

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on Democracy and Development With
Kuwaiti Women in Kuwait City, Kuwait
January 12, 2008

The President. I want to thank these ladies from Kuwait for joining me and the Charge. I'm really looking forward to the conversation. Laura had met with some before and came back very impressed by the spirit and desire of Kuwaiti women to be full participants in Kuwaiti society.

First, I'd like to thank His Highness for his hospitality. Secondly, last night in a conversation with His Highness, I said, "Any regrets about having women vote in elections and run for elections?" He said, "Absolutely not." He said, "Our society is enriched by the participation of our women." And he's right. All societies are enriched by the participation of women. I happen to believe very strongly in the freedom agenda, and I think an integral part of that agenda is making sure that all participants in society have got an equal voice.

And one of the interesting—I think when people look back at the history of the Middle East and history of the world, it's going to be women who helped lead the freedom agenda. And it's happening right here in Kuwait. We've had people here at the table who ran for Kuwaiti parliament. And Jenan ran; she said—I told her the first race I ever ran, I lost. [*Laughter*]. And she said, "Well, the first race I ever ran, I lost too." But she intends to win next time around.

And so I appreciate you all coming. I'm honored to be with you. We want to help. Part of our democracy agenda, of course, is the empowerment of women.

And so thank you for taking time. Doctor, would you like to have a few comments?

Former Minister of Health Maasouma Al-Mubarak of Kuwait. Of course. First of all, we'd like to welcome you, Mr. President. As you probably watched the—our media this morning, the media said that we are

saying it from the deep of our hearts: Welcome, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Al-Mubarak. Definitely, we Kuwaitis look with great appreciation to the role that the American people played in the liberation of Kuwait, and we remember with great appreciation your father role, Mr. Bush. And we call him here in Kuwait, Bu Abdullah. That means he's so close to us, and the role that he played, really still and forever, we remember it as Kuwaitis.

And looking to the domestic issues in Kuwait, and especially the freedom that we are enjoying, looking to this group of ladies that are gathered totally by the Embassy, this is something that you don't have as much in lots of the countries and rarely in the Middle Eastern countries. Our Government has nothing to do with the gathering and nothing to do with this election of the people. And that gives a great idea that we speak our minds; we speak our hearts. And we are so glad to be with you, Mr. President.

And regarding the issues, really, that we are having in mind, Mr. President, as women and as mothers, we're really asking you, as a person and as the leader of the great United States, for to put an end for the agony of mothers in Kuwait, for the people, and for our fellow citizens in Guantanamo. And we are sure that your human feelings so much with us in that, and we need really your role and your assistance in that regard.

And also, as citizens and people from this region, we deserve to live in peace. We are looking forward to live in peace. We are really—not only in Kuwait, but in the whole region, this region, the Gulf region, suffered for years and years from—suffering from the wars and the impact of the wars. And we need your assistance,

your help, your good will to have peace in this part of the world. And as you've played lots of roles in having peace and security in lots of parts of the world—you, your father, and the other President.

Again, welcome, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:03 p.m. at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, he referred to Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge d'Affaires Alan Misenheimer of the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait; Amir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait; and Jenan Boushehri, former candidate for the Kuwait Municipal Council.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Manama, Bahrain *January 12, 2008*

Your Majesty, thank you very much for bestowing upon me the award. I'm most honored. I accept it on behalf of the people of the United States of America. I also thank you and the Crown Prince and the Prime Minister for your gracious hospitality. I am really honored to be the first U.S. sitting President to have visited your country. Perhaps I should say, it's about time.

The American people have a long friendship with the people of Bahrain. For decades, Bahrain has welcomed the United States Navy and is now home to our 5th Fleet. Two years ago, I was pleased to sign legislation that strengthened our friendship and our relationship. It was the free trade agreement with Bahrain; it's America's first such agreement with any nation in the Gulf. This agreement is helping to pave way to freer and fairer trade between our countries so we can create jobs and opportunity and hope in both our lands.

Our two nations share a common vision for the future of the Middle East. Through our alliance, we share the burdens and risks of maintaining security as well as defending freedom throughout the region. We also believe in the power of democratic reform. Your Majesty, I appreciate the fact that

you're on the forefront of providing hope for people through democracy. Your nation has held two free elections since 2000. And in 2006, your people elected a woman to your parliament. Bahrain's reforms are making your nation stronger. You're showing strong leadership, and you're showing the way forward for other nations.

Your Majesty, I look forward to our meetings later today. I look forward to discussing how we continue—can continue to advance peace in the Middle East. I look forward to sharing with you my experiences that I had in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. I look forward to talking about how we can continue to ensure security in the Gulf. Together, we will continue to strengthen our friendship and our cooperation, and I'm proud to be with you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:55 p.m. at Sakhir Palace. In his remarks, he referred to King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, Crown Prince Sheikh Salman bin Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, and Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa of Bahrain. He also referred to Lateefa al-Geood, who was the first woman elected to the Council of Representatives of the National Assembly of Bahrain in 2006.