

Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia and an Exchange With Reporters

November 12, 1999

President Clinton. Let me say, it's a great honor for me and for all of our team to welcome President Wahid here, with the members of his government. He is now the leader of the world's third-largest democracy, and we are very encouraged by that. We have seen this peaceful transition in Indonesia. We've seen a resolution in East Timor, even though there's still the problem of refugees in West Timor. And I'm looking very much forward to this visit.

I think the American people know that a strong and stable and prosperous and democratic Indonesia is very much in our interest. That's the sort of partnership we're interested in pursuing, and I hope I can be helpful in that regard.

So I'm delighted to have you here, Mr. President. And if you'd like to make any public comment to the press while you're here—

President Wahid. Well, thank you for putting a little time for me today to visit you, Mr. President, because you know that I come from Indonesia just to make sure that we are still great friends of the United States, that we are still in good touch with you. And I think that in the future, we meet you more than before. So also that you know that although there is a shift in policy but not at the expense of the American-Indonesian relationship. This is very important to know, since you understand that this is one world, so we have to create that kind of one world.

And I'm interested in the comment you made about our religious dialog, which goes toward one world, in that sense. You see, from far away we heard that you made very nice comments on those inter-religious dialogs in Indonesia. And I hope that 2 months to come, in January, we'll have a discussion initiated by the Americans from Philadelphia, with the Foreign Minister to be a participant there, to be on the organizing committee. We will invite, of course, the chief rabbi of Israel as well as the former chief rabbi. And from here from the Catholic side and so forth, I don't know who will come. But anyway, around 50 people will come there of the three Abrahamic traditions.

And since, you know, that kind of thing is special for us in Indonesia, I would like to use this occasion to inform you about this, before anything else—economic things. Those are the troubles there.

So I'm very glad. Today I met people from the World Bank and the IMF and then from the Ex-Im Bank, in which we see the possibility of having more hands extended towards us, to help us to overcome the difficulties in the economic shape, now.

Well, you mentioned about East Timor. I think that, of course, we still have trouble, and we would like the United States to take attention to this kind of problem as well. But I would like to inform you, Mr. President, that—[*inaudible*—] will come to Jakarta, and I'll meet him. So I hope that will ease a little bit the situation in that area, because East Timor is, you know, our brothers.

President Clinton. Thank you very much. That's very good news.

Pardon for President Soeharto

Q. President Wahid sir, why are you inclined to be willing to pardon your predecessor, President Soeharto? And President Clinton, what do you think of the possibility of a pardon for him?

President Wahid. I think if we—we will use law, of course. And we would like to know whether he is guilty or not, according to the law. But after that, we will pardon him because of two reasons. First is that he was our President, so we have to be careful about this for the future generations. Second thing is that, you know, that it's not easy, because Mr. Soeharto still has big followers. So we have to be careful not to, let's say, topple the cart.

President Clinton. I think the decision, first of all, is one for the Indonesian people and Government to make. And I think every country has to decide how to resolve the tension between the pursuit of a particular case and the desire for the reconciliation of people, and to go forward. And I think that that's a decision that the President has to make, and we ought to support his—anything that he's trying to do

to build democracy and to take Indonesia into the future.

Yes, you had a question?

Military Assistance to Indonesia

Q. Mr. President, after this meeting will you resume military assistance to Indonesia?

President Clinton. Well, we're going to talk about that and about what kinds of things that we both can do, over a period of time, to strengthen our relationships, including the issue of military-to-military ties. And I look forward to talking to the President about that.

Territorial Integrity of Indonesia

Q. How important is the structural integrity—the territorial integrity of Indonesia? And is it more important than the self-determination of the peoples of Indonesia?

President Clinton. Well, I don't think it has to be an either/or thing. I think the—I said, at the time when Indonesia supported giving the East Timorese a vote, that I would support that, and that having given them the vote, that the vote had to be respected.

On the other hand, we support the territorial integrity of Indonesia. And I think we have to acknowledge that it's quite a challenging task to preserve a democracy so widespread and so diverse. And I hope we can be somewhat helpful in the President dealing with this challenge.

Abortion Rights and U.N. Dues

Q. Sir, are you willing to compromise on the abortion funding issue in order to get the U.N. dues paid? And where is the status of those talks concerning the budget matter?

President Clinton. Well, I think it's very important that we pay our United Nations arrears. We can hardly ask others to do their part unless we do ours. And it's a big national security issue for us.

And it's related to this whole idea of whether we're going to fulfill our responsibilities in the world. And we have negotiations ongoing. They haven't been resolved yet. And I think I should

follow the same admonition I try to give others when they're involved in negotiations around the world: the less we say, the better—until we have an agreement that we think we can all stick by. But we're working on it, and I hope we can work it out.

Deputy Press Secretary Richard Siewert, Jr. Thank you, pool.

World Trade Organization Talks in China

Q. [Inaudible]—Mrs. Barshefsky coming back tomorrow? Have you given up hope of any deal, a WTO deal before the end of the year?

President Clinton. No. You know, they're actually—I have committed not to talk about the details of the talks, and I won't. But there are a finite and limited number of issues over which there are still differences, and they're working on them. And I have not given up.

I think it would be a very good thing for the world and a very good thing for the Chinese if China were in the WTO. But the reason it would be a good thing is that it would give them participation in a rule-based system, where you could have more and more open trade on fair and balanced terms. So the entry has to be a decision that has some real integrity to it, and it makes sense in terms of everybody else's membership and everybody else's responsibilities. And we're just trying to work through that. I hope we can.

But I think it's a very, very important objective. And I'm certainly glad we've pursued it, and we will continue to do so. And I hope we'll be successful, but I don't really have anything to say. I wouldn't read too much one way or the other into developments so far. Let's wait and see where we are when we've actually run out of time.

Q. On Pakistan, do you have any information?

President Clinton. Not yet.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.