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Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Abdou Diouf of Senegal in Dakar

April 1, 1998

African Crisis Response Force

Q. Mr. President, are you—how important do you feel an African force is—[*inaudible*]?

The President. Well, I think it's potentially very important because an African Crisis Response Force can enable the Africans to stop problems before they get out of hand. And of course, the President and I are going to review one of the training exercises here in Senegal. We've had one in Uganda. We will have one in Ghana. President Mandela said that he would be interested in participating, so I'm encouraged by that. I think there's an enormous sense among African leaders that if they have infrastructure and the training to do it, they could solve a lot of their own problems. I'm very excited about it.

Q. Will you be talking to—[*inaudible*]—about reports of—[*inaudible*]—party politics here? There is criticism that perhaps the ruling party has too much power and is too controlling.

The President. Well, we'll discuss the whole range of things. But the main thing I want to do today is to thank the President for the support that he's given to peacekeeping around the world and to—[*inaudible*]—Senegal's long experience with elected Presidencies and to work on this African Crisis Response Initiative.

NOTE: The exchange began at approximately 11 a.m. at the Presidential Palace. In his remarks, the President referred to President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks to Senegalese Troops Trained for the African Crisis Response Initiative in Thies, Senegal

April 1, 1998

President Diouf, distinguished leaders of Senegal and the United States, members of the Senegalese and American Armed Forces, ladies and gentlemen. We have just seen a training exercise involving dedicated soldiers from our two nations, part of the African Crisis Response Initiative.

I'd like to thank the Senegalese soldiers and the United States Armed Forces. I'd like to especially thank the distinguished officers who briefed us—Lieutenant Colonel Diallo and Major Erckenbrack. And I'd also like to express my appreciation to the other Senegalese soldiers and gendarmes who were standing there who have served with multinational peacekeeping forces in Haiti and Bosnia, Africa and the Middle East.

Senegal is respected around the world for its tradition of peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. You are a leader among the more than 15 African countries that regularly contribute troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions. I thank Senegalese troops for their commitment to peace, and I thank our American troops for your work here.

Africa and America have a great stake in the success of the soldiers like those President Diouf and I have seen here today. Where bullets and bombs prevent children from going to school and parents from going to work, amid chaos and ruin, these soldiers and other like them can bring security, hope, and a future.

Terrible violence continues to plague our world, and Africa has seen some of the worst. In some cases, children, often against their will, have stood on the frontlines of armies as cannon fodder for the ambitions of others. A few days ago, I met in Rwanda with some of the survivors of the 1994 genocide there. As I said to them, let me say again, we must find better ways to prevent such horrors from occurring.

While peace has started to take hold in many nations that once knew only violence, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, and elsewhere, tensions linger in some of these nations, and violence continues in others, like Burundi, Somalia, and Sudan. Buried landmines prevent children from walking in safety in too many African countries. Millions of refugees still remain driven from their homes. In the debris of war, poverty and disease thrive.

The international community needs new tools to keep the peace in volatile areas and cope with humanitarian crises. The African Crisis Response Initiative program, which

President Diouf and I have seen in action here today, provides peacekeeping training and nonlethal equipment to African soldiers, with the goal of helping African nations to prepare their military units, led by African commanders, to respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian and peacekeeping challenges in Africa and around the world.

Senegal was one of the first nations to support the African Crisis Response Initiative, and along with Uganda, the first to participate in its training exercises. Mali and Malawi participated soon after. We are about to begin an exercise with Ghanaian troops, along with Belgian soldiers. Later this year, we will conduct exercises with Ethiopia, and we look forward to other countries participating soon.

Our purpose is not to dominate security matters in Africa or to abandon America's role in Africa's security but, instead, to build on existing efforts, including those of African nations, the Organization for African Unity, the United Nations, France, Britain, and others, to strengthen the capacity for preserving peace here. With our African partners we will also establish a center for security studies in Africa, modeled on the Marshall Center in Germany, to provide programs for civilian and military leaders on defense policy planning and the role of militaries in democratic societies.

America will continue to be involved on this continent as long as African nations desire our assistance and our partnership in building a safer future.

Mr. President, I want to thank you and your military leaders for being such partners. And I would like to thank the members of the American military, and one in particular—General Jamerson—for his efforts, relentless over the past couple of years to build closer ties between African militaries and our own.

To meet the threats to peace and freedom we will face in the 21st century, we must strengthen our resolve in the face of hatred and violence. We must tell the aggressors and those who tear societies apart, ''You will not prevail.'' We must prove that the peacemakers are getting stronger. And above all, we must demonstrate that the peacemakers are working together.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:45 p.m. at Thies Military Base. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Col. Abdoulaye Diallo, Senegalese Commander, African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI); Maj. Adrian E. Erckenbrack, USA, Commander, Operational Detachment Bravo; and Gen. James L. Jamerson, USAF, Deputy Commander in Chief, European Command.

Statement on House Action Against Legislation Proposing a Uniform Standard Blood-Alcohol Level

April 1, 1998

It is imperative that we set a uniform standard of .08 blood-alcohol content to protect our young people from harm, make our streets safer, and help us crack down on drunk driving nationwide. Our country will not tolerate irresponsible acts that endanger our children and our Nation.

I am disappointed that the House Rules Committee has decided to keep the critical .08 legislation from coming to the floor under the BESTEA transportation bill. By establishing a strong but sensible limit on blood-alcohol content, we could save as many as 600 lives a year. Saving lives and promoting responsibility should not be partisan issues.

Last month, under the leadership of Senator Lautenberg and Senator DeWine, the Senate overwhelmingly supported the .08 standard for drinking and driving. The House leadership, however, once again is hiding behind procedural maneuvers by blocking this effort to protect children and help put an end to drunk driving. The American people deserve better than this.

Last night's setback was by no means final. Building on our victory in the Senate we will work to overcome this roadblock by the House leadership. We will continue the fight against drunk driving on every front. Today, as part of our comprehensive effort, we are announcing grants made possible by the leadership of Senator Byrd that will help combat underage drinking. I stand ready to aid Representative Lowey and Representative Canady as they continue their efforts to pass a sensible, uniform DUI standard. We will