

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea

October 13, 2011

President Obama. Good morning, everybody. I hope everybody is enjoying the weather.

I am told there is a Korean proverb, which says, "Words have no wings, but they can fly a thousand miles." President Lee, First Lady Kim, I hope my words today will be felt in the hearts of all South Koreans when I say to our allies, our partners, our dear friends, please accept our warmest welcome. *Hwan yong hamnida.*

Today we welcome a leader whose remarkable life embodies the rise of his nation, from an impoverished child who drank water to fill his hungry stomach, to the student who cleaned the streets to pay his tuition, to the activist sent to jail for protesting dictatorship, to the leader guiding his country to new heights, my good friend and partner, President Lee.

Today we celebrate an alliance rooted in the shared values of our people: our servicemembers who have fought and bled and died together for our freedom, our students and workers and entrepreneurs who work together to create opportunity and prosperity, and our families, bound by the generations, including many who are here today, proud and patriotic Korean Americans.

President Lee, our two nations have stood together for more than 60 years. Over the past 2 years we've deepened our cooperation. Today I'm proud to say that the alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea is stronger than it has ever been.

Our alliance reflects a broader truth. The United States is a Pacific nation, and America is leading once more in the Asia Pacific. And with our landmark trade agreement, we will bring our nations even closer, creating new jobs for both our people and preserving our edge as two of the most dynamic economies in the world.

Mr. President, your visit thus marks a new chapter in our alliance, because in South Korea the United States has a global partner that is embracing the responsibilities of leadership in the 21st century. As we go forward, let us draw strength from the same sense of solidarity that I've seen during my visit to Korea, in our brave—our very brave armed forces. *Katchi Kapshida*—we go together.

We will go together, investing in our societies and the education and skills of our people. We will go together, reaffirming that alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea is unbreakable. And we will go together, as we partner to meet our global responsibilities, so that our citizens and people around the world may live in security and prosperity.

President Lee, First Lady Kim, members of the Korean delegation, on behalf of Michelle and myself, on behalf of the American people, welcome to the United States.

President Lee. Good morning, everybody.

Audience members. Good morning.

President Lee. Mr. President, whom I consider one of my closest friends, Madam First Lady, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, thank you for your warm welcome extended to me, my

wife, and my delegation. It is always a great pleasure visiting this great country. I would also like to convey the warm greetings from your friends back in Korea, Mr. President and Madam First Lady.

The journey of our alliance began 60 years ago, a journey that brought together two peoples from different sides of the Pacific. What brought us together more than anything was the value that all of us here hold so dear: freedom.

Yesterday I paid tribute at the Korean War Memorial just a short distance away from here. There, I was able to pay my respect to the 37,000 American soldiers who fought and died defending this value. It is written on a wall at that memorial that these American soldiers, quote, "answer the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met," unquote. The simple yet poignant words describe how brave and good they were.

Mr. President, Madam First Lady, ladies and gentlemen, the Korean people have never forgotten what these fallen soldiers and their families gave up. We will always remain grateful to all of them.

Our alliance is the bedrock of stability, peace, and progress, and our relationship is evolving. Our two countries are working together to fight disease and poverty, climate change and natural disasters. We are addressing the issues of energy security and eradicating terrorism and extremism and stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

We are also working together to promote universal values, such as democracy and human rights. We face these challenges both as a nation and as a partner. We will prevail until we overcome these challenges. We will come out stronger. Our two countries will ensure peace and stability of the peninsula and beyond.

Last night the United States Congress ratified the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. This historic achievement will open up a new chapter in our relationship. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Obama for his steadfast leadership. This agreement will create more jobs. It will expand mutual investments into both of our countries. It will become a new engine of growth that will propel our economies forward. Ladies and gentlemen, it will be a win for both of our countries.

Our two peoples walked alongside together, armed with common values, pursuing the same ideals and achieving common goals, and this is making our security and economic alliance stronger. It is bringing our people closer together. We are true partners and close friends, and we will remain as such in the 21st century. Our alliance that was born out of the trenches of war will continue to blossom; it will become stronger.

Mr. President, Madam First Lady, ladies and gentlemen, Korea and the United States are global partners now. We are a force for good. I look forward to a constructive, as well as an enjoyable time here in Washington, DC, with President Obama and the First Lady. My aim is to further strengthen our common values and our partnership.

Once again, thank you, Mr. President, Madam First Lady, people of America, for this warm reception.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:25 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, where President Lee was accorded a formal welcome with full military honors. In his remarks, he referred to Kim Yoon-ok, wife of President Lee. President Lee spoke in Korean, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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