

Obama fields Rasta's question on marijuana

Agence France-Presse

Apr 9, 2015 @ 7:15 PM

US President Barack Obama had been on the verdant Caribbean island of Jamaica less than 24 hours -- and had already visited Bob Marley's former home -- before he was asked by a deadlocked Rastafarian about legalizing marijuana.

In a Kingston town hall event, participant Miguel Williams, sporting a "Rasta4life" wrist band, asked the US commander-in-chief if he would become ganja's champion.

"Give thanks! Yes greetings Mr President," said Williams, "life and blessings on you and your family."

"My name is Miguel Williams but you can call I and I 'steppa'... That is quite sufficient, ya man."

Unperturbed by giggles from the audience, Williams set forth his case for legalization and decriminalization of the hemp industry and marijuana.

The Rastafari faith includes the spiritual use of cannabis.

"How did I anticipate this question?" was Obama's joking response. "Well," he said adding a comic sigh.

"There is the issue of legalization of marijuana and then there is the issue of decriminalizing or dealing with the incarceration in some cases devastation of communities as a consequence of non-violent drug offenses," Obama said.

"I am a very strong believer that the path that we have taken in the United States in the so-called 'war on drugs' has been so heavy in emphasizing incarceration that it has been

counterproductive," he said to some cheers.

But on the question of whether the United States should, in the words of reggae musician Peter Tosh "legalize it" Obama was more circumspect.

"I do not foresee, any time soon, Congress changing the law at a national basis."

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