

doing at every country that I visit because it is my firm belief that a country's strength ultimately comes from its people, and that as important as government is—and laws—what makes a country democratic and effective in delivering prosperity and security and hope to people is when they've got an active, thriving civil society.

And all of these leaders, ranging from business leaders to youth leaders to environmental leaders, those who are advocating on behalf of a free press or the rule of law, all of them contribute in one way or another to continuing to strengthen Russian society and helping to make progress on behalf of all people.

And the same is true in the United States. I'm now in government, but I got my start as a community organizer, somebody who was working in what would be called an NGO in the international community. And the work I was doing was helping poor communities have a voice in what was happening in their lives.

The President's Weekly Address *September 7, 2013*

Almost 3 weeks ago in Syria, more than a thousand innocent people, including hundreds of children, were murdered in the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century. And the United States has presented a powerful case to the world that the Syrian Government was responsible for this horrific attack on its own people.

This was not only a direct attack on human dignity, it's a serious threat to our national security. There's a reason governments representing 98 percent of the world's people have agreed to ban the use of chemical weapons: not only because they cause death and destruction in the most indiscriminate and inhumane way possible, but because they can also fall into the hands of terrorist groups who wish to do us harm.

That's why, last weekend, I announced that, as Commander in Chief, I decided that the United States should take military action against the Syrian regime. This is not a deci-

And I got elected as President by engaging people at a grassroots level.

So the kinds of activities that are represented here are critically important to Russia's development, and I'm very proud of their work. And I think it is important for us to remember that in every country—here in Russia, in the United States, around the globe—that part of good government is making sure that we're creating a space for civil society to function effectively: freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, making sure that people can join together and make common cause around the issues that they care deeply about.

So I appreciate taking the time. I'm not going to do all the talking here. I want to spend most of my time listening. But I want to thank you again and hope all of you continue the good work. Good.

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:31 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza St. Petersburg Airport hotel.

sion I made lightly. Deciding to use military force is the most solemn decision we can make as a nation.

As the leader of the world's oldest constitutional democracy, I also know that our country will be stronger if we act together, and our actions will be more effective. That's why I asked Members of Congress to debate this issue and vote on authorizing the use of force.

What we're not talking about is an open-ended intervention. This would not be another Iraq or Afghanistan. There would be no American boots on the ground. Any action we take would be limited, both in time and scope, designed to deter the Syrian Government from gassing its own people again and degrade its ability to do so.

I know that the American people are weary after a decade of war, even as the war in Iraq has ended and the war in Afghanistan is winding down. That's why we're not putting our troops in the middle of somebody else's war.