

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

April 27, 2014

Moderator. Thank you. Please be seated. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we will begin this press conference today with a statement by the Prime Minister of Malaysia followed by a statement by the President of the United States. And then, the two leaders will take questions. Ladies and gentlemen, the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Prime Minister Najib. *As-salaam alaikum*—[inaudible]. And very good afternoon. It is an honor to host you, Mr. President, and United States delegation. On behalf of the Malaysian people, I extend to you our warmest greetings.

And normally, I would say *selamat datang*, which means "welcome" in our language. But since you grew up not far from here, you're one of the few leaders, world leaders, who will understand when I say *selamat datang, sahabat saya*. [Laughter]

Forty-eight years ago, a U.S. President first stepped onto Malaysian soil. Back then, TV was black and white. The Monkees were topping the U.S. charts with "The Last Train to Clarksville." [Laughter]

President Obama. It's a good song. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Najib. And "The Sound of Music" movie was winning Academy Awards. Today, Mr. President, you see not rubber trees, as Lyndon B. Johnson did, but soaring skyscrapers. They are testament to the transformation that is taking place here in Malaysia. And on this journey, we are thankful for the United States hand of friendship.

Over the past 2 months, the strength of our relationship has been revealed for all to see. From the day MH370 went missing, the United States lent its considerable expertise to the investigation and its unique capabilities and assets to the search effort. We are grateful to you for standing by Malaysia in our hour of need.

The U.S. and Malaysia have a longstanding relationship. We established diplomatic relations on the day of Malaysia's independence in 1957. In the decades that followed, when ideological tensions tore at Southeast Asia, the U.S. and Malaysia remained firm friends. And over the past few years, we have been working to strengthen the bonds between us. Today, we see the fruits of this labor on the economy, on security, and on people-to-people relations. We are closer now than ever before.

Earlier this morning, the President and I talked at length about the issues we face in the region and in the world, and we took significant steps towards our shared objectives. First and foremost, we agreed to upgrade our bilateral relations to a comprehensive partnership. This marks a new phase in our relationship with greater collaboration on economy, security, education, science, technology, and more. We also decided to reinvigorate the senior officials dialogue as a key forum for high-level discussion. Together, these agreements lay a firm foundation for further cooperation to come.

Malaysia welcomes America's rebalancing towards Asia and its contribution to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. Our continents share an ocean. We should be connected

by common policy too. We believe all parties should share in Asia's remarkable growth story, provided they also share a commitment to the peace upon which it depends.

On global security, the President and I agreed to strengthen cooperation in peacekeeping training. Malaysia has also decided to endorse the "Statement of Interdiction Principles" of the Proliferation Security Initiative.

I expressed my appreciation to the President on U.S. strong support for ASEAN and the East Asia Summit and for the confidence they have expressed in Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN next year. As we prepare for this chairmanship, and as we bid for a nonpermanent seat on the U.N. Security Council, we seek a greater role in promoting global peace and regional stability. In these endeavors and more, our friendship with United States is immensely valued.

Just last month, Malaysia helped secure a comprehensive agreement in the Southern Philippines, ending a conflict which claimed 150,000 lives and denying Al Qaida and its affiliates a possible foothold in that region. We have rejected religious extremism by establishing Global Movement of Moderates.

On the South China Sea, President Obama and I both stressed earlier the importance of upholding universally recognized principles of international law, including United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We agreed that the full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties was vital and that an effective code of conduct would enhance mutual trust.

The President and I have agreed on a U.S.-Malaysia English Teaching Assistant Program, formerly known as the Fulbright Program. I'm happy to note that we've agreed on a bilateral work agreement for partners of diplomats, and I would like to thank President Obama for agreeing to consider Malaysia's participation in the Visa Waiver Program. I'm glad the U.S. is now committed to provide technical briefings, security requirements, and information-sharing agreements for this purpose.

For centuries, our people have done business across the Pacific. Today, we continue to do brisk trade. Our bilateral trade has averaged at least 35 billion U.S. dollars annually from 2010 to 2013, while last year, the United States was Malaysia's largest source of foreign investment, investing \$1.9 billion in Malaysia and creating almost 8,000 jobs.

President Obama and I welcome the progress made on the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement negotiations. Trade deals are always complex, but our countries are committed to resolving the remaining issues. I know all sides share our desire for an agreement that delivers the best for our citizens and our businesses. I would like to thank President Obama for his understanding of Malaysia's challenges and sensitivities in the TPP negotiations.

Malaysia has always been a bridge between peoples and cultures, a trading nation bound by vital seas. We are a modern, progressive, Muslim-majority nation, a multiethnic, multireligious society. We have long known the benefit of cooperation across borders, and we have long recognized the power of shared prosperity. In this context, it gives us sincere pleasure to welcome the U.S. delegation for this historic visit. Your presence here, Mr. President, will mark the beginning of the next phase of our partnership, with deeper friendship and a more comprehensive partnership.

Over the past few days, we have found common cause on issues that matter, those that would deliver opportunity for our people and security for our region. And we have set the stage

for a new phase of our relationship, one based on greater cooperation needed to equal the challenges of our time.

Thank you.

President Obama. Selamat tengah hari. [Laughter] Thank you, Prime Minister Najib, for your warm welcome. I am very pleased to be the first U.S. President to visit Malaysia in almost 50 years. And it is wonderful to be staying in Kuala Lumpur, one of Asia's most dynamic cities.

I want to thank Their Majesties, the King and the Queen, for their incredible hospitality at last night's state dinner and the wonderful display of Malaysian culture in all its beauty and diversity. And I want to thank the people of Malaysia for such a warm welcome.

Now, today, the United States is once again playing a leadership role in the Asia-Pacific. And a key part of our strategy is expanding our ties with Southeast Asia, and that includes Malaysia. By virtue of geography, Malaysia is central to regional stability, maritime security, and freedom of navigation. By virtue of its economic progress—that's evident for all who visit here for the first time—and by virtue of Prime Minister Najib's goal of making the economy even more competitive, Malaysia has the potential to unleash a new era of growth. And by virtue of its diversity—people from so many ethnic groups and backgrounds, holding different political beliefs and practicing different faiths—Malaysia has the opportunity to draw on the enormous strengths of its people.

In the United States, embracing that diversity and upholding the rights and dignity of all our citizens has always made us stronger, and I believe it can make Malaysia even stronger as well.

I welcomed Prime Minister Najib to Washington 4 years ago, and we agreed at that time to broaden and deepen the relationship between our countries. Today, across a whole range of areas—security, trade, regional institutions—we're working more closely together than ever before. And today I'm pleased that we're formalizing our efforts in a new comprehensive partnership.

I'd note that we've also seen our cooperation during the response to the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370. And I want to again express the deepest condolences of the American people to all the families who lost loved ones on that flight: Malaysian, American, Chinese, and people from many other nations.

As we have since the beginning of this tragedy, we're working closely with our Malaysian partners, and we will continue to provide all the assistance we can in their search and the investigation. And today the Prime Minister and I discussed some of the lessons that are being learned from this tragedy and how nations, including our own, might continue to improve our cooperation moving forward.

The comprehensive partnership we're launching today aims to deepen our economic ties. As the Prime Minister noted, Malaysia and the United States are already close economic partners, and we're working together on the Trans-Pacific Partnership to open up Asia-Pacific markets, boost exports, promote innovation and growth in both our nations. The TPP will support good jobs in the United States and Malaysia, and it will help Malaysia meet its goal to become a high-income economy by the end of the decade.

Today the Prime Minister and I discussed the particular issues of importance to Malaysia, and we agreed to work quickly to resolve those issues, consistent with a final, high-standards, comprehensive TPP agreement. And tomorrow we'll have the opportunity to join some of our

business leaders as they sign three commercial agreements worth more than \$1 billion of new trade and investment between our nations.

Our comprehensive partnership will expand our security cooperation. As a founding member of ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, Malaysia has already been a critical leader in building the institutions that can advance regional prosperity and security. Strengthening ASEAN unity and its central role in the region is a key part of our own American engagement in Asia. We very much agree with ASEAN's view and Malaysia's view that disputes need to be resolved peacefully, without intimidation or coercion, and that all nations must abide by international rules and international norms.

We welcome Malaysia's recent endorsement of the principles of the Proliferation Security Initiative, the global effort to prevent the trafficking [trafficking] of weapons of mass destruction. We're aiming to step up our coordination on a range of challenges, from disaster relief to maritime security. And we are looking forward to working closely with Malaysia on all these issues when it chairs both ASEAN and the EAS next year.

And finally, our comprehensive partnership will continue to strengthen the strong ties between our peoples, especially our young people. The young women and men of Malaysia are brimming with potential, and we want to do more together to open the door of opportunity to everybody, regardless of race, religion, gender, or language. That's why the Prime Minister and I will be meeting with entrepreneurs from Malaysia and why I'll be engaging with promising young leaders from across South [Southeast] Asia later this afternoon. And thanks to the tremendous success of our program to bring young Americans to Malaysia to teach English, the Prime Minister and I agreed to renew that program for several more years.

The time that I spent in this region as a child helped to shape my understanding of the world, broadened my vision, left me with a lifelong affection for the people and traditions of Southeast Asia. And I look forward to a new generation of Americans getting that same experience here in Malaysia.

So, Prime Minister Najib, thank you again for your partnership, for your vision for what our nations can accomplish together, not only for our two peoples, but for the peace and prosperity of this entire region. *Terima kasih banyak.*

Moderator. Thank you, Excellencies. The leaders will now take questions. We will begin with the first question from the Malaysian media. I'd like to call upon Malaysia's TV-3 to have the first question. Go ahead.

Do we have the mic?

Q. Yes. Good afternoon and *selamat datang* to Mr. President.

President Obama. Thank you.

Nuclear Nonproliferation Efforts/Malaysia-U.S. Security Cooperation

Q. I am Azura from TV-3 Malaysia. I have a question on the issue of Proliferation Security Initiative. [*Inaudible*]¹—this is something new for Malaysia. Are we going to be the 103d member for PSI? And what is the SOP like? And do we have the expertise?

¹ White House correction.

And for Mr. President, is the U.S. going to assist us in capacity building and other requirements? Thank you.

Prime Minister Najib. Well, this PSI is actually not new in substance, because we've been working very closely with United States, and whenever there is a request for us to do some interdiction, we've never failed to respond. What I'm—what we're doing today is to formalize it so that there will be a formal relationship. And that relationship will just continue what we have done, and it also reflects a strong will and desire on Malaysia's side to cooperate not only with the United States, with the international community, to stop the profilation—proliferation—sorry—

President Obama. It's a hard one. I always screw it up. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Najib.—for the spread, rather—[*laughter*]—of parts for nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. I'll get it right, don't worry. [*Laughter*]

President Obama. Well, the—as the Prime Minister said, this is an area where we've already developed strong partnership. And I want to commend Prime Minister Najib and his national security team and his law enforcement, intelligence teams. I think it's fair to say that when both of us came into office, this wasn't at the top of the priority list. And what we were seeing, though, was that this region was a potential area where traffickers in parts and systems that could lead to nuclear proliferation or weapons of mass destruction could operate.

And so in our conversations, in our teams' consultations, we began to tighten the links and bonds between us in terms of sharing information, identifying threats, and working more closely and cooperatively together. And we've done that.

What the PSI does, as the Prime Minister says, is formalize it. It puts a framework around it. It involves capacity building, but it's not just a one-way street. Obviously, we have been working on these issues for a long time. I consider the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as one of the greatest threats to U.S. security, as well as international peace. So we have developed a lot of capacities in this area.

But this is a partnership, and what we seek to do is to find ways in which the strengths and the information that each side has can be enhanced and combined and pooled so that we don't have the possibility of loose nuclear materials or certain component parts that are being shipped or falling into the wrong hands. And we very much appreciate the cooperation that's already there, but I think what the PSI signifies is that we can do even better in the future. Okay.

White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney. The next question comes from Chuck Todd of NBC News.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And, Mr. Prime Minister, *selamat tengah hari*.

President Obama. There you go.

Q. Did I get that right?

President Obama. Good job there, Chuck.

Ukraine/Los Angeles Clippers Owner Donald Sterling/Trans-Pacific Partnership

Q. Mr. President, on the situation in Ukraine and the Russian sanctions that I know the United States and others may be announcing on Monday, I guess my question is, why wait on sectoral sanctions, as far as the United States is concerned? Why not do that on your own, now

and sooner, rather than wait for the Europeans to get on board on this? Because aren't you concerned that Putin is essentially using the European angst over tougher sanctions as a way to slow-walk things and buy more time and space for himself?

Quickly, on a second topic, Mr. President, there's a controversy surrounding some horrendous, racially charged comments that an owner of the L.A. Clippers made. I was wondering if you care to comment on that.

And to the Prime Minister, the TPP—I know you talked about it—it's been generating some protests here in your country, including another one today, chief concern being some worries of higher costs of medical supplies in particular. Are you—I was wondering if you can comment on those protests and their—the concern that somehow you're being bullied into the TPP by the United States. Do you feel that way on that front? Thank you.

President Obama. Okay. First, on Ukraine, in consultation with our European partners, we've determined that because Russia has failed to follow through on its side of the accord that had been hammered out in Geneva, it was important for us to take further steps, sending a message to Russia that the kind of destabilizing activities that are taking place in the east and the south of Ukraine have to stop.

There was a glimmer of hope after the Geneva accords that Ukraine would follow through on its commitments to enter into a dialogue around constitutional reforms, that it would do everything it needed to do to disarm irregular forces and militias, and it would offer amnesty to those who willingly laid down arms and pulled out of the buildings. They've been doing that. Russia has not lifted a finger to help. In fact, there's strong evidence that they have been encouraging the kinds of activities that have been taking place in eastern and southern Ukraine.

And so, collectively, us and the Europeans have said that so long as Russia continues down the path of provocation rather than trying to resolve this issue peacefully and deescalating, there are going to be consequences. And those consequences will continue to grow.

Now, the notion that for us to go forward with sectoral sanctions on our own without the Europeans would be the most effective deterrent to Mr. Putin, I think, is factually wrong. We're going to be in a stronger position to deter Mr. Putin when he sees that the world is unified and the United States and Europe is unified, rather than, this is just a U.S.-Russian conflict.

And in fact, you notice that oftentimes they're really interested in portraying this through this old cold war prism, when, in fact, that's not what the issue is here. The issue is respecting basic international norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The issue is, can the Ukrainians make their own decisions about how they govern themselves and who they have international relations with? That's our only interest in this whole process.

And so it's important for us to make sure that we are part of an international coalition sending that message and that Russia is isolated in its actions, rather than falling into the trap of interpreting this as the United States is trying to pull Ukraine out of Russia's orbit, circa 1950. Because that's not what this is about. And the Europeans have a larger stake in this than anyone.

Now, as I said, I think, at the last press conference, there are going to be differences even within Europe, in part because of the nature of the economic relationships that they've got. And we've got to work through those in a systematic way. If in fact we need to move forward with sectoral sanctions, then it's going to be important that we know exactly what we're

prepared to do and sustain over the long haul; our European partners know what they're willing and able to do as well. And the more we are unified, the more effective it's going to be.

If we, for example, say we're not going to allow certain arms sales to Russia—just to take an example—but every European defense contractor backfills what we do, then it's not very effective. It's going to be more effective if everybody signs on and everybody is committed.

Q. But sectoral sanctions will only happen with European approval?

President Obama. No. I didn't say "only," "never," "when." I said this is our strategy. And I want to emphasize, every time I address this question, there is a diplomatic path to resolving this issue. The Geneva statement pointed towards how we could resolve this statement. What it asks of the Russians is hardly onerous: Make a public statement that those militias need to lay down their arms and exit those buildings; participate with international observers and monitors, rather than stand by while they're being bullied and, in some cases, detained by these thugs; negotiate with the Ukrainian Government and engage in some confidence-building measures. I mean, these aren't heavy lifts if the Russians are sincere in wanting to resolve this problem. So far, we haven't seen that, but we're going to keep on raising the consequences of Russia rejecting that path towards diplomacy.

With respect to the statements by the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers—for our Malaysian audience, this is a sports team, basketball team, in the United States. The owner is reported to have said some incredibly offensive, racist statements that were published. I don't think I have to interpret those statements for you; they kind of speak for themselves. When people—when ignorant folks want to advertise their ignorance, you don't really have to do anything, you just let them talk. [*Laughter*] And that's what happened here.

I have confidence that the NBA commissioner, Adam Silver, a good man, will address this. Obviously, the NBA is a league that is beloved by fans all across the country. It's got an awful lot of African American players. It's steeped in African American culture. And I suspect that the NBA is going to be deeply concerned in resolving this.

I will make just one larger comment about this. We—the United States continues to wrestle with a legacy of race and slavery and segregation that's still there, the vestiges of discrimination. We've made enormous strides, but you're going to continue to see this percolate up every so often. And I think that we just have to be clear and steady in denouncing it, teaching our children differently, but also remaining hopeful that part of why some statements like this stand out so much is because there have been a shift—there has been this shift in how we view ourselves.

And like Malaysia, we constantly have to be on guard against racial attitudes that divide us rather than embracing our diversity as a strength. And I know that the people of Malaysia are committed to wrestling with those issues as well. We have to make sure that we stay on top of it, and we will.

Even though it wasn't directed at me, I am going to say one thing about TPP, this notion somehow that some protests here might indicate U.S. bullying. Keep in mind, I've got protests back home from my own party about TPP. So there's never been a trade deal in which somebody is not going to at some point object because they're fearful of the future or they're invested in the status quo. And I think it's just very important for everybody to wait and see what exactly is the agreement that has been negotiated before folks jump to conclusions.

You take an issue like drugs, for example, the United States does extraordinary work in research and development and providing medical breakthroughs that save a lot of lives around the world. Those companies that make those investments in that research oftentimes want a return, and so there are all kinds of issues around intellectual property and patents and so forth.

At the same time, I think we would all agree that if there's a medicine that can save a lot of lives, then we've got to find a way to make sure that it's available to folks who simply can't afford it as part of our common humanity. And both those values are reflected in the conversations and negotiations that are taking place around TPP. So the assumption somehow that right off the bat, that's not something we're paying attention to, that reflects lack of knowledge of what is going on in the negotiations.

But my point is, you shouldn't be surprised if there are going to be objections, protests, rumors, conspiracy theories, political aggravation around a trade deal. You've been around long enough, Chuck. That's true in Malaysia, it's true in Tokyo, it's true in Seoul. It's true in the United States of America, and it's true in the Democratic Party.

So I continue to strongly believe, however, that this is going to be the right thing to do, creating jobs, creating businesses, expanding opportunity for the United States. And it's going to be good for countries like Malaysia that have been growing rapidly, but are interested in making that next leap to the higher value aspects of the supply chain that can really boost income growth and development.

Prime Minister Najib. I'd just like to echo what President Obama said. Emphatically, in no uncertain terms, we went to the TPP on our own accord. We were not bullied into it. And I can attest to our commitment towards free trade as to principle and philosophy, because we have entered into 13 separate FTA agreements with other countries.

So Malaysia is a great believer in free trade. But we also understand that the benefits of free trade like boosting trade, creating wealth, jobs—those are the good things. But there will be some losers in the process; there will be winners and losers. But overall, the benefit, I think—it's important for us to show to the people in Malaysia that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages of a free trade agreement.

And this is what, in a final analysis, what we have to do, because the underpinnings of a free trade agreement would be acceptance by the people. And we are committed to that process. We'll engage with the public, and we'll also present it to parliament.

So we are working out around the sensitivities and challenges, which I alluded to in my discussions with President Obama. He fully understands our domestic sensitivities, and we will sit down and try to iron this out with the intention of trying to work out a deal in the near future.

Moderator. The next question will be from the Malaysian side. Can I call upon—
[inaudible]?

Malaysia Airlines Flight 370/Visa Waiver Program

Q. Mr. President, *selamat datang*. Mr. President, how do you see Malaysia efforts and ability in getting multinational's support and efforts for the missing MH370 search-and-rescue operation? And, Mr. President, I'd appreciate if you can elaborate on the visa waiver request.

President Obama. Well, I know personally, because I've been in consultation with my team and all the assets that we have available, that the Malaysian Government is working tirelessly to recover the aircraft and investigate exactly what happened. And I can't speak for all the countries in the region, but I can say that the United States and other partners have found the Malaysian Government eager for assistance, have been fully forthcoming with us in terms of the information that they have. And this is a joint effort. It's not easy.

Obviously, we don't know all the details of what happened, but we do know that if in fact the plane went down in the ocean in this part of the world, that is a big, big place, and it is a very challenging effort and laborious effort that's going to take quite some time.

I completely understand the heartache that the families are going through and wanting answers. And I think it's very important—and I have said to Prime Minister Najib—that there should be full transparency in terms of what we know, what we don't know, how the process is proceeding. But I can tell you that the United States is absolutely committed to providing whatever resources and assets that we can and that the Malaysian Government has been very welcoming of that assistance.

On the Visa Waiver Program, the way it works in the United States, we've got a very clear set of laws and provisions in terms of how someone—how a country qualifies to be part of the Visa Waiver Program. And the Prime Minister raised this issue with me, and my team is prepared to work with the Malaysian Government to go through the various steps. Typically, it takes some time; it's not something that happens overnight, because we have to make sure that the kinds of information-sharing, the reporting about lost and stolen passports, terrorist watch lists—that all those pieces are in place—before it's facilitated.

But given the growing and expanding trade that exists and the people-to-people relations between Malaysia and the United States, I want to make sure that we can start down a path. It may take a little bit of time, but we welcome the opportunity to engage with the Government on this issue.

Human Rights Issues/Malaysian Opposition Leader Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim

White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney. The last question—I'm sorry. No. Sorry. The last question, Major Garrett of CBS News.

Q. Prime Minister Najib, good afternoon. Thank you for your hospitality, sir.

Mr. President, you said at your press conference in Seoul you expressed some frustration with the narrative that military force is the best response to difficult foreign policy challenges. I invite you to expand on that if you want to. But I'm more curious about what you said right after that: There are many tools in the American toolbox to advance foreign policy interests.

And as you know, one of those tools is for America to use her prestige to speak out on behalf of human rights, racial tolerance, political accountability, and free speech. As you well know, Mr. President, those issues are up for grabs in Malaysia right now, and they're probably best symbolized by the precarious legal position of Anwar Ibrahim, the opposition political leader in this country. Vice—former Vice President Al Gore has taken up his cause, as has Human Rights Watch and other international lawyers interested in human rights. Can you explain, sir, why you have said nothing about these issues here in Malaysia, why you will not meet with Mr. Ibrahim, and how it's possible for the United States Government to advance these interests of political reform when it won't use the nonmilitary tools in the toolbox you described in Seoul?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, have you made any commitments to the United States Government about your efforts in the future to address the issue of political reform here in Malaysia? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, first of all, Major, I think it's important to note that there is not a meeting I have around the world where issues of freedom of the press, human rights, civil liberties aren't prominent on the agenda. And that includes my meeting with Prime Minister Najib. And I think when you say that issues are all "up for grabs" in Malaysia, I think that implies a judgment about what's happening here in Malaysia that may not fully reflect the progress that's been made by Prime Minister Najib, but also the recognition, I think, by the Malaysian Government that there's more work that needs to be done.

The fact that I haven't met with Mr. Anwar in and of itself is not indicative of our lack of concern, given the fact that there are a lot of people I don't meet with and opposition leaders that I don't meet with. And that doesn't mean that I'm not concerned about them.

But what I have shared with the Prime Minister is the core belief that societies that respect rule of law, that respect freedom of speech, that respect the right of opposition to oppose even when it drives you crazy, even when it's inconvenient, the respect for freedom of assembly, the respect for people of different races and different faiths and different political philosophies—that those values are at the core of who the U.S. is, but also, I think, are a pretty good gauge of whether a society is going to be successful in the 21st century or not.

And I think the Prime Minister is the first to acknowledge that Malaysia has still got some work to do, just like the United States, by the way, has some work to do on these issues. Human Rights Watch probably has a list of things they think we should be doing as a government. And I am going to be constantly committed to making sure that these issues get raised in a constructive way. And Prime Minister Najib came in as a reformer and one who is committed to it, and I'm going to continue to encourage him as a friend and a partner to make sure that we're making progress on that front.

Prime Minister Najib. Well, President Obama and I are both equally concerned about civil liberties as a principle. And as you know, when I came to office 2009, I introduced a slew of reforms, which include a very major undertaking on our part, which is to abolish the detention without trial, ISA. And now, other countries have not done so, but Malaysia has taken the lead in doing so. We've also introduced the Peaceful Assembly Act, the right to protest, the right to assemble.

And within this period, it would be fair to say that this is the largest or the biggest reform in terms of civil liberties in Malaysia's history. So in that, I think you should not underestimate or diminish whatever we have done.

Specifically, on Anwar's case, it's not—I want to put it on record: it's not about the Government against him. It's an action taken by an individual who happens to be his former employee who's taken up this case against him—a complainant. And under the eyes of the law, even if you're a small man or a big man, you have equal justice. I think you believe in that principle.

So now the matter is before the courts. It's not right for me to comment anything more than that. But be assured that Malaysia is committed to the rule of law, to the independence of judiciary, and to civil liberties. As the President said, there's more work to be done. But it also means society has got to be prepared for it, for change, because what is important is the end result. And the end result, as the Prime Minister of this country, I'm committed to ensure

peace, stability, and harmony. That is the most important thing. And people must respect that, because there are sensitivities on either side, sensitivities relating to minorities and majority as well.

So we have to manage that, and that's exactly what Malaysia has done. And because of that, we are a relatively peaceful, harmonious nation. Thank you.

President Obama. Okay. Thank you very much. *Terima Kasih.*

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:32 p.m. at the Perdana Putra. In his remarks, the President referred to King Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah and Queen Tuanku Hajah Haminah of Malaysia; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. Prime Minister Najib referred to Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, a former aide to Malaysian opposition leader Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who brought sodomy and corruption charges against his former employer in 1998.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib.

Locations: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Names: Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, King; Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim; Najib Razak; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Silver, Adam; Sterling, Donald; Tuanku Hajah Haminah, Queen.

Subjects: Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Asia : Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); Asia : East Asia Summit; Basketball Association, National; Civil rights : Racial equality; Communications : News media, Presidential interviews; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Immigration and naturalization : Visa policy, U.S.; Malaysia : Economic growth and development; Malaysia : Human rights issues; Malaysia : King; Malaysia : Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, disappearance; Malaysia : President Obama's visit; Malaysia : Prime Minister; Malaysia : Queen; Malaysia : Relations with U.S.; Malaysia : U.S. assistance; Malaysia : U.S. visa policy; Russia : International diplomatic efforts; Russia : President; Russia : Relations with Ukraine; Sports : Basketball; Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); Ukraine : Democracy efforts; Ukraine : Political unrest and violence; Ukraine : Russia, role.

DCPD Number: DCPD201400299.