

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks With President Andrzej Duda of Poland in a Briefing on Humanitarian Efforts for Ukraine in Jasionka, Poland

March 25, 2022

President Biden. Madam Ambassador, thank you very much. And, Mr. President, thanks for the welcome. Thanks for having us here. And to—and we sent you our best. We sent you Brzezinski as our Ambassador, and I'm glad he's here as well.

And you know, as you and I have spoken before, Mr. Ambassador—excuse me, Mr. President—the single most important thing that we can do from the outset is keep the democracies united in our opposition and our effort to curtail the devastation that is occurring at the hands of a man who, quite frankly, I think is a war criminal. And I think it will meet the legal definition of that as well.

But I want to thank everyone for—and I think it's been a surprise—about how we've all stayed together across the board. The most severe punishing sanctions in the history of the world—economic sanctions—have been imposed. And there's more that will come.

But you know, there's still an awful lot of suffering. I, like many of you, in the past have been through refugee camps all around the world, literally, and seen the devastation as a consequence of people who were abandoned and—in war-ravaged regions of the world, whether it's in the Middle East or Africa or wherever.

I mean, it's just devastating to see those little babies, little children, who are looking at mothers who—you don't have to understand the language they speak—you just see in their eyes the pain. And I mean, literally, the pain of watching their children. I don't think there's anything worse for a parent than to see a child suffering—their child suffering. I mean that sincerely. It's not hyperbole. I mean it from the bottom of my heart.

And so what you, the humanitarian community, are doing is of such enormous consequence. Brother, this is what we say we're about. This is what we say that our obligations are. But you're living up to it. We're doing it every day, all of you who are sitting at this table.

And so, you know, I'm here in Poland to see firsthand the humanitarian crisis. And quite frankly, part of my disappointment is that I can't see it firsthand, like I have in other places—they will not let me, understandably; I guess it would cross the border—and take a look at what's going on in Ukraine. But, you know, I'm eager to hear from you, the humanitarian community, about what you see, what you're doing, and where you think we go from here, because you're doing it every day.

As has been pointed out, 10 million people have been displaced thus far; 3.8 million people to other countries, including more than a million children. And according to the U.N., there are thousands of civilian casualties, 12 million in need of assistance, but hundreds of thousands—hundreds of thousands of people who are being cut off from help by Russian forces and are in—besieged in places like Mariupol. I mean, it's not stopping. It's like something out of a science fiction movie. You turn on the television and see what these towns look like, and the cities.

And I want to thank each one of you and your organizations. Excuse me.

[At this point, President Biden took a sip of water.]

When I was visiting our troops, they had pizza pie with hot peppers on it. *[Laughter]*

But you know, you're helping millions of people—millions of people. And we must—have to continue to scale up that assistance and coordinate it closely with the Government of Ukraine, which is really—I think even you Poles, who know Ukraine so well, have to be a little bit surprised at how what—how much courage and capacity for resiliency of the Ukrainian people. When you see a 30-year-old woman standing there in front of a tank with a rifle—I mean, talk about what happened in Tiananmen Square; that's Tiananmen Square squared.

And look, the—whether it's food or a blanket or cash or the care for medical teams that we send in or child welfare specialists, they need it now. They need it as rapidly as we can get it there.

And so, yesterday I announced, on behalf of the American people, we're prepared to provide another 1 billion, as the Ambassador pointed out, \$1 billion for those who fled and those who are affected around the world as a consequence of the negative impact of this war on food security.

The bad news is, they're—been the breadbasket of the world, Ukraine and Russia. But we, the United States, are going to do our part because we're the third largest producer of wheat in the world. And our Canadian friends are going to do the same thing. But we're going to try very hard.

But in the meantime, the suffering that's taking place now is at your doorstep. You're the ones who are risking, in some cases, your lives and risking all you know to try to help. And the American people are proud to support your efforts.

And today I want to hear from all of you. The problem is, I know they're going to tell me I have to get in the plane, and I'm going to have to leave. But I have a lot of questions, because I really mean it, I learn a great deal from you and your counterparts as I've traveled the world in the last 30 years.

And so I'm honored that President Duda is here today. And I'm joined by Secretary Blinken—he's an old friend as well as my Secretary of State; and our USID—USAID Administrator, Samantha Powers, who, like my sister, whatever I say, she says, "It's not enough." [Laughter] "It's not enough. I don't get to do more." And this is a workhorse, and so—but I'm now going to turn it back to her so we can get to the question-and-answer period.

U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Duda, I'd love—if you'd like to say a few words. And before you do, though, just—I think, on behalf of the entire humanitarian community, we just want to extend our thanks to you for the way that you and the Polish people have opened your borders, your hearts, your homes. The generosity and the show of solidarity has been breathtaking. Thank you so much, sir. Over to you.

President Duda. Thank you very much, Madam Ambassador.

Excellency, Mr. President; Mr. Secretary; Madam Ambassador; Polish and American friends: Please, if you can take these electronic devices and use it—channel two is English—because I would like to speak in my mother tongue, Polish.

[*President Duda spoke in Polish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

President Duda. Your Excellency, Mr. President; dear American and Polish friends; ladies and gentlemen: Thank you so much to you, Mr. President, and to the whole U.S. delegation for coming to Poland. But first and foremost, thank you for coming here to Rzeszów, to the region of Podkarpackie, which is very close—which is located directly to the Polish-Ukrainian border.

Thank you for coming to the place where this influx of refugees to Poland is the biggest. Your presence here, Mr. President, first of all, sends a very big sign of unity. This is a huge sign of support and Euro-Atlantic unity, unity with my country, with Poland. It demonstrates great friendship between Poland and the United States and a very profound alliance.

This is an evidence of great support and care for our mutual relations, but also—a thing of importance to me—it is a sign and a message that you care about the security of Poland.

Today, Mr. President, you met with U.S. soldiers who are deployed here and who watch over our security. They also help in this very difficult work, which is receiving millions of refugees who are crossing the border to our country right now. But first and foremost, they are guarding the security of the Polish border and guarding the security also of the entire Euro-Atlantic community, of the whole of NATO—because, today, the eastern flank of NATO—and I do not hesitate to say this; I also said it yesterday at NATO summit—this is a front line today, the eastern flank.

I'm very happy to have you here, Mr. President, because as I said, your presence here sends a great signal and evidence of unity, unity within NATO. It demonstrates a huge support and also a big significance attached by the United States to the stability and world peace, to reinstating the peace where difficult situations are happening in places where somebody resorts to acts of aggression against other democratic and free nations, as it is happening today against Ukraine, where the Russian aggression, unfortunately, happening for a month now is effect.

But your presence, Mr. President, here today in the city of Rzeszów is also a great sign of support to us: support in terms of humanitarian assistance, which today is provided to the refugees from Ukraine, but also it is provided to us Poles who are receiving guests, because this is the name we want to apply to them. We do not call them "refugees." They are our guests, our brothers, our neighbors from Ukraine who today are in a very difficult situation where 12 million people have fled their houses by the war, by the Russian attacks. More than 3.5 million have already fled abroad. They crossed different borders, but first and foremost, they have crossed the border with Poland.

Today, we have got 2.5 million people in Poland, and the number is growing all the time. So the number—exceeding 2 million right now—is still growing. And all signs are that if the Russian aggression continues, those numbers will continue to grow.

So, first and foremost, this—it gives me an opportunity to extend my gratitude to you, Mr. President, to our guests from the United States, but also to the NGOs, both from my country—starting from the organizations which are present here at this table today—but also, I want to express my gratitude to all NGOs—Polish NGOs who are involved.

But also, I would like to thank the U.S. organizations. A big number of them is already present in Poland, and a lot of them sends assistance to our country. And in this context, I'm so much grateful to you, Mr. President, for your support.

But also, I would like to ask you to convey my personal words of thanks to the First Lady of the United States, to Mrs. Jill Biden, your spouse, Mr. President. And please convey very heartfelt greetings from my wife to your wife. Both ladies had a conversation a couple of days ago. My wife gave an account of the situation in Poland. Both ladies exchanged their views on the possibilities of help. Then my wife paid a visit to the United States. And from the United States, she brought—in order to support Ukraine; in order to support Ukraine hospitals and also centers here in Poland, which treats children from Ukraine, also wounded children from Ukraine—she brought from the United States a number of medical equipment and medicines from the United States.

So thank you so much for this very swift assistance. Thank you so much. And please convey these words of greetings and these words of thanks to your wife. And also, please convey very heartfelt wishes from my wife to your wife.

So, ladies and gentlemen, this presents a huge challenge. This assistance is something unprecedented, because within a couple of weeks, more than 2 million people have come to our country. We have never experienced anything like that throughout our history. This is the first time.

But I would also like to thank all my compatriots who have opened their hearts and opened their houses, who have welcomed refugees—but as I said, first and foremost, our neighbors, our brothers from Ukraine—who are in a difficult position today, who are in need today. And all of us want to help them so much. They are staying in private houses, and they're staying in different facilities. Very often, these people are very much affected by the war: wounded persons, ill persons. Many of them have undergone mental trauma after the experiences they had.

Recently we have received people without any belongings to Poland. They fled from bombs. So the situation is extremely difficult. That is why we are so much thankful for any help and assistance, because this is what we very much need today.

On our part, we are doing everything we can with huge dedication and devotion. NGOs have also demonstrated huge NG—dedication. Also volunteers, firefighters. So there is a lot of assistance from NGOs, from churches—Catholic church, but also other churches in our country and religious communities.

There is a lot of support offered from all different sides, also from abroad. And once again, we're so much grateful for that. This presents a huge challenge to us, but it is also a huge challenge to the whole free world as we understand it, and we all have to live up to it.

Once again, thank you for this visit. And I'm so happy and delighted with the conversation that we can have. All the authorities in Poland are involved in providing assistance. It's not only the Government, NGOs, and volunteers, but also local governments.

Tomorrow, Mr. President, you will meet refugees in Warsaw. But also, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government will be present there, Mr. Mateusz Morawiecki. The mayor of Warsaw, Mr. Rafał Trzaskowski, will be there. And they will share with you, sir, all the activities that are being conducted in Poland in order to live up to this difficult situation, in order to solve the problem.

So, once again, we are delighted with the visit you are paying here, sir, and very—a warm welcome to our country.

President Biden. I'm going to get in real trouble if I don't—I forgot to say something: My wife sends her best as well. But she also went to St. Jude's Hospital, which is a cancer hospital in the United States, to see those young Ukrainian children who were brought over seeking serious, serious help with the cancers they have. And she said to give her best to your wife. That's why she's not with me today. She's out west doing that. So, thank you. Thank you for saving me.

Administrator Power. [Laughter] Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you, President Duda, so much. If I may just ask now the media to leave the room—thank you so much for being—so we can commence our discussion on the humanitarian circumstances. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:48 p.m. in the equipment hangar at the Rzeszów-Jasionka Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Administrator Power, who introduced the President, in her former capacity as U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations; U.S. Ambassador to

Poland Mark F. Brzezinski; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and Agata Kornhauser-Duda, wife of President Duda. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens.

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Names: Blinken, Antony J.; Brzezinski, Mark F.; Duda, Andrzej; Kornhauser-Duda, Agata; Owens, Valerie Biden; Power, Samantha; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich.

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