

American Nobel laureate, whose Peace Prize today occupies a place of honor in the West Wing of the White House.

Tomorrow I'll meet with the newest recipient of that prize, Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Several other Nobel laureates have visited the White House this year: Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Shimon Peres.

These folks come from different regions of the world, but the Nobel Foundation is never limited by region or culture. The standard is a universal one. It is awarded to men and women who have served the highest aspirations of humanity and have done so with success. Many awards recognize excellence; the Nobel Foundation recognizes greatness.

So much of human progress depends on achievements in medicine, physics, chemistry, economics, literature, and peace. The annual selection of the laureates expresses a profound optimism about humanity and our prospects for improvement. This optimism was captured by William Faulkner, when accepting his Nobel Prize a half century ago. "I believe," he said, "that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone amongst creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion, sacrifice, and endurance."

Each of you, in your own field of excellence, has carried forward that same belief

in human progress. You've achieved greatness through service to others. You have been given great gifts, and you've used them to your fullest.

Our Nation is proud of the work each of you have done. We're proud to count you as fellow citizens. We thank you for bringing credit to our country and great benefit to mankind.

And now, Laura and I would like to invite you all into the foyer for a reception.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Swedish Ambassador to the U.S. Jan Eliasson; John H. Marburger III, Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy; 2001 Nobel laureates Eric A. Cornell, Wolfgang Ketterle, and Carl E. Wieman (Physics), William S. Knowles (Chemistry), Leland H. Hartwell (Physiology or Medicine), George A. Akerlof, A. Michael Spence, and Joseph E. Stiglitz (Economic Sciences), and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (Peace); former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, 1993 Nobel Peace laureate; and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel, 1994 Nobel Peace laureate. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations

November 28, 2001

President Bush. It's my honor to welcome back to the White House our friend Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Today we've had a valuable discussion about how to make sure that the good intentions of America and others around the world are met, and those intentions have to do with feeding people who starve in Afghanistan.

Prior to September the 11th, there was a lot of hunger in that country, primarily because it was run by a government that didn't really care about the human condition. After September the 11th, obviously, the war has aggravated the situation, and as I declared to the American people, our

good Government and our great Nation is going to do something about it.

And around the table today are people who are responsible to making sure, as best as they possibly can, food is delivered and medicine is delivered and clothing is delivered to innocent, hurting people of Afghanistan. And the Secretary-General has been so great on this issue, and he's assembled a wonderful team who are here to brief the Secretary of State and myself about the efforts.

The degree of difficulty is high. There's no question we've got a large task ahead of ourselves. We've got ample money, and the United States Government has been a major contributor of that money. We've got the food. The fundamental question is, in an environment that is not very secure, how do we get the food to the people? And that's what we're working on. And I'm convinced that we can do a very good job of meeting that objective.

So, Mr. General, thanks for coming. It's an honor to have you back. I appreciate you bringing your team with you.

Secretary-General Annan. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for the discussions this morning with my team.

The Afghan people have suffered for quite a long time through a series of wars and, recently, drought. And we've been trying to get food to them, and as the President said, it's not always been easy. Even sometimes when we have the food in the country, we cannot always get it to the needy.

We are now, with the help of the U.S. and other donors, able to get in as much food as we think we will need. But because of the insecurity, we have difficulties reaching the needy and the people, and we are working on that. And I hope the situation will clarify in the not-too-distant future to allow us to reach all those in need.

I think it is important for the public to know the numbers we are dealing with, and here I'm talking about refugees, Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries,

particularly Pakistan and Iran, and the internally displaced people. We are talking about 6 million needy people—between 6 million to 7.5 million. We are going to do our best, with the support that we are getting.

And I think, on the political front, if I may say a word, we are meeting the Afghan parties in Bonn. Mr. Brahimi is discussing with them as we sit here. And so far, they're off to a good start. The parties seem to want a broadbased government, and I hope they will be able to settle this—the establishment of the government—before they leave Bonn.

The willingness of the U.S. and other donor countries and the international community is clear, to work with them in rebuilding their society. But we need a partner, and the partner has to be an effective Afghan Government that is cohesive, that is stable, that will work with the donor community to ensure that the resources that are being applied to rehabilitation and reconstruction is used effectively.

The challenge is theirs. They have an historic opportunity to put the past behind them and form a broadbased government that will be loyal to the Afghan people and respect its international obligations. And if they do that, from all the commitments that I have heard from the President and other leaders, the resources will be there over the period, in a sustained manner, to help rebuild Afghanistan.

So I urge them to seize the moment for the sake of their people and for the sake of their country.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. General.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:51 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the Secretary-General referred to U.N. Special Representative for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.