

shared with people everywhere the same need and hope for freedom. This hope overcame the designs of tyrants, and this hope overcame the tragedies of war.

The nations of Central and Eastern Europe are one of history's great examples of the power and appeal of liberty. And we believe that example will be followed and multiplied throughout the world.

Thank you all for coming. May God bless your nations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:38 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi of Bulgaria; Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojula of Estonia; Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete of Latvia; Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis of Lithuania; Foreign Minister Mircea Dan Geoana of Romania; Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan of Slovakia; and Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel of Slovenia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Statement on the Death of Walter Sisulu

*May 8, 2003*

I was saddened to hear of the death of Walter Sisulu in South Africa on May 6, 2003. Walter Sisulu was a man of great moral and strategic vision who committed his life to leading the struggle to end apartheid rule in South Africa. Sisulu was a man of principle and humility whose pursuit of an inclusive, multiracial South Africa never wavered through the 25 years of his imprisonment. Walter Sisulu lived to become a

free man and to see his vision become a reality. He leaves a legacy of courage and conviction for South Africans and all of us who share his belief in the equality of all people.

On behalf of the American people, I extend our deepest sympathies to Mrs. Albertina Sisulu, the Sisulu family, and the people of South Africa.

## Statement on Senate Action To Block Votes on the Nominations of Miguel A. Estrada and Priscilla Owen To Be United States Court of Appeals Circuit Judges

*May 8, 2003*

Miguel Estrada and Priscilla Owen have been waiting 2 years for an up-or-down vote in the Senate. Both of these nominees are of the highest integrity and character with tremendous legal experience. Both have been unanimously rated "well-qualified" by the American Bar Association. Each has the support of a majority of Senators, yet votes on their nominations are being blocked by a minority of Senators who are engaged in simultaneous filibusters.

These partisan obstructionist tactics are unprecedented, unacceptable, and inconsistent with the Senate's constitutional responsibility.

Because of the Senate's failure to hold timely votes, the number of judicial vacancies has become unacceptably high. When the Federal courts are understaffed, they cannot act in a timely manner to resolve disputes that affect the lives and liberties of Americans.

Mr. Estrada and Justice Owen represent the mainstream of American law and American values, possess extraordinary experience and integrity, and have strong bipartisan support from those who know them best. They will be outstanding circuit judges once they receive a vote and are confirmed.

In recent days, many Senators of both parties have rightly spoken out about the broken confirmation process and reiterated the need for the Senate to ensure timely consideration of judicial nominees. I appreciate their call for the Senate to fulfill its constitutional responsibility and hold up-or-down votes on all judicial nominees within a reasonable time after nomination.

## Remarks on the Judicial Confirmation Process *May 9, 2003*

Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Thanks. Thanks a lot for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Welcome to the White House and the Rose Garden. I'm pleased all of you could be here to stand for a truly independent Federal judiciary. The Framers of the Constitution knew that freedom and justice depend on fair and impartial judges. To ensure judges of the highest quality, integrity, they designed a system in which the President would nominate judges and the Senate would vote up or down on the nominees.

Today, we are facing a crisis in the Senate and, therefore, a crisis in our judiciary. Highly qualified judicial nominees are waiting years to get an up-or-down vote from the United States Senate. They wait for years while partisans search in vain for reasons to reject them. The obstructionist tactics of a small group of Senators are setting a pattern that threatens judicial independence. Meanwhile, vacancies on the bench and overcrowded court dockets are causing delays for citizens seeking justice. The judicial confirmation process is broken, and it must be fixed for the good of the country. Every person nominated to the Federal bench deserves a timely vote.

I want to appreciate Al Gonzales' introduction. I appreciate his good, sound legal advice. He's been my friend for a long time. I'm really pleased he left Austin,

Texas, to come up here and serve our country. I also want to thank the Attorney General for serving our country as well. He is doing a fabulous job for our Nation, and we wish him a happiest 60th birthday today.

I'm so pleased the leaders of the United States Senate are here. Bill Frist is ably leading the United States Senate. Thank you for coming, Senator. I want to thank Senator Orrin Hatch for being here as well. The chairman is going to lead the efforts to reform our process. And Mr. Chairman, I support your work to make sure we increase judicial pay across the United States. Thank you for your leadership.

I'm also grateful that Senators Cornyn from Texas, Dole, and Graham of South Carolina, Mitch McConnell, Zell Miller, and Arlen Specter are with us. These folks represent the best of the United States Senate, and thank you for coming.

I appreciate the fact that members of John Ashcroft's staff from the Justice Department are here, in particular Larry Thompson, Bobby McCallum, and Ted Olson. Thank you all for your good work and service.

I know we've got a lot of distinguished lawyers who are here. A.P. Carlton is the president of the American Bar Association. A.P., I appreciate you coming and lending your efforts to make sure that the system