



Clinton issues warning to N. Korea

She outlines priorities for Asia trip, including crucial issues in China, Japan

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NEW YORK - Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, making her first major policy speech, urged North Korea Friday not to take any "provocative" actions that could undermine peace efforts.

Amid press reports that North Korea might be preparing a long-range missile test, Clinton pledged to hold the communist regime to its commitments to give up its nuclear programs in return for international aid and political concessions.

"We will need to work together to address the most acute challenge to stability in northeast Asia: North Korea's nuclear program," she said.

Clinton spoke to New York's Asia Society on the eve of a trip to visit China, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea — her first as secretary of state — and noted that their major economies and huge populations will be critical to turning around the global financial crisis.

She declared that President Barack Obama's administration is "ready to work with leaders in Asia to resolve the economic crisis that threatens the Pacific as much as any other region, ready to strengthen our historic partnerships and alliances while developing deeper bonds with all nations."

She also sought to reassure Japan, the top U.S. ally in the region, on one of its top concerns, promising to meet with the families of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s.

"I will assure our allies in Japan that we have not forgotten the families of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea and I will meet with some of those families in Tokyo next week," she said.

Environment also a priority

Climate change will be another diplomatic priority, Clinton said, especially because of China's fast-growing industries. "Climate change is not just an environmental nor an energy issue, but also has implications for our health, our economies and our security," she said.

On North Korea, Clinton said the Obama administration is committed to working with the reclusive country through the framework of six-nation talks that produced the nuclear agreement.

"We believe we have an opportunity to move these discussions forward," she said. "But it is incumbent on North Korea to avoid any provocative action and unhelpful rhetoric toward South Korea."

The United States is willing to "normalize" relations with North Korea, Clinton said, but only if the regime in Pyongyang agrees to abandon its nuclear weapons programs and accept a program of verification.

She suggested the United States could provide energy and economic aid and sign a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War. The 1950-53 conflict ended with a truce, and the two Koreas face each other across one of the world's most heavily armed borders.

"If North Korea is genuinely prepared to completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program, the Obama administration will be willing to normalize bilateral relations, replace the peninsula's long-standing armistice agreements with a permanent peace treaty, and assist in meeting the energy and other economic needs of the North Korean people," Clinton said.

High emotions over abduction issue

In a conference call with reporters after her speech, Clinton indicated that she would be taking a stance on the

Japanese abduction issue similar to that of former President George W. Bush, who often spoke with emotion of his meeting at the White House with the mother of one of the victims.

"I don't know that I'll be meeting as a secretary of state, any more than I will be meeting with them as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister," Clinton said.

"I cannot imagine what it must feel like to have lost family members and, for so many years, never to have heard anything about them or from them," she said. "It's important that their plight not be forgotten. I attach great importance to the abduction issue."

Clinton pledged to continue to press North Korea to immediately address Japan's concerns and to honor a previous commitment to provide more information to Japanese families. "They deserve it," she said.

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