

So, thank you, Mr. President. Thank you all for the press conference.

*President Saakashvili.* Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:27 a.m. at the Parliament Build-

ing. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. Some reporters spoke in Georgian, and their questions were translated by an interpreter. A portion of this news conference could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

## Remarks With President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia Prior to a Discussion With Civic Leaders in Tbilisi May 10, 2005

*President Bush.* Thank you for having me. I'm anxious to hear from you. There is—one of the great things about—and one of the most important things about democracy is to honor minority rights, is to recognize the rights of minorities. In my own country, we have struggled with this issue throughout our history, and yet we're constantly reminding ourselves of the need to respect minorities.

And I want to thank you for giving me the chance to come and visit with you. You've got a great country. It's a hopeful example, and to the extent that—as you move forward, I know you will honor your country but, at the same time, the heritage of those who live in the country.

So thank you for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you. I look forward to hearing from you. I'm honored to be here. It's an exciting moment for me and my wife, Laura, to be in this—in this beautiful country. Thank you.

*President Saakashvili.* Well, I'll just say maybe one or two words. You know, we are—I've always been impressed and excited to see how people of all different

ethnic origins, Hispanics and Russians and all the others, speaking to American system of democracy and rule of law and how all of them are proud to be Americans by also preserving their identity.

And we strongly believe that Georgia is not weak because it's diverse. On the contrary, our diversities are our strength. So this is our firm belief. You see all different people here, Mr. President. In fact, you saw yesterday comprised elements of all different ethnic groups. You went to the area where all the different ethnic groups have lived for generations and for thousands of years.

And again, thank you very much for coming. And thank you for sharing this conversation with all of us.

*President Bush.* Okay, thanks.

[At this point, the public portion of the event concluded.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. at the Parliament Building. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

## Remarks in Freedom Square in Tbilisi May 10, 2005

Mr. President, thank you for that introduction. Citizens of a free Georgia, Laura and I were in the neighborhood; we thought we'd swing by and say *gamarjoba*.

I am proud to stand beside a President who has shown such spirit, determination, and leadership in the cause of freedom. And Laura and I are proud to stand with the courageous people of Georgia in this place that has earned a proud name, Freedom Square.

When Georgians gathered here 16 years ago, this square had a different name. Under Lenin's steely gaze, thousands of Georgians prayed and sang and demanded their independence. The Soviet army crushed that day of protest, but they could not crush the spirit of the Georgian people.

The following year, Georgians returned to this square and pulled down the statue of Lenin. And on April 9th, 1991, you declared to the world that Soviet Georgia was no more and that the independent nation of Georgia was born. On that historic day, you reclaimed your sovereignty, but the hopeful start you made was not fulfilled. So 18 months ago, Georgians returned to this square to complete the task you began in 1989. You gathered here armed with nothing but roses and the power of your convictions, and you claimed your liberty. And because you acted, Georgia is today both sovereign and free and a beacon of liberty for this region and the world.

The path of freedom you have chosen is not easy, but you will not travel it alone. Americans respect your courageous choice for liberty. And as you build a free and democratic Georgia, the American people will stand with you.

You are building a free future for your children and grandchildren, and you are helping other nations to do the same. When the Afghan people defied terrorists to vote in that nation's first free Presi-

dential elections, Georgian soldiers were there to provide security. And last year, when terrorist violence in Iraq was escalating, Georgia showed her courage. You increased your troop commitment in Iraq fivefold. The Iraqi people are grateful, and so are your American and coalition allies.

You are making many important contributions to freedom's cause, but your most important contribution is your example. In recent months, the world has marveled at the hopeful changes taking place from Baghdad to Beirut to Bishkek. But before there was a Purple Revolution in Iraq or an Orange Revolution in Ukraine or a Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, there was the Rose Revolution in Georgia. Your courage is inspiring democratic reformers and sending a message that echoes across the world: Freedom will be the future of every nation and every people on Earth.

Building a free society is the work of generations. It took nearly 15 years of struggle before liberty and justice fully took root in this country. Many of the students and workers who gathered here on this square 18 months ago were too young to remember the protests of 1989, but they took up freedom's cause and finished the work that their parents had begun.

Now, across the Caucasus, in Central Asia, and the broader Middle East, we see the same desire for liberty burning in the hearts of young people. They are demanding their freedom, and they will have it.

As free nations, the United States and Georgia have great responsibilities, and together, we will do our duty. Free societies are peaceful societies. And by extending liberty to millions who have not known it, we will advance the cause of freedom and we will advance the cause of peace.

In this global struggle for liberty, our duties begin at home. While peaceful revolutions can bring down repressive regimes,