

**Remarks on Mobilizing Indian
Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis
Disaster Relief**

January 3, 2005

I thank you all for coming. I'm honored to be standing here with two former Presidents, President Bush 41, President Clinton 42. We have come together to express our country's sympathy for the victims of a great tragedy. We're here to ask our fellow citizens to join in a broad humanitarian relief effort.

Eight days ago, the most powerful earthquake in 40 years shook the island of Sumatra. The earthquake caused violent tsunamis in the Indian Ocean, which left an arc of destruction from Thailand to the Horn of Africa. The devastation in the region defies comprehension. More than 150,000 lives are estimated to be lost, including 90,000 in Indonesia alone. As many as 5 million people are thought to be homeless or without food or shelter. Thousands more are missing, and millions are vulnerable to disease.

Across the United States this week, our flags will fly at half-staff to honor the victims of this disaster. We mourn especially the tens of thousands of children who are lost. We think of the tens of thousands more who will grow up without their parents or their brothers or their sisters. We hold in our prayers all the people whose fate is still unknown.

The United States Government is in close contact with the governments of the affected countries, and America is playing a leading role in the relief and recovery efforts. Our Nation has committed military assets and made an initial commitment of \$350 million for disaster relief. We're working with the United Nations and with governments around the world to coordinate the comprehensive international response. American military assets in the region are now aiding recovery efforts. Patrol and cargo aircraft have been surveying damage and delivering supplies for several days. Air Force C-130s are flying aid missions 24 hours a day.

We are grateful for the hard work of the men and women who wear our Nation's uniform. The *Abraham Lincoln* carrier group is in place near Indonesia and transporting relief supplies by helicopter. Other naval and Marine assets will arrive shortly to generate

clean water and provide further logistical help.

I have sent a delegation headed by Secretary of State Powell and Governor Bush of Florida to the Indian Ocean region. There they will meet with fellow leaders and international organizations to assess relief efforts in place as well as the needs that remain. Secretary Powell and Governor Bush will report their findings directly to me, so we can ensure that our Government provides the most effective assistance possible.

We're showing the compassion of our Nation in the swift response. But the greatest source of America's generosity is not our Government; it's the good heart of the American people. In the weeks since the tsunami struck, private citizens have contributed millions of dollars for disaster relief and reconstruction. Organizations like the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, the Salvation Army, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, CARE, UNICEF, and America Cares responded rapidly after the tsunamis hit. They have reported an outpouring of generosity from around the world.

To draw even greater amounts of private donations, I have asked two of America's most distinguished private citizens to head a nationwide charitable fundraising effort. Both men, both Presidents, know the great decency of our people. They bring tremendous leadership experience to this role, and they bring good hearts. I am grateful to the former Presidents, Clinton and Bush, for taking on this important responsibility and for serving our country once again.

In the coming days, President Clinton and Bush will ask Americans to donate directly to reliable charities already providing help to tsunami victims. Many of these organizations have dispatched experts to the disaster area, and they have an indepth understanding of the resources required to meet the needs on the ground. In this situation, cash donations are most useful, and I've asked the former Presidents to solicit contributions both large and small.

Over the past week, we have seen some of the innovative ways Americans are helping people in need. A coffee roaster in California is handing out bags of coffee for a \$10 donation to the Red Cross. In Virginia Beach, the

owner of a tax assistance firm is making a donation for every tax return he prepares. Worshipers at a Buddhist temple in Houston collected thousands of dollars in cash to send to their sister temple in Sri Lanka. Some people are selling personal items on the Internet and donating the cash to the charities. Many corporations are matching contributions by their employees. And several have shown exceptional generosity by donating large amounts of cash and products to the relief efforts.

Presidents Clinton and Bush will be speaking about the countless ways individuals and businesses can support this urgent cause. I ask every American to contribute as they are able to do so. For more information about how to make a donation, you can visit the USA Freedom Corps web site at www.usafreedomcorps.gov.

Americans have suffered sudden catastrophe many times in our own history, from massive earthquakes in Anchorage and San Francisco to destructive wildfires in the West to the series of hurricanes that struck Florida last year. From our own experiences, we know that nothing can take away the grief of those affected by tragedy. We also know that Americans have a history of rising to meet great humanitarian challenges and of providing hope to suffering peoples. As men and women across the devastated region begin to rebuild, we offer our sustained compassion and our generosity and our assurance that America will be there to help.

The Presidents and I will be going to the embassies of the countries affected to pay our Nation's respects. I'm so grateful that both President Bush and President Clinton have taken time out of their busy schedules to not only serve as a catalyst for people to give money to help but also to join me and Laura in paying our deepest respects to those nations that have been affected by the tsunamis. As well the Presidents will return to the White House compound to talk to members of the press about how to better effect this great relief effort that is now going on in our Nation.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida.

The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks After Signing the Book of Condolence at the Indonesian Embassy

January 3, 2005

It's our honor to come today to pay our respects for those in Indonesia who suffered under this tremendous disaster. I appreciate the former Presidents joining me. I'm proud Laura is here too as we sign the condolence book.

We're also committed to helping the Indonesian Government and the people of Indonesia. Presidents Clinton and Bush have agreed to help tap into the great generosity of the American people by serving as cochairmen of what will be a massive private relief effort. Of course, I will continue to make sure our Government provides relief as well. I look forward to working with the Indonesian Government to help those who need food and medicine and water and shelter to get their lives back in order so that the great country of Indonesia can rise up from this disaster and provide the hope necessary for the people of that important country.

It's our honor to be here with our friend and ally. Mr. Ambassador, thank you for having us. May God bless the people of Indonesia.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Soemadi Brotodiningrat, Indonesian Ambassador to the United States.

Remarks After Signing the Book of Condolence at the Indian Embassy and an Exchange With Reporters

January 3, 2005

Q. Mr. President, you have come this far; are you planning to extend your visit someday to India? It could be before your Presidency—

The President. Well, I appreciate that very much. I was just telling the Ambassador, when I spoke to the Prime Minister I assured him that my intentions were to make it this year to India. In the meantime, though, our