

CNN Q & A, interview
with First Lady HRC

CNN Q&A
INTERVIEW WITH:
FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON

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MR. KHAN: Tanzanian women and children serenade the U.S. first lady and daughter Chelsea, one stop on their recent high profile trip to Africa.

Welcome to questions and answers everyone. This is Riz Khan in Washington today for a special Q&A. Joining me is one of the most watched women in the world. U.S. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is here to answer your questions, either by telephone, fax or e-mail. Ms. Clinton and Chelsea spent three days in South Africa, including a meeting with President Nelson Mandela and a rare opportunity to visit the prison cell where anti-apartheid crusader was jailed for 27 years.

During many of their outings across the continent, Ms. Clinton and Chelsea were treated to African song and dance, such as this stop in Uganda. And crowds greeted them also in Senegal, where the first lady and Chelsea were given a tour and a history lesson about the once busy slave trade post on Correy (sp) Island. Well, of course, the Clinton women travelled to other parts of the continent, as well. And we'll get to all that in just a moment.

Ms. Clinton, it's a real treat to have you here on the show today.

MS. CLINTON: I am delighted to be here.

MR. KHAN: We've got lots of faxes to get through, lots of e-mail to get through, and of course the phones would be ringing off the wall already. Let me start first of all by asking you about this trip to Africa. Why Africa?

MS. CLINTON: Well, you know, I was asked to go to Africa by the Secretary of State and the president. In part to show that the United States is committed to and concerned about Africa, wanting to support the new emerging democracies and the people there, who are making great efforts to try to improve their lives. And I was thrilled that I had a chance to go.

MR. KHAN: Now, many people say that Americans have a distorted view of Africa. A lot of Africans complain that. They say it's just pictures of starvation, pictures of conflict and so on. When you went there, how much did this change the perceptions you might have had before you went?

MS. CLINTON: That's a very good question, because I do think that America

ns very often only see the coverage of Africa when there is a crisis or a conflict of some kind. And I was lucky enough to have had friends who have spent a lot of time in Africa and I have tried to follow that continent. And so I was not as surprised, perhaps, as some might be, but I think that even for me the experience kind of opened my eyes to some of the challenges and the progress that is being made that never gets much coverage on our television or newspapers.

MR. KHAM: We're obliged to get to some of these questions. The viewers are going crazy, sending in so many questions for you. Let's start with an e-mail question, please, from Thailand. This one asks, did your recent trips to Thailand and Africa alter your thoughts about the needs and rights of women and children in developing countries?

MS. CLINTON: It didn't alter them so much as reinforce them. I believe strongly, as I have said in many different settings, including Thailand and Africa, that women's rights are human rights and that societies which invest in girls as well as boys and give women incentives to be economically and politically and socially involved will be more prosperous in the future.

MR. KHAM: Now, how did the people in those countries react to you, as a person who represents the world's super power, represents a powerful position for a woman, and something that many of them could never see in their own countries? How were you received?

MS. CLINTON: I've been received very well. I've had extraordinary hospitality as I've travelled. And I think part of that is because when I travel, people know that I'm travelling on behalf of the president and our country. And I want the countries that I visit and their people to know that the United States cares about them, even though we may not talk a lot about a particular country or it may not be in our news often, that we understand the interconnections in the world today and we're trying to build relationships everywhere.

MR. KHAM: I'm going to put the first caller through, Ms. Clinton. It's a caller from Belgium.

Your question, please, for the U.S. First Lady.

MR. HAN (sp): Thank you, Riz. This is Anwar (sp) Han calling from Belgium.

Good afternoon, Madame First Lady.

MS. CLINTON: Good afternoon.

MR. HAN: Thank you. My question is, these days domestic violence is going on almost all over the world against women, is there any way to stop such violence or reduce in very significant numbers? Thank you very much, Madame First Lady.

MS. CLINTON: Thank you so much for asking that question, because I have a great concern about it here in my own country, as well as around the world. And, yes, I do think there are ways to stop domestic violence and we've been working on those. And let me just quickly run through a few. In some countries now, I saw it in South Asia and I saw it in Africa, special police divisions are being set up so that women can go with great security and report these crimes. Special courts are trying to make this a more sensitive kind of encounter for women who feel that they have been abused. The laws have to be strengthened and then they have to be enforced. But, most importantly, people all over the world have to value girls and women. That is the real answer to domestic violence, where we see that people are of value and respect them for who they are.

MR. KHAM: Now, you actually have a woman as Secretary of State now?

MS. CLINTON: Yes.

MR. KHAM: I know she has a lot of political duties, but does she get on board some of these campaigns you have for women's rights? She has quite a big role

e to play internationally.

MS. CLINTON: Yes, and in fact, Secretary Albright made a very important speech about a month ago on International Women's Day, where she said very clearly that women are now going to be part of American foreign policy. That the issue of how women are treated and our understanding about what makes democracies effective throughout the world, is going to be a hallmark of what she talks about and what the president and others talk about, as well.

MR. KHAN: I'm going to put another e-mail question. This one came from Hong Kong. And it says, universal health care is given in most developed countries and in many developing countries, but in the world's most powerful nation many go without. What must change to enact health care reform?

MS. CLINTON: Well, as the caller may very well know, the president tried very hard to come up with a system that would provide universal health care and that was not politically acceptable a few years ago. So now I think what you will see in our country is a concerted effort on the part of well meaning people of all political persuasions to try to figure out how to fix our system so that the people who fall through the cracks, primarily working people, but not rich enough to afford insurance, without employers to provide it and not poor enough to get public assistance, will have access to affordable, quality health care. And there is a number of good proposals being talked about now in Washington that I hope will bear fruit.

MR. KHAN: We have so many people standing on the line. I'm going to go to Finland next.

Garret, your question, please?

MR.

: Yes, Ms. Clinton, your fans in Finland would like to know if Chelsea has decided where she is going to university?

MS. CLINTON: She has not. I wish could tell you, because I would like to know. She is still weighing her choices and I think I, like the rest of the world, will have to wait for her decision.

MR. KHAN: I knew that question would come up. We do have to go for a short break. We are just getting started here on Q&A with Hillary Rodham Clinton.

When we come back, Ms. Clinton, more about your important work, your trip to Africa and, of course, some of the political troubles and scandals that trouble you at home. We'll touch on those, too.

Stay with us.

(Commercial break.)

MR. KHAN: Welcome back to Q&A. I'm Riz Khan joined in Washington by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the first lady of the United States.

MS. CLINTON, before we get back to viewer questions, let me touch on one subject. Although there's obviously a lot less international coverage of the controversial issues that bound you personally, the world is hearing of things like allegations of scandals, in particular with regards to fundraising for your husband, or for the Democratic Party. So I do have to ask you about them.

Now, let me start with a direct question. Did you ever raise any funds on federal government property for either your husband or the Democratic Party? >

MS. CLINTON: I don't believe so, no.

MR. KHAN: Okay. How do you feel when these allegations are put and people want direct answers?

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MS. CLINTON: Well, you know, I'm so used to having allegations now, after five years of constant allegations and charges, and my attitude is, I just wait until the dust settles, and they seem to evaporate of their own weight, because there's not much to them. But then a new set of charges comes in to fill the gap. And I think that's just part of our political environment today.

MR. KHAN: There's been a lot of talk about one bedroom in particular in the White House, the Lincoln Bedroom, named after President Abraham Lincoln. And the world heard about this, too. So people, you know, are talking about the fact you let people stay there, friends of yours, people you didn't even know that well. In many cases, people who gave money to your husband's campaign or to the Democratic Party.

So when some people say it cheapens the image of the White House, that the White House is for sale, looking back, do you have any second thoughts or regrets about letting all that happen?

MS. CLINTON: Well, of course I regret that anyone would draw that conclusion or have that feeling because it certainly was nothing that ever crossed our minds, or that we were in any way thinking could be suggested. You know, the White House is the only home we have. We don't have another home. We don't have a Kennedycamp or a ranch in California. That's where we live. It's not only our official residence, it is our home, and we've tried to make it our home. And anyone who knows my husband, knows that he loves people. He loves spending time with people, and we have had many, many guests. And we have been delighted to share the White House with people. I can't tell you how many times late at night the president would, with just such joy and pride, show people around the White House, show them the treasures of our history that are there. And he is a person of a great heart and great hospitality who wanted to share that with people. And the people who we shared it with were people we have known all our lives, and they were people that we have met recently, many of them since my husband has been in public life for, golly, 20, nearly 25 years now, have contributed to his campaigns. But I don't see where that should disqualify someone from being our friend or our guest.

MR. KHAN: And knowing that the White House has that dual role, that it is such an official place, as well as your personal residence, how can you separate that at all?

MS. CLINTON: I don't know the answer to that, Biz. I mean, I would -- you know, that is where we live, and especially with a daughter in school, we haven't even used Camp David very much, certainly not as much as previous occupants of the White House, because her activities kept us in Washington. And it is difficult for any president to go out and to, you know, not cause a great commotion. So we've entertained at home a great deal. And I regret deeply that anyone has tried to impute anything other than what we thought we were doing, which was being hospitable. You know, some of the people we didn't know as well as others, and we wanted to get to know. And for a president, making new friends, spending time with people is not an easy task. So we used our home, which also happens to be the White House, and we've had wonderful times there, and will continue to entertain people there. We feel that that's part of the way we want to share the house. And not only people who come for meals or spend the night, but we've tried to increase the number of public events at the White House. We've tried to make it possible or even more people to see the White House, and we've succeeded with a great number of people being able to feel that the White House is a place that they can see and enjoy as well.

MR. KHAN: Are you having to revise your policies because of the allegations?

MS. CLINTON: No, I don't think so. I don't think that -- you know, if I tried to keep track of all the allegations that are made, I would do nothing else all day long. And what my husband and I try to do is, you know, be sensitive to legitimate criticisms that people might make, because we don't want anyone believing the kinds of allegations that are made against us, but we also have to get on with our life, and it would be a very lonely place to live, the White House, if the president couldn't invite people he wanted to get to know, or to see, to spend time with him. And I'm not going to let that happen. He's a gregarious, outgoing, hosp

itable, gracious man, and I'm going to make sure that he continues to have friends around to play cards with, to give his tours to, to watch sporting events with. I here's so little ways to get release from the pressures of the job, and spending time with people you enjoy is one of those.

MR. KHAN: As our viewers get to ask the questions here, let me go to our next caller. It's someone in London. David, I think it is. Go ahead with your question, please.

CALLER: No. My name is David (sp). Good afternoon, Ms. Clinton. I want to know, do you feel that increasingly violent and explicit images in the media have a detrimental effect on children?

MS. CLINTON: Yes, I do believe that. And I'm speaking just for myself personally, but I think if you follow American politics, you know that the president and the vice president are also concerned about the quantity of violence and explicit sexual material on American television, and have tried to work with our entertainment industry to make some changes, both in rating systems so parents could exercise more authority, but also more importantly in trying to influence what is in the programs that our children see. I personally believe that exposing our children to this steady diet of violence desensitizes them, makes them much more prone to confuse what goes on in the real world with what they see on television. And I would like more parents to exercise more authority and not permit their children to see so much of it. And I would like our programmers to keep that in mind as well.

MR. KHAN: A question from the Internet again, an e-mail question from South Africa. This one asks about your trip to South Africa. It says, I would like to ask you about your visit to Robben Island where many involved in South Africa's push for democracy were incarcerated. What was the experience like for you and Chelsea?

MS. CLINTON: It was one of the most moving experiences I've ever had, and I believe I can speak for her as well. And time we're around President Mandela, we feel that we're in the presence of a very great man who has transformed not only his own country, but influenced so many of us to think differently about how we treat each other, and what our goals should be.

Being on Robben Island with him, where he walked us through his prison cell block, where we stood inside the cell where he was imprisoned, where we were out in the exercise area where he took exercise, made just so real what he went through, and what his compatriots did, and it also was a real challenge, I felt to the rest of us that if these men could emerge from that experience with a positive outlook toward life, with the kind of capacity for forgiveness and their commitment to reconciliation, which they did, then why can't the rest of us who have not been subjected to those kinds of extreme conditions find a little more generosity and forgiveness in our own hearts, get along better with people who are different from ourselves. So it's not only the past that was very real to me, it was the challenge that it posed for all of us in the future.

MR. KHAN: And before I go to the caller in Denmark, let me ask you, watching President Mandela go through that, go through such a big chunk of his life, how was he reacting to being there?

MS. CLINTON: Well, he had been back before. So this was not the first time that he had been there. But he is very straightforward in talking about how he was treated, and how he was mistreated from time to time. Some of the physical strains that he was under because of the work in the quarry and the like. But what he more interested -- was more interested in talking about is how he spent his time, you know, learning Afrikaans, reading widely, debating with his fellow prisoners, getting to know his guards and warders so that he could see them as human beings and they could see him. He's more committed to sharing those experiences, so that it's not that anything will be forgotten, as he has said, but that remembering will permit us to move forward in a more positive way.

MR. KHAN: Well, we have to take a short break. Our caller in Denmark, we'll get to you in a moment. We know many of you want to speak with Mrs. Clinton.

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We have to take this short break. We'll be back with more Q&A from Washington with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton right after these messages.

(Commercial break.)

MR. KHAN: We only have a few short minutes left with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, let's get straight back to your questions.

Our caller in Denmark, thanks for hanging on. Your chance to speak with the U.S. first lady.

CALLER: Yes. Good evening, Mrs. Clinton.

MS. CLINTON: Good evening.

CALLER: Denmark is presenting a proposal to the U.N. condemning China's violations of human rights. What effect do you think this will have as long as it's not getting fully support from the European countries such as France and Germany?

MS. CLINTON: Well, I can't predict what effect it will have. But I think it is important to continue to engage China on all levels, including the level of human rights. And, again, speaking only for myself, I am concerned about religious persecution in China. I am concerned about political persecution. And the denial of human rights, but I agree with those who say we need to engage China on many levels, and not just on the level of either the human rights issues or commercial, strategic, military. It should be a full engagement, and that's what I hope will come from your efforts and others.

MR. KHAN: A fax from Uganda here asks -- says, thank you for visiting Uganda. I would like to start a home instruction program for preschool youngsters in my country, much like you began in Arkansas. Do you have any advice?

MS. CLINTON: I certainly do. I think that's a wonderful idea, and what I will do is get some information to the embassy, your embassy here for the country of Uganda in the United States, and I will get that information to them, and if you would contact our embassy, I will try -- I don't know your name, the person who's called, but I will try to get that information to you by getting it to your embassy and our embassy, and then hopefully you can contact one or the other.

MR. KHAN: James in Germany, a quick question, please?

CALLER: Yes. My question is, did America not come out with the calling Mobutu stepped out too late?

MS. CLINTON: Oh, you're referring to the recent comments by spokesmen for the United States government urging President Mobutu to step down as a part of reaching a peaceful agreement. Well, I hope that it is a timely request and that President Mobutu and the others who are involved in the peace talks in South Africa will find a resolution to that.

MR. KHAN: I have an e-mail question for you that came from Malta. And it asks, I'm concerned with -- I'm concerned about divorce in America. What are your thoughts? What have you told your own daughter about safeguarding herself in the future against the prospect of divorce?

MS. CLINTON: Well, you know, in a book that I wrote, It Takes A Village, I express my feelings about divorce. That, unfortunately, it is too often too easy for families, and that I would urge families with children to be much more cautious in seeking divorce, and I would like to see some changes made in our divorce procedures so that people will get counselling, mediation, and other advice, perhaps, before they finally decide that they want a divorce when a child is involved.

MR. KHAN: Let me squeeze in a fax question from Germany. A lot of people ask this, are you considering a run at political office when your husband's second term is over. Would you run for president yourself?

MS. CLINTON: No. I'm considering a very long vacation when my husband's second term is over.

MR. KHAN: Let me ask you now you think you're perceived around the world as the U.S. first lady?

MS. CLINTON: You know, I have no idea. But I know how I feel when I travel. I feel very proud to be representing our country, and very humble about what I can learn from other countries and other societies, and I hope that in some small way, I can bring lessons both home to the United States and convey the interest and engagement of the United States to people around the world.

MR. KHAN: A caller from England. David, your question.

CALLER: My question is, Mrs. Clinton, your trip to Africa, will it be beneficial in solving social economic problems regarding child health care and poverty?

MR. KHAN: I didn't catch the first part of that. David, ask the first part again.

CALLER: Do you think your trip to Africa will be beneficial in solving social economic problems?

MS. CLINTON: Well, I hope that it helps to support the efforts of many, many people in Africa today. In every country that I visited, I met very dedicated leaders, educators, health care workers, community activities, who are trying to deal with the economic and social problems, and I hope that if I could bring attention to some of the positive programs that are occurring, and encourage others to be involved, that it will have a beneficial effect.

MR. KHAN: Mrs. Clinton, a lot of people question your role as first lady, how you're a very strong campaigner and activist in so many matters, much more so than many of your predecessors. This e-mail that came from Mexico asks, what do you think the role of the first lady will be in the next century, the same or more a policymaker?

MS. CLINTON: You know, I hope that it is determined by what the individual person wants to do, because I don't think we should have stereotypes. That if someone, as I am, is interested in public affairs, I hope that person gets a chance to be involved. But if someone is not, then there should not be any pressure. And, of course, sometime in the next century, I hope we see a man in this position, and then we can see how he does.

MR. KHAN: Let me ask you then, just as a sort of final rounding up question. When, as time goes by, as people look back in history, what will be the impression of the Clintons? What do you think?

MS. CLINTON: I think we'll have to wait and kind of look back ourselves from time ahead, but I hope that my husband's accomplishments of his first term, that I think have been so effective for our country, will be given the credit that they are due, and I hope that his continuing efforts to bring people together and kind of change the way that a lot of people think about how we work together and live together, not only in America, but around the world, will take root.

MR. KHAN: Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, thank you very much for being on Q&A. A real pleasure to have you.

MS. CLINTON: Thank you for having me. I enjoyed it.

MR. KHAN: Thanks very much to you, our viewers, for sending all those e-mails and sorry we couldn't get to all your questions, phone calls and faxes on this show. Of course, we hope that Mrs. Clinton will come back and take some more of them. We're hoping for that, too, and maybe even Mr. Clinton.

Thanks for watching and taking part in our interactive forum. Stay tuned, there's more coming up on CNN.