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The President's News Conference in L'Aquila, Italy
July 10, 2009

The President. Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. I apologize for being a little bit late. Good afternoon. We have just concluded the final session of what has been a highly productive summit here in L'Aquila. And before I discuss what we've achieved these past 3 days, I'd like to take a moment to express my thanks to Prime Minister Berlusconi, his staff, the people of Italy for their extraordinary hospitality and hard work in setting up this summit. And particularly, I want to thank the people of L'Aquila for welcoming us to your home at this difficult time. We've seen how you've come together and taken care of each other, and we've been moved by your courage and your resilience and your kindness.

I'm confident that L'Aquila will be rebuilt, its splendor will be restored, and its people will serve as an example for all of us in how people can rise up from tragedy and begin anew. And we will keep this place and its people in our prayers and our thoughts in the months and years ahead.

We've come to L'Aquila for a very simple reason: Because the challenges of our time threaten the peace and prosperity of every single nation, and no one nation can meet these challenges alone. The threat of climate change can't be contained by borders on a map, and the theft of loose nuclear materials could lead to the extermination of any city on Earth. Reckless actions by a few have fueled a recession that spans the globe, and rising food prices means that 100 million of our fellow citizens are expected to fall into desperate poverty.

So right now, at this defining moment, we face a choice: We can either shape our future or let events shape it for us. We can let the stale debates and old disagreements of the past divide us, or we can recognize our shared interests and shared aspirations and work together to create a safer and cleaner and more prosperous world for future generations. I believe it's clear from our progress these past few days the path that we must choose.

This gathering has included not just leaders of the G–8, but leaders from more than 25 nations, as well as representatives from major international organizations such as the U.N., IMF, WTO, and others. And after weeks of preparation and 3 days of candid and spirited discussions, we've agreed to take significant measures to address some of the most pressing threats facing our environment, our global economy, and our international security.

Let me outline what I believe have been the most significant items that emerged from L'Aquila. First, there was widespread consensus that we must all continue our work to restore economic growth and reform our national and international financial regulatory systems. I'm pleased that the United States has taken the lead on this reform at home, with a sweeping overhaul of our regulatory system, a transformation on a scale that we have not seen since the aftermath of the Great Depression.

But while our markets are improving and we appear to have averted global collapse, we know that too many people are still struggling. So we agree that full recovery is still a ways off; that it would be premature to begin winding down our stimulus plans; and that we must sustain our support for those plans to lay the foundation for a strong and lasting recovery. We also agreed that it's equally important that we return to fiscal sustainability in the midterm after the recovery is completed.

Second, we agreed to historic measures that will help stop the spread of nuclear weapons and move us closer to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. In Prague, I laid out a comprehensive strategy to advance global security by pursuing that goal. In Moscow, President Medvedev and I agreed to substantially reduce our warheads and delivery systems in a treaty that will be completed later this year.

And this week, the leaders of the G–8 nations embraced the strategy I outlined in Prague, which includes measures to strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty, to encourage nations to meet their arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation commitments, and to secure nuclear weapons and vulnerable nuclear materials so they don't fall into the hands of terrorists.

I also invited leaders from the broader group of nations here to attend a global nuclear summit that I will host in Washington in March of next year, where we will discuss steps we can take to secure loose nuclear materials, combat smuggling, and deter, detect, and disrupt attempts at nuclear terrorism.

Now, we face a real-time challenge on nuclear proliferation in Iran. And at this summit, the G–8 nations came together to issue a strong statement calling on Iran to fulfill its responsibilities to the international community without further delay. We remain seriously concerned about the appalling events surrounding the Presidential election. And we're deeply troubled by the proliferation risks Iran's nuclear program poses to the world.

We've offered Iran a path towards assuming its rightful place in the world, but with that right comes responsibilities. And we hope Iran will make the choice to fulfill them, and we will take stock of Iran's progress when we see each other this September at the G–20 meeting.

Third, we took groundbreaking steps forward to address the threat of climate change in our time. The G–8 nations agreed that by 2050, we'll reduce our emissions by 80 percent, and that we'll work with all nations to cut global emissions in half. And 17 of the world's leading economies, both developed and developing nations alike, made unprecedented commitments to reduce their emissions and made significant progress on finance, adaptation, and technology issues.

In the United States, we've already passed legislation in the House of Representatives that puts us on track to meeting this 80 percent goal. And we made historic clean energy investments in our stimulus, as well as setting aside—setting new fuel efficiency standards to increase mileage and decrease pollution, because we believe that the nation that can build a 21st century clean energy economy is the nation that will lead the 21st century global economy.

We did not reach agreement on every issue, and we still have much work ahead on climate change, but these achievements are highly meaningful, and they'll generate significant momentum as we head into the talks at Copenhagen and beyond.

Finally, we have committed to investing $20 billion in food security—agricultural development programs to help fight world hunger. This is in addition to the emergency humanitarian aid that we provide. And I should just note that going into the meeting, we had agreed to 15 billion; we exceeded that mark and obtained an additional $5 billion of hard commitments.

We do not view this assistance as an end in itself. We believe that the purpose of aid must be to create the conditions where it's no longer needed, to help people become self-sufficient, provide for their families, and lift their standards of living. And that's why I proposed a new

approach to this issue, one endorsed by all the leaders here, a coordinated effort to support comprehensive plans created by the countries themselves, with help from multilateral institutions like the World Bank when appropriate, along with significant and sustained financial commitments from our nations.

I also want to speak briefly about additional one-on-one meetings I had with leaders here outside of the G–8 context. These meetings were tremendously valuable and productive. We spoke about how we can forge a strong, coordinated, and effective response to nuclear proliferation threats from Iran and North Korea. We also discussed challenges we faced in managing our economies, steps we can take together in combating climate change, and other important matters. And I believe we laid a solid foundation on these issues.

Ultimately, this summit and the work we've done here reflects a recognition that the defining problems of our time will not be solved without collective action. No one corner of the globe can wall itself off from the challenges of the 21st century or the needs and aspirations of fellow nations. The only way forward is through shared and persistent effort to combat threats to our peace, our prosperity, and our common humanity wherever they may exist.

None of this will be easy. As we worked this week to find common ground, we have not solved all our problems, and we've not agreed on every point. But we've shown that it is possible to move forward and make real and unprecedented progress together. And I'm confident we'll continue to do so in the months and years ahead.

So with that, let me take a few questions. I've got a list that I'm working off of, and I'm going to start with Peter Baker [New York Times].

Peter.

Fight Against World Hunger/Government Corruption on the African Continent/Ghana

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. I'm sorry, your mike didn't—is not working there.

Q. Hello?

The President. Yes.

Q. Yes, that's better. Thank you, sir.

Mr. President, we were told that you made your appeal for the food security money during the meetings personal by citing your family experience in Kenya, your cousin and so forth. I wonder if you could relate to us a little bit of what you said then and talk about what—your family experience, how that influences your policies and approach.

The President. What you heard is true, and I started with this fairly telling point, that when my father traveled to the United States from Kenya to study, at that time the per capita income and Gross Domestic Product of Kenya was higher than South Korea's. Today, obviously, South Korea is a highly developed and relatively wealthy country, and Kenya is still struggling with deep poverty in much of the country.

And the question I asked in the meeting was, why is that? There had been some talk about the legacies of colonialism and other policies by wealthier nations, and without in any way diminishing that history, the point I made was that the South Korean Government, working with the private sector and civil society, was able to create a set of institutions that provided transparency and accountability and efficiency that allowed for extraordinary economic

progress, and that there was no reason why African countries could not do the same. And yet in many African countries, if you want to start a business or get a job, you still have to pay a bribe; that there remains too much—there remains a lack of transparency.

And the point that I was trying to underscore is, is that as we think about this issue of food security, which is of tremendous importance—I mean, we've got 100 million people who dropped into further dire poverty as a consequence of this recession; we estimate that a billion people are hungry around the globe, and so wealthier nations have a moral obligation as well as a national security interest in providing assistance. And we've got to meet those responsibilities.

The flip side is, is that countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the world that are suffering from extreme poverty have an obligation to use the assistance that's available in a way that is transparent, accountable, and that builds on rule of law and other institutional reforms that will allow long-term improvement.

There is no reason why Africa cannot be self-sufficient when it comes to food. It has sufficient arable land. What's lacking is the right seeds, the right irrigation, but also the kinds of institutional mechanisms that ensure that a farmer is going to be able to grow crops, get them to market, get a fair price. And so all these things have to be part of a comprehensive plan, and that's what I was trying to underscore during the meeting today.

Q. And your own family, sir?

The President. What's that?

Q. Your own family?

The President. Well, the point I was making is—my father traveled to the United States a mere 50 years ago, and yet now I have family members who live in villages—they themselves are not going hungry—but live in villages where hunger is real. And so this is something that I understand in very personal terms. And if you talk to people on the ground in Africa, certainly in Kenya, they will say that part of the issue here is the institutions aren't working for ordinary people. And so governance is a vital concern that has to be addressed.

Now, keep in mind—I want to be very careful—Africa is a continent, not a country, and so you can't extrapolate from the experience of one country. And there are a lot of good things happening. Part of the reason that we're traveling to Ghana is because you've got there a functioning democracy, a President who's serious about reducing corruption, and you've seen significant economic growth.

So I don't want to overly generalize, but I do want to make the broader point that a government that is stable, that is not engaging in tribal conflicts, that can give people confidence and security that their work will be rewarded, that is investing in its people and their skills and talents, those countries can succeed, regardless of their history.

All right. Michael Fletcher, the Washington Post.

Nuclear Arms Reduction

Q. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. As you've pushed for an agreement to reduce nuclear stockpiles between Russia and the U.S., part of your rationale has been that you want to have the moral authority to then turn to North Korea and Iran to get them to suspend their programs. Why will they listen to what the U.S. and Russia have to say? What would it matter to them what we do?

The President. Well, I don't think it matters so much necessarily that they will listen to the United States or Russia individually. But it gives us the capacity, as the two nuclear superpowers, to make appeals to the broader world community in a consistent way about the dangers of nuclear proliferation and the need to reduce that danger and hopefully at some point in time eliminate it.

So there are countries that have decided not to pursue nuclear weapons. Brazil, South Africa, Libya have all made a decision not to pursue nuclear weapons. Now, part of the concept behind the Non-Proliferation Treaty was countries could develop peaceful nuclear energy; they would not pursue nuclear weapons if they were signatories to the treaty, and in turn, the United States and Russia would also significantly reduce their nuclear stockpiles.

And so part of the goal here is to show that the U.S. and Russia are going to be fulfilling their commitments so that other countries feel that this is an international effort and it's not something simply being imposed by the United States or Russia or members of the nuclear club. And I am confident that we can rebuild a nonproliferation framework that works for all countries. And I think it's important for us to establish a set of international norms that can be verified, that can be enforced. And when we are speaking to Iran or North Korea, it's not a matter of singling them out, but it—rather it's a set of international norms of behavior that we're expecting everybody to abide by. Okay?

Paolo Valentino [Corriere della Sera].

Group of Eight Nations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. It seems that yesterday morning you had a very spirited and lively discussion within the—with the G–8-plus-5-plus-1, ignited by President Lula objection to the format, to the adequacy of the G–8 as a forum. And, well, I would like—what was your argument in this discussion and whether or not you have the feeling that the days of the G–8 are over?

The President. Yes.

Q. And a very—a second question, but very light, after 6 months wheeling and dealing with these international forums—G–20, NATO, and G–8—do you find it more complicated or less complicated to deal with that than with the American Congress? [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, the—on the second question, it's not even close. I mean, Congress is always tougher. But in terms of the issue of the G's and what's the appropriate international structure and framework, I have to tell you, in the discussions I listened more than I spoke, although what I said privately was the same thing that I've said publicly, which is that there is no doubt that we have to update and refresh and renew the international institutions that were set up in a different time and place. Some—the United Nations—date back to post-World War II; others, like the G–8, are 30 years old. And so there's no sense that those institutions can adequately capture the enormous changes that have taken place during those intervening decades. I—what, exactly, is the right format is a question that I think will be debated.

One point I did make in the meeting is that what I've noticed is everybody wants the smallest possible group, smallest possible organization that includes them. So if they're the 21st-largest nation in the world, then they want the G–21, and think it's highly unfair if they've been cut out.

What's also true is that part of the challenge here is revitalizing the United Nations, because a lot of energy is going into these various summits and these organizations in part

because there's a sense that when it comes to big, tough problems, the U.N. General Assembly is not always working as effectively and rapidly as it needs to. So I'm a strong supporter of the U.N., and I said so in this meeting, but it has to be reformed and revitalized, and this is something that I've said to the Secretary-General.

One thing I think is absolutely true is, is that for us to think we can somehow deal with some of these global challenges in the absence of major powers, like China, India, and Brazil, seems to me wrong-headed. So they are going to have to be included in these conversations. To have entire continents like Africa or Latin America not adequately represented in these major international forums and decisionmaking bodies is not going to work.

So I think we're in a transition period. We're trying to find the right shape that combines the efficiency and capacity for action with inclusiveness. And my expectation is, is that over the next several years, you'll see an evolution, and we'll be able to find the right combination.

The one thing I will be looking forward to is fewer summit meetings, because, as you said, I've only been in office 6 months now, and there have been a lot of these. And I think that there's a possibility of streamlining them and making them more effective. The United States, obviously, is a—absolutely committed partner to concerted international action, but we need to, I think, make sure that they're as productive as possible. Okay?

Hans Nichols [Bloomberg].

Health Care Reform

Q. Hans had other obligations, sir.

The President. Yes, I notice you're not Hans. [*Laughter*]

Q. Right. Roger Runningen [Bloomberg]—we swapped.

The President. There you go.

Q. Anyway, thank you very much for the question.

I'd like to return to domestic issues, Mr. President—health care. The momentum seems to have slowed a bit. The Senate Finance Committee is still wrestling with the cost issue. The Blue Dog Democrats, members of your own party, yesterday said they had strong reservations about what's developing so far. I was just wondering, when are you going to be jumping in really full force with this? Do you have any sweeteners planned? What is your push before the August recess?

The President. Well, we jumped in with both feet. Our team is working with Members of Congress every day on this issue, and it is my highest legislative priority over the next month. So I think it's important just to recognize we are closer to achieving serious health care reform that cuts costs, provides coverage to American families, allows them to keep their doctors and plans that are working for them.

We're closer to that significant reform than at any time in recent history. That doesn't make it easy; it's hard. And we are having a whole series of constant negotiations. This is not simply a Democratic versus Republican issue. This is a House versus Senate issue; this is different committees that have different priorities.

My job is to make sure that I've set some clear parameters in terms of what I want to achieve. We have to bend the cost curve on health care, and there are some very specific ways

of doing that, game changers that incentivize quality as opposed to quantity, that emphasize prevention.

There are a whole host of things that I've put on the table that I want to see included. I've said that it's got to be budget neutral, it's got to be deficit neutral, and so whatever bill is produced has to be paid for, and that creates some difficulties because people would like to get the good stuff without paying for it.

And so there are going to be some tough negotiations in the days and weeks to come, but I'm confident that we're going to get it done. And I think that, appropriately, all of you as reporters are reporting on the game. What I'm trying to keep focused on are the people out in States all across the country that are getting hammered by rising premiums. They're losing their jobs and suddenly losing their health care. They are going into debt. Some are going into bankruptcy—small businesses and large businesses that are feeling enormous pressure. And I'm also looking at the Federal budget.

There's been a lot of talk about the deficit and the debt and—from my Republican colleagues, you know, why isn't Obama doing something about this, ignoring the fact that we got into the worst recession since the Great Depression with a $1.3 billion [trillion][*] deficit. Fair enough. This is occurring on my watch.

What cannot be denied is that the only way to get a handle on our medium- and long-term budget deficits is if we corral and contain health care costs. Nobody denies this. And so my hope is, is that everybody who is talking about deficit reduction gets serious about reducing the cost of health care and puts some serious proposals on the table. And I think it's going to get done.

It is going to be hard, though, because as I said, I think, in one of the town hall meetings that I had, as dissatisfied as Americans may be with the health care system, as concerned as they are about the prospects that they may lose their job or their premiums may keep on rising, they're also afraid of the unknown. And we have a long history in America of scaring people that they're going to lose their doctor, they're going to lose their health care plans, they're going to be stuck with some bureaucratic government system that's not responsive to their needs. And overcoming that fear—fear that is often actively promoted by special interests who profit from the existing system—is a challenge.

And so my biggest job, even as my staff is working on the day-to-day negotiations with the House and Senate staffs, my biggest job is to explain to the American people why this is so important and give them confidence that we can do better than we're doing right now.

Q. Sir—[*inaudible*].

The President. Yes.

Q. Is it pretty much a do-or-die by the August recess?

The President. I never believe anything is do-or-die. But I really want to get it done by the August recess. [*Laughter*]

Christi Parsons [Chicago Tribune]—hometown girl. Is Christi around?

Q. She's not here, sir.

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[*] White House correction.

The President. Christi's not here? I'm disappointed. Do we have any members of the foreign press here? Yes, I'll use Christi's spot for—just so that you guys have a chance to ask a question.

Sovereignty of Nations/Obligation of the International Community to Intervene in Times of Crisis

Q. Thank you very much. I'm almost from hometown——

The President. I'm sorry, I can't hear you though. Can somebody make sure the mike is working?

Q. It's on?

The President. Yes.

Q. Yes. On this trip, you have been talking about the state sovereignty as a cornerstone of international order. How do you reconcile that with the concept of responsibility to protect, which used to be the cornerstone for lots of victims?

The President. I'm sorry, how do I reconcile that with the responsibility to protect, which used to be what?

Q. The cornerstone of hope for lots of people in post-war concept.

The President. Well, if I understand your question correctly, on the one hand, we think that respecting the sovereignties of nation-states is important. We don't want stronger nations bullying weaker nations. On the other hand, where you have nations that are oppressing their people, isn't there an international responsibility to intervene? It is a—one of the most difficult questions in international affairs. And I don't think that there is a clean formula. What I would say is, is that in general, it's important for the sovereignty of nations to be respected and to resolve conflicts between nations through diplomacy and through international organizations in trying to set up international norms that countries want to meet.

There are going to be exceptional circumstances in which I think the need for international intervention becomes a moral imperative, the most obvious example being in a situation like Rwanda where genocide has occurred.

And Gordon Brown, during the last session, told a incredibly powerful story. He—if—and I may not be getting all the details perfectly right, but he said he had gone to Rwanda, went to a—some sort of museum or exhibition that commemorated the—or marked the tragedy in Rwanda, and there was a photograph of a 12-year-old boy, and it gave his name, and that he loved soccer, and he wanted to be a doctor, and provided his biography. And the last line on this exhibit said that right before he and his mother was killed, he turned to his mother, and he said, "Don't worry, the United Nations is going to come save us."

And that voice has to be heard in international relations. The threshold at which international intervention is appropriate, I think, has to be very high. There has to be a strong international outrage at what's taking place.

It's not always going to be a neat decision, and there are going to be objections to just about any decision, because there are some in the international community who believe that state sovereignty is sacrosanct, and you never intervene under any circumstances in somebody's internal affairs.

I think rather than focus on hypotheticals, what my administration wants to do is to build up international norms, put pressure—economic, diplomatic, et cetera—on nations that are not acting in accordance with universal values towards their citizens, but not hypothesize on particular circumstances, take each case as it comes. Okay?

Richard Wolf [USA Today].

Iran

Q. I guess I have to follow on that, Mr. President. Is Iran in that category? And are you disappointed that while you came up with a statement of condemnation from the G–8, you did not come up with any kind of extra sanctions having to do with their crackdown on protestors?

The President. Yes, I have to say, I read, Peter, your article and maybe some others. This notion that we were trying to get sanctions or that this was a forum in which we could get sanctions is not accurate.

What we wanted was exactly what we got, which is a statement of unity and strong condemnation about the appalling treatment of peaceful protestors post-election in Iran, as well as some behavior that just violates basic international norms: storming of Embassies, arresting Embassy personnel, restrictions on journalists. And so I think that the real story here was consensus in that statement, including Russia, which doesn't make statements like that lightly.

Now, there is—the other story there was the agreement that we will reevaluate Iran's posture towards negotiating the cessation of a nuclear weapons policy. We'll evaluate that at the G–20 meeting in September. And I think what that does is it provides a timeframe. The international community has said, here's a door you can walk through that allows you to lessen tensions and more fully join the international community. If Iran chooses not to walk through that door, then you have on record the G–8, to begin with, but, I think, potentially a lot of other countries that are going to say we need to take further steps. And that's been always our premise, is that we provide that door, but we also say we're not going to just wait indefinitely and allow for the development of a nuclear weapon, the breach of international treaties, and wake up one day and find ourselves in a much worse situation and unable to act.

So my hope is, is that the Iranian leadership will look at the statement coming out of the G–8 and recognize that world opinion is clear.

All right, thank you very much, everybody. *Arrivederci*.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:18 p.m. in the U.S. press filing center at the Guardia di Finanza Inspectors' School. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy; President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia; President John Evans Atta Mills of Ghana; Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations; and Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom. A reporter referred to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil.

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Names: Ban Ki-moon; Berlusconi, Silvio; Brown, Gordon; Medvedev, Dmitry A.; Mills, John Evans Atta.

Subjects: Africa : Agricultural production :: Improvement efforts; Africa : Economic development strategies, strengthening efforts; Africa : Government officials, corruption issues; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Security; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Budget, Federal : Deficit; Budget, Federal : National debt; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Commerce, international : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Stabilization efforts; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Unrest; Commerce, international : Group of Eight (G–8) nations; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G–20) nations; Developing countries : Food aid programs, international; Developing countries : International assistance; Developing countries : Recession, effects; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Environment : Climate change ; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Ghana : Democracy efforts; Ghana : Economic growth and development; Ghana : Government corruption, reduction efforts; Ghana : President; Ghana : President Obama's visit; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Iran : Democracy and human rights issues; Iran : International diplomatic efforts; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : Presidential election, 2009; Italy : Earthquake in L'Aquila, damage and recovery efforts; Italy : President Obama's visit; Italy : Prime Minister; Kenya : Poverty and economic instability; Legislation, proposed : "American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009"; Monetary Fund, International; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; Russia : Nuclear weapons stockpile, reduction; Russia : President; Russia : President Obama's visit; South Korea : Economic growth and development; Terrorism : Global threat; United Kingdom : Prime Minister; United Nations : General Assembly; United Nations : Reform; United Nations : Secretary-General; World Bank; World Trade Organization.

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