

July 13 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2008

And our thoughts are with Jill and the three children now as they deal with their grief. We went to church this morning at Camp David, and I prayed for Jill and the family, that they would have—find comfort and strength during this tough time for them. And I just hope they understand that Tony was loved here in the White House,

and a lot of those who, you know, got to know him really do care about Jill and the kids.

So anyway, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks on the 10th Anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act

July 14, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome. I want to welcome Congressman Wolf, Congressman Smith, Congressman Franks, former Senator Nickles. Thank you all for coming. I'm so honored that you've come to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act.

This legislation that we commemorate today builds on a tradition that defined our Nation. After all, when the Founding Fathers adopted the Bill of Rights, the very first liberty they enshrined was the freedom of religion. They recognized that the most basic freedom a man can have is the right to worship his own God as he sees fit. Today, we are blessed to live in a country where that freedom is respected.

In too many countries, expressions of freedom were silenced by tyranny, intolerance, and oppression. So a decade ago, Members of Congress—I suspect some of the Members here—and religious leaders and human rights activists came together to advance religious freedom around the globe. The result of their work was the International Religious Freedom Act. The bill created vital diplomatic tools to help our Government to promote religious liberty abroad. The act established an Ambassador at Large position to ensure that religious liberty remains a priority of every administration. And I want to thank our current Ambassador, John Hanford, for joining

us today. And thank you for taking on this important job.

The act established the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to monitor the state of religious liberty worldwide. The act requires annual reporting on the state of religious freedom in every nation to help identify the most egregious offenders. The act authorizes sanctions against regimes. In all these ways, the act has placed religious liberty where it belongs, at the center of U.S. foreign policy.

We've seen some hopeful progress during the last couple of years. We've seen it in Turkmenistan, where the nation's chief mufti had been ousted and imprisoned for refusing to teach state propaganda as a sacred religious text. Through efforts authorized by the International Religious Freedom Act, the United States pressed for the mufti's release. In 2007, Mufti Ibadullah was pardoned and freed. He has since become an adviser to Turkmenistan's Council on Religious Affairs.

We've seen some progress in Vietnam. The United States used the tools of this act to press for the release of dozens of religious prisoners, all of whom had been freed. Vietnam's Government has reopened many of the churches it had shut down. And most religious groups report a decrease in the Government's oppression of believers. This act has encouraged Vietnam

to take some promising first steps toward religious liberty, and we're going to continue to work toward the day when all Vietnamese are free to worship as they so desire.

The 10-year anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act is also an occasion to remember the many people who have yet to secure this precious liberty. Our thoughts turn especially to those living in the countries where religious freedom is of particular concern. Some of these nations have taken steps toward reform; others haven't. Today we urge the leaders of all these countries to immediately end their abuses of religious freedom. We urge these leaders to respect the rights of those who seek only to worship their God as they see fit.

Today we remember those seeking religious freedom in Iran, where the regime's anti-Semitism has provoked global outrage. We remember those seeking religious freedom in Eritrea, where approximately 3,000 religious prisoners languish in the nation's jails. We remember those seeking religious freedom in Sudan, where police have used tear gas to attack a Christian church, and where Christian leaders who met with a Muslim woman wanting to convert were beaten and detained.

We remember those seeking religious freedom in North Korea, where those caught practicing faiths other than the state ideology are imprisoned and people found with Bibles can be executed. We remember those seeking religious freedom in Burma, especially the nation's Buddhist monks who have endured brutal raids on their monasteries and suffered tear gas attacks and gunfire during peaceful protests.

We remember those seeking religious freedom in Uzbekistan, where, in the past, members of religious minorities have been beaten and jailed, yet where recent agreements give us hope that these abuses will not be repeated in the future.

We remember those seeking religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, where the reli-

gious police continue to harass non-Muslims, yet where we also believe reforms pledged by King Abdallah can bring real change. We remember those seeking religious freedom in China, where we honor those who press for their liberties, people like Uighur Muslims. I had the honor of meeting Rebiya Kadeer. I've also had the honor of meeting those who attend underground churches in China. And we also honor the courage of the Dalai Lama and the Buddhists in Tibet.

And you know, last month here at the White House, I met with a Chinese dissident named Li Baiguang. He's a lawyer who worked on human rights cases; he's a house church Protestant. For his work, he's been repeatedly jailed and attacked. A few months ago, he was scheduled to meet with Members of Congress. State authorities blocked the meeting and detained Li on the outskirts of Beijing. This determined man has pledged: "I'll continue to seek justice for victims of rights abuses and promote the rule of law in China." And my message to President Hu Jintao, when I last met him, was this: So long as there are those who want to fight for their liberty, the United States stands with them.

Whenever and wherever I meet leaders, I'm going to constantly remind them that they ought to welcome religion in their society, not fear it. I'll remind them, someone pledged to love a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves is someone who will add to their society in constructive and peaceful ways.

I'm met by men and women who are working for religious freedom around the globe, people like Li. And when I do, I'm always impressed by their courage. I've attended worship services from Hanoi to Beijing. And when I speak to world leaders, I remind them—the leaders in those countries—that the worship services are a necessary part of developing a society for which they can be proud.

And so as we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom

Act, we pray that all those who seek their God will be able to do so free of oppression and fear.

I want to thank you all for your good work, and I ask for the good Lord to continue to bless our country. Thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:51 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In

his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Donald L. Nickles; Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, adviser, Turkmenistan's Council on Religious Affairs; Chinese Uighur dissident Rebiya Kadeer; and Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on Energy

July 14, 2008

Good afternoon. Across the country, Americans are concerned about the high price of gasoline. Every one of our citizens who drives to work or takes a family vacation or runs a small business is feeling the squeeze of rising prices at the pump.

To reduce pressure on prices, we must continue to implement good conservation policies, and we need to increase the supply of oil, especially here at home. For years, my administration has been calling on Congress to expand domestic oil production. Unfortunately, Democrats on Capitol Hill have rejected virtually every proposal, and now Americans are paying at the pump. When Members of Congress were home over the Fourth of July recess, they heard a clear message from their constituents: We need to take action now to expand domestic oil production.

One of the most important steps we can take to expand American oil production is to increase access to offshore exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf or what's called the OCS. But Congress has restricted access to key parts of the OCS since the early 1980s. Experts believe that these restricted areas of the OCS could eventually produce nearly 10 years worth of America's current annual oil production. And advances in technology have made it

possible to conduct oil exploration in the OCS that is out of sight, protects coral reefs and habitats, and protects against oil spills.

Last month, I asked Congress to lift this legislative ban and allow the exploration and development of offshore oil resources. I committed to lift an executive prohibition on this exploration if Congress did so, tailoring my executive action to match what Congress passed. It's been almost a month since I urged Congress to act, and they've done nothing; they've not moved any legislation. And as the Democratically controlled Congress has sat idle, gas prices have continued to increase.

The failure to act is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to me, and it's unacceptable to the American people. So today I've issued a memorandum to lift the executive prohibition on oil exploration in the OCS. With this action, the executive branch's restrictions on this exploration have been cleared away. This means that the only thing standing between the American people and these vast oil resources is action from the U.S. Congress.

Now the ball is squarely in Congress's court. Democratic leaders can show that they have finally heard the frustrations of