

*May 13 / Administration of Barack Obama, 2009*

rising costs of health care have to be brought down; second, that Americans have to be able to choose their own doctor and their own plan; and third, all Americans have to have quality, affordable health care.

These are the principles to which I'm committed. These are the principles to which the chairmen and the Speaker and the Majority Leader, my Vice President are committed. We're seeing now that traditional opponents of health care reform are embracing these ideas. They recognize that the time is now.

## Remarks Prior to Departure for Tempe, Arizona *May 13, 2009*

### *Situation in Sri Lanka*

Hello, everybody. Sorry to keep you guys waiting. Good to see you. I want to take a few moments at the top to talk about something that, with all the big issues going on, hasn't received much attention, but I think is worth talking about briefly.

As some of you know, we have a humanitarian crisis that's taking place in Sri Lanka, and I've been increasingly saddened by the desperate news in recent days. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians are trapped between the warring Government forces and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka with no means of escape, little access to food, water, shelter, and medicine. This has led to widespread suffering and the loss of hundreds if not thousands of lives.

Without urgent action, this humanitarian crisis could turn into a catastrophe. Now is the time, I believe, to put aside some of the political issues that are involved and to put the lives of the men and women and children who are innocently caught in the crossfire—to put them first.

So I urge the Tamil Tigers to lay down their arms and let civilians go. Their forced recruitment of civilians and their use of civilians as human shields is deplorable. These tactics will only serve to alienate all those who carry them out.

I'm also calling on the Sri Lankan Government to take several steps to alleviate this humanitarian crisis. First, the Government

And so I am just deeply encouraged. And I want the message to go out all across America, we are not going to rest until we've delivered the kind of health care reform that's going to bring down costs for families, and improve quality, affordability, accessibility for all Americans.

So thank you very much, and enjoy this wonderful weather.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. on the South Drive at the White House.

should stop the indiscriminate shelling that has taken hundreds of innocent lives, including several hospitals. The Government should live up to its commitment to not use heavy weapons in the conflict zone.

Second, the Government should give United Nations humanitarian teams access to the civilians who are trapped between the warring parties so that they can receive the immediate assistance necessary to save lives.

Third, the Government should also allow the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross access to nearly 190,000 displaced people within Sri Lanka so that they can receive additional support that they need.

The United States stands ready to work with the international community to support the people of Sri Lanka in this time of suffering. I don't believe that we can delay. Now is the time for all of us to work together to avert further humanitarian suffering.

Going forward, Sri Lanka must seek a peace that is secure and lasting and grounded in respect for all of its citizens. More civilian casualties and inadequate care for those caught in resettlement camps will only make it more difficult to achieve the peace that the people of Sri Lanka deserve.

### *Release of Detainee Interrogation Photos*

Now, let me also say a few words about an issue that I know you asked Robert Gibbs

about quite a bit today, and that's my decision to argue against the release of additional detainee photos. Understand, these photos are associated with closed investigations of the alleged abuse of detainees in our ongoing war effort.

And I want to emphasize that these photos that were requested in this case are not particularly sensational, especially when compared to the painful images that we remember from Abu Ghraib, but they do represent conduct that did not conform with the Army Manual. That's precisely why they were investigated—and, I might add, investigated long before I took office—and, where appropriate, sanctions have been applied.

In other words, this is not a situation in which the Pentagon has concealed or sought to justify inappropriate action. Rather, it has gone through the appropriate and regular processes. And the individuals who were involved have been identified, and appropriate actions have been taken.

It's therefore my belief that the publication of these photos would not add any additional benefit to our understanding of what was carried out in the past by a small number of individuals. In fact, the most direct consequence of releasing them, I believe, would be to further inflame anti-American opinion and to put our troops in greater danger.

Moreover, I fear the publication of these photos may only have a chilling effect on future investigations of detainee abuse. And obviously, the thing that is most important in my mind is making sure that we are abiding by the Army Manual, and that we are swiftly investigating any instances in which individuals have not acted appropriately, and that they are appropriately sanctioned. That's my aim, and I do not believe that the release of these photos at this time would further that goal.

Now, let me be clear: I am concerned about how the release of these photos would be—would impact on the safety of our troops. I have made it very clear to all who are within the chain of command, however, of the United States Armed Forces that the abuse of detainees in our custody is prohibited and will not be tolerated. I have repeated that since I've been in office. Secretary Gates understands that; Admiral Mullen understands that; and that has been communicated across the chain of command.

Any abuse of detainees is unacceptable. It is against our values. It endangers our security. It will not be tolerated.

All right. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:12 p.m. on the South Drive at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Press Secretary Robert L. Gibbs.

## Commencement Address at Arizona State University in Tempe *May 13, 2009*

Well, thank you. Thank you, President Crow, for that extremely generous introduction, for your inspired leadership as well here at ASU. And I want to thank the entire ASU community for the honor of attaching my name to a scholarship program that will help open the doors of higher education to students from every background. What a wonderful gift. Thank you. That notion of opening doors of opportunity to everybody, that is the core mission of this school; it's the core mission of my Presidency. And I hope this program will serve as a model for universities across this country. So thank you so much.

I want to, obviously, congratulate the class of 2009 for your unbelievable achievement. I want to thank the parents, the uncles, the grandpas, the grandmas, cousins—calabash cousins—everybody who was involved in helping these extraordinary young people arrive at this moment. I also want to apologize to the entire State of Arizona for stealing away your wonderful former Governor, Janet Napolitano. But you've got a fine Governor here, and I also know that Janet is now applying her extraordinary talents to serve our entire country as the Secretary of Homeland Security, keeping America safe. And she's doing a great job.