

Remarks at a Reception for Members of the Diplomatic Corps
December 19, 2012

Thank you. Well, good evening, everyone. It is wonderful to see all of you.

I want to publicly thank Deputy Secretary Bill Burns. For those of you who don't know, Bill is only the second career diplomat in American history to rise to the level of Deputy Secretary. It is a tribute to Bill's extraordinary skills. I first met him when I was a new Senator, and I traveled to Moscow. And he was then the Ambassador in Moscow, and he immediately impressed me. One of these guys who doesn't speak loud, but actually has something to say—*[laughter]*—which is hard to find in Washington. In Washington, you have a lot of folks who speak loud and have nothing to say. *[Laughter]*

And so we're thrilled obviously with the work that he's done, but Bill, I think, is representative of our incredible Foreign Service officers. So thanks not only to Bill, but to all the outstanding State Department personnel who are working every day, often at great risk, to advance our interests and our ideals around the world.

Had Secretary Clinton been able to join us, I was going to congratulate her on her record-breaking travels, visiting 112 nations—just about every one of the countries that are represented here this evening—more than 400 travel days, nearly 1 million miles. These are not frequent flyer miles. *[Laughter]* She does not get discounts. I suspect she's not going to be flying commercial that much after she leaves the State Department. But she is tireless and extraordinary.

I spoke with her this past week. We can't wait to have her back. And I know that all of you join me in sending her wishes for a speedy recovery.

Now, we get together like this every year or so around the holidays, either here or at the White House. It's a chance for me to express my appreciation for the cooperation and partnership between our countries. That includes the hospitality that you and your fellow citizens show every single day to our diplomats and their families, Americans who are serving far from home.

But tonight I also want to thank you for something else. This obviously continues to be a very difficult week here in America. We're still grieving and reeling from unspeakable violence that took place in Newtown. I was up there on Sunday. I told the families there that they are not alone, that our entire Nation stands with them. But over the past few days, what we've also seen is, is that the entire world stands with them, and so many of your countries, your citizens, your leaders have sent messages to them. And I know they are grateful, and certainly, I am grateful.

At our Embassies and consulates, people are placing flowers and leaving notes. We've seen candlelight vigils and makeshift memorials, including a beach in Brazil marked by 26 crosses and a bright American flag. Across the globe, people are going online and posting messages and sending e-mails and texts of support. I think of the woman, a teacher in Lithuania, who said: "I send all my love and prayers to the families. It's all I can do so far away, but my heart is now in Newtown."

So this evening I want you and your fellow citizens back home to know how much this has meant to all of us: to the good people of Newtown, to me, and to the American people. You've stood with us, just as we've stood with you in similar moments: whether it's been a Scottish village, an Australian town, most recently, the terrible tragedy at a youth camp in Norway.

Whether it's a tsunami that strikes or an earthquake that levels communities or when a young girl is targeted and nearly killed just for wanting to go to school, we're reminded that terrible things happen in this world, but there are more people of good will than people of ill will. And that if we can just remind ourselves of our common humanity, perhaps we can make progress.

These are moments that pierce through all the noise of our daily lives. And they speak to a larger truth that permeates our work together. You turn on the TV, you open the newspaper, and every day, it seems we're bombarded with images of tension and conflict and division and differences. And that sometimes seems to validate those who believe that civilizations are destined to clash.

But when you think about the last few days, you're reminded that there's a fundamental human response that transcends cultures and transcends borders. And that's what is represented in this room. You look around the room, and we reflect this vast tapestry of human experience: people from every continent and every culture; North, South, East and West; from all great faiths; every creed and color; men and women. And we're reminded that whatever differences on the surface, deep down we're bound by a certain set of basic aspirations.

We want our children to be safe and free from fear. We want people to live in dignity and prosperity, free from want. We want people to be free to think for themselves and speak their minds and pray as they choose. We want them to surpass or do a little bit better than we did. That's what we want for our children. That's why we're here, to serve them, to do everything in our power to leave our children and the next generation a better, safer world.

And that's why, over the past 4 years, we've worked together, wherever we can, with your nations in a new era of engagement, based on mutual interest and mutual respect: strengthening alliances; forging new partnerships; confronting the spread of nuclear weapons; promoting open government, global health and food security and fighting human trafficking; ending one war in Iraq; winding down another war in Afghanistan; going after terrorist networks that threaten all of our people; standing up for self-determination and freedom, from South Sudan to the Arab Spring to Burma.

At the same time, we're mindful that we've got so much more work to do together. There still are wars to end. There are still democratic transitions to sustain. Violent extremism remains out there and has to be confronted and deadly weapons still have to be contained. We have to work to ease tensions between nations and uphold human rights. There are still political prisoners that need to be freed and children that deserve a better education. And all of us have to be concerned about a changing climate that could have a profound impact on every single country here.

This must be our work. And I'm here to say tonight that this spirit of partnership with your nations that defined my first term will remain a core principle of my second term. That's my commitment. That is America's commitment. And that, I think, is one of the ways we can honor all these beautiful children and incredible teachers who were lost this past Friday: by building a future that is equal to their dreams and delivers on the dreams of children all around the world just like them.

So as we gather this holiday season and look ahead to the new year, I'd leave you with a simple message, a wish: In the face of violence, let's seek peace. In the face of injustice, let's strive for dignity. In the face of oppression, let's stand for liberty. And in the face of suspicion and mistrust, let's build empathy and understanding. Let's understand that we need to live together: as nations and as peoples and as brothers and sisters, as children of a loving God. I hope all of you have a wonderful holiday season, and I look forward to seeing you in the new year.

God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:57 p.m. at the Department of State.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Diplomatic corps, reception at the Department of State.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Burns, William J.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Connecticut : Shootings in Newtown; Foreign policy, U.S : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Foreign policy, U.S. : Humanitarian assistance programs; Foreign Policy, U.S. : Open government and transparency, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; State, Department of : Deputy Secretary; State, Department of : Diplomatic corps, reception; State, Department of : Secretary; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200959.