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Week Ending Friday, February 22, 2008

Remarks on Accepting the Grand Cross of the National Order of Benin in Cotonou, Benin

February 16, 2008

Mr. President, thank you. Laura and I are honored to be with you and the First Lady. I gratefully accept this on behalf of the American people. I stand here by your side as a friend, a believer in your vision, and a partner in your willingness to confront the disease and poverty and—that affect mankind.

We would not be standing here if you and your Government was not committed to your people. You mentioned some of the dollar—money we're spending with you, but those dollars come with great compassion from the American people. We care when we see suffering. We believe we're all children of God. And so it's a great honor to accept this award, and the American people send their blessings.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:28 a.m. at Cadjehoun International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to President Thomas Yayi Boni of Benin and his wife, Chantal de Souza Yayi.

The President's News Conference With President Thomas Yayi Boni of Benin in Cotonou

February 16, 2008

President Yayi. Ladies and gentlemen, journalists, on this day, Saturday, February 16, 2008, His Excellency, Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, and his wife, Laura Bush, have honored my Government and the Beninese people as a whole by deciding to conduct a working visit as part of his second trip to Africa. This visit is a followup to the meetings that I had at the White House on December 14, 2006, as part of my working trip to the United States.

Today President Bush and myself have had very fruitful exchanges during our bilateral meeting, as well as during an expanded working meeting with our staffs, in order to review the excellent relations of cooperation which unite the United States and my country, Benin. As you know, during his two terms in office, President Bush showed great concern for Africa, its well-being, and of the development of its people.

I should only mention as evidence the various initiatives on behalf of children, youth, and women, such as the initiative against malaria, the emergency plan against AIDS, the initiative for justice and empowerment of women. For all of these initiatives, Benin was selected by the Government of the United States. Likewise, my country is also benefiting from the President's Millennium Challenge Account initiative, as well as the AGOA, whose ultimate goal is to create the conditions favorable to economic growth on a sustainable manner in order to reduce poverty and build an emerging nation.

During our discussions, we talked about all of the issues of cooperation as well as other international topics, such as settlement of conflicts in Africa, Benin's participation in peacekeeping operations, as well as the reform of the United Nations system.

On behalf of the people of Benin, of my wife, and myself, I'd like to express most sincerely my friendship and all my gratitude to President Bush and to Mrs. Laura Bush for this stay filled with cordiality and conviviality. On behalf of the Beninese people, I would like to thank—wish you a good stay in Africa, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you for your friendship; thank you for your vision. Madam, thank you for your warm hospitality. Laura and I are honored to be here.

You know, we've come to talk about our mutual interests, but we would not be talking about this mutual interests if, Mr. President,

you didn't believe in certain truths and certain values: that all human beings have dignity; that people need a government that responds to their desires and wishes.

And so I come bringing the warm friendship of the people of the United States and reaffirm our desire to help strengthen your democracy by helping the people here realize their God-given talents.

We spent a little time talking about the malaria initiative and your deep desire to make sure every child has got a mosquito net to protect them. I mean, we can save lives with an aggressive, comprehensive strategy. And that's exactly what you're putting in place here in Benin. And I want to thank you for your leadership on that very important issue. We will continue to help you.

I thank very much your focus on education. You know what I know, that a nation can't be a hopeful place unless its youth are educated. So I'm very pleased to be working with you to expand educational opportunities for the people of your country. Through the African Education Initiative, we've helped train about 30,000 teachers and administrators here. We've provided about 1 million textbooks and teaching guides and workbooks. We've helped young girls get a good education. And we're going to spend another $6 million on these efforts, only because you are focused and your Government is dedicated to making sure the money is spent well and wisely. And so I want to thank you for that, sir.

I appreciate very much your mentioning of the Millennium Challenge Account. That account—those monies are given to countries which fight corruption, which invest in the health and education of their children, which believe in marketplace economies. And that's what you do. And that's why we were more than pleased to provide $307 million over a 5-year period; it's because of your leadership, the commitment of your Government to be a trustworthy partner for the people of Benin. This compact is—should touch the lives of about 5 million people here in Benin and help thousands grow out of poverty.

We also really appreciate the fact that your fight against corruption is visible and easy for the people to see. I mean, after all, you've put auditors in place to make sure the people's money is spent well; that, you know, in so doing—and this is such a good lesson.

And one of the reasons I've come here, sir, is because leaders around the world have got to understand that the United States wants to partner with leaders and the people, but we're not going to do so with people that steal money, pure and simple. And the transparency that you put in place and the strong audits that you've got in your country should give the people of your nation great confidence in your Government, because it gives me confidence to stand side by side with you here.

And so I appreciate your conversation we had. You're right; we spent a lot of time talking about a variety of issues. And I'm so honored that you would receive us in such a graceful way. Thank you very—*merci*. [*Laughter*]

A couple of questions, you think? Maybe? Okay.

President's Visit to Benin

Q. Hi, I'm from Beninese television. Mr. President, during this first visit to Benin—this is a first for you, but cooperation between our two countries is been going on for 47 years, but yet it's the first time that we host a President of your great country in our country. So in history, this has been written, but given what has just occurred, is this a diplomatic coup or is it truly a change in the relationships between Benin and the United States? Is this a stunt?

President Bush. Well, I can give you my perspective, and of course, the President will give you his. First of all, I am the first President to have come to Benin. I am here to really confirm to the people of Benin and the people on the continent of Africa that the United States is committed to helping improve people's lives.

And I also have come to a country like Benin to remind our fellow citizens that it's in our national interest to support the people of nations, even though we may not have had relations with them in the past, particularly those nations in which the leadership and the government makes a firm commitment to the investment in its people as well as fighting corruption, marketplace economies. And

I'm—my trip here is a way to remind future Presidents and future Congresses that it is in the national interest and in the moral interests of the United States of America to help people.

I reject some of the old-style type of grants, which basically said, let's feel better; we'll just give some money out. We believe that rather than making ourselves feel better, that our money ought to make the people of a particular country feel better about their government. And that's why the Millennium Challenge Account, for example, has got certain criterion. And your Government has met those criterion.

I would say that it's been a change of relationship. But it's been a change of relationship because the leader have changed attitude toward how government ought to relate to its people. And so, Mr. President, I'm proud to be the first President to be in Benin, and I want to thank you for extending me that invitation.

President Yayi. I believe that perhaps for the journalists who are coming from abroad or my compatriots who are also journalists, I think that you know well my position on this issue. And I must tell you that the visit of the President is a symbol. Perhaps it's a signal to us, because as he just said, he conveys who at least—he is attached to virtue. Virtue means a lot to him. He is here to support the countries which strive to be virtuous, the governments which accept to be working on behalf of their people, to serve their people, especially as part of a clear vision where we say, where are we going? Where are we leading our people?

And we were clear about that today. We want to move towards prosperity and sharing—prosperity, sharing, that means using the resources, the work, economic activity, and so on. Of course, this vision cannot be achieved unless you have the behaviors that—which you have defined, namely to ensure that everything that which stains our democracy, which is the—[*inaudible*]—of the people. Everything that would stains democracy will be suppressed—I should say, eliminated—which is why we want to ensure that our democracy will honor us, ensure education, access to water, to roads, to electricity, telephone, to infrastructure—all of these things without which you cannot create jobs and distribute income.

And we identified these ailments that harm democracy, first and foremost, corruption, Mr. President. And behalf of the Beninese people, I would like to reassure you once again—I did it already last month when I was visiting the United States at the White House—I told you that the people have already defined a mission. The mission that we have defined for ourselves is to guarantee that we can ensure good governance, have the best management of the affairs of a state. And it's at this price that we'll be able to accelerate this march towards prosperity.

So, quite naturally for us, the visit of President Bush is a strong signal, which comforts us in our beliefs. It's an extra support, an extra encouragement in this direction to ensure that this vision will realize itself as quickly as possible for the well-being of our people. And in this regard, during the talks that we have just had, the President himself encouraged us by saying, go ahead, move forward. Do not hesitate. Don't distance yourself from the people. We Americans have to support you, but the issue, the initiatives that we've started in this—in the United States, namely the support against malaria, of course the fight against HIV/AIDS, the emergency plan against HIV/AIDS, the MCA—because all of these initiatives today which reinforce U.S.—the United States position to help the poor and to fight against poverty.

So I do believe this is a good starting point which takes into account the needs of the 21st century.

President Bush. Oh, I'm sorry. Excuse me.

Situations in Darfur and Kenya/U.S. Foreign Aid

Q. [*Inaudible*]—while it's obvious that Benin is a hopeful example of progress on the African Continent, there are a number of other examples, unfortunately, of violence and strife in other places, most notably Kenya. And I'm wondering, Mr. President, how you go about deciding how best to spend your time here on the continent? It seems a bit of a contrast when there are some hopeful signs, but there obviously are a number

of other examples where things are, frankly, in a very tough position right now.

President Bush. Yes. I've always found, Kevin [Kevin Corke, NBC News], that when you herald success, it's—it helps others realize what is possible. And you're right; there's no question, Sudan is a very difficult situation, which we have labeled a genocide and which we're sanctioning some, rallying others to provide aid in the hopes that there will be a robust U.N. force in Darfur that will help relieve the suffering.

As I said in my speech the other day, that the United States will help facilitate the movement of the force. As I told Ban Ki-moon yesterday in the White House, we want to help you, but you must make sure we have a robust force ready to go.

Secondly, Kenya is an issue, and—we're going to be in the neighborhood in Kenya—in Kenya's neighborhood. And that's why I'm sending Secretary Rice there to help the Kofi Annan initiative, all aimed at having a clear message that there be no violence and that there ought to be a power-sharing agreement. You know, this is—but this is a large place with a lot of nations, and no question, not everything is perfect.

On the other hand, there's a lot of great success stories, and the United States is pleased to be involved with those success stories. I want to remind you, Kevin, that when I first became President, there was about 50,000 people receiving antiretroviral drugs to deal with HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa. Today, there's about a million three just from the PEPFAR initiative. In other words, there's great progress being made. And there's a lot more work to be done. One of the reasons I've come on this trip is to say, look at the successes we've had—"we," by the way, is not American successes; these are joint successes—and look at the work that needs to be done.

You know, the malaria initiative is an initiative that is very dear to my heart and Laura's heart, because we weep when we think about little babies needlessly dying. And now we've got a President who is committed to distributing a net to every child under 5 years old. But there are still a lot of places that need work on malaria. And so the reason I go to countries in which we've got good relations, where the leaders are making good choices, is to send a clear signal to others that we want to help you, but you've got to have good leadership, you've got to make right choices, and you've got to set a strategy in place in order to benefit your people.

I'm excited to be here. I really am. You know, it's my second trip as President, Laura's fifth trip as First Lady. I hope that sends a clear commitment that the United States—a clear signal that the United States is committed. We're committed for national security reasons, and that being that these ideologues that murder the innocent people can only attract people when there's hopelessness. They have no clear vision that's positive. But we're also committed for moral reasons. As I told you and told people all the time, to whom much is given, much is required. Well, we've been given a lot in the United States, and I believe we're required to help brothers and sisters in need.

And so thank you for your question, and thanks for traveling with us. This is a great trip.

U.S. Trade Policy

Q. Hi, I am from the Beninese national radio. Mr. President, since you have been in power, you have done trips to the United States and Benin. Last time, you discussed with President Bush of the issue of cotton, American subsidies to their farmers in that country. And we saw with which enthusiasm you tackled this issue because, indeed, cotton is one of the pillars of the Beninese economy. So based on this visit, and up until today, have these things evolved? But is the issue of cotton still a sensitive issue?

President Yayi. I must confess that when we started these discussions, we on purpose did not talk about this, because the President asked us, what is your country ailing of? And I didn't bring up cotton. It's he himself who asked, what about this cotton business; what's going on with cotton? And I thanked him profusely for that.

So of course, he shared his vision with us, and he is encouraging us to diversify the sources of solutions to the problem that we have today, namely the cotton industry. He is aware that in our subregion—when we, for example, look at West Africa, and you add

Central Africa to that, and a—one citizen out of two lives out of that industry. So I do believe of the workers in Burkina Faso and Mali, Niger and Togo, elsewhere, Senegal—and quite naturally, I think of my compatriots who commit themselves everyday that gives them into this line of business.

So, Mr. President, I was expecting that the press would indeed bring up this issue because anybody who decides to fight on behalf of Africa against poverty cannot be—allow the cotton industry to deteriorate or to disappear. I do believe that there's a strong correlation between the health of the cotton industry and the prosperity of our countries.

So you indeed gave us some advice. I could repeat some of this advice. He said, "Do everything you can to bring added value." That's his first piece of advice. And he asked us to translate this into a vision, and this vision must also be part of a political vision and of a strategy. And I answered him, "You are perfectly right." We ourselves—this was the direction that we have chosen for ourselves. But we are limited by various constraints, such as the shortcomings of some of our infrastructure, which are indispensable.

For example, electricity; I even told him that electricity for the textile industry is basically what blood is for the human body. That we do have basic issues, basic shortcomings, in terms of energy, electricity, water, and so on, truly, and if you could help us in that regard. And he told me to—recommend to talk to OPIC, in terms of the United States, and to create a partnership between the private and public sectors to allow us to move ahead.

And I reassured him, and I told him that this issue is being discussed within the communities that we have, ECOWAS, so that we can indeed come up with a subregional strategy, because our countries, taken alone, cannot do anything by themself, especially when you look at the difference in the Asian countries, in terms of their textile agencies. And practically no country in the world can compete against them.

So of course, the President did not fail to follow up this question that I asked him when I was at the White House, namely the issue of subsidies. I think you are, indeed, right. Of course, he believed that this was an American issue, and that it's not even at his level that the core issue is being discussed—it's at the Senate; it's in Congress—and that in reality, his concern is to ensure that these efforts towards other countries—in order to resume the Doha cycle. It's through that Doha cycle that we'll come up with a solution. And he said, "If Europe moves, if China moves, and if everyone else moves this, America moves." And I said, "You're absolutely right." But there's one other issue, because when we talked about—with European leaders, they told me, "Well, if America moves, we Europeans, we will move ourselves." So—and he says, "Now, if Europe moves, well, we will move."

So since the America is the great America, I do hope that great America will move, because I wrote to him when this issue was being debated in Congress. And I told him, truly, please intervene personally to ensure that the United States will indeed be the first to make the move.

So today I applaud the fact that he did remember my request, but he did say you can count on him personally, on great America, to ensure that the Doha round will resume. And of course, we will come up with a solution to this—of world governance—to ensure that international trade can truly help the development of the poorest countries, of which we are.

So that's where we are. That's in the update. I would like to thank him very much, because he was the first one, personally, to ask this question.

President Bush. Yes, I brought it up because it was on his mind. Look, the way to solve this issue is for the Doha round to succeed. And the United States has made moves on agricultural subsidies at the—during the negotiations. As a matter of fact, the talks were stalled earlier in my Presidency, and I gave a speech that said, we're going to move on subsidies, and we expect others to, but we'll take the first step—and have.

And so we'll see what happens. These are serious negotiations, but our attitude is, is that we're willing to reduce agricultural subsidies. We just want to have access to people's markets, just like they've got to our markets. And I told the President I was fairly

optimistic that we can succeed with the Doha round, and we'll keep working it.

I also said that commodities—whether the United States has subsidies or not, commodities—cotton can be overproduced. There's a lot of cotton producers. And so the best way to deal with commodity swings is to be a value-added processor; take the cotton and convert it into a product people want. And that's why we got into the discussion about electricity needs and, you know, is there investment capital available. And now it's in Washington, DC, that OPIC has got some expanded programs that he ought to look into. So it was a good discussion.

Ann [Ann Compton, ABC News].

U.S. Role in Africa/Situation in Darfur

Q. What specifically do you expect to see coming out of Secretary Rice's visit in Kenya for a few hours on Monday? How much can get done on Monday?

And for both of you, at what point does it take more active intervention by an American President in some of the trouble spots here in Africa?

President Bush. Well, first, you know, I've been very active, in this sense: Every time I meet with a world leader that could affect the outcome of a particular issue, I bring it up and expect there to be, you know, focus and concrete action. For example, I've spent a fair amount of time with Hu Jintao on Darfur, talking about the need for us to work collaboratively on Darfur—the same in Burma. In other words, what—these meetings give me an opportunity to talk about ways forward in trouble spots.

In terms of Condi's visit, I will—the key is, is that the leaders hear from her firsthand U.S. desires to see that there be no violence and that there be a power-sharing agreement that will help this nation resolve its difficulties. That's what diplomacy is, and we've been very active on all fronts. Ours—after all, back to Darfur, ours is the first and probably only nation that's declared it a genocide.

And, you know, I had a tough decision to make early on, and that is whether to send troops into Darfur. And I think I've discussed this with you all before, that I made the decision not to, upon the recommendation of a lot of the groups involved in Darfur as well as other folks. I've listened very carefully to their—whether we should or shouldn't, but once you make that decision, then there's not many other avenues except for the United Nations and the peacekeeping forces. And that's where we spend a lot of time and energy trying to get there to be an effective response.

The African Union stepped forward initially. And one of the reasons I'm going to Rwanda is to thank President Kagame for his strong efforts in Darfur as a—as one of the real leaders in providing peacekeepers.

But we've been plenty active on these issues. And we'll continue to be active on these issues because they're important issues for the U.S. security and for our interests.

Well, Mr. President, thank you. Like, press conference over. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 9:59 a.m. at Cadjehoun International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Chantal de Souza Yayi, wife of President Yayi; Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and former Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations; President Hu Jintao of China; and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda. President Yayi and some reporters spoke in French, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

The President's Radio Address

February 16, 2008

Good morning. At the stroke of midnight tonight, a vital intelligence law that is helping protect our Nation will expire. Congress had the power to prevent this from happening, but chose not to.

The Senate passed a good bill that would have given our intelligence professionals the tools they need to keep us safe. But leaders in the House of Representatives blocked a House vote on the Senate bill and then left on a 10-day recess.

Some congressional leaders claim that this will not affect our security. They are wrong. Because Congress failed to act, it will be harder for our Government to keep you safe from terrorist attack. At midnight, the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence will be stripped of their power to authorize new surveillance against terrorist