

begun a dialogue. Still, violations of human rights persist. So we will continue to speak clearly about the steps that must be taken for the Government of Burma to have a better relationship with the United States.

This is the future we seek in the Asia-Pacific: security, prosperity, and dignity for all. That's what we stand for. That's who we are. That's the future we will pursue in partnership with allies and friends and with every element of American power. So let there be no doubt: In the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in.

Still, in times of great change and uncertainty, the future can seem unsettling. Across a vast ocean, it's impossible to know what lies beyond the horizon. But if this vast region and its people teach us anything, it's the yearning for liberty and progress will not be denied.

It's why women in this country demanded that their voices be heard, making Australia the first nation to let women vote and run for Parliament and one day become Prime Minister. It's why the people took to the streets, from Delhi to Seoul, from Manila to Jakarta, to throw off colonialism and dictatorship and build some of the world's largest democracies.

It's why a soldier in a watchtower along the DMZ defends a free people in the South and why a man from the North risks his life to escape across the border. Why soldiers in blue helmets keep the peace in a new nation. And why women of courage go into brothels to save young girls from modern-day slavery, which must come to an end.

It's why men of peace in saffron robes faced beatings and bullets and why every day, from some of the world's largest cities to dusty rural towns, in small acts of courage the world may never see, a student posts a blog, a citizen signs a charter, an activist remains unbowed, imprisoned in his home, just to have the same rights that we cherish here today.

Men and women like these know what the world must never forget. The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move, decidedly, decisively, in a single direction. History is on the side of the free: free societies, free governments, free economies, free people. And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals, in this region and around the world.

This is the story of the alliance we celebrate today. This is the essence of America's leadership; it is the essence of our partnership. This is the work we will carry on together, for the security and prosperity and dignity of all people.

So God bless Australia, God bless America, and God bless the friendship between our two peoples.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:42 a.m. at Parliament House. In his remarks, he referred to Leader of the Opposition Anthony J. Abbott, Speaker of the House of Representatives Henry A. Jenkins, and President of the Senate John J. Hogg of Australia; and National League for Democracy in Burma Leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Campbell High School in Canberra November 17, 2011

President Obama. So the—well, thank you for taking the time. Part of the reason we wanted to come by was when Julia came to Washington, DC, we had a visit with some high school students there. And I didn't want to miss out on the fun when I came to Australia. So I wanted to get a chance to find out what's going on and see if you guys had any questions.

I've had a wonderful time here. On the way here, your Prime Minister was telling me about all the deadly animals that could kill you if they bite you. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Julia E. Gillard of Australia. Just talking—[*inaudible*].

President Obama. There seems to be a surplus of those here in Australia.

But part of the reason that I love meeting with students is because so much of what we do together, your Prime Minister and I, is focused on your future: how we can make sure you've got good careers and have opportunity and the world is safe and we're taking care of our environment in a serious way. And I'm always inspired when I meet with young people because you're not stuck in some of the old stodgy ideas that the rest of us are sometimes.

So who wants to start first? Somebody have a question or a comment?

Yes, what's your name?

Education

Q. My name is Emily, and my question is directed to you, Mr. President. What directions will the American education system be taking for the future?

Prime Minister Gillard. Good question.

President Obama. Well, it's a great question. The United States historically became an economic superpower in part because we were ahead of the curve when it came to education: establishing compulsory public high schools, using the GI bill to help veterans coming home go to college. And we still have some outstanding schools in the United States. But we also have some schools that just aren't doing the job and a sizeable number of our young people who aren't getting the kind of preparation they need.

So one of my biggest priorities when I came in was, how do we reform the system overall? A lot of it starts with early childhood education. A lot of poor children don't get the support that they need when they're very young so, by the time they get to grammar school, they're already behind. They don't know their numbers, people haven't read to them, et cetera. So working with programs that are good for young people—or very young children when they're toddlers and infants—to give them a head start, that's very important. We're focusing a lot on math and science education, where I think we've fallen behind.

The most important thing for every grade level is the quality of teachers. So we're spending a lot of time thinking about how do we train teachers more effectively, how do we pay them

more so that they have fewer worries about supporting themselves and can really focus on the work that they do, and making sure that they are up to snuff when it comes to the subject matter that they teach. And then, we've seen studies that show that the biggest correlation, other than your parents, about how well the student does is the quality of their teachers.

So we're going to be spending a lot of time focusing on those issues over the next several years.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Prime Minister Gillard. And Aussie influence.
President Obama. Absolutely.

Prime Minister Gillard. Secretary Duncan, who is the equivalent in the U.S. of the Federal Education Minister, played basketball in Australia.

President Obama. He was a professional basketball player here in Australia and is married to a Tasmanian wife. [*Laughter*] So he obviously was inspired when he was here by the excellent schools.

Who's next?

President's Influence

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm Meg. Have you ever thought about teaming up with a high-profile celebrity such as Justin Bieber to appeal to more people? [*Laughter*]

President Obama. You know, that's an interesting question. The—we—I interact a lot with celebrities. They end up coming to the White House for a pet cause or some of them were very supportive of me during my campaign. But generally speaking, hopefully, if I'm going to be successful, it's going to be because of the ideas I put forward and not because I'm hanging out with Justin Bieber. [*Laughter*] Although he is a very nice young man, and I'll tell him you said hi.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Karen L. Duncan, wife of Secretary Duncan. Prime Minister Gillard referred to Minister of School Education, Early Childhood, and Youth Peter R. Garrett of Australia. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.