

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

Ocean Security and Human Rights Forum

Welcome

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CSIS EXPERTS

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Hello again. Well, good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone. And welcome, welcome, welcome. It's wonderful to see you all here. And I'm really honored, and it's a great pleasure to welcome you to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Ocean Security and Human Rights Forum. I am Enoch Ebong and I lead the Global Development Department here at CSIS.

I've been saying to some of you who are in attendance that I'm learning every day in this job, including about this topic. So for me, the title of the forum, Ocean Security and Human Rights, is powerful in its simplicity and its complexity all at once. A wealth of issues lies just beneath the surface of the title. And there's no pun intended there, but it does. Ocean governance, climate change, human rights all sit at the intersection of food security, economic security, global competition, sovereignty, and human dignity. Add to that the recent events in the Strait of Hormuz, which have thrust maritime issues into the global spotlight, highlighting the impacts of such disruption on supply chains, energy markets, and broader security.

We see the same interconnectedness in our work at the CSIS Global Development Department – I'll just call it GDD from now on. Conflicts, wars, pandemics, and climate change, in addition to dramatic cuts in traditional aid budgets, just as demand surges, have exposed serious vulnerabilities in international government, health, food and water security, human rights, and the resilience of investments. So these are our core priorities. And our goal is to translate them into policies that promote human wellbeing and economic opportunity.

So these kinds of linkages are pervasive, I feel. So in the ocean security space, a consistent thread is the growth of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing – IUU. It's a problem that is extensive in its scale and its reach. It depletes fishing stocks. It undermines the sovereignty of coastal nations and the principles of free navigation that underpin global trade. And it is deeply, systematically entangled with forced labor, engaging some of the most egregious human rights abuses occurring anywhere in the world today, largely invisible to the rest of us. Here, I am struck by the role of civil society organizations and their ability to monitor, document, and expose what is happening on the high seas. It's impactful work and it points to the importance of an independent, well-financed, and well-funded civil society in this, and in the development sector as a whole.

So from where I sit, leading global development work alongside our colleagues here in the defense and national security, geopolitics, and economic security departments, I am continuously reminded of how thoroughly these threads connect. So this isn't just a conservation issue, or a trade issue, or a human rights issue. It's all of these at once. And the economic stakes are concrete. American companies, and companies

everywhere that play by the rules, simply cannot compete on a level playing field against fleets that are subsidized by the use of forced labor. That's a moral problem, and it's a market problem as well.

I think the really good news here, and it's genuine good news, is that because of the diverse impacts and the impacts on the American economy, this is one of the areas where we see real bipartisan agreement that something has to be done. So that's why we're here today, to think carefully and practically about how the United States and its allies can work alongside civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders to confront these challenges. I'm grateful to all of you for being part of that conversation, to our distinguished panelists and guests, and to all attending. And I look forward to what we'll learn together.

In closing, I would like to thank those who have made this forum possible. Andrew Friedman of the Human Rights Initiative, and Whit Saumweber of the Stephenson Ocean Security Project, both within GDD, have partnered to provide the vision and execution that have resulted in the dynamic and thought-provoking agenda that you will enjoy today. We are most grateful to the Pew Charitable Trusts for their general support of this timely and important discussion. Finally, I'd like to thank the wonderful CSIS ecosystem, that clicks into high gear to make an event like this happen. Thank you all for joining today. And I hope you find the conversation productive and informative. Thank you so much. (Applause.) And now I'll hand the podium over to Whit.

(END.)