



Hillary Clinton's Comparison of the 2000 U.S. Recount to Nigeria's Elections Spur Criticism

Some Say the Secretary of State's Remarks Were 'Ill-Advised'

By JAKE TAPPER

Aug. 13, 2009—

Hillary Clinton may be the United States' top diplomat, but some are accusing the Secretary of State for [undiplomatic behavior abroad](#).

For [the second time](#) this week, the former first lady is embroiled in a controversy over [remarks she made in Africa](#). At a town hall in Abuja, [Nigeria](#), a land of corrupt elections, Clinton tried to push the message that embracing violence is never the answer. But it was [her mention of U.S. elections](#) that caught people's attention.

"Our democracy is still evolving," the secretary of state told the crowd. "You know we've had all kinds of problems in some of our past elections as you might remember. [In 2000](#), our presidential election came down to one state where the brother of the man running for president was the governor of the state, so we have our problems, too."

Republicans pounced on Clinton's remarks.

"Governor Bush is declining to weigh in on these ill-advised comments," a spokesman for former Florida governor Jeb Bush said. "But wishes Secretary Clinton a safe and successful trip."

Others accused her of comparing [the Florida recount](#) that gave George W. Bush the presidency to the kind of wholesale fraud in Nigeria.

"When you criticize your own country as an official of that country it obviously undermines the authority of the government," Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow at the libertarian non-profit the Cato Institute, told ABC News. "It casts a shadow on the legitimacy of the U.S. government as we pursue our foreign affairs. I don't think that helps."

The State Department said Clinton was merely making the comparison to prove the point that despite the problems and disagreements in [the U.S. election](#), there was still a peaceful transfer of power, and that it is better to accept a flawed result after a dispute rather than resorting to violence.

"The point she is making is that it's about [a disputed result](#) and then the willingness of the candidates to accept a flawed result rather than, say, resort to violence," said Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley. "There are still some who [think Gore won more votes](#). People still [raise questions](#) about hanging chads in Florida, or the butterfly ballot in Dade County. ... We are still arguing about it, but eventually Vice President Gore accepted the result, yielded, and paved the way for President Bush's inauguration."

Crowley said Clinton also made this point privately to Kenyan officials in Nairobi last week.

"This has been [a consistent message](#) she has delivered to countries who are struggling in Africa, that they have to strengthen their electoral processes and form independent electoral commissions, but most importantly the candidates themselves have to accept the results rather than resort to violence," he told reporters.

Were Clinton's Remarks Misconstrued?

[Nigerian politics](#) is fraught with corruption and Africa's most populated country has constantly been criticized by the international community for vote rigging and massive fraud. [Violence has ensued](#) after nearly every election in the country's history.

Some foreign policy experts say Clinton didn't say anything wrong.

"I think she was doing the right thing by giving the Nigerians the sense that we Americans are not perfect either. All countries have problems," Walter Russell Mead of the Council on Foreign Relations told ABC News. "A lot of people get upset when American officials take the attitude that America is perfect and we're telling everybody else how to live."

This is not the first time on [her trip to Africa](#) that Clinton has grabbed headlines for her comments.

Earlier this week, [the secretary of State took offense when asked by a student](#) in Kinshasa, Congo what her husband thought of China's offer of a loan to Congo.

"Wait, you want me to tell you what my husband thinks? My husband is not the secretary of state. I am, So, you ask my opinion, I will tell you my opinion. I'm not going to be channeling my husband," Clinton responded angrily.

The State Department first said that the translator erred by referring to Mr. Clinton instead of President Obama, but later said they didn't know exactly what happened and that the questioner misspoke instead of the translator.

"The fact that after [her comments on Monday](#) everybody is watching her like a hawk," Mead said.

The White House is backing Clinton fully, saying she was just pointing out how important it is for the losing candidate to move on, which is an argument that Obama also made in Ghana in July, when he was greeted by the winner and loser of that election.

ABC News' Huma Khan contributed to this report.

Copyright © 2009 ABC News Internet Ventures