

U.S. Official Sheds Light on Possible Upcoming Obama Africa Policy

By James Butty, 24 June 2009

The new U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs said the Obama administration plans to invest substantial amounts of money over the coming years in agricultural development to promote food security in Africa.

Ambassador Johnnie Carson spoke Monday in Washington to a constituency of Africa advocacy groups. He outlined what is likely to be the Obama administration's Africa policies for the next four years.

Carson told the African American Unity Caucus that over the next four years the Obama administration will focus on four key issues as part of its Africa policy.

These, he said, include promoting and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, preventing and resolving conflicts, encouraging sustained growth and working with African countries to address what he called the new and old global challenges.

Ambassador Carson praised Africa for the progress the continent has made over the last 15 years in strengthening democratic institutions. He referenced recent successful elections in Ghana, South Africa and Malawi.

But he said challenges still remain as evident by recent electoral problems in Zimbabwe and Kenya. He said Washington will do all it can to help strengthen democratic institutions.

"We constantly have to encourage those in civil society to be the voice and conscience of their countries, and we have to promote constitutional democratic governments, strong court systems, strong legislatures, regular elections, free media, and religious tolerance," he said.

Carson praised the African Union for the role it played in resolving the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Angola. He said challenges also remain as evident by the continued conflicts in Somalia, eastern Congo, and Sudan.

"We have to do as much as we possibly can to help resolve those conflicts," Carson said.

Carson said President Obama has taken a keen interest in resolving the conflict by his appointment of General Scott Gration as special envoy on Sudan. He said the Obama administration plans to focus on food security and agricultural development in Africa.

"The administration plans over a number of years to put a substantial amount of money into agricultural development to do two things. One is to lift people out of poverty and the other one is to help grow agriculture," Carson said.

On what he called the new and old global challenges, Ambassador Carson said the Obama administration plans to work with African countries to address the issues of climate change and illicit drug trafficking

Carson said President Obama will elaborate on some of these topics when the president visits Ghana on July this year, the earliest visit to Africa by a sitting American president.