

Statement on a Meeting of the Interagency Task Force To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

March 15, 2012

Nearly 150 years ago, in issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, President Abraham Lincoln reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to the enduring cause of freedom. Then as now, we remain steadfast in our resolve to see that all men, women, and children have the opportunity to realize this greatest of gifts. Yet millions around the world, including here in the United States, toil under the boot of modern slavery. Mothers and fathers are forced to work in fields and factories against their will or in service to debts that can never be repaid. Sons and daughters are sold for sex, abducted as child soldiers, or coerced into involuntary labor. In dark corners of our world and hidden in plain sight in our own communities, human beings are exploited for financial gain and subjected to unspeakable cruelty.

Slavery remains the affront to human dignity and stain on our collective conscience that it has always been. That is why members of my Cabinet and senior advisers gathered at the White House today, at a meeting chaired by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to lay out their plans for meeting this challenge. The United States is committed to eradicating trafficking in persons, and we will draw on tools

ranging from law enforcement and victim service provision to public awareness building and diplomatic pressure. Because we know that Government efforts are not enough, we are also increasing our partnerships with a broad coalition of local communities, faith-based and nongovernmental organizations, schools, and businesses.

To bring all these elements together and to be sure we are maximizing our efforts, today I am directing my Cabinet to find ways to strengthen our current work and to expand on partnerships with civil society and the private sector so that we can bring more resources to bear in fighting this horrific injustice. In the coming weeks, the White House will build on this gathering on behalf of human dignity. I am confident that we will one day end the scourge of modern slavery because I believe in those committed to this issue: young people, people of faith and station, Americans who refuse to accept this injustice and will not rest until it is vanquished. Today I reaffirm that the United States stands with them and that together we will realize the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation and our country's ideal of freedom.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Regarding the Comprehensive Interagency Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication

March 15, 2012

Dear _____:

Pursuant to section 1055 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, I am providing an update on my Administration's comprehensive interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication, which was submitted to the Congress in March 2010.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Daniel K. Inouye, chairman, and W. Thad Cochran, vice chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Carl M. Levin, chairman, and John S. McCain III, ranking member, Senate Committee on Armed Services; John F. Kerry, chairman, and Richard G. Lugar, ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Harold D. Rogers, chairman, and Norman D. Dicks, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations; Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, chairman, and Adam Smith, ranking member,

House Committee on Armed Services; and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chairman, and Howard L.

Berman, ranking member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser in Chicago, Illinois March 16, 2012

Hello, Chicago! Thank you! Thank you so much. It is good to be home! Good to be home. Thank you very much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you so much.

I have never seen the city look prettier, I have to say. And every time I come back, I am just overwhelmed with not only the beauty of this city, but I was explaining to folks as we were flying over—Dick Durbin flew in with me—what makes this place so special is not just that this is where my daughters were born, not just where I really started my political career, but I've got so many good friends, so many relationships. And as I look out across the room, seeing so many folks who put up with me—[laughter]—before I was President and helped me get there, it is just extraordinary.

So I miss you guys. I wish I could stay the weekend—[laughter]—especially this weekend, because we all know there is no better place to be on St. Patrick's Day than in Chicago.

Let me say just thank you to, first of all, one of the finest attorney generals in the country. She proved it again in helping us to get this settlement on the housing issue—Lisa Madigan is doing outstanding work. The senior Senator of the great State of Illinois and one of my dearest friends, Dick Durbin is in the house. The Governor of the great State of Illinois, Pat Quinn; you've got a new mayor here—[laughter]—I don't know how he's doing, but he seems to have a little bit of energy—Mr. Rahm Emanuel.

We got Representatives Bobby Rush and Jan Schakowsky in the house. County Board President and my former Alderwoman, Toni Preckwinkle. The trees were always trimmed. [Laughter] Snow was shoveled when Toni was in charge. And I want to thank Axelrod and Penny and Daley for the preprogram.

Now, you might have noticed that we have some guests in Illinois this week. Apparently, things haven't quite wrapped up on the other

side. [Laughter] So there is actually some interest in the primary that we have here on Tuesday.

And my message to all the candidates is, "Welcome to the Land of Lincoln"—[laughter]—because I'm thinking maybe some Lincoln will rub off on them while they are here. [Laughter]

Now, we remember Lincoln as the leader who saved our Union, but this is a President who, in the midst of the Civil War, launched the transcontinental railroad, understanding that in order for America to grow, we had to stitch ourselves together, to be connected, coast to coast.

He set up the first land-grant colleges in the midst of war, because this largely self-taught man understood that education could give people the chance to real their—realize their potential, and if we were able to give that kid on a farm the opportunity to learn, that that would be good for all of us, not just for that kid; created the National Academy of Sciences to promote the discovery and innovation that would lead to new jobs and entire new industries.

Lincoln, the first Republican President, knew that if we as a nation, through our Federal Government, didn't act to facilitate these things, then they likely wouldn't happen, and as a result, we'd all be worse off. He understood that we are a people that take great pride in our self-reliance and our independence but that we are also one Nation and one people and that we rise or fall together.

So I hope that while my counterparts on the other side enjoy the outstanding hospitality of the people of Illinois and spend some money here to promote our economy—[laughter]—I hope they also take a little bit of time to reflect on this great man, the first Republican President.

Of course, you may not feel confident that will happen. You may be watching some of this