

Remarks Following a Meeting With Darfur Human Rights Activist Halima Bashir

December 10, 2008

The President. I have just had the distinct pleasure and honor of visiting with Dr. Halima Bashir, who wrote a book called “Tears of the Desert.” This good soul brings firsthand accounts to what life is like in Darfur. She has witnessed violence, deprivation, and she carries a message of a lot of people who want our help.

I assured her that, in spite of the economic difficulties, our aid will continue to flow. We will use our influence to make sure the aid gets to the people of Darfur.

I also made it clear that I am frustrated with the pace of activities, that the United Nations must expedite sending troops, peacekeepers, to provide security for the people. That’s what they want; they want to be able to have a secure life, and that we’ll help.

The United States continues to stand at the ready to provide airlift. The pace of action out of the United Nations is too slow. We support the mediation process by the A.U.-U.N. mediator. In other words, we recognize in order for there to be peace in Darfur that parties must come to the table in good faith and solve the problems.

And finally, it’s very important for President Bashir of Sudan to know that he cannot escape accountability, that if he so choose, he could change people’s lives—the condition of people’s lives very quickly.

I’ve appointed a Special Envoy to Sudan to help put pressure on the Government.

The United States must continue to rally the international community to put pressure on the Government as well. The urgency of the situation is never more apparent than when I had the honor of visiting with this brave soul.

And so I welcome you to the Oval Office. And I welcome any comments you want to make.

Halima Bashir. Yes, of course. Thank you very much for the President to invite me to the White House. And I think this is—I’m very happy because now Darfur victims’ voices is heard in the White House and to the American people and to the world. And I think the President, the message I send to him is going to do more work in Darfur to handle the situation, and to—[inaudible]—and the ICC ruling and just to stop the genocide and the crisis in Darfur. Because now more than 5 years, and we do not need to wait anymore. We need real action.

And thank you very much.

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

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:27 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Djibril Yipene Bassole, Joint A.U.-U.N. Mediator for Darfur; President Umar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan; and U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Richard S. Williamson.

Remarks Following a Discussion on Drug Use Reduction

December 11, 2008

I’ve just had an extraordinary discussion with a group of our fellow citizens; some

are pastors, some are ex-cons, some are baseball players, some are docs, some are

community activists, all who have come together to talk about a comprehensive strategy to deal with drug use in America.

And our strategy is threefold: one, reduce demand, interdict supply, and then help people who have become addicts. And we're making progress. No question, there's still work to do in America, but we are making progress. And one way to note the progress is this statistic: Since 2001, teenage drug use has declined by 25 percent; that means 900,000 fewer teens on drugs.

The strategy can be measured. The implementation requires understanding that grassroots activists—for example, like the faith community—can play an integral work in working alongside government to achieve our objectives. The Admiral here has—Admiral Allen, Commandant of the Coast Guard, reported about our interdiction efforts—that we've been making great progress at interdicting, for example, cocaine being trafficked primarily out of South America and Central America into our country.

And finally, I am pleased that the Access to Recovery program and programs like that are vibrant and active, which basically says to an addict: If you so choose, you

can redeem your health, redeem your money at a place of love in the faith community.

Lives are changing. People's lives are being saved. I say government is justice, government is law and—but government must not fear places of love. And so this has been a positive report and a great meeting, and I want to thank you all for coming. More importantly, I want to thank you for being citizens and not spectators, people who have decided to do something about your personal lives, as well as the lives of those in your communities. It is the collective effort of thousands of social entrepreneurs that help make America a hopeful place.

There will be more work done after I'm out of here, but we have laid the foundation for a successful effort against drug use, drug supply, and helping those who have been addicted.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:09 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Commencement Address at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas

December 12, 2008

The President. Thank you all. Howdy!

Audience members. Howdy!

The President. I am thrilled to be back in Aggieland. And it's always an honor to be introduced by the President of the United States, especially when he's your dad. And how about mom? Mom, I've been meaning to say this publicly for a long time: thanks, thanks for the gray hair. *[Laughter]*

I congratulate the graduates of the Fighting Texas Aggie classes of 2008, class of 2007, the class of 2006—I'd better stop.

[Laughter] Let's just say that I hope there's no one left from when I spoke to the commencement in 1998. *[Laughter]* If so, I hope you're walking out of here with a Ph.D. *[Laughter]*

I am grateful to the faculty and staff of Texas A&M for their devotion to learning and their example of scholarship. I appreciate your outstanding president, Dr. Elsa Murano. And I am glad to be with—*[applause]*—there you go. And I am glad to have traveled from Washington today