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to have more false charges retracted in this world, and I'm pleased by that.

Q. Do you know anything about a possible cease-fire that would inject new life into the peace talks?

The President. I know nothing more than you do probably about that. We're going to talk about it. I know we're working for it, and we'll keep working for it.

Q. Mr. President, there is a perception that the talks in Northern Ireland are going nowhere at the moment, that an agreement on decommissioning which looked close this week is not now likely in the immediate term. Are you as pessimistic as some people are in Northern Ireland?

The President. No, we can't afford pessimism. I mean, after all, if you just look at the whole sweep of events in the last 3 years or so and compare that to the previous 25 years, I still think that things are moving right along here. We're in a rough patch, but if we just keep at it, I think it will come out all right.

Prime Minister Bruton. Exactly.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Charles Yah Lin Trie, CEO, Diahatsu International Trading Co.; Michael H. Cardozo, executive director of the Presidential Legal Expense Trust; and Martha Pope, Deputy to the Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State for Economic Initiatives in Ireland. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Receiving the National AIDS Strategy

December 17, 1996

I am pleased today to receive the first-ever National AIDS Strategy. In the 15 years of this epidemic, we have never had such a unified strategy. This strategy represents an important milestone in the history of the fight to defeat this epidemic.

The National Strategy reiterates our administration's and our Nation's commitment to winning the battle against AIDS. It establishes six major goals for our national efforts: to find a cure and a vaccine; to reduce new HIV infections; to assure people living with HIV and AIDS access to high-quality care; to fight AIDS-related discrimination at every turn; to lead the global fight to end AIDS; and to translate our research advances into treatment as quickly as possible.

These goals will help to guide our work in the coming term, and more specifically in the coming year. We have made significant progress in the last 4 years. Researchers working toward a cure and a vaccine are reporting encouraging news and giving us hope. New treatments, approved by the FDA in record time, are producing some very encouraging results in terms of the quality of people's lives and the potential for extending the length of life.

This progress results from more than a decade of investment in AIDS research, prevention, and care. I am very proud that in the four budgets my administration has produced, funding for AIDS programs has increased by 55 percent. We have also strengthened the Office of AIDS Research at NIH and tripled funding for AIDS drug assistance programs.

Despite this progress, we must recognize that the AIDS epidemic is not over. Far too many of our sons and daughters are still losing their lives to this epidemic every day. Far too many are still becoming infected. We will win the battle against HIV, but to do so we must stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight and we must build on the strides we have made. I am confident that my administration will do its part and that we have taken yet another step forward in that battle today.

Statement on Approval of the New Stabilization Force in Bosnia

December 17, 1996

I have formally approved NATO's new operation plan for the Stabilization Force (SFOR) that will succeed the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia after December 20. I welcome NATO's decision yesterday to approve formally the new operation plan and today to approve the Activation Order that will authorize the start of SFOR's mission.

SFOR's limited and focused mission is to consolidate the peace that IFOR successfully established and maintained. During the past