

Press Releases: Remarks to the Staff and Families of U.S. Embassy Malaysia

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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AMBASSADOR LAKHDIR: (In progress) – all of you for coming and thank you for welcoming our Secretary. We've had a very productive visit and I've described for him how all of you are the goldmine of this embassy, our crack team, and how we're so happy that he would come and visit us, and I thank him very much.

So I would like to introduce Secretary Tillerson, and please welcome him. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you so much, Ambassador Lakhdhir, and thank you particularly for the leadership here with the embassy and the mission here in Malaysia, and we've had a good conversation, first time for us to have a chance to sit face-to-face and talk. And I think she's already won me over because the most important priority to her is you, your safety, your security, your well-being, and that's also my priority as well. So you've got a great leader here that cares a lot about you and that's – I think that's really important.

I also know that anytime the Secretary kind of drops in on somewhat short notice – this was not planned well, well in advance, but while I was in the region for the ASEAN and East Asian Summit meetings in Manila, I wanted to at least drop in on a couple of our missions here in the neighborhood, so I was up in Bangkok yesterday and down here last night and today, and really valuable trips for me. I had good meetings with the prime minister last night, the deputy prime minister this morning, and a lot of time with the foreign minister over in Manila working together on the outcome of that summit, which I think was actually quite positive and quite good in terms of what came out of that summit, so great relationships here in Malaysia in no small measure due to your efforts and the relationships that you have for us.

So our two countries really have a lot in common. It's a really important relationship to the U.S. both from the standpoint of regional security

issues, strong mil-to-mil relationships, but obviously very important and significant economic relationships – a lot of U.S. direct investment in this country, a long history of U.S. direct investment in this country, and a large U.S. American population that makes their home here. And you know all of them and where they are and what they do because you have to help take care of them and their needs while they're here in Malaysia as well.

But also, we're working hard to attract more Malaysian investment back home in the U.S., and I know many of you worked in that area in that regard as well to promote opportunities for Malaysian investors and Malaysian business back in the U.S., and we want to continue to expand and grow that as well.

Now it's our view and I think broadly understood and shared that the more economic relationships we have, there's more interdependencies between the two countries, and there's a greater opportunity from a people-to-people standpoint to know one another better also, so really important and appreciate your efforts in that regard. I know the office here has – also represents – there are a number of agencies that carry out their activities through this office, and so your support of their efforts interagency-wise, but also working collectively and collaboratively with them is very important to our success here.

And the most important thing, obviously, that you do for us is present the American face to the Malaysian people. You are America when you're here. And so it's how you conduct yourself, the integrity with which you conduct yourself, the way in which you represent America is just extraordinarily important to our relationship here. But none of that happens without our locally employed staff and the important way in which you help us be successful here. You're extremely valuable to our success as a mission and we do really appreciate the work you do on our behalf. The support you give our activities here is important to our ability to meet our mission as the State Department here in Malaysia.

I want to say just a quick word about the Department and the redesign that you're hearing a little bit about. First, for those of you who participated in the listening survey back in May, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to do that. We had over 35,000 of our colleagues in the State Department responding to that listening survey. We also have had sit-down, lengthy, face-to-face interviews with over 300 people in the Department, all of this to give us some sense of where some of the opportunities for us to improve things within the Department might be. No one knows better what gets in the way of you being effective than you, and that was really what we're wanting to have some understanding of with that listening tour that we did.

We've taken that information now and we've set up a number of work teams. Now this whole effort is led by the employees of the State Department, your colleagues. We have a steering team that helps guide them that's chaired by Deputy Secretary Sullivan. But we really are wanting this to be an employee-led redesign effort, and it's all about looking at how we get our work done. What do you see that would allow you – if we could do this for you, what would make things better for you? How do we make it easier for you to deliver on the mission? And a lot of that's – sometimes we know we have things that

are statutorily required that sometimes make our lives challenging, some of it is local rules that we obviously have to comply with.

But we know a lot of things are internal to the Department, things we put into place that – maybe that got put into place a long time ago in a different era and made a lot of sense then, but things have changed now. So we're really wanting to take a completely – a complete and fulsome re-examination of how the work gets done, let you tell us how to redesign that work to address some of the obstacles. And even if they're statutorily – as I was telling the Ambassador, I have already had conversations with people on the Hill in the appropriations committees where a lot of these things get written, and they've said to me, "Look, if we're doing something requiring something that's standing in the way of the State Department being able to carry out its mission, we're willing to sit down and talk about those and make changes." And I'm willing to go up there and fight to make those changes on your behalf if you feel that's really important to our ability to deliver on the mission they're wanting us to deliver on – do it more effectively, more efficiently.

So the answers are going to come from all of this work. This is a little bit more of a roll your sleeves up and have to work a little harder at it, at this stage in particular. I know it creates a lot of uncertainty for people, and having done this two or three times now over my lifetime, I do appreciate what is going through a lot of people's minds in terms of what does this mean for me, what does it mean for my career, what is it going to do to the way I conduct my affairs. That's why we wanted to be informed, we wanted to be led by your colleagues. So at the end of it, our objective is that your ability to carry out your work and deliver on your part of our mission is easier for you, it means you can do more, because I know everyone is very dedicated to delivering on the mission. That's the one thing that clearly came out of the listening exercise.

And then how can we give you a more rewarding career? You are the career people. This is what you've chosen to do with your lives. I'm kind of passing through. I had my opportunity to do something for a short period of time. But one of the things I hope I do in the short period of time I have is leave you a State Department that gives you the ability to do what you do more effectively, more efficiently, and with a lot more satisfaction. And then your vision of where you'd like to see your career go in the future is enabled in a way that you can achieve your own expectations and your own aspirations as well.

So it's easy to say, when you just kind of roll it off the tongue that way, hard to do. But we're prepared to undertake the hard work to do that and to support the hard work that your colleagues are doing back at the State Department in Washington. And we really welcome and want people to bring your questions forward, your concerns forward. We will address those. At every step along the way, we're going to try to do as much communication as this thing is progressing as possible so that you have some understanding of where it's going.

I'm kind of with you. I don't know where it's going. We'll see it together

and then we'll make some decisions about what we think is actually achievable, what we think we do need to go to the Congress to get some help on, and we'll work this thing together. I'm willing to take the time it takes up front to allow us to get to that answer.

And so that's really what we're about, and I hope to the extent that there are questions – and I know there are a lot of rumors that circulate around out there and there – it's always interesting to me when I hear things and I say, "Holy cow, where did that come from?" And if it causes concern, we hope people will get it elevated so we can answer that question for you.

So the most important thing for me to leave you with, though, is again, what I learned out of that listening exercise is what a dedicated, patriotic organization I have the extreme honor to lead. And it is really an honor for me to be in this position leading you, because your commitment, your dedication to what you're doing came through loud and clear. And that is the most important thing to me is that we have an organization that is committed to doing the right thing, so we want to help you do that during my time that I'm here.

So, thank you. Thank you for being here. Thanks to the local employed staff, really important to us. For those of you that are here for your tour through Malaysia with your families, thank you for being willing to do this. We understand what it means for families to be away from home and to be away from your extended families back in the United States. We know it means missing some things. And at the same time, hopefully you're building some wonderful memories with your families, those of you that are here. You're making memories that'll stay with you a lifetime, and most importantly, you're doing something that you can be very proud of during the time you're here in the mission in Malaysia.

So it's great to see all of you. I wish I could stay longer. I have had many visits to Malaysia over my career, some of you probably know. So I do know Malaysia quite well and I have a great affection for the Malay people. And I'll be back. I'll be back for a longer visit. But again, thank all of you for what you do for us. (Applause.)

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