Russian President Putin Calls for an Educated Relationship Between U.S. and Russia

BY COLIN MORRIS

In front of an attentive audience in the Low Library Rotunda, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin described the global benefits of keeping close ties between the United States and the Russian Federation.

Putin reminded the audience that there was a time in the not too distant past when the U.S. and Russia enjoyed the kind of amicable relationship that could again flourish today.

“When we have been together, we have always achieved success and triumphed over evil, tyranny and prejudice,” Putin said, after describing the concomitant relationship and correspondence between U.S. President Jefferson and Emperer Alexander in 1807. Putin explained that benefits can again accrue for both countries, including greater trade opportunities, enriched cultural exchange and enhanced global security.

To realize these benefits Putin emphasized the need for reevaluating the manner in which both countries learn about each other.

“Unfortunately, the American school of ‘soviotelogy’ and the Soviet school of ‘American studies,’ or rather, ‘the study of American imperialism, as they liked to say in Russia at the time, were for many years the hostages of big politics, when our countries alternated between becoming allies, and bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe,” Putin stated. Scholarly work was excessively politicized during the Cold War, Putin explained, which worked to reinforce stereotypes—a trend, which he believes continues today.

“Today, our countries adhere to many common values like never before,” he said. “However, we can see that we are still a long way from a complete and mutual end to differences and stereotypical views about each other.” Putin encouraged the students in the audience focusing on Russian studies to directly involve themselves in this task.

In an increasingly interconnected world, Putin stressed that a new approach to education can not only enhance the benefits of a free society for both countries, but can be used as a safeguard for the common values of living that both the U.S. and Russia work to enjoy. Neither country is a stranger to the horrors of terrorism, Putin explained, suggesting that the use of force to combat these threats can only go so far.

“The conflict of regions and nations should be countered by the institutions of knowledge and humanism,” Putin explained.

By using a combined intellectual front, Putin believes both countries can focus on the roots for terror such as poverty and social instability. After his speech, Putin toured Butler Library and its Bakhtin-teff Archive, which boasts the second largest depository of Russian emigre materials outside of Russia.

Putin, along with Russian Minister of Sport V'yacheslav Fetisov, also oversaw a baseball skills competition on the South Field between a Russian youth baseball team and a Harlem RBI youth squad. Major League Baseball president Bob DuPuy was in attendance and met with Putin to promote the sport.

Columbia’s own head baseball coach, Paul Fernandes was on hand with players Brian Dorevall and Jessen Grant to present the Russian President with a Lions jersey.

Ghana President Kufuor Promotes Private Sector as Main Engine of Economic Growth

BY KRISTIN STERLING

John Agyekum Kufuor, President of Ghana, made history when he stepped into power in 2001. It marked the first time since Ghana’s independence in 1957 that one civil administration handed over power to another in a constitutional and democratic manner.

During the world leaders forum at Columbia, Kufuor explained that he is committed to the party manifesto that was central to his campaign—“To liberate the energies of the people for the good of the property-owning democracy in this land, with right to life, freedom and justice as the principles with which government and laws of the land should be dedicated in order specifically to enrich life, liberty, and property to each and every citizen.”

By the end of his first year in office, Kufuor reconsiders he established five priorities. First, to rehabilitate and enhance the country’s infrastructure, particularly its roads and electricity. Second, to modernize agriculture by improving rural development. To promote this goal his government offers support to private farmers as well as technical advice. One thousand tractor facilities, for instance, are being provided throughout the country and modernize markets, storage facilities, and credit systems enabling the country to credit is being improved.

Third, Kufuor is working to enhance the provision of social services, particularly education and health delivery. Fourth, he is upholding and promoting good governance through efficient implementation and zero tolerance policy towards corruption. Finally, Kufuor is promoting the private sector as a main engine of growth by encouraging entrepreneurship, and offering training. His ministries are also helping entrepreneurs access credit and markets.

Kufuor reports that he is making great strides implementing programs that support these priorities and points to the support he is getting from domestic and foreign investors. Within the past two years fiscal and monetary management have improved and utilities are being deregulated. He indicates that large domestic government debts have been renegotiated into long-term instruments, a move that has helped to free up capital for loans to the private sector.

Inflation, which was 42 percent when he took office, dropped to 13 percent within Kufuor’s first 15 months in office. With the deregulation of utilities, Ghana has experienced a 29 percent increase in inflation, but Kufuor quickly adds that even so “stabilization has been achieved. There is a reversal in the upward surge.” Likewise, interest rates have decreased from 52 percent to 25 percent. And these achievements have led to an improved credit rating for the country.

Kufuor says that President Bush praised his achievements when they met during the UN General Assembly.

Kufuor concluded his marks on an optimistic note that through additional government reforms, Ghana will become a “middle-income earning economy” in the next decade.