

Being the temporary custodian of the office has been a privilege of a lifetime. Over the past 8 years, I have been inspired by the character and courage of our Nation, especially the men and women of our Armed Forces. I have been moved by the compassion of our citizens, from those who mentor a child to those who save lives around the world. Most of all, I've been uplifted by the many Americans who have sent their prayers.

And so, with deep gratitude, I offer my own: For all of you in this room, for the success of our next President and those who follow, and for God's continued blessings on our wonderful Nation.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. at the National Portrait Gallery. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution G. Wayne Clough; Martin E. Sullivan, Director, National Portrait Gallery; and painter Aleksander "Sasha" Titovets. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included remarks by the First Lady.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority

December 19, 2008

President Bush. I'm thinking about the first time I met you—I think it was in Jordan—and I can't help but reflect on how far the process has come to bring peace to the Holy Land.

You have done a lot of important and hard work in helping the region understand the importance of two states living side by side in peace. No question, this is a hard challenge, but nevertheless, people must recognize that we have made a good deal of progress. And a lot of it has to do with your leadership, and I thank you.

I was pleased to note that the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution which confirms that bilateral negotiation—the bilateral negotiation process is irreversible, is—and it's a path to a Palestinian state and a path to peace in the Middle East.

And I've been looking forward to this visit. I'm looking forward to getting a briefing on not only the negotiations, the discussions

you've had with Israel, but also the fine progress that's being made on the West Bank, which is a credit to your leadership and the leadership of the Prime Minister.

So welcome, sir, and thank you for coming.

President Abbas. Thank you very much, Mr. President. And thank you for finding the time to meet with us during these days. There is no doubt that we will always remember the efforts that you have undertaken to promote the peace process. You were the first sitting President who accepted as a policy the establishment of two states—a state of Israel and a state of Palestine—living next to each other in peace and security. And this policy has become a reality in every corner around the world.

And we also remember very fondly, Mr. President, the great efforts that you have undertaken to convene the Annapolis conference after so many years of absent peace process accords. This conference was attended by representatives from more than 50 countries from around the world and made it a reality that the roadmap would be the way to go.

Also the Annapolis conference talked about and promoted the bilateral direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians over the fundamental and basic issues. These basic issues, as we all know, they include Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, water, security, as well as prisoners. And of course, you pushed very hard for the two sides to carry out their commitments based on phase one of the roadmap and to carry out their responsibilities. And you were clear about both Palestinian commitments as well as Israeli commitments.

On the basis of your efforts and the convening of the Annapolis conference, two other conferences took place—the Paris and the Berlin conferences. And during the Paris conference, there was an agreement in order to support financially, in a very generous way, the Palestinian Authority. After that, we have seen on the grounds that the West Bank was much calmer, and there was performance on security throughout that part of Palestine. And we also appreciate the efforts that were given to us in the area of security, which helped our own security apparatus to carry out their responsibilities.

Also developments took place on issues in the West Bank, such as progress on security, as well as the economic situation, as well as the social conditions.

There is no doubt that we exerted efforts also to promote the peace process under your leadership during the last year; and together we put the fundamental, basic things needed for the peace process. There is no doubt that we will continue these efforts and the peace negotiations. But everything will be based on the foundation, and that foundation was laid by you during your time in office. Because we are committed to the peace process—and this is not a slogan or a rhetorical commitment: We are practically committed to the peace process. And we are confident all these efforts will be transferred to the new administration that will continue to do its part regarding the peace process.

Some might say that all these efforts perhaps went in vain. I happen to disagree. I believe that they have cemented the real principles that carried out the peace process and the negotiations forward. And here I have also to mention the Arab League peace initiative to promote peace, which is actually published today in a number of newspapers, including American newspapers today. And the purpose of this also coincides to cement your vision of two states as well as the principle of land for peace.

We are here today, Mr. President, in order to express our appreciation for your efforts. And we know very well that we would not have been able to go that far in our work without your support and the promotion of the peace process.

I also would like to take the opportunity to thank members of your own administration: Secretary Rice, as well as Mr. Hadley, those people who worked with us tirelessly.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. *Shukran jazeelan.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. President Abbas spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Proclamation 8330—To Take Certain Actions Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Generalized System of Preferences

December 19, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

1. Section 506A(a)(1) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (the “1974 Act”) (19 U.S.C. 2466a(a)(1)), as added by section 111(a) of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (title I of Public Law 106–200) (AGOA), authorizes the President to designate a country listed in section 107 of the AGOA (19 U.S.C. 3706) as a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country if the President determines that the country meets the eligibility requirements set forth in section 104 of the AGOA (19 U.S.C. 3703) and the eligibility criteria set forth in section 502 of the 1974 Act (19 U.S.C. 2462).

2. Section 104 of the AGOA authorizes the President to designate a country listed in section 107 of the AGOA as an eligible sub-Saharan African country if the President determines that the country meets certain eligibility requirements.

3. Section 112(c) of the AGOA (19 U.S.C. 3721(c)), as added by section 6002(a) of the Africa Investment Incentive Act of 2006 (division D, title VI of Public Law 109–432), provides special rules for certain apparel articles imported from lesser developed beneficiary sub-Saharan African countries.

4. In Proclamation 8157 of June 28, 2007, I designated the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (Mauritania) as an eligible sub-Saharan African country and a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country pursuant to section 104 of the AGOA and section 506A(a)(1) of the 1974 Act and provided that it would be considered a lesser developed beneficiary sub-Saharan African country for purposes of section 112(c) of the AGOA.

5. Section 506A(a)(3) of the 1974 Act (19 U.S.C. 2466a(a)(3)) authorizes the President to terminate the designation of a country as a beneficiary sub-Saharan African country for purposes of section 506A if he determines that the country is not making continual