

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