

Press Releases: State of Emergency in the Maldives

Press Statement
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Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 5, 2018

The United States is troubled and disappointed by reports that Maldivian President Yameen has declared a State of Emergency, which gives sweeping powers to security forces to arrest and detain suspects, bans public gatherings, imposes travel restrictions, and suspends parts of the Maldivian Constitution. The President, army, and police have also failed to obey a lawful Supreme Court ruling, contrary to the Constitution and rule of law.

Despite being elected in 2013 with the support of a broad coalition, President Yameen has systematically alienated his coalition, jailed or exiled every major opposition political figure, deprived elected Members of Parliament of their right to represent their voters in the legislature, revised laws to erode human rights, especially freedom of expression, and weakened the institutions of government by firing any officials who refuse orders that run contrary to Maldivian law and its Constitution.

The United States calls on President Yameen, the army, and police to comply with the rule of law, implement the Supreme Court's ruling and the rulings of the Criminal Court, ensure the full and proper functioning of the Parliament, and restore constitutionally guaranteed rights of the people and institutions of the Maldives.

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Press Releases: Press Availability With Peruvian Foreign Minister Lucia Cayetana Aljovin Gazzani

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Lima, Peru

February 5, 2018

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Good afternoon (inaudible) declaration of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru Cayetana Aljovin.

FOREIGN MINISTER ALJOVIN: (Via interpreter) Welcome, press. Thank you for being here with us today. I just wanted to welcome Secretary of State of the United States Rex Tillerson for coming here in such an important event. We have talked about the excellent relationship between Peru and the U.S. We

have agreed that we will continue cooperation to solidify them, especially in investments.

And we have also addressed the Summit of the Americas and we agreed how important it is (inaudible) selected by Peru, which is: Democratic Governance Against Corruption. We agree that the results of this summit should be to address and get to concrete results and not just declaration.

We talked about the – Peru being party of the Security Council of the UN, and he said that Peru will look for consensus within the council. We also talked about the aspirations of Peru to be to the OECD, and we thank Mr. Tillerson for his continued support as well as the U.S. support to our national aspiration.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) declaration of the Secretary of the U.S.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well first, thank you, Minister Aljovin, for welcoming me to Peru. It is indeed a pleasure to be back in Peru. It's only been 48 years since I was last here. (Laughter.) But interestingly, I came here as an 18-year-old college student on a relief mission in 1971, actually January the 2nd, after a terrible earthquake in Peru. I came down with my university band to bring awareness to the situation.

And that was also a very special year for Peru. 1970 was the year the Peruvian football team made it to the quarterfinals of the FIFA World Cup in Mexico City, and a composer had written a tune, *Peru Campeon*, to celebrate the 1970's football team. And in a plaza just about three blocks over here, when I was 18 years old I was standing in that plaza with my university band at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and we struck up *Peru Campeon*, and people poured out of the buildings and into the street to celebrate the national soccer club, the football team.

And you know what I realized is how easy it is to bind people together around something. And what that tells me is Peruvians know how to bind together, and we look forward to the future with Peru as well. But I have very fond memories of that first trip to Peru, and it was nice to drive by that plaza today and it brought those memories back.

The United States and Peru have a very longstanding relationship. It's really built on the shared values of democracies, prosperity for our people. And with – just within the last few days, we marked the 9th anniversary of the U.S.- Peru Trade Promotion Agreement, PTPA, which has really been a cornerstone of our bilateral relationship. This agreement really sets a high standard for both of our countries on market access, investment safeguards, intellectual property rights, environmental and labor rights. And because of that agreement, two-way trade continues to increase between our two countries, from \$9.1 billion in 2009 to \$14.3 billion in 2016. That's an almost 60 percent increase in trade as a result of that agreement.

We also have a very strong law enforcement and security relationship which is essential to our partnership in keeping our people safe and promoting stability. All of our nations suffer the results of transcriminal

organizations who are marketing narcotics, trafficking human beings, weapons, and we have a very good joint effort with Peru to counter these transnational criminal organizations.

Just last October, Peru posted a gathering of general prosecutors and attorneys from more than 20 countries to promote more effectiveness in criminal prosecutions of transnational organizations. This really is helping us create a network throughout the entire hemisphere of sharing information on these organizations so we can interdict, hold them accountable, and disrupt their activities.

We also want to welcome Peru to its growing international leadership role on a range of issues, and we discussed Peru just recently took up its seat for a two-year term on the UN Security Council. And we look forward to Peru's important voice on many, many issues that will be important coming before the Security Council, and we know we will have wonderful collaboration with Peru because of so many shared values.

Also, I want to acknowledge Peru's strong support for the international effort to send North Korea's leadership a message that they must give up their nuclear weapons. Peru has taken significant steps to – in sending diplomats home and other steps to ensure that the North Koreans understand Peru's stance on this, and they are an important part of the entire international effort on that regard.

I also want to acknowledge all of the very positive steps that have been taken by Peru and the progress that they have made in putting in place all the elements to meet the requirements for an invitation to accession to the OECD, and we think they are well-positioned. We look forward also to supporting Peru as you host a successful Summit of the Americas in April. This is a terrific opportunity, and I think Peru has chosen an important theme: Democratic Governance Against Corruption. It is certainly relevant and timely for all the nations participating.

Lastly, I do want to touch on an issue that both President Trump and President Kuczynski discussed when they were together last year, and that's the serious concerns we all share around the political situation in Venezuela. Our governments appreciate Peru's leadership of the Lima Group in an effort to bring some reconciliation between the Maduro regime – encouraging the regime to return to its constitution and allow the people of Venezuela's voice to be heard in the selection of their leaders. And we had a very good exchange on the issue of what else can we do together to ensure the people of Venezuela receive the right for their voice to be heard that they – that they deserve, and to relieve the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

Again, it's a real pleasure to be back in Peru. I promise I won't wait 48 years to come back again. But it's a delight to be here. Thank you.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Now we will have four questions from the press – two, those that come with Secretary Tillerson, and two locals. Thank you.

QUESTION: Gracias. I'm Tracy Wilkinson from the *Los Angeles Times*. Minister

Aljovin, President Trump has criticized your country and other countries in the region for failing to do enough to fight drugs. He said we send a lot of aid, millions of dollars, and you all are laughing at us and not doing enough. And he's even threatened to cut aid. What is your response to that? Did you talk to the Secretary about it?

And Secretary Tillerson, are you re-evaluating aid to Peru? And to the broader point, you kind of keep getting pushed off message. The Trump – President Trump made those comments literally as you were standing in the press conference in Mexico. Could you speak a little to the frustration of that, of being pushed off message? And what is the message? Is it your message of building closer relationships? You talked about the – how well Peru is doing in terms of law enforcement. Or is it President's Trump's message of punishing these countries? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER ALJOVIN: (Via interpreter) Well, we have talked with Secretary Tillerson regarding the fight against drug trafficking. We agreed that in the bilateral relationship this is an issue that is important in our agenda. The Secretary of State acknowledged the efforts made by Peru in the fight against drug trafficking, the increased budget that Peru passed to be able to fight this scourge, and we agreed that we have to continue working together in this fight. We also agreed that sometimes drug traffickers work with terrorists, joint forces to carry out these terrorist attacks. And we agreed in how important it is for both of us to work together so that this scourge is eradicated and is something that affects negatively our region.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, we did have an exchange, a discussion about our joint efforts on transcriminal organizations, not just here but in every stop I am making throughout the hemisphere, because this is really a hemisphere-wide challenge. And every country has its own challenges in responding to that, and there are victims of these transcriminal organizations in every country in the hemisphere. The U.S. is victimized certainly by the flow of narcotics to the U.S. But the countries in which these narcotics are transiting or where organizations are carrying out their activities to move these drugs, they also suffer as well from violence in their neighborhoods, violence in their cities and towns, and it has its own effect on their nations.

I think one of the things we've been very clear in the joint dialogue we've had with Mexico, for instance, is the U.S. has to acknowledge that we are the market, and we are the largest consumer of illicit drugs, and so we have to begin to work on that problem. And President Trump has recognized it and he has put an initiative forward on drug demand reduction, ready to put a billion dollars behind that effort to reduce the demand for drugs among the American people as well, because of the devastating impact it's having.

But this is an issue that touches every country in the region and it's why we're setting up so many joint efforts and we're beginning to connect these through networks like the hosting of the 20 countries that I mentioned at Peru. The more we can share, the more we can connect our activities, the more progress we can make to disrupt these organizations.

I don't get frustrated about anything, so I don't need to answer the question.

QUESTION: Thank you. Kylie Atwood with CBS News. Madam Foreign Minister, the U.S. is looking to counter China's economic influence in the region, and Chinese investments, they said, are threatening to the pillars of democracy here. Do you view Chinese investments as threatening to Peru? And how can you trust the U.S. given that they said that they would be a reliable partner for Peru in terms of trade, but the Trump administration has pulled out of the TPP and is also threatening to terminate NAFTA?

And Mr. Secretary, I've got a question for you: This week, the Vice President is headed to the Olympics in South Korea, and North Korea is also going to be there with a delegation. You have continually pressed that diplomacy is the way to solve the North Korea threat. And there has been a period of relative calm in terms of North Korea nuclear tests and missile launches. Is the time when you would consider U.S.-North Korea talks getting closer? And would the Trump administration accept an invitation for North Korean officials to meet in South Korea this coming week? Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Do you want me to go first?

QUESTION: Sure.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Okay. Well, with respect to the Vice President's trip to the Olympics and whether or not there would be an opportunity for any kind of a meeting with North Korea, I think we'll just see. We'll see what happens. And I would comment too that with respect to the trade relations – I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Sorry, so it's not a "No." It's "We'll see"? It's possible.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Yeah, we'll just have to – we'll see. We'll see what happens. With respect to the trade relations, again, I would point you back to the PTPA agreement between Peru and the United States. This has been a very successful trade agreement. We have other agreements in the region as well. As you know, I think we have something like 12 free trade agreements. Of the 23 trade agreements the United States has globally, 12 of them are in this hemisphere, so we have very strong trading agreements already in place. So I think it's important to keep that in the context of TPP being yet another trading architecture, which the U.S. and the President's assessment at the time was didn't really meet our needs.

Now, having said that, the President has said on TPP 11, which is being concluded – he said we could take a look at it. He hasn't rejected that out of hand. But we also have very strong trade agreements already in place with many of the countries in this hemisphere and we should use those fully. As I mentioned, we've had a 60 percent increase in trade between the U.S. and Peru just in the last over-five-year period since that agreement was put in place. So we think it's in a very positive trajectory.

FOREIGN MINISTER ALJOVIN: (Via interpreter) Regarding your question, regarding our relationship with (inaudible), I would like to say that we do

have free trade agreements with China, we also have it with the U.S. As Secretary Tillerson just mentioned, that we talked about the increase of almost 60 percent of trade, and this is why we have talked about how the 60 percent could become in a larger amount. So we also have trade agreements with European Union, TPP, the free trade agreement with Australia. So Peru is an open economy, and we have relationships with most countries of the world, and we continue along that path.

INTERPRETER: I am sorry, but I cannot hear. There is no mike.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good afternoon. My question – I have a couple of questions for Secretary Tillerson. The first one is: our country expects the extradition of Alejandro Toledo from your country. And my question is: Is President Trump to approve the extradition of former President Toledo for money laundering and traffic of influence among other accusations?

Another question for both of you would be in this meeting that you had, did you make any decisions regarding the announcement of President Maduro to attend the next Summit of the Americas? Will he be received or won't he? And can you confirm if President Donald Trump will come to the meeting that will take place in April?

FOREIGN MINISTER ALJOVIN: (Via interpreter) Well, I cannot answer regarding the invitation. Peru sent invitations to all the countries in the region to come to the summit. We have not received any formal response yet, and therefore we have not made any decisions because the formal response has not been received as of yet.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to the Summit of the Americas, we certainly want to respect the host country's decision – they are the host country – in terms of attendance, and so we will support the host country in this decision. And in terms of President Trump attending, there's been no final decision made. The President's calendar – we don't normally confirm that this far in advance. But he is considering his attendance and we'll have more to say about that when a final decision is made.

With respect to the extradition, I would have to refer the question to the Department of Justice to get their answer on that.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Julio Cisneros from RPP.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good afternoon. Julio Cisneros from RPP. Two questions, actually. First for Secretary Tillerson, what do you understand or government Trump about the – what is your reading about the problems of (inaudible) in the region, and do you think that there will be a will of President Trump to come to the summit? Because Nicolas Maduro could attend as well. Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, as I said, we've made no final decision, certainly President Trump has made no final decision yet, as his schedulers have yet to put forward a plan together for his decision.

I think in terms of whether President Maduro attends or not, I think what's

important – and the Madam Minister and I spoke about this – is I think a very, very good agenda has been put together by the host country, Peru, to deal with issues that are very important to everyone in the region. And everyone wants to see progress made. And I would hope that there would not be a distraction to sticking to that agenda. And I think that's what we want to support, is a very successful Summit of the Americas with a very good agenda that's been put together, and not have other issues take away from what's a very important opportunity for leaders together in Lima, and discuss how to make progress on corruption, strengthening governance. These are all very important issues for everyone in the region to strengthen our democracies.

FOREIGN MINISTER ALJOVIN: (Via interpreter) (Inaudible) the issue of (inaudible) affected the whole region, and of course this is the reason why the main issue that Peru chose is the fight against corruption, and this is the reason why we agree with Secretary of State that the results of this summit is not just declaration but concrete results on how to fight corruption to benefit our peoples.

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[Press Releases: Assistant Secretary of State Manisha Singh Travels to the United Arab Emirates](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
February 5, 2018

Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Manisha Singh will travel to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), February 5-8.

While there, the Assistant Secretary will meet with UAE government counterparts to discuss U.S. economic and trade priorities.

For updates on Acting Assistant Secretary Singh, follow her on [Facebook](#) and Twitter [@EconAtState](#).

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[Press Releases: Press Availability With Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie](#)

Remarks

Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Buenos Aires, Argentina

February 4, 2018

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) Good afternoon. Thank you for making the effort on this Sunday afternoon, on such a fine day. We were just chatting with Rex about the spectacular summer sky we've got today, so thank you for making the effort to come and share this talk with us.

For the record, I would publicly like to state my appreciation for the visit paid by Secretary of State Tillerson to Argentina. He has come to us as part of a regional tour around other countries in the region. We were very pleased to know that he had a chance to visit Bariloche yesterday, which allowed him to have some contact with one of the highly positive elements of Argentina's reality, which is the potential in tourism, Bariloche being one of the most beautiful areas we have to showcase to the world, and we hope he had a chance

to enjoy it.

Over the course of this morning, we had a discussion of several matters relating to our bilateral relations in the political field, in the economic field as well. We have talked about the regional situation, exchanging our shared views. We also talked about multilateral mechanisms that we are a part of, our two countries, and how we view the evolution of these regional and international organizations. At the same time, we have shared our concerns, such as peacekeeping and the safeguarding of democracy in our region, obviously referring to the concern our two countries share with regard to the actions of drug trafficking groups and the links that drug trafficking has with terrorism issues, and we've also discussed possible actions with regards to how to jointly combat these two interlinked elements in the context of joint actions.

We also talked about the work coming up in the context of the G20 with the current Argentine presidency, also discussing the views of the United States, which will be very important to us. I also very specifically thanked him for the support of the United States over the course of last year and in 2016 for Argentina to enter the OECD. And I would like to seize this opportunity to publicly thank the United States for its support right from the first moment when the disappearance of – the *ARA San Juan* submarine disappeared. They were there to provide us with support, technical and otherwise, to look for the submarine. And we Argentines, the whole people, are thankful for all of the efforts made by the United States and by the people of the U.S. and we're indebted to you.

We shared a luncheon with the Argentine ministers of the treasury, defense, production, agro industry, security, and energy. With each of them in the context of our bilateral relations, we have issues to deal with, and I think it was an opportunity for each of these departments to share the expectations of Argentina in each of those portfolios, and I think Secretary Tillerson is now taking home with him an overview of Argentina's position and of our concerns with regard to different areas.

Again, this is an important visit. Before leaving the United States, Mr. Tillerson offered a very interesting lecture at the university of Austin, Texas, his natal state. The university offered an opportunity for him to present ideas on relations with Latin America. I thought that was very valuable, as he referred not only to what Latin America means in terms of the special relationship we must have during the course of this year in view of the many high international profile events to take place in countries around the region, which obviously include the G20 under the Argentine presidency.

But he also talked about the need to look closely at energy security. Argentina has very important potential, and fortunately, Argentina also has that significantly in order to take part in a mechanism in which energy security internationally is guaranteed. During our lunch, he mentioned that energy security is one way to stabilize the international process, and our countries in Latin America can make specific contributions, and Argentina feels particularly well placed to do this jointly with the United States and with other partners, which also gave Minister Aranguren an opportunity to

talk about some of the possibilities we have in that field.

The region, like the United States, defends democracy, civil liberties, and political freedoms. This is why Argentina has in recent years made a point of staunchly defending this value as one of the attributes of our region, and along those lines, we have exchanged and shared our views with Secretary Tillerson.

Before taking questions from you, I would like to give the floor to Rex for him to make a statement on the visit. Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you very much, Foreign Minister Faurie, Jorge, for your very kind words and the welcome that you've given us in Argentina. And it was a – it's a pleasure to be back in Buenos Aires, but it was also a pleasure to spend yesterday in Bariloche, indeed, one of the most beautiful places on planet Earth. And I very much enjoyed the chance to visit the park, an opportunity to meet with the president of the national park administration, Chipi Breard. We had a very interesting exchange. I was – learned a lot about the amount of interchange between the United States National Park Service and the national park administration in Argentina, where we're both benefiting. And we talked about how we might expand that further, and so I'm taking some ideas back from that discussion to the U.S. that I'll pass along to our Interior Secretary as well.

But just it's an area of cooperation that a lot of people don't know about between our two countries, and what I've learned from that – there's probably other areas of cooperation that don't get a lot of publicity between our countries.

But the U.S.-Argentine relationship is really growing stronger every day as we work together to build a more secure, more prosperous hemisphere, and Argentina has an extremely important role to play in that under the leadership of President Macri. Argentina has reemerged as a strong advocate for democracy and the rule of law, and we in particular welcome Argentina's leadership to promote democracy, including, in particular, in Venezuela. We must continue to work to fulfill the requirements of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. We simply cannot allow and stand idly by to see a total destruction of democracy in Venezuela. The Venezuelan people deserve better, and President Macri has been clear in that regard as well.

President Macri is also leading Argentina to a future of a long-term foundation for greater prosperity, and the United States sees great opportunity and is committed to our joint economic and trading relationship, both two-way trading relationships, and we've had a lot of discussion about trade and investment in each other's countries as well, fostering and protecting innovation, joint science – areas of science and technology of interest, encouraging entrepreneurship. So we see many, many areas for continuing to grow this relationship. And we're also deepening the relationship in other areas, and Jorge mentioned some of these; in particular, strengthening our partnership to combat transnational criminal organizations, counternarcotics efforts, money laundering, terrorist financing, as the minister mentioned. And we are grateful for the close

cooperation and collaboration we have in countering these trans-criminal organizations as the U.S. takes a very regional approach to beginning to address these illicit activities.

The United States does welcome Argentina's return to global leadership and we wish them all success for this year's G20, their presidency term, and also the upcoming G20 that will be hosted here in Argentina. We very much look forward to participating and we know it'll be an important agenda that Argentina will put in place.

I also want to thank Argentina for their strong statements of support in our efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, and echoing our efforts to denuclearize the DPRK.

Before I conclude, I do want to extend my respects to the family members of the *ARA San Juan* and crew for their service, and we acknowledge that.

I also want to extend condolences to the five Argentines who lost their lives in the terror attack in New York City this last October. We mourn their loss with you as well.

So thank you again, Jorge, for the very warm welcome in hosting me today. It was a very productive lunch meeting. Many important issues were exchanged, and very useful to me already on this visit. So thank you very much again.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) We are now ready to take a few questions. I think that's already been organized.

QUESTION: Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Mr. Foreign Minister, Argentina has spoken quite a lot about the need to isolate Venezuela diplomatically, but there are some concerns that those words have not been put into action. Could you respond to that claim?

And also for both of you, particularly Secretary Tillerson, did you discuss the possibility of oil restrictions on Venezuela as President Macri has asked? And is that something the U.S. would be willing to consider, particularly given the damaging effects it might have on U.S. refiners? Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) First of all, allow me to say that Argentina's position since the inauguration of President Macri's administration with regard to Venezuela has been absolutely clear. We do not recognize the political process and authoritarian deviation of Venezuela. We do not recognize the Constituent Assembly, and we are against the restrictions on all sorts of freedoms in Venezuela, especially civil and political freedoms, and the ban on political leaders that are not allowed to take part in the political process underway. The electoral system is fully controlled by the current government of Maduro. So we have supported all regional mechanisms that have acted with a view to not accepting the legitimacy of decisions adopted by the Maduro government.

With regard to possible sanctions, it is always our idea that sanctions should not affect the situation of the Venezuelan people, the purpose being

to control the financing for the current government, whether it be direct or indirect. That is extremely important and something that we have discussed with Secretary Tillerson.

As for the sales of oil and trade in oil that exists, that is particularly important. We should closely follow up on this and ensure subsequent monitoring to ensure an appropriate balance between what the Venezuelan nation needs and what is being used by the leaders of the Venezuelan Government. We have also talked about sharing these efforts, not only within the context of the Lima Group countries, but also to gradually open up dialogue with the CARICOM countries in order to re-dynamize the work of the OAS, which has been stagnant in that regard. The commitment of Argentina to the recovery of democracy and full respect for the institutions and structures on which a true democratic system relies in Argentina is absolute, and we are always closely following the situation in Venezuela, which has now drifted towards sanitary and humanitarian crisis of extraordinary proportions, which obviously and primarily affects neighboring countries like Colombia, but this has led, among many other things, to a major flow of Venezuelan immigration into Argentina. We have embraced and welcomed them, helping them to reintegrate and spend a time of their lives in our country.

Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We did discuss Venezuela fairly extensively, including what additional steps could be taken to increase the pressure on the Maduro regime to return to the constitution, return to their constitutional process, and that's all we've asked – is that they return to the constitution, return to free, fair, and verifiable elections. And that is our only objective.

Obviously, sanctioning the oil or in effect prohibiting the oil to be sold in the United States, or for the United States as well to sell or provide oil to Venezuela, or refined products, is something we continue to consider. I think, as the Foreign Minister indicated, we – our disagreements are with the Venezuelan regime, not the Venezuelan people. And the Venezuelan people are suffering mightily under the current circumstances, and Jorge just described those. You know them well: the number of Vens that find they must leave the country, whether it's to Argentina or to Colombia or to Brazil or to Guyana, simply to receive medical care, medical treatment, or to find food. The situation is becoming quite dire in Venezuela.

So one of the aspects of considering sanctioning oil is what effect will it have on the Venezuelan people, and is it a step that might bring this to an end, to a more rapid end and a more rapid close? Because not doing anything to bring this to an end is also asking the Venezuelan people to suffer for a much longer time.

So we are looking at options, and in particular, we're looking at how to mitigate, and I think as you framed it in your question, how to mitigate the impacts on U.S. business interests, but also there are other regional countries that it would affect as well, and we want to be mindful that we're not – we do not want to harm them with an action we take either.

So it is under study, it's under consideration, and we've had – we've had exchanges: when I was in Mexico City; we had an exchange today about it. And I think the point being that all of us in the region want to see Venezuela return to its constitution. We just – this is heart-wrenching to watch what is happening to the Venezuelan people.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) From *Clarín* newspaper, Natasha Niebieskikwiat. In the name of my colleagues, I would like to ask Secretary Tillerson if you have asked or if your government will ask Argentina and the region for Venezuela to be excluded from the Summit of the Americas to be held in Lima? And what does Foreign Minister Faurie think about this? Would Argentina be in favor of leaving Venezuela out?

And I would also like to ask the Secretary of State what did you discuss with regard to your expressed concern with regard to Chinese presence in the region and Argentina in particular? Any special requests on that?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: With respect to Venezuela's participation in the Summit of the Americas, we're respectful of the host country, Peru, in this regard. And so we do not in any way want to impinge upon Peru's role as the host nation, and so I think it is something that they will think about and others will think about.

I think it is – it will be challenging as to how we have productive talks because we don't know what the agenda of Venezuelan participants might be. But again, I don't want to suggest one way or the other; I really want to leave that to the host country of Peru to decide out of respect for their government.

And as to China, we did not discuss China today that I recall. If it came up, I don't remember. (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) On the meeting in Lima, what Secretary Tillerson stated is our common view. It is up to the host country to decide on a particular arrangement. Obviously, none of the participating countries is interested in discussing other matters than those related to the agenda set by Peru for that meeting.

(In English) Any other questions?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: I think I have Pete.

QUESTION: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Secretary. As Defense Secretary Mattis mentioned yesterday, chemical attacks are continuing in Syria carried out by the regime. Russia and Iran continue to support that regime as these attacks continue. When you discussed counternarcotics and counterterrorism, did you discuss reports that the Hizballah organization, which is fighting in Syria, is able to raise money in this region, including in Argentina?

And Mr. Secretary Tillerson, the Congress gave you a mechanism for increasing sanctions on Russia, and so far you've chosen not to use it. Can you explain why?

SECRETARY TILLERSON: We did discuss the chemical weapons concerns in Syria today with Argentina, and I'm sure the foreign minister will make his own points on it. He's been a very, very strong proponent of following the chemical weapons accords and eliminating chemical weapons use that all of us have committed ourselves to.

And it is quite concerning to us the reports we're receiving of weaponizing chlorine in particular, but other potential use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict on innocent Syrian civilians and citizens, including children. So we are examining the situation carefully.

We also have called upon Russia to fulfill its role as the guarantor of eliminating chemical weapons from the Syrian regime and have called upon Russia to cease their vetoing of the resolutions necessary to reauthorize the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the OPCW to investigate these matters and give us a fair report as to what is happening on the ground.

With respect to Hizballah, we also did speak today in our discussions about all of the reasons why we must jointly go after these trans-criminal organizations – narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, money laundering – because we see the connections to terrorist financing organizations as well. And we did specifically discuss the presence of Lebanese Hizballah in this hemisphere, which is raising funds obviously to support their terrorist activities. So it is something that we jointly agree we need to attack and eliminate.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: (Via interpreter) Indeed, as the Secretary of State just pointed out, we discussed the situation in Syria, a current international issue of great interest. Argentina has a longstanding tradition in terms of defending peace and condemning the use of different kinds of weapons which particularly harm civilians. Specifically, we are a country that clearly condemns the use of chemical weapons. The secretary-general of OPCW was from our country for two terms, and our commitment is clear in that regard, and we have conveyed to the Secretary of State our belief in the importance that the use of chemical weapons should be prevented and should not extend in any war theater, in this particular case in Syria.

As regards the actions of terrorist groups in the region, we are very closely watching developments because one of the significant features of Latin America and South America nowadays is that it's a zone of peace, and this zone of peace should not be jeopardized by the actions of external groups, whether they use the region to search for financing, whether they seek to act within our regions. And as Secretary Tillerson said, we need to intensify every possible exchange, not only in terms of dialogue but also in terms of information on the actions of these groups which take advantage of transnational crime to foster their interests, which Argentina certainly does not agree with.

Last question, please.

QUESTION: Martin Torino, *El Cronista Comercial* newspaper. I would like to ask if you have reached an agreement on biodiesel or whether you are going to

take the matter up to WTO. And I would like to ask for Minister Faurie if you intend to make a submission to the U.S. tribunal in that regard, as Indonesia did.

FOREIGN MINISTER FAURIE: We have been discussing with Secretary Tillerson with regard to the bilateral economic relationship, although it's not the specific portfolio of the Secretary of State. But obviously, government interaction enables us to convey Argentina's interest in settling the biodiesel matter. And I think we have ongoing dialogue which gives an opportunity to seek bilateral solutions which we have been working on over the course of the last two or three months. Most recently, Secretary Wilbur Ross visited the embassy of Argentina on the occasion of Ambassador Oris de Roa's taking office, and he restated the interest in continuing to look for solutions. And once this process has been completed, we'll be able to address these issues you mentioned.

(In English) Thank you.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Thank you very much.

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[Press Releases: Sri Lanka's Independence Day](#)

Press Statement
Rex W. Tillerson

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
February 4, 2018

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, I offer

congratulations to the people of Sri Lanka on the 70th anniversary of your independence.

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Sri Lanka. Our nations share common goals as fellow democracies both working to uphold universal principles and freedoms. As we reaffirmed during the second annual U.S.-Sri Lanka Partnership Dialogue last November, we are committed to promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

In 2015, Sri Lankan voters chose a new government that pledged transparency, reconciliation, and accountability. We look forward to even greater progress on these areas in the coming year, along with increased peace, prosperity, and further growth in our bilateral relations.

Best wishes to Sri Lankans of all ethnicities and religions as you celebrate this historic Independence Day.

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