and nonviolent protest allow citizens to share their concerns with their government. This type of citizen engagement should be allowed. We also encouraged Chad to take proactive steps to join the international fight against the trafficking of persons. We look forward to greater cooperation with Chad on every front including counterterrorism, encouraging democratic reforms, and strengthening economic ties between our countries.

Thank you again, Minister Cherif, for welcoming me to your country, and I want to thank President Deby again for his generous provision of the time for our important discussions. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Secretary Tillerson. I don't know if there are some questions from the press (inaudible).

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MODERATOR: (In French.)

QUESTION: (In French.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect –

MODERATOR: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yeah, with respect to the travel ban, we had a very good exchange between President Deby and myself, and first I wanted to ensure that the people of Chad understand they are welcome in the United States. The steps that have been taken are necessary because of all of the conflict that exists on Chad's borders, and we recognize the challenges this presents to Chad and the Government of Chad in ensuring that Chad has full control of people who are traveling in and out of its own borders.

We had a very good trip from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the State Department late last year – visited Chad – and we had a very good exchange and many, many important positive steps have been taken by the Government of Chad to strengthen the control over its own passports, to strengthen the information sharing around people who are of concern, potential terrorists. And these steps, I think, are going to allow us to take actions to begin to normalize the travel relationship with Chad. There will be a report prepared in the United States later this month and that will be reviewed with the President in April and we're hopeful – we're hopeful that we can return things to a normalization of travel status, but we'll have to wait for the final report.

QUESTION: (In French.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, I think as I just indicated in response to the prior question, the impetus for the action taken on the travel ban – and Chad

was not singled out as the only country – had to do with an assessment of the ability of Chad to ensure that passport issuance, passport cancellation, tracking passports that have been lost, that there was a very sound process within the Chadian Government to ensure that it was keeping control of passports. The second was in issuing new passports and ensuring that the latest technologies were being used in issuance of new passports. And then the third was the sharing of information around individuals of concern.

And I think these steps actually are all in Chad's interest as well, because this strengthens the internal security for Chad as well as meeting some of the security concerns that the United States has more broadly. And again, as I indicated, all of these areas have been addressed by Chad and significant progress made in our most recent engagement late last year.

So that – there was no other impetus behind the action that was taken than to improve security in both of our countries.

FOREIGN MINISTER CHERIF: (In French.)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, the President's authorized the department to spend 120 million to counter Russian meddling in Western democracies. But more than a year later, we have not spent any of this money. Why? And isn't this failure part of the broad set of (inaudible) on your watch, including a paralysis – specifically (inaudible) and (inaudible) inability to get even close to a full leadership in place by now?

And Mr. Foreign Minister, were you at all insulted when you heard that President Trump described Africa as shithole countries (inaudible)?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: The funds that you're referring to, some of those funds were in the Department of Defense's budget and the Congress authorized the transfer of funds, and a memorandum of understanding was developed in order to transfer those funds. That memorandum was actually requested in March of last year. We only received DOD's concurrence in the last couple of months, so a large portion of those funds were tied up over at DOD.

In terms of the use of the funds, now that we have our confirmed under secretary for diplomatic relations – for public diplomatic relations [\[i\]](#), there is a very active effort underway through the Global Engagement Center now using social media and other tools to begin to respond to Russia's – in particular Russia's meddling and interference in elections not just here but abroad. So we're in the early stages of developing that effort and those programs, and some of those funds are being used – very small amounts at this point – as we staff up to be able to respond more proactively.

Having said that, there have been other actions taken through interagency processes to respond already, so it has not gone without a response.

FOREIGN MINISTER CHERIF: (In French.)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, (inaudible) that the foreign minister, how concerned are you about the threat of ISIS in Libya, as well as in the Sahel (inaudible)? And what reassurances did you give (inaudible)?

And Mr. Foreign Minister, were you reassured (inaudible)? And (inaudible) your desire (inaudible) the U.S. (inaudible)?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, as we anticipated, as we have had success in defeating ISIS in Iraq and Syria, we knew that fighters would flee that area, and we knew that Africa is a place they would come. Now they have established themselves in various regions and they are – they have actually recruiting efforts underway. So we are concerned about the presence of ISIS in Libya but also the presence of ISIS elements elsewhere in the Sahel. It's the reason we strongly support the G5 Sahel forces, but also the forces in Mali as well, to control the spread of ISIS in this region. As we've said many, many times, this is a global fight to defeat ISIS, both on the battlefield but also ideologically, and that fight goes on here very actively in Africa, with our important partner Chad contributing significantly to that effort.

FOREIGN MINISTER CHERIF: (In French.)

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[i] Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

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