

of Congress, have signed letters to the President.

Rather than prejudge what can be achieved by this trip or try to tie the President's hands concerning the Middle East, I want to simply make a few straightforward points.

First, no one who knows the Middle East can honestly expect momentous accomplishments from a short visit like this, especially when the new Israeli Government is still in the process of forming. But despite that, it is very positive that the President is traveling to the region, and this is as good a time as any.

Second, the peace process, as we have come to refer to it, between Israelis and Palestinians has been stalled for a dozen years. In many ways the prospects for an end to the conflict are worse today than in the mid-1990s, and there is plenty of blame to go around. Just traveling to Israel and the West Bank reaffirms this administration's interest in helping the parties find ways to make progress on the key issues. Ultimately, however, it is up to them, not the United States, to resolve their differences.

Third, it reaffirms President Obama's longstanding support for Israel. While during the Presidential campaign there were shameful attempts to portray the President as somehow not committed enough or supportive enough of Israel, that was pure politics. The record is abundantly clear that he has been, is—and, there is every reason to believe, will continue to be—a strong supporter of Israel. Top Israeli officials have acknowledged this.

That is not to say that we and the Israeli Government are going to agree on every issue. Israel and the United States share fundamental interests, but we are different countries and sometimes our interests diverge. That is to be expected.

Fourth, the President's visit is an opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians to recognize that the status quo is unsustainable. Maintaining this untenable limbo is neither in their interests nor in the interests of our great Nation. Unilateral actions by either side are harmful to the peace process. Rhetoric that dehumanizes or demonizes the other is harmful. Settlement construction in disputed territory is harmful. Incitement to violence is harmful. Both sides need to demonstrate that they want lasting peace through negotiations.

The President will also visit Jordan, which is facing increasing pressure from the flood of Syrian refugees, an issue that concerns us all. The fiscal year 2013 continuing resolution that is expected to pass the Senate this week includes additional assistance for Jordan and for Syria's other neighbors to help address these needs.

And, of course, there are growing concerns about Iran's nuclear program. I believe the President has wisely proceeded with caution in the way his administration has responded to this

grave threat. While some have urged the President to adopt a purely military policy toward Iran, the advice of our top military leaders is restraint. We should exhaust other means at our disposal to try to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions and to avoid another war in that part of the world.

Mr. President, I commend President Obama for traveling to the Middle East. Real peace with enduring security between Israelis and Palestinians has long been and remains a key goal of the United States. It is one toward which the Congress and the administration should work together.

FREE SPEECH IN THE AMERICAS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, there is much at the Organization of American States that needs to be reformed, but the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, is not among them. Yet that is what the Government of Ecuador and some other Latin American governments purport to be calling for when the OAS general assembly meets this coming Friday.

In reality, it is not about reform at all but a concerted effort to severely weaken the IACHR, the one institution in the Americas that has been a consistent, strong defender of free expression and other fundamental human rights that have been too often denied by those same governments.

I have spoken previously about the courageous work of Colombian lawyer Dr. Catalina Botero, the special rapporteur for freedom of expression. I have also spoken about the efforts by Ecuador's President Rafael Correa to intimidate and control what remains of an independent press in his country. So I will not repeat myself here.

But the United States is the largest contributor to the OAS, and we have provided additional funds in recent years to support the critically important work of the IACHR. I want to be sure Senators are aware of what is happening, as it could have serious consequences for our future support for the OAS. I ask unanimous consent that an article in the Washington Post by Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, former President of Colombia and Secretary General of the OAS, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Washington Post, Mar. 19, 2013]

MUZZLING A FREE-SPEECH CHAMPION

(By César Gaviria Trujillo)

César Gaviria Trujillo is a former president of Colombia and past secretary general of the Organization of American States.

A historic showdown set to occur at Friday's meeting of the general assembly of the Organization of American States could determine the future of human rights protections throughout the Western Hemisphere.

A group of nations led by Ecuador is pushing to "reform" the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its office on free-

dom of expression. The purported aim of these changes is to "strengthen" human rights protections. If implemented, however, the reforms will severely weaken the commission and make it easier for governments to ignore basic rights and limit free speech.

When I served as president of Colombia from 1990 to 1994, I saw how difficult it could be for national institutions to evolve and change without external pressure. As secretary general of the OAS between 1994 and 2004, I saw firsthand how effective the Inter-American Commission could be in providing this pressure when nations needed help to move forward on human rights.

The commission has played a crucial role, particularly in defending the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. It has pressed for transparency and fair elections, and, equally important, it has intervened when governments sought to undermine judicial independence or free speech. A genuine democracy requires checks and balances as well as freedom of the press.

The changes being promoted would drastically curtail the autonomy that has been critical to the Inter-American Commission's success. One proposal would prevent the commission from obtaining funds from outside the region, effectively putting a financial stranglehold on the panel. As of this year, about a third of the commission's budget comes from Europe.

This measure would have a devastating impact, especially on the commission's Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression, which for many years has led the fight for press freedoms throughout the region and has served as a constant thorn in the side of governments that do not believe in free speech. The office stands to lose virtually all of its budget, making it easier for governments to prosecute their critics, impose censorship and close independent media outlets.

Another reform under consideration would prevent states that have not ratified the American Convention on Human Rights from nominating members to the commission. This measure appears to be designed to limit the involvement of the United States and Canada, neither of which has ratified the convention though they are nonetheless subject to its monitoring and, most important, are major sources of financial and political support for its work.

Our region has made important progress on human rights since the dark days of the Cold War. Nearly all of this hemisphere's dictatorships have been replaced by democracies. Yet these democracies have at times trampled on free speech and other fundamental rights. The Inter-American human rights system is the best mechanism we have for ensuring that governments in the Americas do a better job of protecting these rights and freedoms.

So far, only a handful of countries have joined Ecuador in this determined effort to weaken our regional human rights system. Those governments that are truly committed to human rights and democracy must stand up for the commission this week and put an end to this ill-conceived campaign.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, during the past 50 years there has been significant progress in improving living standards in developing countries. Some of the successes have been particularly noteworthy: eradicating smallpox and almost eradicating polio, stabilizing population growth rates in many areas, longer life spans, lower infant mortality, fewer people living in poverty, the expansion of democracy.

Investments in international development made by government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropic foundations in the United States and around the world have made a difference. Our country is more secure and our economy more resilient than it would otherwise be, thanks to these investments.

Yet there is plenty of room for improvement to get better value for our overseas investments, particularly to increase the sustainability of the assistance we provide. Too often we set unrealistic goals, do not hold governments accountable for corruption, ignore local input, and channel our aid through contractors that charge high fees and put profit over results.

There are other critical areas that have not received nearly the attention they deserve, either by our government or other donors, including the explosive growth of cities and the world's changing climate.

The President mentioned the looming threat of climate change in his inauguration speech, and like many others I am glad he did. To date, our efforts to address this global challenge have been painfully slow and woefully inadequate. As anyone who works the land will tell you, the world's climate is changing fast—spring is coming earlier, polar ice and glaciers are melting, and storms are more violent. Scientists say these changes are potentially catastrophic, and that we will experience even more frequent severe weather events, shrinking water supplies, more intense heat waves and droughts, the spread of disease, and more and more threats to food production.

It is the poorest people who are most vulnerable to these phenomena, and who are most likely to be uprooted from their homes as a result. If the international community does not mobilize quickly to address this challenge we risk the reversal of many or most of the international development gains of the last 50 years, leaving an unprecedented crisis for our children and future generations.

Then there is the related challenge of urbanization. I am proud to say that a Vermont organization called the Institute for Sustainable Communities, founded by former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin, is leading an effort to accelerate climate solutions among more than 320 U.S. cities—and the list is growing. The institute is focusing on cities because it is in densely populated areas that the opportunity to quickly strengthen climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions is greatest. This work should be expanded on a global scale.

Currently, only a very small percentage of international development dollars is spent to address problems in urban areas, yet 70 percent of the world's population will live in cities by 2030. The number of people migrating to New Delhi, Mumbai, Dhaka, Lagos, Kinshasa, and Karachi each year is greater than the entire population of

Europe. Between now and 2030—only 17 years—the world will need to build a city of 1 million people every 5 days to keep up with the urbanization of the developing world. That is a staggering and frightening statistic.

Those cities are not remotely prepared to handle this flood of desperate people. These are not places like Boston or London, Washington or Paris that expanded gradually over centuries becoming stronger as they grew. Cities in developing countries expand through shantytowns, like the vast slums of Nairobi and Lagos. And bit by bit, the edges of the city creep out and suddenly the city's size has doubled, or quadrupled. Closer to home, Tijuana, on the United States Mexican border, is one of Mexico's fastest growing cities. Tijuana adds about 80,000 people each year, and is projected to be the second largest city in Mexico by 2030. Many of its inhabitants arrive with no place to live and no job. The city's infrastructure is utterly unprepared to handle them. It is a recipe for crime and misery.

Slums are not infrastructure, and in general most infrastructure decisions are not well planned. Most of the developing world does not have running water or reliable electricity, and nearly 40 percent of the world's population does not have access to basic sanitation, including 1 billion children. That number is likely to rise as rapidly expanding cities become even less able to meet the demand for basic sanitation and health care.

This immense growth in cities is a cauldron for chaos and instability. People living in cities without safe water or electricity, plagued by hunger, disease and unhealthy living conditions, threatened by rising sea levels and violent storms—these desperate conditions are likely to lead to violence, displacement, and even the toppling of governments.

Rapid urbanization is already putting tremendous pressure on the environment and threatens productive farmland. What will happen when there is not enough food or water for cities filled with millions of people? What will happen if the population of Jakarta doubles without an improvement in living conditions?

Yet as cities grow we also have an opportunity to prevent chaos. Growing cities are going to be constructing new buildings—let's make sure they are energy efficient. They are going to be creating new transport systems—let's focus on low-carbon strategies that move people, not just cars. They are going to need to feed hundreds of millions of hungry people—let's make sure urban centers are connected to the rural economy in a sustainable way. And as they build new infrastructure, let's make sure that it is designed to support livable communities and built in ways that are more resilient to extreme weather and sea level rise.

Investing in cities gives us economies of scale. We can accomplish a great

deal through investing in efficient infrastructure, and we can apply lessons learned all across the developing world. An estimated 60 percent of the infrastructure needed to keep pace with the growth in urban centers has not been built yet, but it will be by 2030.

Let's focus on helping cities build smarter. It is a lot easier and cheaper to build it right the first time, than to go back and fix it later. And here in the United States there are companies that produce some of the world's best technology and some of the world's best thinking about creating smart cities. Together with our international partners we can meet this challenge if we share our expertise.

International donors, led by the U.S. Agency for International Development, should devote a larger portion of resources and effort to addressing the urgent problems of climate change and rapid urbanization. It is a critical investment for the 21st century.

VERMONTERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have been privileged to serve Vermonters for many years as a voice on foreign policy matters, and I am always reminded that my work is a reflection of the outward looking posture of the people of my State. Vermonters have a long history of defending human rights and social justice at home and abroad. The longest functioning international exchange program is based in Vermont, and there are over 3,600 nonprofits registered in Vermont that are carrying out programs to protect the environment, support public health, and many other activities here and abroad.

These small businesses help bring Vermont values to such far off places as Vietnam, central Africa, the Middle East, and Central America. One example of the far-reaching contributions Vermont small businesses make every day is the BOMA Project. Based in Manchester, VT, Kathleen Colson started the BOMA Project in the mid-2000s as a way to help women in Kenya escape extreme poverty. Kathleen's company replaces loans with grants and creates opportunities for these women to start small, sustainable income-generating businesses. To date, her company has launched over 1,100 micro-enterprises across northern Kenya.

Other examples of Vermont organizations doing innovative work to improve the lives of people overseas are the Institute for Sustainable Communities, Pure Water for the World, Clear Path International, the ARAVA Institute for Environmental Studies, and World Learning. And there are many others.

A February 10, 2013, article by the Associated Press quoted Peace Corps recruiter Brian Melman as he spoke about the people who work with these Vermont organizations: "These are people who are willing to think big with small resources. They will go out