

Remarks Following a Discussion With President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali

February 12, 2008

President Bush. It's been a honor and a pleasure to welcome the President of Mali here to the Oval Office.

We discussed a variety of issues. I was touched by the President's concern about the life of the average citizen in Mali. We are partners with the President and the people of Mali through the Millennium Challenge Account. And one reason we worked with the Government is because they've agreed to fight corruption and support the education and health of its citizens. This is a country that's committed to the rights of its people, and we're proud to be standing side by side with you.

Two issues that are very important to this administration, Mr. President, were the issues that my wife Laura discussed when she came to your country: One is literacy, and two is the eradication of malaria. And I assured the President that our commitment remains strong to both important issues. And I thank him very much for his hard work in helping his citizens deal with HIV/AIDS.

And finally, the President and I spent a fair amount of time talking about the dangers of radicals and extremists associated with groups like Al Qaida. And we talked about the need for close cooperation to protect the innocent people from those who murder the innocent in order to achieve their dark political vision.

So it's been my honor to welcome a good man here to the Oval Office.

President Toure. Yes. First of all, I would like to convey to the President of the United States the sympathies and solidarity of the people of Mali because of the destruction—

President Bush. Thank you.

President Toure. —brought by the tornadoes in some of the Southern States of the United States.

And then I told Mr. President that we were sensitive and impressed by the impression that we had from the visit of Mrs. Laura Bush to Mali some time ago. Also, thank the President for the friendship between the people of the United States and the people of Mali and the cooperation between Mali and the United States that we do entertain on both sides since the independence of Mali in 1960.

But I could also come to the United States just to tell Mr. President—

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Toure. —thank you, because the President had some initiatives not only for Mali but also for Africa, which we believe are historical initiatives, and which we do have the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the greater participation against the fight against AIDS through the Global Fund, the initiative of the eradication of malaria, and not to forget the Presidential initiative on literacy in Africa, which is very important in our view, because when you want to develop, you—

President Bush. That's right.

President Toure. —need to also improve basic education.

President Bush. That's right.

President Toure. So I emphasized to the President that—and I reaffirm—that Mali signed and Mali averred to all different initiatives on the fight against terrorism. So it is humanly inadmissible, unacceptable to see or to assist or to be indifferent to the suggestion that we are seeing to some practices which really do not deserve to exist.

So we had a fruitful exchange of views on our cooperation. So I said to Mr. President that I would like to thank him and also to convey all the gratitude of the people of Mali, but I emphasized also the fact that may God save Mali and the United States. President, thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:33 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Presi-

dent Toure spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Celebration of African American History Month February 12, 2008

The President. Thank you all for coming. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. Laura and I are honored that you all came as we celebrate African American History Month. This is a month in which we recognize the many African Americans who've made great contributions to our country. We honor the talent and their courage. We renew our commitment to securing liberty and justice for every American. That's why we're here.

I appreciate many of the notables who have joined us. Madam Secretary, appreciate you coming—Mr. Secretary, Alphonso Jackson, and Marcia. Thanks for coming, Mr. Secretary. Proud you're here.

If I skip some of the notables, it's because I'm going to say something about them a little later on. [*Laughter*] So, Congressman, I'll be with you in a minute. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate Dr. Leonard Haynes, who's the Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I am proud—Doc, thanks for coming. I'm proud to welcome all the presidents from the Historically Black Colleges and Universities here today; really appreciate your service to the country.

I want to thank Ron Langston, National Director of the Minority Business Development Agency; Roslyn Brock, vice chairman of the NAACP. Roslyn, thank you for coming. Somewhere you are—there you are. I thank John Fleming, president, Association of the Study of African American Life and History. Yes, sir, Reverend Al Sharpton

and his wife Dominique; Reverend, it's good to see you.

Audience member. Daughter.

The President. Daughter. [*Laughter*] Daughter. [*Laughter*] I don't get them right all the time. [*Laughter*] But thank you for coming. And, Dominique, you're sure a lot prettier than your father. [*Laughter*]

Thurgood Marshall, Jr., we're proud you're here. Yes, thanks for coming. Good to see you, sir. State Representative Calvin Smyre of the State of Georgia, who is the president of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. Sure proud you're here.

Thank you all for coming. There's a lot of other notables here. Just consider yourself welcomed. [*Laughter*]

The theme of this year's African American History Month is a celebration of America's cultural diversity. It is a tribute to a scholar who deepened our appreciation for diversity, Carter G. Woodson. When Dr. Woodson began his career in the early 20th century, most Americans knew little about African American heritage. Dr. Woodson set out to correct that. His scholarship helped pioneer the field of African American studies. And by the time he passed away in 1950, the son of freed slaves had become known as the Father of Black History.

It is important for all our citizens to know the history of the African American struggle for equality. We must remember that the slave trade brought many Africans to America in chains, not by choice. We must remember how slaves claimed their God-given right to freedom. And we must