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Remarks on the Attack on Israeli Schoolchildren and an Exchange With Reporters

March 13, 1997

The President. Today along the normally peaceful border between Israel and Jordan, we have seen an inexcusable and tragic act of violence against schoolchildren. I condemn this act in the strongest possible terms. I offer to Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Israeli people, and the families and friends of the innocent children who died or were wounded my profound condolences and those of the American people.

As I travel to North Carolina today to speak to people about our own schoolchildren, the senseless denial of a future for these young Israeli children will bear heavily on my mind. There is no justification or excuse for these acts. Now the leaders in the region must work hard to calm the situation, to do everything in their power to create an atmosphere in which violence is rejected rather than embraced.

I call on the leaders and the people of the region to reject violence, to redouble their efforts toward peace and reconciliation. I was encouraged by the statement which King Hussein issued not long ago—just a few moments ago—and I am very hopeful that the leaders and the people will respond in an appropriate manner.

Thank you.

Jerusalem Settlements

Q. Mr. President, do you believe the Israelis have to halt the settlements in East Jerusalem at this point? Do you think that might help calm the situation there?

The President. Let me first say that there is no evidence at this moment that this terrible incident is related to the tensions in the area over the issues. For all we know, this may have been just a deranged person. And I think it is important, given King Hussein and Jordan's long record of reaching for peace and reconciliation, that no one jump to any undue conclusions.

We don't have the facts. None of us have any facts other than we know this incident occurred. But we have no reason to believe that this was politically motivated by any larger group or anything. We just don't know that.

But you know what I believe. I believe that this is a time when we need to be building confidence and working together and there needs to be a certain mutuality of action in the Middle East to get this peace process well underway. That is what I had hoped would happen after the Hebron agreement, and that is still what I believe has to happen if we're going to succeed.

So we'll be talking to all the parties, and I'm in more or less constant contact with them. And we'll continue to be hopeful. But for right now, I think we need to give the people of Israel the time to absorb this terrible shock.

Thank you.

Q. Have you had a chance to talk to King Hussein?

The President. No.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:36 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Raleigh, NC. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel and King Hussein I of Jordan.

Remarks to a Joint Session of the North Carolina State Legislature in Raleigh

March 13, 1997

Thank you very much. Lieutenant Governor Wicker, Speaker Brubaker, Senator Basnight, the other State elected officials who are here, my good friend Governor Hunt, Mayor Fetzer. I'd like to thank those who came down here with me today. I brought some of the Members of your congressional delegation home. They don't need to hear this speech, they've heard