Katherine Hu

President Barack Obama visited Vietnam and gave a speech that was aired on Vietnamese television. In his speech, he encouraged human rights and expressed hopes for strong relations between the US and Vietnam. He also recognized the tensions in the South China Sea and offered US support to helping Vietnam preserve its security. Obama encouraged the peaceful resolution of the South China Sea conflicts and said that all nations are sovereign, so large nations should not bully smaller ones and small nations deserve respect for their territory. He claimed that the US would try to uphold freedom of navigation in the area. Obama also discussed the progress the US and Vietnam have made since the Vietnam War, and announced hopes for peaceful relations between the two countries. Obama received a warm reception in Vietnam and met with six leaders of Vietnamese civil society. Audience members were highly supportive of his encouragement of human rights. The audience expressed favorable opinions toward his ideas and the future of US-Vietnam relations. This speech came just after the ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam was lifted by the US, and was notable also because the speech was aired on state-run TV when it criticized Vietnam’s human rights record, which is rare. In response, China’s Foreign Ministry expressed skepticism at the US support of freedom of navigation.

This article clearly shows the tensions still lingering in the South China Sea and that the US must be careful in what it does, as its actions can still cause major discussion. Now that the US is giving support to Vietnam and its security, things will likely become tenser. Since Vietnam can now buy weapons from the US, this increases the likelihood of bloodshed over the disputed territories as Vietnam arms itself. The Chinese response also suggests that China is displeased with the idea of US involvement. Though China is not mentioned by name, some of the comments seem to refer to China indirectly, and this may not help with relations between the US and China. Despite the US’s peaceful intentions, as an area important to trade and oil, the South China Sea is unlikely to stay peaceful for long. Other recent articles have pointed out debate between the US and China over this region and whether or not the US should have freedom of navigation there. A US warship and a US plane were both in the area this month, and both caused quite the discussion. Though the US does not claim any territory in the area, the presence of its ships and planes in this area and its alliances with claimants will likely cause further tensions. Hopefully, these tensions will not escalate and Obama’s hope for a peaceful resolution will be fulfilled. However, the article also mentions Vietnamese claims of Chinese abuse in this area, so peace is unlikely to come any time soon. While relations between the US and Vietnam seem to be improving, there is still quite a lot of tension between Vietnam and China and the US and China, which will likely cause more trouble in this area.

**Obama raises human rights in Vietnam, calls for 'peaceful resolution' of South China Sea disputes**

By James Griffiths, Pamela Boykoff and Rebecca Wright, CNN

Updated 7:41 PM ET, Tue May 24, 2016

**Story highlights**

Obama said big nations shouldn't bully smaller ones

The president's remarks on human rights were aired on Vietnamese TV

President Barack Obama made a forceful case for human rights in Vietnam Tuesday during a speech in Hanoi and he called for the "peaceful resolution" of disputes in the South China Sea.

Obama stressed the need to uphold human rights in his remarks to the Vietnamese people and were broadcast on television in a nation that has a dismal record on the issue.

Human rights "is not a threat to stability" but reinforces it, Obama said.

Freedom of speech and expression "fuels" the economy, the President continued. "That is how some of our greatest companies began."

Highlighting freedom of the press, assembly, and religion, Obama said that while the U.S. is not trying to "impose the American form of government on Vietnam," the country should be more open to scrutiny in order to grow "stronger and more prosperous."

The White House said the President's speech was broadcast on Vietnamese television. It is almost unheard of for criticism of the country's human rights' record to be aired on state-run TV.

Before addressing the Vietnamese people on human rights, Obama met with six leaders from Vietnamese civil society. The President noted that several activists had been prevented from attending the meeting.

"We are not going to be able to release any names of folks that could not attend, but as the President said, a small number of invitees faced obstacles in attending the meeting," White House spokesman Eric Schultz said.

"The unprecedented nature of a meeting between a head of state and independent civil society in Hanoi demonstrates that we will continue to raise issues related to human rights with Vietnam even as our relationship progresses and we have continued differences, and the President expressed to both the government and civil society that he believes our deepening engagement will allow us to more productively support progress on legal reforms and respect for universal values going forward," he added.

Audience members said Obama raised "important" issues in his speech, and praised his support for human rights.

"We feel really motivated to later express ourselves freely," Ngoc Dao, 23, told CNN.

Obama also discussed recent problems in the South China Sea.

"In the South China Sea, the U.S. is not a claimant in current disputes, but we will stand with our partners in upholding key principles like freedom of navigation," Obama said.

His remarks came the day after the U.S. lifted a decades-long ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam.

"Vietnam will have greater access to the equipment you need to improve your security," Obama said. "Nations are sovereign and no matter how large or small a nation may be, its territory should be respected."

Though he did not mention the country by name, China has been making aggressive moves in the South China Sea, where it has multiple territorial claims.

"Big nations should not bully smaller ones," Obama said. "Disputes should be resolved peacefully."

China's Foreign Ministry responded Tuesday to Obama's comments, with spokeswoman Hua Chunyin saying: "The freedom of navigation they are talking about, is it true freedom of navigation enjoyed by every nation under international law, or it is a privileged freedom of navigation for American naval vessels and military aircraft?

"If the former, of course we welcome it with open arms, we protect it and resolutely support it," she added. "But if it is the latter, I think the international community would not agree."

Vietnamese fishermen told CNN this month that they are repeatedly boarded by Chinese-flagged vessels and their equipment stolen and crew beaten.

A day after lifting the ban on the sales of lethal weapons to Vietnam, Obama also addressed the progress the U.S. and Vietnam have made since the Vietnam War.

"War, no matter what our intentions may be, brings suffering and tragedy," he said.

The President remarked on the loss of life on both sides, saying that family and friends in the U.S. "still ache" for the loss of the more than 58,000 Americans who were killed during the war.

Obama said that his daughters, like the predominantly young Vietnamese generation, have lived their lives knowing only "peace and normalized relations between Vietnam and the U.S."

The President also stressed the post-war progress has led to improved relations between the U.S. and Vietnam, saying, "As Vietnam has transformed so has the relationship between our two countries."

Obama credited Vietnam War veterans, including Sen. John McCain, for making that progress possible.

McCain and fellow vets, Secretary of State John Kerry and former Sen. Bob Kerrey, published an oped in The New York Times Tuesday headlined, "Moving on in Vietnam but remembering its lessons."

With President Obama's visit this week with crowds that we saw along the street today, the remarkably warm and generous welcome, the unbelievable excitement of people that we are here with a President of the United States at this moment is absolutely palpable and I think it is a demarcation point," Kerry told reporters Tuesday in Hanoi.

"I think that clearly we will never fail to honor the sacrifice of those who fought here and what their dreams were for this country, but I think one can say genuinely, definitively without a failing to honor past service, that we have reached a very new point in our relationship now," he added.

Obama also used his speech to promote the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a U.S.-led trade deal that has attracted considerable criticism in recent months, with both Democratic presidential candidates and presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump distancing themselves from the agreement.

"I strongly support TPP," Obama said, adding that it had "important strategic benefits."

"We have to get it done for the sake of our economic prosperity," he said.

Audience member Tung Dong, 21, said, "(Vietnam) should cooperate with the Americans more."

"For thousands of years we have been under the influence of China," he said. "We might as well have some Western influence now, more Western influence now."

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24 MAY 2016

Human Rights Watch (Washington, DC)

**Central African Republic: No More Excuses - the Need for an Inclusive Humanitarian Response**

OPINION

By Peter Bouckaert

Participants in next week's [5/23-24] World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, with its lofty call to "leave no one behind," should consider the story of Hamamatou from the Central African Republic.

When anti-balaka rebels attacked Hamamatou's village of Guen in early 2014, the 13-year-old had no way to run. A bout with polio had left her with a serious disability. Her brother tried to carry her to safety on his back, but soon was too exhausted to continue. "I told him, 'Souleymane, put me down and save yourself'," she told me. "He said he would come back for me if they didn't kill him."

Souleymane never returned, and Hamamatou spent two weeks abandoned by the river. Then the anti-balaka fighters found her. Seeing she could not walk without assistance, the fighters decided to kill her. "They said, 'We have found an animal, let's finish it off'," Hamamatou recalled. A female fighter intervened to save her life.

War is difficult for everyone, but one of the often untold stories of many conflicts is the profound isolation, abandonment, and neglect faced by people with disabilities in conflicts around the world.

Throughout our work on the Central African Republic, Human Rights Watch has repeatedly met people with disabilities who had been left behind when their communities were attacked. We learned of many cases in which the Seleka and anti-balaka rebels showed no mercy to those abandoned, killing them on the spot. At times, the killers showed extreme cruelty toward people with disabilities: one young pregnant woman with a disability was tied up and thrown alive on a fire by the Seleka fighters, and suffered a horrible death.

But the abandonment and neglect we found wasn't only in the heat of battles, when people focused on saving themselves. Even in camps set up for displaced persons, the basic needs of people with disabilities often go ignored. The camps often have no toilets and sanitary facilities accessible to people with disabilities. Open sewage drains and open fires pose a constant danger to people who are blind or have low vision. Food distribution neglects the needs of people with disabilities, so they often get less -- or nothing at all.

For many people with disabilities, the profound feelings of isolation and neglect they experience in camps are often more upsetting than the abandonment they faced during the fighting. Hamamatou, the young polio survivor, told me that she had never felt as lonely in her life as she did when she finally reached a camp, even though she had never lived so close to hundreds of people. No one ever brought her food, or even a bucket of water to wash herself. Aimé, a blind musician living in the Mpoko camp in the capital, Bangui, told me, "Sometimes I get so angry and discouraged by the difficulties of living here that I just stay inside for the whole day."

Much of this suffering takes place not because the humanitarian community lacks the resources to meet the needs of people with disabilities, but because the humanitarian community remains mostly unaware or insensitive to the plight of people with disabilities in conflict. As one senior UN official admitted to Human Rights Watch: "We don't pay enough attention to the issue of disability. We should be doing more. There is no place for discrimination in humanitarian action."

A first step toward addressing the needs of people with disabilities would be to include them in the humanitarian response: no one knows the needs of people with disabilities better, and they know how those needs can be met. Many of these needs can be satisfied with simple modifications and a more inclusive planning process.

At the World Humanitarian Summit, governments have taken a key step by endorsing the new Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. The charter commits governments to ensure that their humanitarian response plans and programs reflect the various needs and capacities of women, girls, men and boys with disabilities by the end of 2020.

One final, perhaps most important, lesson we learned from people with disabilities during our work in the Central African Republic is that they are often an amazing source of strength and resilience during times of conflict. Perhaps the only community that stayed truly united during the bloody sectarian conflict in the Central African Republic was people with disabilities. They never broke down along sectarian lines, and continued to look after each other with courage and care. In Mpoko camp, people with disabilities organized one of the most popular bands in town, with inspiring songs about ending war and reconciling the nation. That strength and resilience is something from which we all can learn.