

In the battle of Afghanistan, nations from Central and Eastern Europe supplied soldiers and special forces and peacekeepers to help defeat the Taliban, to help destroy the terrorists and to bring freedom to the Afghan people.

In the battle of Iraq, Central and Eastern European countries have stood with America and our coalition to end a grave threat to peace and to rid Iraq of a brutal, brutal regime. The peoples of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia have a fresh memory of tyranny. And they know the consequences of complacency in the face of danger.

Time and again, they have demonstrated their desire and ability to defend freedom against its enemies. They have proven themselves to be allies by their action, and now it is time to make them allies by treaty.

This morning's vote in the Senate brings that day closer. I urge all the current members of NATO to welcome these new members as quickly as possible. These nations will make NATO stronger, and we need that strength for all the work that lies ahead. We must continue to fight global terror and strongly oppose the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

NATO itself must develop new military capabilities to meet the emerging dangers of a new era. We must help the people of the Balkans to become full partners in the progress of Europe. We welcome the commitment of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to the values and principles of NATO. And we will help them as they move forward with reform.

We have work ahead in bringing order and security to Iraq, so the Iraqi people can build the institutions of freedom and provide an example of democracy to other Arab nations. And just as NATO has stood for the freedom of all of Europe, we must stand with people everywhere who strive for greater freedom and tolerance and development and health and opportunity, including those in the Middle East and Africa.

This day was a long time in coming, yet there was never any doubt. Through decades

of crisis and division, Europe's peoples shared with people everywhere the same need and hope for freedom. This hope overcame the designs of tyrants, and this hope overcame the tragedies of war.

The nations of Central and Eastern Europe are one of history's great examples of the power and appeal of liberty. And we believe that example will be followed and multiplied throughout the world.

Thank you all for coming. May God bless your nations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:38 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi of Bulgaria; Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland of Estonia; Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete of Latvia; Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis of Lithuania; Foreign Minister Mircea Dan Geoana of Romania; Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan of Slovakia; and Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel of Slovenia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of Walter Sisulu

May 8, 2003

I was saddened to hear of the death of Walter Sisulu in South Africa on May 6, 2003. Walter Sisulu was a man of great moral and strategic vision who committed his life to leading the struggle to end apartheid rule in South Africa. Sisulu was a man of principle and humility whose pursuit of an inclusive, multiracial South Africa never wavered through the 25 years of his imprisonment. Walter Sisulu lived to become a free man and to see his vision become a reality. He leaves a legacy of courage and conviction for South Africans, and all of us who share his belief in the equality of all people.

On behalf of the American people, I extend our deepest sympathies to Mrs. Albertina Sisulu, the Sisulu family, and the people of South Africa.

**Statement on the Senate Filibusters
of the Nominations of Miguel A.
Estrada and Priscilla Owen To Be
Judges on the United States Court of
Appeals**

May 8, 2003

Miguel Estrada and Priscilla Owen have been waiting 2 years for an up-or-down vote in the Senate. Both of these nominees are of the highest integrity and character with tremendous legal experience. Both have been unanimously rated “well-qualified” by the American Bar Association. Each has the support of a majority of Senators, yet votes on their nominations are being blocked by a minority of Senators who are engaged in simultaneous filibusters. These partisan obstructionist tactics are unprecedented, unacceptable, and inconsistent with the Senate’s constitutional responsibility.

Because of the Senate’s failure to hold timely votes, the number of judicial vacancies has become unacceptably high. When the Federal courts are understaffed, they cannot act in a timely manner to resolve disputes that affect the lives and liberties of Americans.

Mr. Estrada and Justice Owen represent the mainstream of American law and American values, possess extraordinary experience and integrity, and have strong bipartisan support from those who know them best. They will be outstanding circuit judges once they receive a vote and are confirmed.

In recent days, many Senators of both parties have rightly spoken out about the broken confirmation process and reiterated the need for the Senate to ensure timely consideration of judicial nominees. I appreciate their call for the Senate to fulfill its constitutional responsibility and hold up-or-down votes on all judicial nominees within a reasonable time after nomination.

**Executive Order 13299—
Interagency Group on Insular Areas**

May 8, 2003

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the

United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Interagency Group on Insular Areas. (a) There is established, within the Department of the Interior for administrative purposes, the Interagency Group on Insular Areas (IGIA). The group shall consist exclusively of:

- (i) the heads of the executive departments; and
- (ii) the heads of such agencies as the Secretary of the Interior may designate.

(b) The Secretary of the Interior, or the Secretary’s designee under section 1(c) of this order, shall convene and preside at the meetings of the IGIA, determine its agenda, direct its work and, as appropriate to deal with particular subject matters, establish and direct subgroups of the IGIA that shall consist exclusively of members of the IGIA.

(c) A member of the IGIA may designate, to perform the IGIA or IGIA subgroup functions of the member, any person who is a part of the member’s department or agency (agency) and who is either an officer of the United States appointed by the President or a member of the Senior Executive Service.

Sec. 2. Functions of the IGIA. The IGIA shall:

(a) provide advice on establishment or implementation of policies concerning American Samoa, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (Insular Areas) to:

- (i) the President, through the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs in the White House Office, in written reports, at least once each year; and
- (ii) the Secretary of the Interior;

(b) obtain information and advice concerning Insular Areas from governors and other elected officials in the Insular Areas (including through a meeting at least once each year with such governors of the Insular Areas who may wish to attend) in a manner that seeks their individual advice and does not involve collective judgment or consensus advice or deliberation;

(c) obtain information and advice concerning Insular Areas, as the IGIA determines appropriate, from representatives of entities or other individuals in a manner that