

Statement on the Death of Akhtar Mohammad Mansur

May 23, 2016

Today marks an important milestone in our longstanding effort to bring peace and prosperity to Afghanistan. With the death of Taliban leader Akhtar Mohammad Mansur, we have removed the leader of an organization that has continued to plot against and unleash attacks on American and coalition forces, to wage war against the Afghan people, and align itself with extremist groups like Al Qaeda.

Mansur rejected efforts by the Afghan Government to seriously engage in peace talks and end the violence that has taken the lives of countless innocent Afghan men, women, and children. The Taliban should seize the opportunity to pursue the only real path for ending this long conflict: joining the Afghan Government in a reconciliation process that leads to lasting peace and stability.

As an enduring partner of the Afghan people, the United States will continue to help strengthen Afghan security forces and support

President Ghani and the National Unity Government in their efforts to forge the peace and progress that Afghans deserve. We will continue taking action against extremist networks that target the United States. We will work on shared objectives with Pakistan, where terrorists that threaten all our nations must be denied safe haven. After so many years of conflict, today gives the people of Afghanistan and the region a chance at a different, better future.

I thank our dedicated military and intelligence personnel who have once again sent a clear message to all those who target our people and our partners: You will have no safe haven. Today is a day for us to give thanks to all of the Americans who have served in Afghanistan for so many years with a selfless commitment to the security of our Nation and a better future for the Afghan people.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Civil Society Leaders in Hanoi, Vietnam

May 24, 2016

I just had a wonderful conversation with some preeminent civil society activists here in Vietnam. And I just want to thank them for taking the time to meet with me and discussing with me some of the important work that they're doing, and the progress that's being made in—here in Vietnam.

We have a wide range of activists here. We have pastors whose congregations are doing important work helping individuals fight addiction and encouraging the faithful around the values of their faith. We have advocates on behalf of the disabled who are doing important work to make sure that they have full access to jobs and opportunity here in Vietnam. We have LGBT activists who are making sure that the marginalized in society have a voice. We have advocates on behalf of freedom of speech and press and the Internet, who are doing important training throughout the country. We

have a very popular artist here who is speaking out on behalf of freedom of speech and expression and artists throughout Vietnam.

And so what I've heard consistently from all of them is a recognition that Vietnam has made remarkable strides in many ways—the economy is growing quickly, the Internet is booming, and there's a growing confidence here—but that, as I indicated yesterday, there are still areas of significant concern in terms of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, accountability with respect to government.

I emphasized in my meetings yesterday with the President, the Prime Minister, the General Secretary, the Chairwoman of the National Assembly that we respect the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam. Ultimately, it's up to the Vietnamese people to determine how their society functions and the nature of their government.

But we do believe in certain universal values, and it's important for us to speak out on behalf of those values wherever we go. And it's particularly important and useful for me to hear directly from those who, under often very difficult conditions, are willing to make their voices heard on behalf of greater freedom and human rights.

I should note that there were several other activists who were invited who were prevented from coming for various reasons. And I think it's an indication of the fact that, although there has been some modest progress—and it is our hope that through some of the legal reforms that are being drafted and passed there will be more progress—there are still folks who find it very difficult to assemble and organize peacefully around issues that they care deeply about.

And it's my hope that the Government of Vietnam comes to recognize what we've recognized and what so many countries around the world have recognized, and that is that it's very hard to prosper in this modern economy if you haven't fully unleashed the potential of your people. And your people's potential, in part, derives from their ability to express themselves and express new ideas, to try to right wrongs that are taking place in the society. And so it's my hope that, increasingly, the Vietnamese Government, seeing the enormous strides that the country is making, has more confidence that its people want to work together, but also want to be able to assemble and participate in

Remarks in Hanoi

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Xin chào! Xin chào, Vietnam! Thank you. Thank you so much. Please. To the Government and the people of Vietnam, thank you for this very warm welcome and the hospitality that you've shown me on this visit. And thank all of you for being here today. We have Vietnamese from across this great country, including so many young people who represent the dynamism and the talent and the hope of Vietnam.

On this visit, my heart has been touched by the kindness for which the Vietnamese people

the society in ways that will be good for everybody in the long run.

So, again, I want to thank all of you for your courageous work, and I want you to know that you will continue to have a friend in the United States of America, because we think the work that you're doing is work that's important everywhere, including, by the way, in the United States, where there are all sorts of activists and people who are mobilizing, oftentimes are very critical of me and don't always make my life comfortable, but ultimately, I think it is a better country and I do a better job as President because I'm subject to that accountability.

Thank you so much. I very much appreciate it. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in Event Rooms 2 and 3 at the JW Marriott Hotel Hanoi. In his remarks, he referred to musician and activist Mai Khoi; and President Tran Dai Quang, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuân Phúc, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phú Trọng, and National Assembly Chair Nguyen Thi Kim Ngân of Vietnam. He also referred to human rights activist Nguyen Quang A, independent journalist and blogger Pham Doan Trang, and human rights defense lawyer Ha Huy Son, who were invited to the meeting, but barred from attending by Vietnamese security officials. Also participating in the meeting were reporter Mai Phan Loi; and lawyer Ta Ngoc Van.

are known. In the many people who have been lining the streets, smiling and waving, I feel the friendship between our peoples. Last night I visited the Old Quarter here in Hanoi and enjoyed some outstanding Vietnamese food. I tried some *bún chả*, drank some *Bia Hà Nội*. [Laughter] But I have to say, the busy streets of this city, I've never seen so many motorbikes in my life. [Laughter] So I haven't had to try to cross the street so far, but maybe when I come back and visit, you can tell me how. [Laughter]