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Week Ending Friday, November 20, 1998

The President's Radio Address

November 14, 1998

The President. Today I would like to talk about the hurricane that struck Central America 2 weeks ago and what we in the United States are doing to help. I'm joined by Tipper Gore, who will describe her trip leading our delegation to the region.

As Hurricane Mitch swept across the Caribbean, we were spared the brunt of the storm. But our neighbors in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala were not so lucky. We know the terrible death toll in those nations, more than 10,000 lives so far. But that figure only begins to convey the devastation. Hundreds of thousands are homeless. Mudslides and collapsed bridges have made it difficult to send help. In huge areas people have still almost no food and water. Roads, farms, schools, hospitals, all have been destroyed.

Tipper Gore led our Presidential mission to the region, and she just reported to me on the conditions there. I'd like to ask her now to tell what she saw.

Tipper Gore. Thank you, Mr. President.

In Honduras, we visited a neighborhood devastated by the storm. We joined the effort to clean up a school that will become a medical facility. That night I slept in a tent outside a shelter with homeless families, where I met a woman who was 6 months pregnant, a grandmother who was caring for four of her grandchildren, and a man who was alone and blind. They had all lost everything. They are now living together in one room, sleeping on mats.

In Nicaragua, I visited a refugee site for more than a thousand men, women, and children whose homes along a riverbank are gone. The conditions are unimaginable. The Government has allocated a plot of land which is divided into parcels, one per family. Their shelter consists of sheets of plastic. Disease is rampant, and their biggest concerns right now are food, water, and medicine.

Yet everywhere, I was struck by the spirit of the people. They are not defeated. They're cleaning up, and they are rebuilding their lives. In Honduras, community leaders are working to help those most in need to get supplies to the outlying areas. In the makeshift shelters in Managua, many people were measuring foundations for new walls they will build when the materials are available.

You can see that this disaster has destroyed their homes but not their spirits. They will survive. And we will stand with them as they do so.

The President. Thanks, Tipper. Thank you for the trip and for your recommendations for what the United States should do next.

Next Monday the First Lady will also visit the region. We want to do everything we can to help—now and over the long run. To quickly address the catastrophe, I ordered $80 million in emergency aid. Over 1,300 American troops are assisting with relief efforts, providing food, water, and medicine. Engineers are rebuilding roads. Helicopters and planes are delivering vital supplies, 1.3 million tons to date. And more help is on the way.

In the wake of Mrs. Gore's trip, I am announcing today that we will offer $45 million in additional defense goods and services to provide the resources our troops need to continue their critical work toward recovery.

I've also asked Secretary of the Treasury Bob Rubin to find the best way to provide debt relief and emergency financial aid from the United States and the international community. We've already encouraged international institutions to provide more than $500 million in near-term financial aid, and we're working with them to secure sufficient money for reconstruction.

Finally, we intend to extend our stay of deportation through the holidays for citizens

of the affected countries living in the United States, while examining on an urgent basis recommendations for further relief, consistent with the recommendation Mrs. Gore made to me.

A storm shows no respect for boundaries, and we should respond the same way. Many American citizens have relatives in Central America; our nations are related, too. They are our friends and our neighbors. We are going to share the future together. America is at its best when lending a helping hand to friends in need. Central Americans have taken great strides in the last decade in ending conflicts and strengthening democracies. We must not, and we will not, let a hurricane drown these aspirations.

The United States will spare no aid to people of Central America, our fellow Americans, as we all strive to build a better world in a new century.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 1:59 p.m. on November 13 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 14. This transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 13 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Memorandum on Emergency Disaster Relief for Central America

November 14, 1998

Presidential Determination No. 99–04

Memorandum for the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense

Subject: Drawdown Under Section 506(a)(2)(A)(i)(II) of the Foreign Assistance Act to Provide Emergency Disaster Relief Assistance for Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by section 506(a)(2)(A)(i)(II) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (''the Act''), 22 U.S.C. 2318(a)(2), I hereby determine that it is in the national interest of the United States to draw down articles and services from the inventory and resources of the Department of Defense, for the purpose of providing international disaster relief assistance to Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Therefore, I direct the drawdown of up to $45 million of articles and services from the inventory and resources of the Department of Defense for the Governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala for the purposes and under the authorities of chapter 9 of part I of the Act.

The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to report this determination to the Congress immediately and to arrange for its publication in the *Federal Register*.

William J. Clinton

Statement on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

November 14, 1998

On this International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, I want to reaffirm my administration's strong commitment to religious freedom around the world.

Today, in solidarity with millions of people at home and abroad, we pray for those who suffer for their beliefs—a suffering forewarned by Scripture: ''. . . they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you . . . [you will be] brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.'' But with this warning comes the promise, ''I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to deny or resist.'' (Luke 21:12).

My administration worked closely with Members of Congress and the U.S. religious community to secure passage of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which is an important addition to our ongoing efforts to make the promotion of religious freedom a national priority and an integral part of our foreign policy.

On this day, when we keep in our thoughts the noble struggle for religious freedom of people of all backgrounds, whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha'i, or of any other faith, we remember the words of the American Founding Father James Madison, who called religious liberty the ''luster of our country.'' And we pray that our devotion to religious tolerance will serve as a beacon for all people everywhere who yearn for spiritual freedom.