

Statement on the Earthquake in New Zealand *February 22, 2011*

On behalf of the American people, Michelle and I extend our deepest condolences to the people of New Zealand and to the families and friends of the victims in Christchurch, which has suffered its second major earthquake in just 6 months. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those whose lives have been touched by this tragedy, especially as they search for their loved ones and work to recover from this disaster. The United States is a close friend and partner of New Zealand, as evidenced by the meeting of the U.S.-New Zealand Partnership Forum that was underway in Christchurch

when the earthquake struck. To assist in the rescue and recovery efforts, we have agreed to deploy a U.S. Agency for International Development Disaster Assistance Response Team, including an urban search and rescue team, and we stand ready to provide more assistance as needed. As our New Zealand friends move forward, may they find some comfort and strength in knowing that they will have the enduring friendship and support of many partners around the world, including the United States.

Statement on the Election of Rahm I. Emanuel as Mayor of Chicago, Illinois *February 22, 2011*

I want to extend my congratulations to Rahm Emanuel on a well-deserved victory tonight. As a Chicagoan and a friend, I couldn't

be prouder. Rahm will be a terrific mayor for all the people of Chicago.

Remarks on the Situation in Libya *February 23, 2011*

Good afternoon, everybody. Secretary Clinton and I just concluded a meeting that focused on the ongoing situation in Libya. Over the last few days, my national security team has been working around the clock to monitor the situation there and to coordinate with our international partners about a way forward.

First, we are doing everything we can to protect American citizens. That is my highest priority. In Libya, we've urged our people to leave the country and the State Department is assisting those in need of support. Meanwhile, I think all Americans should give thanks to the heroic work that's being done by our Foreign Service officers and the men and women serving in our Embassies and consulates around the world. They represent the very best of our country and its values.

Now, throughout this period of unrest and upheaval across the region, the United States has maintained a set of core principles which

guide our approach. These principles apply to the situation in Libya. As I said last week, we strongly condemn the use of violence in Libya.

The American people extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of all who've been killed and injured. The suffering and bloodshed is outrageous, and it is unacceptable. So are threats and orders to shoot peaceful protesters and further punish the people of Libya. These actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency. This violence must stop.

The United States also strongly supports the universal rights of the Libyan people. That includes the rights of peaceful assembly, free speech, and the ability of the Libyan people to determine their own destiny. These are human rights. They are not negotiable. They must be respected in every country. And they cannot be denied through violence or suppression.

In a volatile situation like this one, it is imperative that the nations and peoples of the world speak with one voice, and that has been our focus. Yesterday a unanimous U.N. Security Council sent a clear message that it condemns the violence in Libya, supports accountability for the perpetrators, and stands with the Libyan people.

This same message, by the way, has been delivered by the European Union, the Arab League, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and many individual nations. North and south, east and west, voices are being raised together to oppose suppression and support the rights of the Libyan people.

I've also asked my administration to prepare the full range of options that we have to respond to this crisis. This includes those actions we may take and those we will coordinate with our allies and partners, or those that we'll carry out through multilateral institutions.

Like all governments, the Libyan Government has a responsibility to refrain from violence, to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, and to respect the rights of its people. It must be held accountable for its failure to meet those responsibilities and face the cost of continued violations of human rights.

This is not simply a concern of the United States. The entire world is watching, and we will coordinate our assistance and accountability measures with the international community. To that end, Secretary Clinton and I have asked Bill Burns, our Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, to make several stops in

Europe and the region to intensify our consultations with allies and partners about the situation in Libya.

I've also asked Secretary Clinton to travel to Geneva on Monday, where a number of foreign ministers will convene for a session of the Human Rights Council. There she'll hold consultations with her counterparts on events throughout the region and continue to ensure that we join with the international community to speak with one voice to the Government and the people of Libya.

And even as we are focused on the urgent situation in Libya, let me just say that our efforts continue to address the events taking place elsewhere, including how the international community can most effectively support the peaceful transition to democracy in both Tunisia and in Egypt.

So let me be clear: The change that is taking place across the region is being driven by the people of the region. This change doesn't represent the work of the United States or any foreign power. It represents the aspirations of people who are seeking a better life.

As one Libyan said, "We just want to be able to live like human beings." We just want to be able to live like human beings—it is the most basic of aspirations that is driving this change. And throughout this time of transition, the United States will continue to stand up for freedom, stand up for justice, and stand up for the dignity of all people.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:07 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House.

Statement on the First Anniversary of the Death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo February 23, 2011

One year ago today, the selfless and tragic death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo galvanized the world's attention to the ongoing mistreatment of those unjustly held by Cuban authorities for bravely standing up for the rights of the Cuban people.

The attention brought to the plight of Cuba's political prisoners by Zapata's coura-

geous act and by the peaceful protests of *las Damas de Blanco* has helped free a number of his fellow activists through the good offices of the Catholic Church in Cuba. Today I join the Cuban people in marking this anniversary by again calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Cuba.