

Laura joins me in sending our best wishes for a joyous Kwanzaa.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

The President's Radio Address *December 25, 2004*

Good morning. On this Christmas Day, as families across the Nation gather in our homes to celebrate, Laura and I extend to all Americans our best wishes for the holidays. We hope this Christmas is a time of joy and peace for each of you, and we hope it offers you a chance for rest and reflection as you look forward to the new year ahead.

The Christmas season fills our hearts with gratitude for the many blessings in our lives, and with those blessings comes a responsibility to reach out to others. Many of our fellow Americans still suffer from the effects of illness or poverty. Others fight cruel addictions or cope with division in their families or grieve the loss of a loved one.

Christmastime reminds each of us that we have a duty to our fellow citizens, that we are called to love our neighbor just as we would like to be loved ourselves. By volunteering our time and talents where they are needed most, we help heal the sick, comfort those who suffer, and bring hope to those who despair, one heart and one soul at a time.

During the holidays, we also keep in our thoughts and prayers the men and women of our Armed Forces, especially those far from home, separated from family and friends by the call of duty. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, these skilled and courageous Americans are fighting the enemies of freedom and protecting our country from danger. By bringing liberty to the oppressed, our troops are helping to win the

war on terror, and they are defending the freedom and security of us all. They and their families are making many sacrifices for our Nation, and for that, all Americans are deeply grateful.

The times we live in have brought many challenges to our country. And in such times, the story of Christmas brings special comfort and confidence. For 2,000 years, Christmas has proclaimed a message of hope, the patient hope of men and women across centuries who listened to the words of prophets and lived in joyful expectation, the hope of Mary who welcomed God's plan with great faith, and the hope of Wise Men who set out on a long journey, guided only by a promise traced in the stars.

Christmas reminds us that the grandest purposes of God can be found in the humblest places, and it gives us hope that all the love and gifts that come to us in this life are the signs and symbols of an even greater love and gift that came on a holy night.

Thank you for listening, and Merry Christmas.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on December 23 at Camp David, MD, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 25. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 23 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the Earthquake and Tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and an Exchange With Reporters in Crawford, Texas
December 29, 2004

The President. Good morning. Laura and I and the American people are shocked and we are saddened by the terrible loss of life from the recent earthquake and the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. Our prayers go out to the people who have lost so much to this series of disasters. Our hearts are also with the Americans who have lost loved ones in this tragedy. Our Embassies are working with host governments to locate American citizens who are still missing and to assist those who have been injured or displaced.

This morning I spoke with the leaders of India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Indonesia. I expressed my condolences and our country's condolences. I told them of our support. I praised their steadfast leadership during these difficult time. We're grateful to the American and international organizations that are working courageously to save lives and to provide assistance, and I assured those leaders this is only the beginning of our help.

We are committed to helping the affected countries in the difficult weeks and months that lie ahead. We pledged an initial \$35 million in relief assistance. We have deployed disaster experts to the region. All leaders expressed their appreciation for the hard work of our Ambassadors and their embassy staffs to help the countries in need. As well we're dispatching a Marine expeditionary unit, the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, and the maritime preposition squadron from Guam to the area to help with relief efforts.

Secretary Powell is working hard. He has spoken with his counterparts in Japan, India, Australia, as well as other nations who are helping with the response, in order to begin building an international coalition for immediate humanitarian relief and long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Based on these discussions, we've established a regional core group with India, Japan, and Australia to help coordinate relief efforts. I'm confident more nations will join this core group in short order. Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman will lead a U.S. task force to work with these partners to help coordinate interagency response in our own Government and to encourage other nations to participate in the relief efforts.

These past few days have brought loss and grief to the world that is beyond our comprehension. The United States will continue to stand with the affected governments as they care for the victims. We will stand with them as they start to rebuild their communities. And together the world will cope with their loss; we will prevail over this destruction.

Let me answer some questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Iraqi Elections

Q. Mr. President, more than 50 people died yesterday alone in the Sunni Triangle area. And with the Sunnis backing out of the election, how concerned are you that the world and the Iraqis will view this election as credible?

The President. Well, you said "with the Sunnis backing out"; you mean a Sunni party has backed out, yes. I talked to President Yawr yesterday, who happens to be a Sunni, who on the one hand expressed concern about the security situation in Mosul and on the other hand reminded me that most people in Iraq, Sunni or Shi'a, want to vote. And so the task at hand is to provide as much security as possible for the election officials as well as for the people inside cities like Mosul, to encourage them to express their will.