

Remarks in a Discussion With Members of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome, Italy

June 9, 2007

The President. I want to thank the good folks of Sant'Egidio for joining us. Sant'Egidio is one of the great faith-based organizations in the world. And we're here to talk about our common commitment to help the poor, feed the hungry, and help eradicate disease. The United States is firmly committed to helping people on the continent of Africa. We have committed in our Congress—and we'll work with our Congress—to spend \$30 billion to deal with HIV/AIDS, over a billion to deal with malaria, billions to deal with hunger, money to deal with education.

But these programs cannot be effective without loving people on the ground helping a neighbor in need. I want to thank you for being a part of the international army of compassion. I thank you for hearing the call to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. I'm looking forward to hearing your strategies in dealing with some of the most difficult problems in the world. I'm proud of your organization, and I thank all members of your organization for being such loving souls.

Thank you for having us here.

Marco Impagliazzo. Thank you, Mr. President. Before our strategy, some little word about our community, with your permission.

The President. Please.

Mr. Impagliazzo. The Community of Sant'Egidio was born in Rome, in this city, in 1968. At that time, the West was wondering about its future and the young people were looking for something. Andrea Riccardi, who is the founder of our community, was a student at the time in a high school of Rome. He called some of his fellow students to listen and to live according to the gospel, gospel of Jesus.

In those years, people believed that the revolution would have changed the world.

Andrea understood that there would have been no lasting change unless the people's hearts were touched by the word of Jesus. This word put into practice, meant, first of all, to be friends with the poor.

Today, there are communities of Sant'Egidio in 70 countries, with 60,000 members all over the world. Its spirituality is founded on several pillars—just three pillars, Mr. President. First, prayer, which takes place every day in all our communities—a personal prayer, reading the Scripture every day, but also common prayer. It means that every day, 60,000 people open the Scriptures. They read it and pray to the Lord from the beautiful churches of Rome—like the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere that you would have visited—to the hearts of Africa, or so many places in the immense lands of Latin America. Mr. President, prayer is our strength.

The second pillar is mission, reaching out to all those who seek and ask for a sense for their lives.

Finally, the third pillar, solidarity with the poor. There's a voluntary service carried out for free because no one is paid for his service to the poor in our community. No one.

Gratuitousness, Mr. President, is what our society is missing today. Everything is there to buy or to sell. But Jesus said: You received without payment; give without payment—Jesus said. This word of Jesus is the source of our members' work. In our story, one thing has always proved too: There is no love for the poor without faith.

Christians must live the primacy of the heart. One never has the solution to everything, but we must not close our hearts when we do not have a solution. We are all at the window of the world. That is why we cannot forget demands of the poor peoples of the world.

So what is striking in our story is that these signs, signs of resurrection, to place in those very places where it seems there is no hope left, like Africa. With your permission, therefore, Mr. President, I would like to pass now the floor to my friends who works every day in Africa.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

[At this point, the public portion of the event concluded; the discussion continued, however, and no transcript was provided.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:01 p.m. at the U.S. Embassy. Participating in the discussion were Andrea Riccardi, founder; Marco Impagliazzo, president; Mario Giro, director for international affairs; and members Cristina Marazzi, Leonardo Palombi, Elard Sadimba Allumando, Beatrice Kun Adon, and Claudio Betti, the Community of Sant'Egidio.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Romano Prodi of Italy in Rome

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Prime Minister Prodi. Good afternoon, everyone. I am delighted to have received President Bush today, and I thank President Bush for having chosen to spend a couple of days in Rome for his European mission, a rather long European mission, I would say. And this is the first in his second term.

Our talks today have been very, very interesting, indeed, very friendly talks. And I must say that we took the opportunity, in fact, to pursue some issues that we already began discussing in Heiligendamm. And, in fact, we had a bilateral meeting today and discussed some of the issues, as I said, that we already went over in Germany.

We talked about climate change, energy, our fight against poverty, our Africa policies. These are all very, very important decisions and choices that we have to make and, of course, that are going to be important for the future, the next generation as well.

We briefly went over some bilateral issues. Fortunately, we don't have any bilateral problems—I would say—no serious problems that have created any divisions

between our two countries. And in particular, in fact, we do share the same views with regard to many issues, many matters. And we basically agree on how the future of the world should look, should be.

Now, I thanked President Bush for some symbolic gestures that he has shown. Our countries are becoming closer and closer. And, in fact, Italian, the Italian language is one of the language that can be freely chosen in American schools. All high schools in America offer Italian as a language of study. And I think that this is a wonderful step, a wonderful way to bring two countries closer, especially when we consider that the flow of immigration between our two countries has stopped; it stopped a long time ago.

Now, going on to other issues, of course, we agree that we need some new major players, new major world players, and we have to, in fact, work together with China, India, Brazil, Mexico. And we agree on that approach.

We also talked about some meetings that we had with Mr. Lula and President Hu Jintao after the end of the G-8 summit. And we realize, as I've said, that we've