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Again, people will—this happened in our country. And there was all kinds of speculation as to who attacked, who started the attacks. And it took a while to make sure we knew. But over time, our intelligence services got worked up and law enforcement got involved, and I think you'll find the case to be in Spain as well. The facts will become known. And then that makes it easier for the Government to make the decision as to how to proceed.

Q. Thank you very much. As I said, on behalf of the Spanish people, thank you for sending a message and for being close to us.

The President. Yes. Well, we care deeply about our friends, and the people of Spain are friends. May God bless them.

Q. Thank you.

The First Lady. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:25 p.m. at the Embassy of Spain. In his remarks, the President referred to Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on Efforts To Globally Promote Women's Human Rights

March 12, 2004

Thank you all very much. It takes me 45 seconds to walk to work, and sometimes I get introduced by my wife. [*Laughter*] It's a heck of a job. Thanks, Laura.

Laura is—you know, one of the interesting moments in our family came when she gave a radio address. She used the President's time to give a radio address, to speak to the women of Afghanistan. And it made a big difference in people's lives. And it was from that moment forward that she, personally, has dedicated time to make sure that people who have been enslaved are free, particularly women. And I'm proud of Laura's leadership.

In the last 2½ years, we have seen remarkable and hopeful development in world history. Just think about it: More than 50 million men, women, and children have been liberated from two of the most brutal tyrannies on Earth—50 million people are free. All these people are now learning the blessings of freedom.

And for 25 million women and girls, liberation has a special significance. Some of these girls are attending school for the first time. It's hard for people in America to imagine. A lot of young girls now get to go to school. Some of the women are preparing to vote in free elections for the very first time.

The public whippings by Taliban officials have ended. The systematic use of rape by Saddam's regime to dishonor families has ended. He sits in the prison cell.

The advance of freedom in the greater Middle East has given new rights and new hopes to women. And America will do its part to continue the spread of liberty.

I want to thank a man who is working hard to continue the spread of liberty, and that's the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. I appreciate three members of my Cabinet who are here: Secretary Gale Norton, Secretary Ann Veneman, and Secretary Elaine Chao. I put together, in all due humility, the greatest Cabinet ever. And one of the reasons why is these three ladies have agreed to serve. The President has got to get pretty good advice—I mean really good advice, frankly, from people other than his wife. [*Laughter*] I get great foreign policy advice from Condoleezza Rice, who is with us today.

I want to thank other members of my administration who are here for this very important occasion to end what has been a very important dialog. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is with us; Andrew Natsios, who runs USAID. Paula Dobriansky of the Department of State—and I want to thank you for going to Afghanistan recently with Joyce Rumsfeld, Secretary Rumsfeld's better half, who also went to Afghanistan recently to spread the word that America will stay the course, that when we say something, we mean it, and that we say we're going to—[*applause*].

I just named a distinguished American to be a U.S. delegate to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, my sister, Dorothy. Thank you for being here, Doro. And I took the recommendation of Vice President Cheney for another member of the same delegation. He suggested that America would be well served by his eldest daughter, Liz. And he's right. Good to see you, Liz.

I want to thank Rend al-Rahim, who is with us today. Rend, thank you for coming. She's the senior Iraqi representative to the United States. That is a forerunner to ambassadorial status, I guess. Certainly I'm not speaking for what is going to be the sovereign Government of Iraq. She's good at what she does, I'm telling you.

There's a lot of ambassadors who are here. I want to thank you all for coming. It's good to see you. I appreciate you taking time to be here. This is an important conference. The message of the United States about freedom and liberty in the Middle East is a serious message. And I thank the Governments for being here to listen and to help us advance this vital cause for what's good for the world. And so thanks for coming. There's a lot of countries represented here, particularly Middle Eastern countries.

As I told you, Joyce went to—and Paula went to Afghanistan. There are other members of the U.S. Afghan Women's Council that went to Kabul. I want to thank you all for going. I hear it's—one of the travelers, Karen Hughes, reported back, and Margaret did as well—Margaret Spellings, who is my Domestic Policy Advisor. They said it's unbelievable what's taking place there. The country is transitioning from despair to hope. And it's easy to see now. It's changing and changing for the better. The people of Afghanistan have just got to know that we'll stand with them for however long it takes to be free.

I appreciate the Iraqi women who attended the Commission on the Status of Women in New York this week. I want to thank you all for coming. I appreciate you being here.

I want to thank my friend Dr. Raja Khuzai, who's with us today. This is the third time we have met. The first time we met, she walked into the Oval Office—let's see, was it the first time? It was the first time. The door opened up. She said, "My liberator," and burst out in tears. And so did I.

Dr. Khuzai also was there to have Thanksgiving dinner with our troops. And it turned out to be me as well. Of course, I didn't tell her I was coming. [*Laughter*] But I appreciate that, and now she's here again. I want to thank you, Doctor, for your hard work on the writing of the basic law for your people. You have stood fast. You have stood strong. Like me, you've got liberty etched in your heart, and you're not going to yield. And you are doing a great job, and we're proud to have you back. Thanks for coming.

Ambassador Ssempala is with us as well, from Uganda. It's great to see you again, Ambassador. Thanks. She made our trip to Uganda so special that time. She paved the way for what was a special trip. I'm going to talk a little bit about HIV/AIDS. I want to thank you and your country's leadership on that important issue.

Shamim Jawad is with us, Ambassador Said Jawad's better half. I want to thank you very much for being here, Shamim. Thanks for coming. I appreciate your coming.

The Director of the Anti-Trafficking Operations for International Justice Mission is Sharon Cohn. She's with us. Let me tell what that means. That means she's working to end sex slavery. She is a noble soul who cares deeply about the plight of every woman. And I'm honored that you're up here, Sharon. I want thank you very much for your strong commitment. This Government stands with you, and our country stands with you. We abhor—we abhor—the practice of sex slavery. We will do all we can to help you.

Support for human rights is the cornerstone of American foreign policy. As a matter of national conviction, we believe that every person in every culture is meant by God to live in freedom. As a matter of national interest, we know that the spread of liberty and hope is essential to the defeat of despair and bitterness and terror. The policy of the American Government is to stand for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity—the rule of law, the limits on the power of the state, free speech, freedom of worship, equal justice, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance, and protections for private property. That is what we believe, and we're not going to change.

We have transformed this belief in human rights into action. Last year, our Government devoted nearly $75 million to combat the worldwide trafficking in human beings. It's a brutal trade, inhumane trade, by sick people that targets many women and girls. I spoke out against this practice at the United Nations. I called upon the world to join us.

This country is determined to fight and end this modern form of slavery.

HIV/AIDS has orphaned millions of children worldwide. And in some African countries, nearly 60 percent of adults carrying the virus are women. In 2002, we created the Mother and Child HIV Prevention Initiative to prevent viral transmission of the virus between generations. It's an important initiative by this Government, but it wasn't enough.

Last year, I announced an Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, a $15 billion commitment over 5 years to fight this deadly disease. This country is determined to turn the tide against this modern plague. When we see disease and suffering, we will not turn our back.

The economic empowerment of women is one effective way to improve lives and to protect rights. Each year for the past 5 years, the United States Government has provided an average of $155 million in small loans, microloans. About 70 percent of those benefit women. It turns out the world is learning what we know in America: The best entrepreneurs in the country are women. In America, most new small businesses are started by women. With the right help, that will be the case around the world as well.

We're determined to help women to find the independence and dignity that comes from ownership. These are necessary responses to urgent problems. Yet, in the end, the rights of women and all human beings can be assured only within the framework of freedom and democracy. If people aren't free, it is likely that women will be suppressed.

Human rights are defined by a constitution. They're defended by an impartial rule of law. They're secured in a pluralistic society. The advance of women's rights and the advance of liberty are ultimately inseparable. America stands with the world's oppressed peoples. We've got to speak clearly for freedom, and we will, in places like Cuba or North Korea or Zimbabwe or Burma.

We stand with courageous reformers. Aung San Suu Kyi is a courageous reformer and a remarkable woman who remains under house arrest for her efforts to bring democracy to her nation. Earlier today, the Libyan Government released Fathi Jahmi. She's a local government official who was imprisoned in 2002 for advocating free speech and democracy. It's an encouraging step toward reform in Libya. You probably have heard, Libya is beginning to change her attitude about a lot of things. We hope that more such steps will follow in Libya and around the world.

The advance of freedom cannot be held back forever. And America is working to hasten the day when freedom comes to every single nation. We understand a free world is more likely to be a peaceful world.

When Iran's Shirin Ebadi accepted the Nobel for peace—Nobel Prize for Peace last year, here's what she said: "If the 21st century wishes to free itself from the cycle of violence and acts of terror and war and avoid repetition of the experience of the 20th century, there is no other way except by understanding and putting into practice every human right for all mankind, irrespective of race and gender, faith, nationality, or social status." That's a powerful statement coming from Iran. No wonder she won the Nobel Prize. She's a proud Iranian. She is a devout Muslim. She believes that democracy is consistent with Islamic teachings. And we share in this belief. That's what we believe in America. A religion that demands individual moral accountability and encourages the encounter of the individual with God is fully compatible with the rights and responsibilities of self-government. Promotion of democracy in the greater Middle East is important. It's a priority of ours. And it will be a long and difficult road. But we're on the way.

Three years ago, the nation of Afghanistan was the primary training ground for Al Qaida. You heard Laura talk about the movie "Osama." See it. It'll help enrich the words I'm about to say: The Taliban were incredibly barbaric. It's hard for the American mind to understand "barbaric." Watch the movie. Women were forbidden from appearing in public unescorted. That's barbaric. Women were prohibited from holding jobs. It's impossible for young girls to get an education. That's barbaric. It's not right.

Today, the Taliban regime is gone, thank goodness. Girls are back in class. The amazing accomplishment, though, is that Afghanistan has a new constitution that guarantees

full participation by women. The constitution is a milestone in Afghanistan's history. It's really a milestone in world history, when you think about it. All Afghan citizens, regardless of gender, now have equal rights before the law.

The new lower house of Parliament will guarantee places for women. Women voters in Afghanistan, as Laura said, are registering at a faster rate than men for the June election. What's new? [*Laughter*] Afghanistan still has challenges ahead, no doubt about it. But now the women of that country, instead of living in silence and fear, are a part of the future of the country. They're a part of a hopeful tomorrow.

Iraq has a different history and yet a different set of challenges. Only one year ago—only one year after being liberated from an incredibly ruthless person and a ruthless regime, Iraqi women are playing an essential part in rebuilding the nation. They're part of the future of the country.

Every woman in Iraq is better off because the rape rooms and torture chambers of Saddam Hussein are forever closed. He is a barbaric person. He violated people in such a brutal way that some never thought that the spirit of Iraq could arise again. We never felt that way here in this administration. We felt that people innately love freedom and if just given a chance, if given an opportunity, they will rise to the challenge.

Three women now serve on the Iraqi Governing Council. You just heard me praise one. The historic document that was written recently guarantees the basic rights of all Iraqis, men and women, including freedoms of worship, expression, and association. The document protects unions and political parties and outlaws discrimination based on gender, ethnic class, and religion. It's an amazing document that's been written.

Iraqi women are already using their new political powers to guard against extremism and intolerance in any form, whether it be religious or secular. The women leaders of Afghanistan and Iraq have shown incredible courage. When you think about what life was like months ago for many women, the fact that they have risen up is a testament to their souls, to their very being, their bravery. Some have paid for their new freedoms with their lives, but in so doing, their sons and daughters will be forever grateful. These leaders have sent a message throughout the Middle East and throughout the world: Every man and women in every culture was born to live in freedom.

The momentum of liberty is building in the Middle East. Just think about what's taken place recently. In 2002, Bahrain elected its own parliament for the first time in nearly three decades. Liberty is marching. Oman has extended the vote to all adult citizens. On Monday, its Sultan appointed the nation's first female cabinet minister. We're making progress on the road to freedom. Qatar has a new constitution. Yemen has a multiparty political system. Kuwait has a directly elected national assembly. Jordan held historic elections last summer. Times are changing.

America is taking the side of those reformers who are committed to democratic change. It is our calling to do so. It is our duty to do so. I proposed doubling the budget for the National Endowment for Democracy to $80 million. We will focus its new work on bringing free elections and free markets and free speech and free labor unions to the Middle East.

By radio and television, we're broadcasting the message of tolerance and truth in Arabic and Persian to tens of millions of people. And our Middle East Partnership Initiative supports economic and political and educational reform throughout the region. We're building women's centers in Afghanistan and Iraq that will offer job training and provide loans for small businesses and teach women about their rights as citizens and human beings. We're active. We're strong in the pursuit of freedom. We just don't talk a good game in America, we act.

In Afghanistan, the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council is developing projects to improve the education of women and to train the leaders of tomorrow. You heard Laura talk about her deep desire to help train women to become teachers, not only in the cities but in the rural parts of Afghanistan. We'll succeed. We'll follow through on that initiative. We're pursuing a forward strategy of freedom—that's how I like to describe it, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. And I believe

there's no doubt that if America stays the course and we call upon others to stay the course, liberty will arrive and the world will be better off.

The momentum of freedom in the Middle East is beginning to benefit women. That's what's important for this conference. A free society is a society in which women will benefit.

I want to remind you of what King Mohamed of Morocco said when he proposed a series of laws to protect women and their families. It's a remarkable statement. It's like he's put the stake in the ground for women's rights. He said, ''How can society achieve progress while women, who represent half the nation, see their rights violated and suffer as a result of injustice and violence and marginalization, notwithstanding the dignity and justice granted to them by our glorious religion.'' It's a strong statement of freedom. He's right. America stands with His Majesty and others who share that basic belief. The future of Muslim nations will be better off for all with the full participation of women.

These are extraordinary times, historic times. We've seen the fall of brutal tyrants. We're seeing the rise of democracy in the Middle East. We're seeing women take their rightful place in societies that were once incredibly oppressive and closed. We're seeing the power and appeal of liberty in every single culture. And we're proud once again—this Nation is proud—to advance the cause of human rights and human freedom.

I want to thank you all for serving the cause. The cause is just, the cause is right, and the cause is good. May God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m. in the the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Karen Hughes, former Counselor to the President; Dr. Raja Habib Khuzai, member, Iraqi Governing Council; Shamim Jawad, wife of Said Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S.; Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy of Burma; and Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said and Minister of Higher Education Rawya bint Saud al-Bussaidi of Oman. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 6

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with President Vicente Fox of Mexico.

At noon, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a lunch for President Fox and his wife, Marta Sahagun de Fox.

March 8

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Dallas, TX, where, upon arrival, he greeted USA Freedom Corps volunteer Dr. Joann Sanders.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Houston, TX, where he attended the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and greeted the 2003 Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association champions.

In the evening, the President returned to Washington, DC.

The President announced his intention to designate J. Bonnie Newman and Leighton Smith, Jr., as members of the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Naval Academy.

March 9

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. He then traveled to Arlington, VA, and later returned to Washington, DC.

In the afternoon, the President met with Veterans of Foreign Wars commander-in-chief Edward S. Banas, Sr. He then participated in a photo opportunity with the winners of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Voice of Democracy Award.

The President announced his intention to nominate Tina Westby Jonas to be Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).

The President announced his intention to designate Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr., as Acting