

As we turn our thoughts to a new year, Americans have every right to be proud of the work of their Government and its employees. They will continue to work vigilantly through the holidays and into the new year so that America may celebrate the arrival of a new millennium.

**Letter to Congressional Leaders  
Transmitting a Report on the  
National Emergency With Respect  
to Burma**

*December 14, 1999*

*Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)*

As required by section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. 1703(c), I transmit herewith a 6-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to Burma that was declared in Executive Order 13047 of May 20, 1997.

Sincerely,

**William J. Clinton**

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Albert Gore, Jr., President of the Senate.

**Remarks Prior to Discussions With  
Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel  
and Foreign Minister Farouk  
al-Shara of Syria**

*December 15, 1999*

***Middle East Peace Process***

**The President.** Good morning. It is an honor to welcome Prime Minister Barak, Foreign Minister Shara, and the members of the Israeli and Syrian delegations here to the White House.

When the history of this century is written, some of its most illustrious chapters will be the stories of men and women who put old rivalries and conflicts behind them and looked ahead to peace and reconciliation for their children. What we are witnessing today is not yet peace, and getting there will re-

quire bold thinking and hard choices. But today is a big step along that path.

Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara are about to begin the highest level meeting ever between their two countries. They are prepared to get down to business. For the first time in history, there is a chance of a comprehensive peace between Israel and Syria and, indeed, all its neighbors.

That Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara chose to come here to Washington reminds us of one other fact, of course, which is the United States own responsibility in this endeavor. Secretary Albright and I and our entire team will do everything we possibly can to help the parties succeed, for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is vital not only to the region; it is also vital to the world and to the security of the American people, for we have learned from experience that tensions in the region can escalate, and the escalations can lead into diplomatic, financial, and ultimately, military involvement, far more costly than even the costliest peace.

We should be clear, of course, the success of the enterprise we embark upon today is not guaranteed. The road to peace is no easier, and in many ways it is harder, than the road to war. There will be challenges along the way, but we have never had such an extraordinary opportunity to reach a comprehensive settlement.

Prime Minister Barak, an exceptional hero in war, is now a determined soldier for peace. He knows a negotiated peace, one that serves the interests of all sides, is the only way to bring genuine security to the people of Israel, to see that they are bound by a circle of peace.

President Asad, too, has known the cost of war. From my discussion with him in recent months, I am convinced he knows what a true peace could do to lift the lives of his people and give them a better future. And Foreign Minister Shara is an able representative of the President and the people of Syria.

Let me also say a brief word about the continuing progress of the Palestinian track. Chairman Arafat also has embarked on a courageous quest for peace, and the Israelis and the Palestinians continue to work on that.

We see now leaders with an unquestioned determination to defend and advance the interest of their own people but also determined to marshal the courage and creativity, the vision and resolve, to secure a bright future based on peace rather than a dark future under the storm clouds of continuing, endless conflict.

At the close of this millennium and in this season of religious celebration for Jews, for Muslims, for Christians, Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese, all have it within their power to end decades of bitter conflict. Together, they can choose to write a new chapter in the history of our time. Again, let me say that today's meeting is a big step in the right direction, and I am profoundly grateful for the leaders of both nations for being here.

We have just talked and agreed that it would be appropriate for each leader to say a few brief words on behalf of the delegation. We will take no questions, in keeping with our commitment to do serious business and not cause more problems than we can solve out here with you and all your helpful questions.

But I will begin with Prime Minister Barak.

*[At this point, Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister al-Shara made remarks.]*

**The President.** Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We're going to work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister al-Shara.

### **Remarks on Action by Germany To Compensate Nazi Regime Victims of Forced Labor and an Exchange With Reporters**

*December 15, 1999*

**The President.** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to make a statement about the very important work that Stuebben has been involved with. I have just

received a letter from Chancellor Schroeder confirming that the German Government and German industry are prepared to commit 10 billion deutsche marks, the equivalent of more than \$5 billion, to a fund for those who were slave and forced laborers and suffered other injuries under the Nazi regime.

We believe this satisfies the requirements of those representing the victims. We close the 20th century with an extraordinary achievement that will bring an added measure of material and moral justice to the victims of this century's most terrible crime. It will help us start a new millennium on higher ground.

Those who will benefit are elderly survivors. Sadly, they're passing away at a rate of almost 10 percent a year. Some are living here in the United States, many are living in central and eastern Europe, double victims who endured the Holocaust first and then a half-century of communism. They have been waiting a long, long time, and nothing can fully compensate their searing loss.

But we can accept our generation's responsibility to remember and to redress the injustices they suffered. We owe that to them and to future generations. I've been working with Chancellor Schroeder for some time to reach this point. We could not have done this without his truly remarkable leadership.

Germany already has made more than \$60 billion in payments to Holocaust survivors and to other victims of Nazi persecution. But this is the first important gesture made to those who were forced and slave laborers working for private industry, to those whose insurance policies were not honored, and those whose property was confiscated.

This was not an easy step for the German Government to take, but it reaffirms its commitment to human dignity, reinforces its partnership with the United States, and strengthens its ties with neighbors in central and eastern Europe. I want to thank the companies involved in the settlement for acknowledging their moral and historic responsibility.

I will do everything I can to provide legal finality for them and to remove the potential cloud hanging over German companies doing business here in the United States. I also