

Sept. 15 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Remarks on Hurricane Floyd, in Honolulu, Hawaii September 15, 1999

Good morning. Let me first say it's good to be back on American soil after a very good week at the APEC conference in New Zealand. I'm especially anxious to get back to Washington to help to deal with the problems caused by Hurricane Floyd.

I have just had telephone calls with our FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, who has been giving me regular updates. And as you know, the storm currently, in its rain form, is battering Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolina, and is targeting the entire Northeast.

These States are now engaged in the largest peacetime evacuation in our history. Yesterday I announced emergency declarations for Florida and Georgia. Today I am issuing similar declarations for South Carolina and North Carolina. I have just spoken with both Governor Hunt of North Carolina and Governor Hodges of South Carolina. I've assured them that we would do everything we can to help them, and they've given me updates on the problems that they expect to encounter, particularly problems for the farmers in those areas, who, if there is severe flooding, could well lose their entire crops.

Let me commend the efforts of FEMA, the National Weather Service, the National Hurricane Center, and the other Federal agencies and State and local officials who are working around the clock to protect people and property. Their efforts, along with new technologies, have

enhanced our ability to predict and prepare for these storms. I hope that every citizen will heed the warnings of the officials and the recommendations to take every action to protect their families and stay out of harm's way. Meanwhile, we will continue to take extraordinary measures to protect lives and property from Hurricane Floyd.

As always, in times of crisis, I am inspired by the way our people come together and work together. It proves that the American spirit is stronger than the force of any storm. We will keep working on this. We're going to leave here in a few minutes, and I'll be getting regular updates. It does seem that the entry point of the storm has moved considerably north from where it was predicted to move. But it is still very, very powerful, and if the present predictions hold clear, there'll be a lot of wind and an enormous amount of water on the coast in South Carolina and North Carolina within the next few hours.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:00 a.m. at Hickam Air Force Base, after crossing the international dateline on his return from New Zealand. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina, and Gov. Jim Hodges of South Carolina.

Remarks on East Timor and the Shootings at Wedgewood Baptist Church and an Exchange With Reporters September 16, 1999

The President. Before I depart for the FEMA operations center, I'd like to say just a few words about East Timor and the terrible murders in Texas last night.

First, I'm pleased that the U.N. Security Council has approved the creation of a multinational force to be led by Australia, to deploy as soon as possible to end violence, restore order, and support the results of the August

30 referendum, where the people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence.

After consulting closely with Congress and with the Government of Australia on the best way for the United States to support this operation, and on the recommendation of Secretary Cohen and my national security team, I have decided to contribute to the force in a limited but essential way, including communications and logistical aid, intelligence, air lifts of personnel

and material, and coordination of the humanitarian response to the tragedy.

We will deploy about 200 people, about half of whom will serve on the ground in East Timor. In addition, elements of the Pacific Fleet will provide support. I am especially encouraged that Asian nations will be taking the primary responsibility. The overall force will contain about 7,500 people, roughly half will be Australian, and I understand that Thailand and many other Asian nations will contribute, as well as governments from outside the region.

This mission is in America's interest for several reasons. Indonesia's future is important to us, not only because of its resources and its sea lanes but for its potential as a leader in the region and the world. It is the fourth most populous nation in the world; the largest Muslim nation in the world. All Asians and Americans have an interest in a stable, democratic, prosperous Indonesia.

Our fundamental values are also at stake in East Timor. The election on August 30th was conducted fairly, under the leadership of the U.N., with the agreement of the Indonesian Government. It produced a clear mandate for independence. The violence since is abhorrent to all of us who care about human dignity and democracy.

Of course, on any mission like this, there are dangers and risks of casualties. There remains a great deal of work ahead, but this force is well equipped for the job, and it is a job that is in the interests of peace and stability.

Last night, in the Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, during a prayer service for teen-

agers, a gunman killed seven worshipers, wounded seven others and killed himself. Yet again, we have seen a sanctuary violated by gun violence, taking children brimming with faith and promise and hope before their time. Our Nation's support and prayers are with the families of the victims, those still suffering in the hospital, and the entire Fort Worth community.

Federal law enforcement officials are now working with State officials and local authorities to find all the answers. But we know we have to redouble our efforts to protect our children. We know we have to act as if it were our own children being targeted by gun violence.

We know that there is nothing we can do to assure that this will never happen, but there is a lot more we can do to assure that it will happen more rarely. And I can only hope that the shock of this event will spur that kind of action.

Thank you very much.

Consultation With Congressional Leaders on East Timor

Q. Mr. President, did you consult the leaders? You say you consulted the leaders on the force, this very small force?

The President. Yes. Yes.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House prior to departure for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In his remarks, he referred to Larry Gene Ashbrook, gunman who attacked a prayer group at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX, on September 15.

Remarks in a Teleconference With Governors From States Struck by Hurricane Floyd and to Disaster Relief Workers and an Exchange With Reporters *September 16, 1999*

The President. Thank you, Governor. Let me just say, there may be some people who question, when this is over, whether we did the right thing to recommend all the evacuations. But now that we have this technology at the National Weather Center, we have to act on it. And we can all be grateful to God that this storm turned away and didn't hurt us as bad

as we feared. But I think that this is a terrific test, even though it was extremely burdensome, because some day our ability to do this evacuation will save hundreds of people's lives.

And I just want to thank you, Governor. I'm glad that all those people, in the end, didn't have to go. But I'm glad we did it because we've got the technology now, we knew what