

we hope and pray that they were moved and emboldened and redetermined by Senator Mitchell's words. I will say what I have said from the beginning: The United States will support all sides in Ireland that take honest steps for peace. And I hope and believe that the necessary steps can be taken before we pass another Good Friday.

Thank you very much.

Now, enough of this really too serious stuff. Now we're going to have Saint Patrick's Day fun. Let me begin by thanking the performers who already have been entertaining you here and in the White House. Let me mention them all, and then I think we should give them a round of applause: the Irish Fire band and dancers from the O'Hare School of Irish Dance; the Culin School of Traditional Irish Dance and The Next Generation Band; the harpists, Ellen James and Michael O'Hanlan; the Prince George's County Police Pipe Band; and the U.S. Marine Band Irish Ensemble. Thank you very much. Hillary and I appreciate it. [*Applause*]

There is another great performance ahead: Both Sides Now, music and spoken words celebrating the people of Northern Ireland. You will hear the great music from our friends Phil Coulter and James Galway, two of Ireland's and the world's great musicians. Last December they performed together in Oslo on a great day, the day John Hume and David Trimble received the Nobel Peace Prize. They are joined by some familiar faces, Roma Downey and Aidan Quinn. We thank them for being here. And you will hear from the musicians of Different Drums of Ireland, whose sounds represent a melding of Ireland's traditions.

Finally, you will hear from a truly beautiful and remarkable young woman, Claire Gallagher. She lost her sight in the terrible bombing at Omagh, but she did not lose the vision and strength of her spirit and soul. And her mission for peace is powerful and clear. Claire came here tonight with her parents, her siblings, her teacher, and we are genuinely honored to have her. Hillary was so moved by her before in Northern Ireland, and I can't say enough about my respect for what she has done to carry on with what will still be a genuinely remarkable life.

I thank all of our performers in advance. And again, I say I hope the music and the spirit embodied by the Irish who are here will also help to give us the strength and resolve to fulfill the final promises of the Good Friday accord.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. in a pavilion on the South Grounds at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; Celia Larkin, who accompanied Prime Minister Ahern; First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume; Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams; Queen Elizabeth II, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Marjorie Mowlam of the United Kingdom; "Star Wars" creator George Lucas; and actors Roma Downey and Aidan Quinn. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Mr. Mitchell.

United States-Africa Ministerial Joint Communiqué *March 18, 1999*

From March 15–18, 1999, the United States hosted the first-ever meeting of African and American Ministers to enhance the U.S.-Africa partnership in order to foster greater economic development, trade, investment, political reform, and mutual economic growth in the 21st century. The President, eight members of the Cabinet, and four agency heads met for the first time with the African delegations. Eighty-three

Ministers from forty-six sub-Saharan African nations, representatives from four North African nations, and the heads of eight African regional organizations participated in this historic and successful meeting. African Ministers also met with members of the U.S. Congress.

In an effort to consolidate and build upon the significant progress achieved in Africa in recent years, Ministers and senior U.S. officials

discussed concrete ways to accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy. African Ministers expressed strong support for the immediate passage by Congress of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and for continued implementation of the President's Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity.

U.S. and African Ministers engaged in an active exchange on a broad range of economic, political, and social issues. They shared the view that high indebtedness constitutes a serious constraint to sustainable development in many African countries. In response to African requests for more effective debt relief, President Clinton proposed a six-point expanded debt relief program for highly indebted poor countries, which was warmly welcomed by the African ministers.

African and American officials discussed trade finance, market access, and access to private investment capital for ventures in Africa. Initiatives to enhance trade and investment links and economic policy dialogue were discussed as well as efforts to improve transportation and communications infrastructure and cooperation in agribusiness and energy. Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of addressing environmental issues. They noted that early ratification by the U.S. Senate of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification will help to mobilize community and international efforts to better manage land and water resources.

African Ministers and their U.S. counterparts exchanged ideas on how to enhance Africa's ability to compete in the global market through

the development of its greatest resource—its people. Emphasizing the need for accelerating reform and continued development assistance as well as trade and investment, participants examined ways to bolster human capacity through investment in education, skills training, gender equity, micro-enterprises and health, particularly the prevention of HIV/AIDS. All agreed that these steps will accelerate the ability of Africa to sustain socio-economic development and reduce poverty. They also recognized the crucial role of regional cooperation in the overall development process and in the integration of African states into the global economy.

Recognizing that sub-Saharan Africa is a vast and diverse region marked by serious problems as well as significant successes, Ministers examined ways to enhance U.S.-Africa cooperation to prevent and resolve conflicts. They also agreed on the importance of strengthening democratic institutions and respect for worker and human rights, accelerating economic reform, and creating a positive climate for business through political and social reforms. Ministers noted that the Ministerial illuminated the breadth and depth of the U.S.-Africa partnership, and set it on a firm foundation for future mutual advancement in the 21st century. All recognized the need for continuing dialogue and agreed to work out the means of ensuring regular and timely follow-up.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Joint Statement on the Northern Ireland Peace Process by United States President Bill Clinton, the Irish *Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern, and the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair

March 18, 1999

As we approach the first anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we can all take heart at how far we have come in a year.

The Agreement has provided the basis for the two traditions to work together, both in Northern Ireland and on the island as a whole, for the first time in 200 years. Democratically endorsed by an emphatic majority of people in both the North and the South, it gives a unique opportunity for peace and reconciliation in

which all the signatories can take pride. It has rightly been acknowledged as an example to the rest of the world of how dialogue can bring an end to conflict.

Much progress has been made in implementing the Agreement. The basis for a new partnership government in Northern Ireland has been agreed. Elections have been held. Last week, the Irish and British Governments signed treaties providing for the establishment of