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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
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Clinton, on Africa trip, visits Malawi

By MATTHEW LEE
 Associated Press

LILONGWE, Malawi (AP) -- U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton offered praise and pledged continued American support to the impoverished southern African nation of Malawi on Sunday, making a brief stop here to visit with the country's first woman president, only the second female African head of state.

A longtime champion for women's empowerment, Clinton met Malawian President Joyce Banda in the capital of Lilongwe and encouraged her to stay on a course of economic reform to make the country more attractive to foreign investment.

Later, Clinton was to visit a girls secondary school and an agriculture project supported by U.S. assistance.

Clinton, the first secretary of state to visit Malawi, was clearly pleased to meet Banda and told her that the United States "strongly supports you and your government and your efforts on behalf of the people of this absolutely wonderful country."

Banda, a women's rights campaigner who had been Malawi's vice president but assumed the top job in April after President Bingu wa Mutharika died in office, told Clinton that "for a long time we have both been women and children's activists and I was looking forward to the day that we would meet. And we meet today in an official capacity and I am proud."

Banda has been keen to differentiate herself from her predecessor who had a rocky relationship with international development agencies and whose policies led the U.S. to suspend a \$350.7 million assistance package last year. In May, the country devalued its currency by one third and loosened restrictions on foreign currency exchange.

In June, the International Monetary Fund and Malawi agreed to a \$157 million aid package to be distributed over three years and the U.S. restored the aid package, which was aimed at improving energy infrastructure and run by the Millenium Challenge Corporation that offers assistance to developing countries that can prove good government practices.

In addition to that package, the U.S. provided Malawi with \$230 million in bilateral development aid in 2011. Malawi is an AIDS-ravaged nation with an agriculture-based economy and few natural resources.

Clinton's visit to Malawi comes in the middle of an 11-day tour of Africa that has already taken her to Senegal, Uganda, South Sudan and Kenya. After Malawi, she will travel to South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Benin.

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