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Remarks on the Death of James W. Foley in Syria From Edgartown, Massachusetts

August 20, 2014

Good afternoon, everybody. Today the entire world is appalled by the brutal murder of Jim Foley by the terrorist group ISIL.

Jim was a journalist, a son, a brother, and a friend. He reported from difficult and dangerous places, bearing witness to the lives of people a world away. He was taken hostage nearly 2 years ago in Syria, and he was courageously reporting at the time on the conflict there.

Jim was taken from us in an act of violence that shocks the conscience of the entire world. He was 40 years old, one of five siblings, the son of a mom and dad who worked tirelessly for his release. Earlier today I spoke to the Foleys and told them that we are all heartbroken at their loss and join them in honoring Jim and all that he did.

Now, Jim Foley's life stands in stark contrast to his killers'. Let's be clear about ISIL. They have rampaged across cities and villages, killing innocent, unarmed civilians in cowardly acts of violence. They abduct women and children and subject them to torture and rape and slavery. They have murdered Muslims—both Sunni and Shia—by the thousands. They target Christians and religious minorities, driving them from their homes, murdering them when they can, for no other reason than they practice a different religion. They declared their ambition to commit genocide against an ancient people.

So ISIL speaks for no religion. Their victims are overwhelmingly Muslim, and no faith teaches people to massacre innocents. No just God would stand for what they did yesterday and for what they do every single day. ISIL has no ideology of any value to human beings. Their ideology is bankrupt. They may claim out of expediency that they are at war with the United States or the West, but the fact is, they terrorize their neighbors and offer them nothing but an endless slavery to their empty vision and the collapse of any definition of civilized behavior.

And people like this ultimately fail. They fail because the future is won by those who build and not destroy and the world is shaped by people like Jim Foley and the overwhelming majority of humanity who are appalled by those who killed him.

The United States of America will continue to do what we must do to protect our people. We will be vigilant, and we will be relentless. When people harm Americans anywhere, we do what's necessary to see that justice is done. And we act against ISIL, standing alongside others.

The people of Iraq, who with our support are taking the fight to ISIL, must continue coming together to expel these terrorists from their communities. The people of Syria, whose story Jim Foley told, do not deserve to live under the shadow of a tyrant or terrorists. They have our support in their pursuit of a future rooted in dignity.

From governments and peoples across the Middle East, there has to be a common effort to extract this cancer so that it does not spread. There has to be a clear rejection of these kind of nihilistic ideologies. One thing we can all agree on is that a group like ISIL has no place in the 21st century.

Friends and allies around the world, we share a common security and a common set of values that are rooted in the opposite of what we saw yesterday. And we will continue to confront this hateful terrorism and replace it with a sense of hope and civility. That's what Jim Foley stood for, a man who lived his work, who courageously told the stories of his fellow human beings, who was liked and loved by friends and family.

Today the American people will all say a prayer for those who loved Jim. All of us feel the ache of his absence. All of us mourn his loss. We keep in our prayers those other Americans who are separated from their families. We will do everything that we can to protect our people and the timeless values that we stand for.

May God bless and keep Jim's memory, and may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:52 p.m. at the Edgartown School. In his remarks, he referred to James W. Foley, a freelance journalist who was killed by members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) organization on August 19, and his parents John and Diane; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Deaths :: Foley, James W., in Syria, remarks in Edgartown, MA.

Locations: Edgartown, MA.

Names: Asad, Bashar al-; Foley, Diane; Foley, James W.; Foley, John.

Subjects: Deaths : Foley, James W.; Iraq : Iraqi military and security forces; Iraq : Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) organization; Massachusetts : President's visits; Syria : Civil war and sectarian conflict; Syria : President; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Global threat.

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