

Statement on Providing Disaster Assistance to Venezuela December 23, 1999

Today I authorized a \$20 million drawdown of emergency disaster assistance to support relief operations in Venezuela. This assistance, to be drawn from existing Department of Defense inventories, will augment the \$5.5 million we have already committed to Venezuela. These funds will support continued search and rescue operations by U.S. military helicopters now on the scene, airlift of food, shelter, and medicines, water purification systems, and other critical needs.

As I told President Chavez when I spoke to him by telephone on Tuesday, we are deeply

saddened by the loss of life and devastation that has taken place in Venezuela. The heroic response of the Venezuelan people to this calamity has left a profound impression on all of us. Through the efforts of our military and USAID, we will continue to do everything possible to help the people of Venezuela. Providing this assistance is not only the right thing to do; it also promotes our interest in ensuring stability in a nation that is a key partner in the hemisphere.

At this holiday season, the people of Venezuela are in our thoughts and prayers.

Christmas Greeting to the Nation December 24, 1999

The President. On this holiest of holidays, Hillary and I would like to wish all of you a very merry Christmas. This is a season of joy, a time for family and friends to rejoice in one another's company and in the magic of Christmas. This is also the season of peace.

On behalf of all Americans, I'd like to send a special greeting to the brave men and women in uniform who are serving our country in lands far from home. Thank you for the greatest gift of the season, for protecting our Nation and safeguarding the blessings we all hold dear.

The First Lady. At the dawn of this new millennium, let us reflect on our hopes, our dreams, and the gifts we can give to the future. So let all of us cherish the gift of every child

among us and pledge to build a world where all children, no matter where they are born, can make their dreams come true.

The President. From our family to yours, merry Christmas, happy new year, and may God bless you all.

NOTE: The greeting was videotaped at approximately 2:30 p.m. on December 23 in Room 459 in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building for later broadcast. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 23 but was embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m. on December 24. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this greeting.

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The First Lady. At the dawn of this new millennium, let us reflect on our hopes, our dreams, and the gifts we can give to the future. Let us all cherish the gift of every child among us and pledge to build a world worthy of all our children.

The President. May the spirit of the season be with you today and throughout the new year. From our family to yours, merry Christmas, happy new year, may God bless you all.

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Radio Remarks for the “Lost Lives” Christmas Eve Broadcast December 24, 1999

3625, Maura Monaghan, from Tyrone. A Catholic girl, just 18 months old. To her family, little Maura Monaghan was known simply as “Mossie.” She was the youngest victim of the Omagh bombing. Her mother, Avril, her grandmother, Mary Grimes, and her unborn twin sisters also were killed on that Saturday afternoon, the 15th of August 1998, at 10 past 3 p.m., when that terrible bomb exploded.

They had gone to Omagh town as a special treat, to celebrate Mary Grimes’ birthday. They had even been to church earlier that day, the same church where their funeral services would be held just a few days later.

I still feel a personal connection with this tragedy. Two weeks later, Hillary and I visited Omagh. We saw the scene where 31 people were killed in the worst single incident of the Troubles. And then we went to the Leisure Center, where the families of the victims had had to wait for news of their loved ones. They were again to meet us, as were many victims who had been terribly injured on that day.

That meeting was one of the most difficult and moving experiences of our lives. But I have to say, it was also one of the most uplifting. Again and again, people who had been injured or lost loved ones said, “Keep going with the peace process. Keep going, and don’t give up on it. Do whatever you can to make sure that nobody else suffers as we are suffering.”

I know they suffer still. I know the first dawn of the new millennium will be a sad time for those who remember the family and friends who should still be with them. But I never forgot their courage and their faith in the new beginning for Northern Ireland and neither did so many of you, who raised your voices and said, “Enough is enough.”

And so we kept going. And now it looks as though, after all the difficulties, the new day we’ve been talking about for so long is finally at hand.