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NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Christine O'Brien, New Jersey organizer, who introduced the President, and Donna Dees-Thomases, founder, Million Mom March; and Michael D. Barnes, president, Handgun Control, Inc. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Death of Former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan

May 14, 2000

Hillary and I are deeply saddened by the death of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. I want to extend our deepest condolences to his wife, Chizuko, his family, and his nation.

Japan has lost a strong and vibrant leader. The United States has lost one of our closest friends.

I had the honor of meeting with Prime Minister Obuchi several times after he became Prime Minister in 1998. I visited him in Tokyo that fall, and he came to Washington for a memorable visit in May 1999. In all our meetings, I was impressed by his effective statesmanship and his personal warmth. He believed ardently, as I do, in a U.S.-Japanese partnership built upon shared values and mutual respect. The personal friendship he and I forged helped us act on that belief and strengthened our desire to address all the issues affecting our two countries in a spirit of true friendship. The bonsai tree he gave me, and which he tended himself, is a living symbol of our alliance.

The job of Prime Minister is never easy, but Keizo Obuchi met every challenge with courage and confidence. He embodied before the world the famous Japanese virtues of honor, loyalty, and determination. He became known for imitating the art and skill of an orchestra conductor in finding harmony among people of different views. From his first days in office, he took swift steps to meet the economic challenges facing Japan, and he also gave strong support to the cause of peace—from Kosovo to East Timor. Prime Minister Obuchi worked hard in countless ways to strengthen our alliance and to place it on a new foundation for the 21st century. The friendship between our peoples remains the cornerstone of stability in east Asia and was greatly strengthened by his lifetime of building bridges between us.

Prime Minister Obuchi touched the hearts of Americans in simple, human ways: when he threw out what he called an unhittable pitch to Sammy Sosa; when he reminded us of the honor he felt meeting Robert Kennedy as young man; when he told us how he drew from that meeting new inspiration for the noble privilege of serving a great people.

On behalf of all Americans, I am grateful for Prime Minister Obuchi's dedicated, principled public service and for all he did to build for us a brighter future. I will work closely with Prime Minister Mori to continue our close cooperation with Japan.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Situation in Sierra Leone

May 12, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Military forces of the Government of Sierra Leone and Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) forces provided by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were engaged in military operations in Sierra Leone against the insurgent Revolutionary United Front (RUF) until mid-1999. At that time, the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF signed the Lome Peace Agreement, which provides for an end to hostilities and the disarmament, demobilization, and resettlement of the insurgent RUF forces. The United Nations Security Council in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1270 and 1289 established the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to facilitate implementation of the Lome Agreement and provide security at key locations and government buildings and at all sites of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program, among other tasks.

Recently, as UNAMSIL expanded its efforts to establish monitoring and disarmament sites in or near RUF-controlled territory, RUF forces initiated military activity