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INTERVIEW

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
With Fouad Arif of Al-Aoula Television

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Marakech, Morocco

QUESTION: First of all, on behalf of the Moroccan viewers, Madame Secretary of State, I would like to thank you very much, despite a busy week and a very heavy schedule. My first question is during the past 10 years, His Majesty the King Mohammed VI has initiated reforms across the board – social, economic, human rights, and more specifically, women’s rights.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes.

QUESTION: I would like to have your take on these changes that have been taking place in Morocco.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first let me say I am delighted to speak with you. I always enjoy my visits to Morocco. I was here 10 years ago and I have very fond memories of that trip and a prior trip. So for me, this is a special privilege. And I wanted to express my appreciation, as I did when I met with His Majesty King Mohammed VI, for the changes that he is instituting and that under his leadership the Government of Morocco is following through on.

I think the changes are important. I particularly applaud the new freedoms for women. It has enhanced the cooperation and the participation that women have been able to show. I know in recent local elections more than 3,000 women were elected. I think it will make Morocco a stronger country. The more you involve the citizens, the more you empower citizens to make responsible decisions, the stronger Morocco will be.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, as you know, Morocco and the United States are two countries tied by a free trade agreement, which is, by the way, the only one with an African country. But how can the two countries combine their efforts so that there – it has more economic ties?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, of course, we’re very proud that our relationship with Morocco goes back more than 220 years, our longest relationship in the world that is unbroken by any kind of difficulty. And the recent free trade agreement, which I was privileged to vote for when I was a senator from New York, is a modern example of this very deep and broad relationship.

I think that the significance of it is, as you say, the first free trade agreement with any country in Africa on a bilateral basis, a recognition that Morocco's economy is growing and the United States wants to invest, and a platform for further work that we must do together.

QUESTION: Yesterday, Madame Secretary, you reaffirmed that there is no change in the Obama Administration's position as far as the Moroccan autonomy plan in the Sahara is concerned. Would you like please to elaborate some more?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, this is a plan, as you know, that originated in the Clinton Administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush Administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama Administration. Now, we are supporting the United Nations process because we think that if there can be a peaceful resolution to the difficulties that exist with your neighbors, both to the east and to the south and the west, that is in everyone's interest.

But because of our long relationship, we are very aware of how challenging the circumstances are. And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same.

QUESTION: President Obama has more than once called for a renewed and a new beginning with the Islamic world. How can Morocco, with its longstanding tradition of coexistence and tolerance, help in this regard? And how do you envision the relations of Morocco and the United States in light of the Cairo speech?

SECRETARY CLINTON: That's an excellent question because I think that Morocco is especially well positioned to take a leadership role in fulfilling the call for greater cooperation and understanding that President Obama set forth in his Cairo speech. In fact, the President has reached out to His Majesty King Mohammed VI to ask that the King lead one of the interfaith dialogue working groups because of the history of toleration and interfaith cooperation that exists in Morocco. We are looking to Morocco as a model in many areas, and we think in this area of greater understanding between the United States and the Muslim world, Morocco can help lead the way.

QUESTION: How can both countries again combine efforts to advance the peace process towards a two-state solution?

SECRETARY CLINTON: I think by continuing the very helpful support for the process, recognizing how difficult it is for the parties to do this solely on their own, that they need other countries and leaders like His Majesty to be very much pushing and prodding the process along, and I think refraining from inflammatory comments that sometimes come from others in the region, which unfortunately just get everyone agitated and stall the process.

This is very difficult work. It's an intensely time-consuming effort. The President has evidenced great sincerity and commitment, but we know that you have to build on that by the painstaking outreach to both. And we would welcome and seek the active support of others.

QUESTION: We are going to move a little bit away from the Near East. I would like to ask

you a question about the Maghreb region and its neighborhood. This region is facing several challenges, not least of which the economic ones which are made now more problematic because of the borders – Moroccan-Algerian borders are closed for the time being, and also because of the al-Qaida in the Maghreb, which is causing lots of problems. What is your take on this situation, and how can we move to the more positive path?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we are grateful for our close cooperation with Morocco and with other countries in the Maghreb on counterterrorism, on law enforcement, on mutual cooperation against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups, against drug traffickers and human traffickers. So we are committed to working with you and other nations to help you defend yourself and to create a more positive atmosphere.

But we also hope that there can be greater regional understanding and cooperation across borders, opening up borders, economic cooperation which would benefit – if you look across North Africa through the Maghreb, there is such an opportunity to build a region of economic success. And that requires political discussion and consultation, so we would encourage our friends, certainly Morocco and others, to see how possible that might be and not to be discouraged by the difficulty at starting such a political consultation.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I would like to thank you very much on behalf of the Moroccan viewers again. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. Great to be back here. Thank you.

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