When I took office, we were spending $3 million each year to address the enormous challenge of UXO. We have steadily increased that amount, up to $15 million last year. This funding—together with the work of the Lao Government, UXO Lao, other international donors, and several nongovernmental organizations—has allowed us to fund clearance efforts while also developing plans for a nationwide survey that can help locate UXO and focus clearance efforts on areas that have the most potential for economic development.

So yesterday I was proud to announce a significant increase in America's commitment to this work. We will invest $90 million over the next 3 years to this effort. Our hope is that this funding can mark a decisive step forward in the work of rolling back the danger of UXO: clearing bombs, supporting survivors, and advancing a better future for the people of Laos.

As President of the United States, I believe that we have a profound moral and humanitarian obligation to support this work. We're a nation that was founded on the belief in the dignity of every human being. Sometimes, we've struggled to stay true to that belief, but that is precisely why we always have to work to address those difficult moments in history and to forge friendships with people who we once called enemies.

That belief in the value of every human being is what motivates the teams of Americans who have traveled to remote parts of this land to find the remains of hundreds of Americans who have been missing so that their families can receive some measure of comfort. That belief has to lead us to value the life of every young Lao boy and girl, who deserve to be freed from the fear of the shadow of a war that happened long ago.

Doing this work also builds trust. History does not have to drive us apart; it can sometimes pull us together. And addressing the most painful chapters in our history honestly and openly can create openings, as it has done in Vietnam, to work together on other issues so that violence is replaced by peaceful commerce, cooperation, and people-to-people ties.

And above all, acknowledging the history of war and how it's experienced concretely by ordinary people is a way that we make future wars less likely. We have to force ourselves to remember that war is not just about words written in books or the names of famous men and battles. War is about the countless millions who suffer in the shadows of war: the innocents who die and the bombs that remain unexploded in fields decades after.

Here in Laos, here at COPE, we see the victims of bombs that were dropped because of decisions made half a century ago, and we are reminded that wars always carry tremendous costs, many of them unintended. People have suffered, and we've also seen, though, how people can be resourceful and resilient. It helps us recognize our common humanity. And we can remember that most people want to live lives of peace and security. And we embrace the hope that out of this history, we can make decisions that lead to a better future for the people of Laos, for the United States, for the world.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:44 a.m.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Town Hall Meeting in Luang Prabang, Laos
September 7, 2016

The President. Thank you! Thank you so much! *Sabaidii!*

Audience members. Sabaidii!

The President. Well, it is such a pleasure to be here. Can everybody please give Om a big round of applause for that great introduction?

So it is wonderful to be in Luang Prabang. I've always wanted to visit. It is said that this is where the Buddha smiled when he rested during his travels. And I can see why, because it is beautiful and relaxed. I've just come from seeing Wat Xieng Thong. Did I say that right?

Sort of. [*Laughter*] And it was beautiful. And the entire area is spectacular. I want to thank everyone at Souphanouvong for hosting me here today. And I want to thank the people of Laos. I've been deeply touched by the hospitality that you've shown me.

This is my 11th visit to Asia as President of the United States, but it's my first visit to Laos. And in fact, I am the first United States President ever to come here. And with the kindness that you've shown me, I'm sure I will not be the last. Other Presidents will want to come as well. [*Laughter*] And I promise you I will come back when I'm no longer President. [*Applause*] Yes. And the good thing about when I come back and I'm not President, I won't have so much security. [*Laughter*] And I can sit and relax and have some food, and I won't be so busy.

Now, whenever I travel around the world, I spend a lot of time doing business with world leaders, and I meet with the presidents of big companies. But I try to balance spending time with young people like you. And I gave a long speech yesterday, so I'm not going to do a long speech today. I want to have a conversation with you. I want to hear what you have to say. But I'm just going to make a few remarks.

I think you know that this part of the world means a lot to me because I lived in Indonesia as a boy. And my sister is half-Indonesian. She was born there. She married a man whose parents were from Malaysia. My mother worked in Southeast Asia for most of her life, working with women in villages to try to help them get more money through selling handicrafts and developing small businesses. So, as I drive around here, it's very familiar to me. It reminds me of my childhood. And my commitment to deepening America's ties to Southeast Asia is very real.

Now, that's why I'm the first U.S. President who has regularly met with ASEAN leaders. It's why we're working together to promote peace, protect human rights, encourage sustainable development, advance equality for women and girls, and to meet challenges like climate change and other environmental issues.

While Presidents and Prime Ministers can help lay the foundation, it's going to be young people like you who build the future of this region and the world. Here in Southeast Asia, almost two-thirds of you were born after 1980, which makes me feel very old. [*Laughter*] In Laos, half of you were born after 1995. And from Rangoon to Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City to Kuala Lumpur, everywhere I go, I see the energy and the optimism of all the young people who live here. I've seen your desire to resolve conflicts through diplomacy and not war. I've seen your desire for prosperity through entrepreneurship and the rejection of corruption. I've seen your interest in promoting social harmony, not by discriminating against anyone in the community, but by upholding the rights of all people, regardless of what they look like or what religion they belong to.

And because your generation is the most educated and because you are all connected through your phones—[*laughter*]—you have more power to shape the future than any generation that we've ever known. And that's why I've made connecting our young people a cornerstone of American foreign policy.

Three years ago, we launched YSEALI, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative. And what began as a small group of young people is now a network of 100,000 young people from all 10 ASEAN countries. And in fact, across Africa, the Americas, and Europe, we now have nearly half a million young people like you in our Young Leaders Initiative worldwide.

And our goal is to empower young people with skills and resources and the networks that you need to turn your ideas into action and to become the next generation of leaders in civil society and in business and in government. We have regional exchanges, workshops, online networking, hands-on training. We've offered grant competitions to support your efforts. We've welcomed hundreds of you to the United States to study in our universities and experience our State and local governments and to intern, spend time at our companies. And I've even hosted some of you at the White House.

So what we've wanted to do is to hear from you and for you to hear from each other how

you can share ideas and practices and, hopefully, forge partnerships and friendships that will last you a lifetime. And I've been so proud to see how you've made YSEALI such a success. Some of you have started projects to teach summer school and helped farmers markets grow. Some of you have worked to increase civic engagement. Some of you have been involved in economic development projects so that no country in ASEAN is left behind in today's economy.

And I know that closing the development gap in innovative and in impactful ways is what you're focused on at this YSEALI summit in Laos. And that's wonderful, because whatever sector we work in, we all have a role to play when it comes to things like educating our people, lifting communities up from poverty, and protecting the environment for future generations. I also understand that YSEALI alumni have come together to plan an event called YOUnified, which is a day of service across the region on December 3, and that will be the third anniversary of YSEALI.

So I could not be more impressed with all of you. This is change that's happening on a global scale. Young people are taking over. And I want to help it sustain itself. So today, in Luang Prabang, I have a few announcements to make that focus on what you're here to talk about, and that's development across the ASEAN region.

First, at a time when English is the language of business, science, and a networked world, it's very important that young people have English language training. And that's why today we're launching English for All. This is a program where we're going to bring more English teachers to your countries, including Laos, and bring more of your educators to America for training. And we're going to offer opportunities and resources to help anybody around the world learn English on a new website called englishforall.state.gov.

Second, we're focused on making sure that every girl earns a quality education. In too many countries now, women and girls are not getting the same educational opportunities as men and boys. And research shows that when girls get an education, not only do they grow up healthier, but her children will grow up healthier also. Not only will she become more prosperous, but her community will become more prosperous.

And that's why yesterday I announced that "Let Girls Learn"—this is a program that I'm working on, but more importantly, my wife is working on—[*laughter*]—is coming to two more countries: Laos and Nepal. And today we're announcing the new U.S.-ASEAN Women's Leadership Academy for YSEALI. Each year, this program will offer leadership training and mentoring for emerging women leaders from all 10 ASEAN countries. And because we've partnered with several multinational companies to sponsor this academy, we're going to be able to empower women to take their place in society for decades to come. So we're very excited about that.

So that's what we're doing. But ultimately, it's up to you as role models to inspire young people across this region. And before I take questions, I just want to highlight two YSEALI role models whose stories have really inspired me and I think will inspire you as well.

The first is Mimi Sae-Ju. Where is Mimi? [*Applause*] There you go, there's Mimi. So Mimi grew up in a Lisu village in Northern Thailand. When YSEALI brought her to our State of Montana in the United States she met some of our Native American tribes. And in their experience, it reminded her of her own people. So she decided "to show my people that ladies in America are doing the same things as them." So she founded the Lisu Cultural Heritage Center in Chiang Mai to promote and preserve the indigenous history of her people. And she sells handicrafts made by Lisu women, which helps them earn a living and makes sure that the culture lives on in future generations.

And, Mimi, is that some of the stuff that they're making? You should model it for us. [*Laughter*] It's very nice. Beautiful. And you got that hat in Montana, though, right?

YSEALI Fellow Amema "Mimi" Sae-Ju. Yes.

The President. There you go. Excellent.

Ms. Amema. [*Inaudible*]—Asian and U.S. relations—[*inaudible*].

The President. There you go. I like that. You've got a nice cowboy hat.

The second person I want to introduce is Dissa Ahdanisa. Where is—[*applause*]? So, after her experience in America through YSEALI, she said, "When I came back to Indonesia, I realized I love the United States not because of the fancy stuff, but because of the people and because of their kindness." And so I want you to know that the American people feel the same way about you.

But it was actually Dissa's time volunteering in Nicaragua a few years ago that set her on a new course. One day, she happened across a cafe for the deaf. And at first, she just wanted to learn a new language, in this case, the sign language spoken by the waiters and waitresses. She came to realize that cafe was a great way to empower people with a disability. She visited schools for the deaf, made deaf friends. Last year, Dissa opened the Fingertalk Cafe in Indonesia to provide job opportunities for the deaf community there. And I've been told great things about the cafe, because my receptionist, as you know, in the White House, a wonderful young woman named Leah, she visited earlier this year. She is deaf, and she is the receptionist at the White House. So, when you come visit the White House, she's the first person you meet. And she signs. And she said—she wanted me to tell you how proud she is of you. So congratulations.

So Dissa says she wants her country to be a place where people can "achieve dreams without restriction," where her daughter "can be who she wants to be . . . [and] inspire other people with what she's doing." And I'm inspired by what Dissa is doing, because here, on my final trip to Asia as President, I want to make sure that all of you keep on inspiring others the way these two young women are inspiring people in their countries and around the world.

And because we're in Laos, I'm going to finish with an inspiring story I heard last year about a Lao woman named Thongvone Sosamphan. I shared it with the YSEALI Fellows I welcomed to the White House. I hope you don't mind me sharing it again. Where is she? Is she here? I wasn't sure if she was here, but I'm going to tell her story anyway.

So, as part of YSEALI, Thongvone spent time in our city of Atlanta, and she visited the memorial and center honoring one of my heroes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And she said she was struck by what this great civil rights leader said. He said: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?"

And that question made her think about the true meaning of leadership. And then she wrote something very beautiful: "Leadership is inside you. . . . Everyone can be a leader, because everyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to lead. You don't need to know more than others. All you need is a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."

And that is what I see in all of you. And as long as I think you keep on trying to answer that question that Dr. King asked, what are you doing for others, then I'm sure you will be extraordinary leaders in your own country. And you will always have a friend and partner in the United States of America.

So thank you very much, everybody. And with that, let's take some questions and comments from our YSEALI network. All right?

So what I'm going to do is, I think we have microphones in the audience, and we will—I will call on people. I'm going to go—I'm going to call on boys and then girls and back and forth so that it's fair. [*Laughter*] And when I call on you, if you could introduce yourself, tell us where you're from, and tell us what you're doing. And then you can ask a question. Okay?

So let's start with this young lady right here. Yes, you. Here's a microphone. Oh, I'm sorry.

Role of Young People in Political and Economic Development

Q. Hello, Mr. President. I'm your big fan, actually. [*Laughter*] So my name is Tia. I'm from Indonesia. And it's a pleasure that you can come here. So my question is, in your opinion as a father and as a President, how im-

portant we, as a youth, to take a role in developing countries' development and changing? And also, how you measure it? Thank you.

The President. How—I'm sorry, what was the last one?

Q. Do you think, how important is—how important youth role is in developing country development and how you measure it as a President and as a father? Thank you.

The President. Well, I think that young people historically have always been the key to progress and development. Because if you think about it, old people like me—[*laughter*]—we do things the old way. We have—we're trapped by our own experience, and we look to the past so often and we think this is how things always should be. Young people, they're looking to the future, and so they're able to say, we don't have to do things the old way; we can do things new ways. And that's what creates new ideas, new businesses, new ways of organizing people, new ways of treating each other with more respect, rejecting some of the old habits.

Think about the U.S. relationship with Laos. For 9 years, there was a secret war in which the United States was dropping bombs on this country. And I just this morning came from a organization that is taking ordnance—explosives that did not detonate—and trying to remove them from the countryside. So, if you are an old person, that may be your image of the United States. If you're a young person, now you think we have the opportunity to work with the United States in a different way, and that creates new opportunities and new hope and new relationships.

So I think the challenge for young people is to find the skills and the resources to put your ideas into action. Because it's not enough just to dream about, I want to educate everybody in my country, or I want to build a great new business. You actually have to do the work, and you have to have plans. And it's hard. And so part of what we're trying to do is to provide resources to young people, but also help them learn from each other so that maybe there's a program—well, we just learned from Dissa, right? She saw a program in Nicaragua, and now it's in Indonesia. So now maybe somebody in Africa visits Southeast Asia, and they have a new idea about sustainable agriculture. Right? And part of what we want to do is to make sure that people are exchanging ideas all the time. And that's very valuable.

All right? Good. Well, I said I was going to call on a gentleman first, right? This young man in the uniform. That's a very fancy uniform—[*laughter*]—so we'll have to find out from him what——

Association of Southeast Asian Nations-U.S. Relations

Q. Okay. *Sawatdee krab*. Good afternoon. My name is Phillip—[*inaudible*]. I'm from Thailand. And my question is, in next 10 years, what do you expect ASEAN people to think about U.S.A., and why?

The President. Well, the—my hope is, is that the next President will continue my policy of meeting regularly with ASEAN leaders. We are working on a whole range of different issues, from how can we help develop health care networks so that people are getting better health care, but also so that we identify if there's a disease and we can stop it before it starts spreading; to disaster relief so that if there's a typhoon that there's local capacity to respond quickly; to economic development; to education. And some of these programs, they'll take some years before they bear fruit. And my hope is that 10 years from now, people will look back and they'll say that the engagement that we began with ASEAN now has developed so that we have a very mature and deep relationship in all areas.

And I believe that the United States is and can be a great force for good in the world. But because we're such a big country, we haven't always had to know about other parts of the world. If you are in Laos, you need to know about Thailand and China and Cambodia, because you're a small country and they're right next door and you need to know who they are. If you are the United States, sometimes, you can feel lazy and think we're so big—[*laughter*]—we don't have to really know anything about other people.

And that's part of what I'm trying to change, because this is actually the region that's going to grow faster than anyplace else in the world. It has the youngest population, and the economy is growing faster than anyplace. And if we aren't here interacting and learning from you and understanding the culture of the region, then we'll be left behind. We'll miss an opportunity. And I don't want to—that to happen.

Okay? Good. All right, let's see. This young lady right here.

Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative/The President's Plans After Leaving Office

Q. Oh, thank you. Thank you, sir.

The President. What's your name?

Q. My name is—[*inaudible*]. I am from Singapore. Yes. I like to ask since YSEALI means so much to you, how will you ensure that YSEALI continues after you step down?

The President. Well, it's a great question. There are two things that we're going to do. First of all, we're working with the State Department, my Foreign Ministry, so that YSEALI continues after I've left. The program to bring certain members of YSEALI to the United States, to maintain the networks, we're trying to institutionalize that so that it continues after I'm gone.

What I'm also going to do is, in my own work as an ex-President, I'm hoping to continue to work with young people through my Presidential Center. And so one of the components that I've discussed with my team is how I can continue to interact with the YSEALI alumni, and we can share ideas, and I can continue to meet with you, and we can work on projects together. So I'll continue to stay involved. But the YSEALI program itself we will continue to run through the State Department. And I'm confident that it will continue to do great things. Good. All right.

So, since were in Laos, let me see if—a Lao young man. Here we go, right here.

Q. Sabaidii.

The President. Sabaidii.

Education

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President. Thank you for visiting us. My name is—[*inaudible*]. I wanted to ask you, if one thing, only one thing, can be changed in ASEAN, especially in Lao, what kind of the change do you want to see? And how will you contribute to that change? Thank you.

The President. No, it's a good question. Well, I think that if there's one thing that we've learned is that the most important thing for any country is its people. So, if there's one thing that I could help to bring about, it would be improving educational standards for young people throughout Laos and throughout ASEAN and, as I said before, making sure that that includes girls and not just boys.

Because if you look at the countries that are successful—let's just take ASEAN as an example—the country that has the highest standard of living is Singapore. Now, Singapore actually has very little. It doesn't have natural resources. It has ports, but it's a tiny country. And yet, economically, it is very successful. Well, why is that? Well, part of it is because its education levels are extremely high, and as a result, companies from around the world, they are interested in locating in places where they can find a workforce that is creative and smart and can do the job.

So it's wonderful if you have natural resources. It's wonderful if you're a big country with a large population. But ultimately, how successful a country is will depend on whether its people have the skills and the education and the vision to be able to use those resources effectively. And we're going to continue to work with all the countries in ASEAN so that we can constantly promote greater education and greater training.

Now, when I say education, by the way, I don't always just mean a high-level college degree. Technical training, training in a trade, that can be valuable as well. And in the United States—this is not just for ASEAN; this is in the United States as well. In the United States, we have some of the best universities in the world, but one of the things I've been empha-

sizing is, we also have what are called community colleges. They're not 4-year universities, they're 2-year—typically 2-year degrees. And you can be very successful going there and finding a specialized trade or learning a very specific skill that companies are hiring for.

And we want to give young people a range of options. Not everybody wants to study in a classroom and become a lawyer or a doctor. But it's also very valuable if you have somebody who's a really skilled electrician. We talk about high tech, and it's true that people who are designing software for the iPhone are the best engineers, but there are jobs in computer science where you don't need a 4-year degree. Coding is not actually that complicated once you learn how to do it. So we want to make sure that at every level young people have the ability to access a great education. And if we're able to do that, then I'm confident that ASEAN will be successful.

Okay? Yes, go ahead.

Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Pluralism/Human Rights

Q. Okay. Hello. My name is—[*inaudible*]. I'm from Indonesia. I'm asking a question on behalf of the YSEALI online audience. So this question is from my friend—[*inaudible*]—from Indonesia also. She asked about this: "Actually, America is a very big country, consists of various community of different tribes, religions, and also race. And how do you unite them into live peacefully side by side in accordance of the United States motto, *e pluribus unum*"?

The President. Oh, that's a great question. Thank you very much. Well, you're exactly right that the United States historically, unless you're a Native American, like those who Mimi met in Montana, you came from someplace else. Those of you who visit the United States, if you walk down the streets of Los Angeles or New York, you don't know what an American looks like because Americans could be anything. They could be any color, any religion, from—with a heritage from countries all around the world. And that's our great strength. Because one of the things that I strongly believe is that when people from different cultures interact, then you're always learning something, because people bring new ideas and new traditions.

And that's why in our big cities in America, you can get really good food from everywhere. And then sometimes, people come up with new food that's a mix of different foods. The same with music. If you think about rock and roll or hip-hop or any American—or jazz—any American music, it's a blend of all these different traditions. And that's part of what makes us unique.

Recently, we all saw the Olympics. And not to brag, but the United States did very well at the Olympics. [*Laughter*] Now, part of this is because we're a big country and we're a wealthy country, so we can provide training and opportunities for our athletes. But if you look at our athletes, there are two things that stand out. First of all, half—more than half of the medals we won were from women. And the reason—so we passed a law a long time ago that said, if you give sports opportunities to boys, you have to give them to girls too. It's called title IX. And as a consequence, we've developed a really excellent program for women's athletics.

The second thing is, because we have people that came from everywhere, we have people of all different types for every sport. So we have really tall people to play basketball or to swim. We have little people for gymnastics. [*Laughter*] Right? We have, genetically, for whatever sport, we have people who fit the sport, right? And that's a good metaphor for why I think we've been very successful.

Now, the challenge we have, because we are people from so many different places, is that sometimes we've had to deal with racism or conflict between races, ethnic groups, new immigrants. And that especially becomes a problem when the economy is not doing well, and so people feel stressed. And typically, when people feel stressed, they turn on others who don't look like them. It's easy—that's true everywhere in the world. When things are going good, everybody is okay. And then, when suddenly things are harder, people start saying, ah,

you know what, this is the fault of the Chinese, or this is the fault of the Jews, or this is the fault of the Houthi, or whatever this—it's the Javanese or the—so one of the things that we try to do is to make sure that we're continually reminding ourselves that what makes an American is not your race or your skin color, but what makes an American is a set of beliefs, a creed: our belief that all men are created equal or our belief that our Constitution is the law of the land and that everybody has to follow it and everybody is equal before the law, so that if you're a President or you're a janitor, in the court of law you should be treated the same. We try to promote the notion that the state cannot choose sides in a religion. We have a very religious country, but part of the reason America is very religious is because we don't let the state establish one religion, so everybody is free to choose the religion that they practice.

And so these ideas, these principles, are the things that need to be constantly strengthened and reinforced. And I think that, ultimately, that's where we need to go as a human race. And this is why sometimes we talk about issues like human rights or freedom of the press or freedom of speech. And I'll be honest, everywhere we go, including here at ASEAN, sometimes, people say: "Ah, why are the Americans talking about these issues? This is none of their business; they shouldn't be meddling in other people's business. And they're—also, America is not perfect. Look, it still has racial discrimination. It still has its own problems. It should worry about its own problems."

And I agree with that in the sense that we definitely do still have problems we have to work on. We still have discrimination; we still have situations where women are not treated equally. But I think that, over the long term, the only way that humans are going to be able to work together and interact and prosper and deal with big problems is if we are able to see what we have in common with each other and treat everybody with dignity and respect. And that means that we have to have some principles that are not just based on our nationality, they're not just based on our tribe or our religion or our ethnicity. Otherwise, we—at some point, we're not going to be able to get along, and we'll have more war, and we'll have more conflict, because that's been human history.

And this is why we talk about these issues when we travel to other countries as well. It's not because we think we're better than other people, it's because we have learned from our own experience that if you don't respect all people or you don't respect all religions, but also make sure that no matter how religious you are, you respect other people to have a different idea—we've learned that if that doesn't happen, then we have conflict.

And if you look at what's happening now in the Middle East, for example, that's not a—the problem in the Middle East is not primarily a problem of the West versus Islam; the problem increasingly is, Shia thinking that Sunnis are following the wrong path, and vice versa. And in Syria, if you're an Alawite or you're a Christian or—then you're worried about what the Sunni Muslims are going to do. And that—the same in Africa, where—a place like Rwanda, where in a matter of just a few months you saw a country kill hundreds of thousands of people just because of those differences. And that's been true in all parts of the world. So we have to fight against that. And that means that we have to be able to promote principles that rise above any individual religion, nationality, race. And that's what we've been trying to promote. We—not always successfully. Not everybody in America agrees with me on this, by the way. [*Laughter*] I'll leave it at that.

Okay. Let's see. What country has not been—okay, but it's a—first of all, it's a boy's turn, first. Huh? Myanmar. Let's go, right here.

Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is—[*inaudible*]—from Myanmar. And YSEALI is almost 3 years now. And my question is, what is the best impact of the YSEALI you have ever seen in your second term of the President, and how that is affect your administration in ASEAN? Thank you.

The President. Sorry, what is the best what?

Q. The best impacts of YSEALI.

The President. The biggest impact of YSEALI.

Q. The best impact of YSEALI——

The President. I see.

Q. ——and you have ever seen in your second term of the President, and how that affect your administration in ASEAN? Thank you.

The President. Well, I don't think I can choose the best project, because there have been so many good ones. I mean, we have already heard a few here. I know that at the last town hall that we had, YSEALI town hall—where were we? It was in Ho Chi Minh City. And I had before that, Kuala Lumpur. I'm not sure which one it was, but we—I'm going to point out, there was a Lao woman who had grown up in a small village, and she had somehow traveled—her family could not afford to give her an education. She became a migrant and traveled on her own when she was very young. And because she was so driven, somehow learned English and became part of this NGO—international NGO—and she applied for YSEALI and had become a conservationist and traveled to the United States, learned about conservation practices, and then was coming back to rural communities here in Laos to help preserve the environment and to teach sustainable agriculture.

And I remember just listening to her story—you were asking how this affected me. And I thought, if a young—and she was tiny; she was, like, about this big—[*laughter*]—and she looked very young. And I thought, if a young women, who was not—she was not born to wealth, she was not born to a famous family, she wasn't politically connected—if she could suddenly make such an impact, then that means that anybody can make an impact. And that's inspired me as a President, because it's not so much that her project was any better than any of the projects that you're working on. It's just, part of the point of YSEALI is, is that in each of us, in each of you, there's the potential to change the world. And you don't know exactly who it is here that's going to make some world-changing business or organization or environmental idea. But if we empower everybody, then we will all benefit from the talents of those people. And this is true whether you're talking about non-for-profit work or if you're talking about business.

I just came from China, from the hometown of a gentleman named Jack Ma—some of you know—he's Chinese. And he is the founder and—of Alibaba. So Jack is very wealthy now. But if you listen to Jack's story, he basically started off as somebody who couldn't get into the top universities, taught himself English because he was interested in getting to America somehow. Came back, started a business that nobody thought was going to actually be very successful. He couldn't get any funding for it. But he had this idea that the Internet and computers were really important and now has created the biggest platform in Asia for selling goods.

If you looked at Jack Ma when he was 20 years old, when he was your age, nobody would have predicted that he'd be one of the most successful businessmen on Earth. Just like if you met Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, you wouldn't predict that he was going to be the most—have one of the most successful businesses in history.

Well, what is true in business, it's also true in politics, it's also true in government. All of you have enormous potential, but you have to have very specific plans. And you have to work really hard, and you have to pursue those plans with determination and dedication. And then, if what you're trying isn't working, then you have to try something different and not get discouraged, because very few people are successful right away. Even the most successful people, typically, they have some failures that they have to learn from and not get discouraged.

So—good. Let's see. What other countries aren't—Philippines, right here.

Sustainable Development/Alternative and Renewable Energy Sources/Environment

Q. Mabuhay, Mr. President. You were noted as one of—the only American President who was able to protect such a large area of land and sea. How were you able to justify and reconcile the very idealistic concept of economic sustainability

and development without exploiting the environment? Thank you very much.

The President. Well, it's a good question. The—and it's a good question for ASEAN, because ASEAN is so populated, there's so many people here, and it's growing so fast—it's such a young population—that you have to ask some very tough questions, particularly because what we now know is that the models of development that we saw in the West, using fossil fuels, are not going to be sustainable. We're not going to be able to develop Laos the same way that we developed the United States. We're going to have to have a new model.

Because if all of the ASEAN countries and China and India all were using as much oil and gas and coal as the West did when it was developing, we're all going to be underwater. The environment will not survive.

So what we have to do is to, first of all, leapfrog over the old models. And what I mean by that is to come up with more efficient ways of doing the same thing. A good example of that—although this is not in the energy space, but it will describe what I mean—if you travel through Asia or Africa, everybody has got a phone. But in the West, we had to lay all these lines, right, all these underground cables and above-line telephone poles. That's how we communicated. Now, if you're a poor country, it would make no sense to rebuild all those cables. Now you just put up a cell tower, because we have a new technology.

Well, what's true in communications is also true in energy. Part of what we're going to have to do is to develop solar power and wind power and hydropower. We have to come up with more efficient cars, more efficient appliances. And this is part of what the Paris Agreement was all about, was having each country come up with its own plans for reducing its carbon footprint without holding countries back from their ability to develop and insisting that the wealthier countries contribute to poorer countries so that they can develop faster, but using new technologies rather than the old ones.

But I think that every country has to recognize that there's no contradiction between conservation and development if you have a good plan. The problem is that oftentimes, in order to have good planning, you have to have a government that has skills in identifying: If we put a factory here, what's this going to do to the river? If we are going to see an expansion of population, are we going to build a mass transit system—a train system or bus system—so that people can travel without everybody using their own car? That requires a level of planning and participation and listening to the community.

I—when we were in Vietnam, one of the biggest stories there was a big factory—was it steel? I think it was a steel—there was some sort of manufacturing company that, whatever they were doing to the water, it appeared as if it was killing all the fish. I mean, you had these days where just thousands of fish were just floating up to the surface. And so there were a lot of people who were still depending on fish for their livelihoods. So that's not a good model over the long term.

So, when that factory had put in its application to build a factory, the government may have thought to itself, well, this is great for development, this is going to create jobs. But if it's creating jobs for the people in the factory, but destroying the jobs for the people who fish, then the total sum of development is lower than it could be. And if they had planned ahead of time, then they could have built a factory that maybe had a filter. It might have cost a little bit more, but it also meant that the water was maintained.

And so part of the thing for young people like you, whether you're in government or an NGO, you're going to have to learn the best practices so that you can still grow, but you do so in a way that can be sustained over a long period of time. And look, the United States is still learning how to do this, and we've been at it a long time. But we used to have terrible pollution everywhere. And we ultimately passed laws like the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, and what we discovered was, when you set rules to preserve the environment, that companies will adjust, and they'll find new and innovative ways to make the same products and make the same amount of money, but do it

in a way that actually is good for the environment.

So the—usually, if you see the environment destroyed, it's not because that's necessary for development. It's usually because we're being lazy, and we're not being as creative as we could be about how to do it in a smarter, sustainable way.

All right? Okay. So any other countries we haven't called on yet? Vietnam? Okay. Vietnam? Vietnam? Okay, right here.

Trans-Pacific Partnership

Q. Good afternoon, President Obama. I am Pham, from Vietnam. I would like to ask you about TPP. That is a very good idea to have all other countries in the world; the TPP includes four countries in ASEAN country, like Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam.

The President. Right.

Q. And we expect a lot about the future with TPP. But now, so far, the Government has not ratified it. So do we believe that within the remaining time, or even the new President—the TPP will be, could be ratified? Otherwise, what shall happen? Thank you.

The President. I believe it will be ratified because it's the right thing to do. We're in a political season now, and it's always difficult to get things done. Congress isn't doing much right now. They're all going home and talking to their constituents trying to get reelected. So, after the election, I think people can refocus attention on why this is so important.

But the reason I think it is important is because the United States and the ASEAN countries and the Asia-Pacific region, together, these countries represent 40 percent of the world's economy. And the problem we are seeing is that at a time when growth is slow around the world, if we don't pass trade agreements that create a level playing field so businesses and workers are all treated fairly, so that there are environmental standards, just as we discussed, for products that are being sold—if we don't do that, then countries are going to turn inward, and everybody will be poorer.

So, right now, around the world, there are some people who are resisting trade. And in some ways, that's understandable, because in advanced countries, in wealthier countries, they feel as if the old manufacturing jobs have gone to China and places with cheaper labor and lower environmental standards and lower worker protections. And so, even though the United States is still very wealthy, there are places where the factories have closed because they've moved someplace else. And that happened over the course of the last 30 years. And people remember that, and they feel as if trade wasn't good for them.

And what I've had to explain is that, first of all, if we do nothing, then we're not going to bring those old jobs back. Those factories will not reopen. But if we now enter into agreements with countries like Vietnam, where we have difficulty selling our products, then we can create new businesses, have new customers. And yes, Vietnam may be selling shoes and shirts, but we'll be selling software, and we'll be selling jet engines, and so both countries can grow together.

One of the problems we've also seen in terms of trade is that the benefits of trade all too often have gone to the wealthy people who own the companies. A lot of times, they haven't gone to the workers. And so what I've said is that, as part of TPP, we've asked countries like Vietnam, that want to be a part of it, to start raising their standards and protections for their workers and allow worker organizations to join together so that they have more of a voice in terms of their wages and their benefits and the safety of the workplace. And in fact, the Vietnamese Government has said that it's willing to do that.

And if standards in ASEAN countries rise, then they're not going to be competing with U.S. workers just for who can pay workers the least, or put them in the most unsafe conditions. Instead, they'll be competing for who's working smartest and has the best products and the best ideas. And that's a competition that all of us will benefit from.

So I believe that we'll get it done, but it's always going to be hard. Nothing is easy in the U.S. Congress right now. [*Laughter*] Maybe there was a time when it was, but I haven't

seen it. It sure hasn't been easy since I've been President. All right? But eventually, we'll get it done.

Okay. How many more—how much time do we have? Last question? Because I can't miss—after having said such nice things about ASEAN, if I miss the dinner tonight, I'll be in trouble. [*Laughter*] So I'm going to have to go. The—who, okay, hold on, hold on. I can't hear everybody. Let's see. So I've got Brunei that hasn't had a question and Malaysia and Cambodia. Those three, huh? Man, that's a lot of countries.

All right, we'll go really quick. Somebody from Brunei. Somebody from Brunei. Okay, here. Go ahead.

First Lady Michelle Obama/Global Health

Q. Hello, Mr. President. Thank you for the opportunity. My name is—[*inaudible*]—from Brunei Darussalam. I would like to thank you for the YSEALI initiative, and also to your wife, who has initiated the healthy nutrition initiative that has changed the norms of nutrition worldwide.

The President. Yes.

Q. So my question is, what are your views on the future of global health, especially on noncommunicable diseases, such as cancer and diabetes? And will your wife continue her healthy nutrition initiative after this?

The President. Well, the—first of all, my wife I think, will continue to work on nutrition issues. But she's going to probably be more involved internationally as well as domestically than she has been. Now that our girls are getting older, she can travel more. It used to be, she didn't like going too far away for too long because she wanted to make sure the girls were doing their homework and acting properly. But now that they're almost grown—Malia is—she's leaving, and Sasha will be gone soon as well—I think you'll see Michelle work on these issues internationally more than she has.

In terms of global health, I think that there are different stages. In developing countries, there are just a lot of things that we know how to do; we just have to do them. Diseases that are the result of poor nutrition, not enough to eat, no clean drinking water; sanitation systems that are not ideal; basic preventive care that can be provided in clinics and don't require big technologies; preventing malaria, which—just mosquito nets and effective mosquito abatement can make a difference. So there's a lot of low-hanging fruit, things that we can do that can save so many lives. Maternal health, working—because we still have too much infant mortality and women who are dying in childbirth. So that's one set of issues.

A second set of issues have to do with, actually, prosperity. And that is, as people get wealthier, they're starting to get fatter, they're starting to get more diseases that are associated with modern life, right? Lack of exercise, processed foods. And what's been interesting is, these are—a lot of these problems, like diabetes, used to be primarily in wealthier countries; now you're seeing them pop up in countries like Mexico that didn't used to have these problems because of changing eating habits and lifestyles. So those are a second set of issues. Again, these are all preventable.

The third set of issues have to do with cancer and Alzheimer's, and these are issues that really have to do with new science and new technology. And one of the things that I've done as President in the United States is to invest heavily in research. Now that we have been able to crack the code on human genetics, we think that the time will come when we'll be able to diagnose diseases before they happen. We'll be able to say that this person has a tendency because of their genetic variations to get these diseases and develop cures before those diseases kill them.

But I guess my general attitude would be that even as we're working on those diseases that are worldwide and that have plagued humanity for a very long time, we can save a lot of lives and improve quality of life for a lot of people now just by dealing with the things that we know what to do, but we're just not doing it as well as we should. All right?

Okay. So, Cambodia, who—we have somebody from Cambodia? Right here, this young man. By the way, everybody looks very good in their native clothes. Those of you who are just

wearing shirts, you look good too. [*Laughter*] But I appreciate how nice everybody looks today. Go ahead.

Sustainable Development Goals

Q. Okay, so thank you, Mr. President. May name is—[*inaudible*]—from Cambodia, and actually, my question was taken by one of the Fellows, so I just come with the second question. If the 17 goals of the SDGs were implemented in the United States, what—which goals should be the top priority, and why is it? And how you are going to deal with it? Thank you.

The President. The—that's a good question. So, for those of you who didn't hear the question, SDG is the sustainable development goals that were an update on the original set of goals. Keep in mind how much progress we've made on those goals over the last 20 years.

I mean, the numbers of people who we've seen rise out of extreme poverty, the number of people who are now able to have enough to eat, the reduction in infant mortality has been remarkable. So we've made real progress. Worldwide, people are much better off now than they were just 20 years ago, and I think we can make similar progress going forward.

I've actually asked our teams to look at where in these sustainable development goals do we have work to do in the United States? And although we're still evaluating that, I would say that the areas where we still fall short are—there are still too many children in poverty in the United States. Now, they're not suffering extreme poverty of the sort that you see in parts of India or China or Laos or Cambodia, but we have children who are very poor and who still aren't getting enough to eat. That is also connected to education. And we still have a lot of children in a country so wealthy that on a day-to-day basis are not getting the kinds of educational opportunities that they deserve.

So I would say that the way forward for us involves addressing those pockets of poverty, and starting with kids. And we have enough wealth to do it. The question is whether we have the political will to make the investments in these communities, many of which are in inner cities. Oftentimes, they are poor African American or Latino who are still held back historically by discrimination. And sometimes, it's harder to get the society as a whole to invest in these kids.

But if we're going to be successful, we're going to have to do it. This goes to a question that was asked earlier. The United States, by the year 2050, so that—which is only 35 years from now, will no longer be a majority-White country—think about that—because the birth rates for particularly people of Hispanic background, but also Asians, in America is much faster, much higher.

So, if those kids today who are poor aren't provided opportunity, our society as a whole is going to be poorer, because that's going to be the workforce of the future. And that's where I think we have to make the most progress.

All right, so what was the last country?

Audience members. Malaysia!

The President. Malaysia. Okay, go ahead, right here.

Native American Issues

Q. My name is Alice Matthew, I'm from the State of Sabah in Malaysia. My question is, in solidarity with the indigenous people in—not my country, but in America itself. I just heard recently that this group of people is fighting to protect their ancestral land against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Yes. So my question is, what—in your capacity, what can you do to ensure the protection of the ancestral land, the supply of clean water, and also environmental justice is upheld? Yes.

The President. Well, it's a great question. The—as many of you know, the way that Native Americans were treated was tragic. And one of the priorities that I've had as President is restoring an honest and generous and respectful relationship with Native American tribes. And so we have made an unprecedented investment in meeting regularly with the tribes, helping them design ideas and plans for economic development, for education, for health that is culturally appropriate for them.

And this issue of ancestral lands and helping them preserve their way of life is something that we have worked very hard on. Now, some of these issues are caught up with laws and treaties, and so I can't give you details on this particular case. I'd have to go back to my staff and find out, how are we doing on this one?

But what I can tell you is, is that we have actually restored more rights among Native Americans to their ancestral lands, sacred sites, waters, hunting grounds. We have done a lot more work on that over the last 8 years than we had in the previous 20, 30 years. And this is something that I hope will continue as we go forward. But it was an excellent question.

Let me just say this in closing. This has been a great group. I want to thank, again, the university for hosting us and the people of Laos for being such wonderful partners in this process.

For all the young people here, I want to end by telling you the same thing that I tell young people back in the United States. Sometimes, because we have so much information from all around the world on our televisions, on our computers, on our phones, it seems as if the world is falling apart. All right? Because we're always getting information about, there's a war here, and there's a terrible environmental disaster there, and there's conflict here, and this horrible issue is happening, and everybody is shouting and everybody hates each other. And you get kind of depressed. You think, goodness, what's happening?

But the truth is, is that when you look at all the measures of well-being in the world, if you had a choice of when to be born and you didn't know ahead of time who you were going to be—what nationality, whether you were male or female, what religion—but you just said, when in human history would be the best time to be born? The time would be now. The world has never been healthier, it's never been wealthier, it's never been better educated. It's never been less violent, more tolerant than it is today.

Now, we don't always see that, because there are terrible things that are happening around the world, and there are real tragedies and injustice that are happening. And it's your job to fix it. But you should never be discouraged because you have more opportunity today to make a difference in the world than any generation before. And my hope is that you will seize that opportunity and you'll know that you will have a strong friend and partner in the United States of America when you do. Okay?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:49 p.m. in the Lanon Bacam auditorium at Souphanouvong University. In his remarks, he referred to Phonesapith "Om" Sotitham, a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Fellow; White House Receptionist Leah Katz-Hernandez; YSEALI Institute on Global Environmental Issues alumna Chindavone Sanlath; and Mark E. Zuckerberg, founder and chief executive officer, Facebook, Inc. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng, brother-in-law Konrad Ng, and Mr. Ng's parents Howard and Joan Ng.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Association of Southeast Asian Nations Leaders in Vientiane, Laos

September 8, 2016

I want to begin by thanking the Government and the people of Laos for hosting this summit. I've now met with the leaders of ASEAN eight times, visited Southeast Asia more than any other U.S. President, and it reflects the growing importance of ASEAN and this region.

ASEAN is key to the U.S. rebalance to Asia, and more importantly, it's key to a peaceful and prosperous future for the world. And we have forged a strategic partnership. The U.S. is committed to building on this solid foundation.

We have laid out a common vision for the region, articulated in the Sunnylands Declara-