

We received some tragic news today that President Rabbani, who had been heading up the reconciliation process, was killed in a suicide attack. He was a man who cared deeply about Afghanistan and had been a valued adviser to President Karzai, had made enormous contributions to rebuilding the country. So it is a tragic loss. We want to extend our heartfelt condolences to you, his family, and the people of Afghanistan.

But, Mr. President, I think we both believe that despite this incident, we will not be deterred from creating a path whereby Afghans can live in freedom and safety and security and prosperity and that it is going to be important to continue the efforts to bring all elements of Afghan society together to end what has been a senseless cycle of violence.

So we very much appreciate your presence here today. I know that you're going to have to leave after our meeting. But we want to give you an opportunity to speak to the press as well.

President Karzai. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your message of condolence and support to myself and to Afghan people on the very tragic loss and martyrdom of Professor

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the chairman of the Afghan Peace Council, the former Afghan President, and Afghan patriot, who, as we see, has sacrificed his life for the sake of Afghanistan and for the peace of our country.

The mission that he had undertaken was vital, Mr. President, for the Afghan people and for the security of our country and for peace in our country. We will miss him very, very much. I don't think, Mr. President, that we can fill his place easily. He was one of the few people in Afghanistan with the distinction that we cannot easily find in societies, a terrible loss. But as you rightly say, this will not deter us from continuing on the path that we have, and we'll definitely succeed.

Thank you, Mr. President, for condemning this act of brutality and cowardice against President Rabbani. I will take that message from you to the Afghan people. This is a sad day for us in Afghanistan, but a day of unity and a day of continuity of our efforts.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Remarks at the Opening of an Open Government Partnership Event in New York City *September 20, 2011*

Good afternoon, everyone. And welcome to this inaugural event of a partnership that's already transforming how governments serve their citizens in the 21st century.

One year ago, at the U.N. General Assembly, I stated a simple truth: that the strongest foundation for human progress lies in open economies, open societies, and in open governments. And I challenged our countries to come back this year with specific commitments to promote transparency, to fight corruption, to energize civic engagement, and to leverage new technologies so we can strengthen the foundations of freedom in our own countries.

Today we're joined by nations and organizations from around the world that are answering

this challenge. In this Open Government Partnership, I'm pleased to be joined by leaders from the seven other founding nations of this initiative. I especially want to commend my friend, President Rousseff of Brazil, for her leadership in open government and for joining the United States as the first cochairs of this effort.

We're joined by nearly 40 other nations who've also embraced this challenge, with the goal of joining this partnership next year. And we're joined by civil society organizations from around the world, groups that not only help hold governments accountable, but who partnered with us and who offer new ideas and help us to make better decisions. Put simply,

our countries are stronger when we engage citizens beyond the halls of government. So I welcome our civil society representatives, not as spectators, but as equal partners in this initiative.

This, I believe, is how progress will be achieved in the 21st century: meeting global challenges through global cooperation, across all levels of society. And this is exactly the kind of partnership that we need now, as emerging democracies from Latin America to Africa to Asia are all showing how innovations in open government can help make countries more prosperous and more just, as new generations across the Middle East and North Africa assert the old truth that government exists for the benefit of their people, and as young people everywhere, from teeming cities to remote villages, are logging on and texting and tweeting and demanding government that is just as fast, just as smart, just as accountable.

This is the moment that we must meet. These are the expectations that we must fulfill. And now we see governments around the world meeting this challenge, including many represented here today. Countries from Mexico to Turkey to Liberia have passed laws guaranteeing citizens the right to information. From Chile to Kenya to the Philippines, civil society groups are giving citizens new tools to report corruption. From Tanzania to Indonesia, and as I saw firsthand during my visit to India, rural villages are organizing and making their voices heard and getting the public services that they need. Governments from Brazil to South Africa are putting more information online, helping people hold public officials accountable for how they spend taxpayer dollars.

Here in the United States, we've worked to make government more open and responsive than ever before. We've been promoting greater disclosure of government information, empowering citizens with new ways to participate in their democracy. We are releasing more data in usable forms on health and safety and the environment, because information is power, and helping people make informed decisions and entrepreneurs turn data into new products that create new jobs. We're also soliciting the

best ideas from our people in how to make government work better. And around the world, we're standing up for freedom to access information, including a free and open Internet.

Today the eight founding nations of our partnership are going even further, agreeing to an open government declaration rooted in several core principles. We pledge to be more transparent at every level, because more information on government activity should be open, timely, and freely available to the people. We pledge to engage more of our citizens in decisionmaking, because it makes government more effective and responsive. We pledge to implement the highest standards of integrity, because those in power must serve the people, not themselves. And we pledge to increase access to technology, because in this digital century, access to information is a right that is universal.

Next, to put these principles into practice, every country that seeks to join this partnership will work with civil society groups to develop an action plan of specific commitments. Today the United States is releasing our plan, which we are posting on the White House website and at opengovpartnership.org.

Among our commitments, we're launching a new online tool called "We the People" to allow Americans to directly petition the White House, and we'll share that technology so that any government in the world can enable its citizens to do the same. We've developed new tools called "smart disclosures" so that the data we make public can help people make health care choices, help small businesses innovate, and help scientists achieve new breakthroughs.

We'll work to reform and expand protections for whistleblowers who expose government waste, fraud, and abuse. And we're continuing our leadership of the global effort against corruption by building on legislation that now requires oil, gas, and mining companies to disclose the payments that foreign governments demand of them.

Today I can announce that the United States will join the global initiative in which these industries, governments, and civil society

all work together for greater transparency so that taxpayers receive every dollar they're due from the extraction of natural resources.

So these are just some of the steps that we're taking. And today is just the beginning of a partnership that will only grow, as Secretary Clinton leads our effort on behalf of the United States, as these nearly 40 nations develop their own commitments, as we share and learn from each other and build the next generation of tools to empower our citizens and serve them better.

So that's the purpose of open government. And I believe that's the essence of democracy. That's the commitment to which we're committing ourselves here today. And I thank all of you for joining us as we meet this challenge together.

I want to thank you very much for your participation. And with that, I would like to turn over the chair to my cochair, President Rousseff.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Remarks at the Closing of an Open Government Partnership Event in New York City *September 20, 2011*

Well, thank you, Rakesh, for that wonderful testimony. Thank you all to the leaders who shared their action plans and the steps that they're taking and your willingness to participate in this initiative. We are extraordinarily grateful.

As I said earlier, today is just the beginning of this partnership. Those who are the founding members have to go back home and work to meet the commitments that we've made and to be held accountable. The 38 nations joining us today will be working on their own action plans. And we look forward to our next meeting in Brazil next year, when our partnership welcomes more countries who share our commitment to open government.

I want to thank all the participants. I particularly want to thank the civil society organizations that are doing extraordinary work.

I very much appreciated the statement by the representative from the United Kingdom that this is not always comfortable, if done right, because governments are human institutions, which means that even with the best of

intentions we are flawed and we make mistakes, and it's a natural human impulse to try to cover up mistakes and to resist the kind of openness that's been discussed here today.

But as Rakesh, I think, said so well, the more open we are, the more willing we are to hear constructive criticism, the more effective we can be. And ultimately, governments are here to serve the people, not to serve those in power.

And so I'm very grateful for all of you for participating. Thank you for embracing this challenge to make sure our governments are as open and accountable and as effective as they can be so that we can meet the aspirations of all our citizens.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Rakesh Rajani, head, Twaveza; and Francis Maude, chairman, Open Government Partnership.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City *September 20, 2011*

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Erdogan and his delegation to

New York City and to the United States. Turkey is a NATO ally, a great friend and partner