

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand

September 19, 2005

President Bush. It's been my honor to welcome the Prime Minister of Thailand back to the—to Washington. Thank you for coming, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Thaksin. Thank you.

President Bush. Laura and I were just talking the other evening about what a wonderful visit we had to your country when you hosted APEC. It's reminded me—when I was thinking about that visit, reminded me of our close friendship. The Prime Minister is a person who believes in markets and free enterprise and freedom. And I'm really, really pleased he's here.

We had a—we talked about a lot of subjects. One subject that I'm particularly interested in is avian flu and the need for our countries to work together. Thailand is a leader in putting systems in place that will track the virus as it attacks different birds and watches very carefully to make sure that there's no bird-to-human transmission in his country. He's willing to work in the neighborhood, for which I'm grateful. All of us need to be mindful of this potentially devastating disease. And we've got a good friend and a very thoughtful leader when it comes to that subject.

We talked about North Korea. We talked about the neighborhood. We talked about our economies. We would like to get a free trade agreement concluded here as quickly as possible, and the Prime Minister made that very clear to me.

All in all, it was a very good visit, covering a lot of subjects, and I'm not surprised, because I'm visiting with a good friend.

So, welcome, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Thaksin. Thank you, Mr. President. It's my pleasure to visit Washington, DC, again. It's my third time during Prime Ministership—and this trip I have been—discussed with the President about the bilateral and also the regional—in Asia as well. And we had a very good conversation.

I committed to President Bush that we are pressing ahead with the FTA, and also we will work closely with U.S. by drafting the

plan of action in the cooperation between our two countries and also with the third country as well if the two countries would like to work together with, in helping or in working with other countries.

I also want to welcome the President to meet with the ASEAN seven during APEC meeting in November in Korea.

President Bush. Finally, I do want to thank the Prime Minister and His Majesty for sending relief supplies to our folks that have been affected by Hurricane Katrina. This good country has just come through a tsunami, and they're on their way to recovery. And yet they were able to, through their—because of their generous hearts, ship help. And so thanks very much, and please thank His Majesty for his generous contribution to the folks down there.

Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:52 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to King Phumiphon Adunyadet of Thailand.

Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand

September 19, 2005

President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat met today to reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Thai alliance and the importance of bilateral cooperation in regional and global affairs. Both leaders recognized the special and enduring bonds between the two countries as well as between the American and Thai people, demonstrated most recently by the close cooperation following last December's devastating tsunami and after Hurricane Katrina. President Bush expressed his admiration for the resilience and determination of the Thai people and government in rebuilding areas affected by the tsunami and pledged continued U.S. assistance. The President noted Thailand's effort to mobilize support for an establishment of a regional tsunami early warning system.

Prime Minister Thaksin once again expressed his profound condolences for American casualties and the devastation from Hurricane Katrina. President Bush expressed his

appreciation for His Majesty the King of Thailand's donations for the people affected by Hurricane Katrina and for Thailand's dispatch of emergency relief supplies.

The two leaders welcomed the expanding and deepening security cooperation that has followed Thailand's designation as a Major Non-NATO Ally and discussed plans to inaugurate a senior-level bilateral dialogue on strategic and security issues in Bangkok this fall. They also directed their officials to work together on a comprehensive Plan of Action covering all major areas of cooperation, aiming to serve as a roadmap to maximize the benefits arising from close and productive U.S.-Thai relations. In that context, the two leaders emphasized the importance of tri-lateral cooperation to support economic and social development in countries where both the U.S. and Thailand are working.

The two leaders discussed the importance of stepping up efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and pledged to explore cooperation in the Proliferation Security Initiative. The President noted the outstanding cooperation by U.S. and Thai military forces in this year's Cobra Gold joint exercises.

Both leaders expressed concern over current trends in Burma. Stressing their shared objectives of promoting democracy and national reconciliation in Burma, both sides agreed to have closer consultations on this matter. The two leaders noted that they had called for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other jailed political activists when they met in 2003 and reiterated that this step was necessary for a credible process of political dialogue for all parties.

Prime Minister Thaksin briefed President Bush on Bangkok's efforts to deal with the violence in southern Thailand while preserving the democratic freedom that has made Thailand a leader in Southeast Asia. The President commended the Prime Minister's creation of a National Reconciliation Commission aimed at developing a broad-based approach to the South that combines security, equitable development, and protection for basic rights.

The two leaders agreed to make vigorous efforts to reach conclusion on the U.S.-Thai Free Trade Agreement (FTA) next year.

They expressed satisfaction with the fourth round of talks held in Montana in July and looked forward to the 5th round next week in Hawaii. President Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin agreed that the FTA must be beneficial to the people of both countries and comprehensive in its mandate, and it must address issues of importance to both sides.

The two leaders welcomed the signing of an Air Transport Agreement between the two countries that would provide substantial benefits to travelers and businesses and further expand bilateral economic linkages.

As the coordinator for ASEAN dialogue with the United States, Thailand plays a key role in U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia. President Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin discussed regional and development issues and ways to enhance U.S.-Thai cooperation in regional forums, particularly the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences, as well as the vital nexus of economic, trade, and security issues at APEC. President Bush noted that he was looking forward to meeting jointly with ASEAN members of APEC at the Leaders' Meeting in Busan this November. The two leaders also expressed their support for the Aceh peace agreement underway in Indonesia and praised the serious efforts of both sides in achieving such a breakthrough.

Both leaders underscored the importance of combating infectious diseases and the urgency of addressing avian flu in particular. President Bush applauded Prime Minister Thaksin's leadership in responding to outbreaks in his country. The two leaders agreed on the critical importance of transparency, close monitoring, and cooperation across sectors and with international health organizations by all countries in the region. They pledged to intensify cooperation on global efforts to respond to this critical emerging issue.

President Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin agreed on the potential for even greater coordination on areas of mutual concern and overlapping interest and looked forward to meeting again in November at APEC.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

**Statement on the Recommendations
of the National Commission on
Election Reform**

September 19, 2005

I greatly appreciate the excellent work of the bipartisan commission in identifying ways to strengthen the integrity of the voting process. It is critical to maintain America's trust in our election system, and I look forward to reviewing this report and working with Congress on the recommendations.

**Remarks to the Governor's
Commission on Recovery,
Rebuilding, and Renewal in
Gulfport, Mississippi**

September 20, 2005

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks. Well, thanks for having me—again. A couple of things, observations: Every time I come back here, I see progress. You know, sometimes when you're so close to the situation, it's hard to really see noticeable change. But this part of the country is changing. And it's—you're moving forward. I don't know if you know that or not, but flying in or driving in, there's something different than the first time I was here.

Now, what wasn't different is, this Mississippi spirit is strong. It was noticeable. There is a can-do attitude in the midst of all the trauma and pain. One thing I noticed on my first trip was, "We can do this." And now I'm seeing it being done. "We can do this" means a lot of things. It meant, like Jerry Darden, who's there—Jerry, stand up for a minute—Jerry Darden rescued 20 people out of the flood waters. He represents kind of the heroic action that took place when the storm hit. I met him out at the airport. He said, "I never thought I'd get to see a President." [*Laughter*] I said, "I never thought I'd get to meet a fellow who saved 20 lives."

And that can-do spirit is—these county commissioners—we call them county commissioners—county supervisors and mayors who are dealing with unbelievable trauma, and you know, they're right there on the frontline of trying to comfort people who

hurt. And yet, amidst all that agony and pain, they're going through was this comforting spirit. The can-do spirit is, you know, seeing progress being made. And inside this tent there's a can-do spirit of taking a horrible situation and making this part of the world better. And so I'm impressed.

And I think that when Haley said, "Well, we've got to make sure that people take a look down here to invest," the first thing they're going to look at is not the tax code, but the character of the people, which will give you a great advantage.

My pledge is—let me step back. I really appreciate this commission. I think it's really important for Mississippi folks to chart your path. And I know Gene Taylor feels that way, and I know the Senators feel that way. It's just—you really don't want the Federal Government telling you how to rebuild. What you want is the Federal Government to help you rebuild. You want a partner, not somebody who is going to tell you what the strategy ought to be.

I also appreciate Haley saying that the State of Mississippi and this commission will take into account what the local folks think. Their input is going to be vital. I mean, you've got yourself some mayors and some supervisors who were elected by the people; you need to listen to them, because they're going to be listening to the people.

A couple of recovery items: One, I spent some time—quality time at the Chevron plant in Pascagoula, and I want to thank Roland for being here. By the way, you talk about a dedicated group of people who are working huge hours and long hours, not only to get that plant up and running but to help the community. It was an impressive display of compassion and hard work, and thanks for having me.

But I did hear from the mayors and the county supervisors, and there was a level of frustration, as there should have been. You know, you hear one thing about debris removal, and nothing is happening. Well, I got back, and I called them in, and I said, "Look, part of the recovery, we've got to help these folks have a sensible plan to start removing debris." We worked with Haley. The mayors tell me—I'm a little cautious about laying it out there—but the mayors tell me there is