

Statement on the Death of King George Tupou V of Tonga

March 19, 2012

With the passing yesterday of King George Tupou V of Tonga, the United States has lost a friend and the people of Tonga have lost a visionary leader. Upon ascending to the throne, King George championed a process of peaceful democratization that led to the first majority elected Parliament of Tonga taking office in 2010. As I said when I met with the King at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy graduation last

spring, Tonga is one of the United States closest partners among the Pacific Island States, and we are grateful for its role in Afghanistan, where Tonga makes an active contribution to the international coalition. On behalf of all Americans, I extend my deepest condolences to the Queen Mother Halaevalu Mata'aho, the royal family, and the people of Tonga on the passing of King George Tupou V.

Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2012

Today Michelle and I extend our best wishes to all those who are celebrating Nowruz around the world. In communities and homes from America to Southwest Asia, families and friends are coming together to celebrate the hope that comes with renewal.

To the people of Iran, this holiday comes at a time of continued tension between our two countries. But as people gather with their families, do good deeds, and welcome a new season, we're also reminded of the common humanity that we share.

There is no reason for the United States and Iran to be divided from one another. Here in the United States, Iranian Americans prosper and contribute greatly to our culture. This year, an Iranian production, "A Separation," won America's highest honor for a foreign film. Our navies have confronted the danger of piracy, with U.S. sailors even rescuing Iranian citizens who had been taken hostage. And from Facebook to Twitter, from cell phones to the Internet, our people use the same tools to talk to one another and to enrich our lives.

Yet, increasingly, the Iranian people are denied the basic freedom to access the information that they want. Instead, the Iranian Government jams satellite signals to shut down television and radio broadcasts. It censors the Internet to control what the Iranian people can see and say. The regime monitors computers and cell phones for the sole purpose of protect-

ing its own power. And in recent weeks, the Internet restrictions have become so severe that Iranians can't communicate freely with their loved ones within Iran or beyond its borders. Technologies that should empower citizens are being used to repress them.

Because of the actions of the Iranian regime, an electronic curtain has fallen around Iran, a barrier that stops the free flow of information and ideas into the country and denies the rest of the world the benefit of interacting with the Iranian people, who have so much to offer.

I want the Iranian people to know that America seeks a dialogue to hear your views and understand your aspirations. That's why we set up a virtual Embassy so you can see for yourselves what the United States is saying and doing. We're using Farsi on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. And even as we've imposed sanctions on the Iranian Government, today my administration is issuing new guidelines to make it easier for American businesses to provide software and services into Iran that will make it easier for the Iranian people to use the Internet.

The United States will continue to draw attention to the electronic curtain that is cutting the Iranian people off from the world. And we hope that others will join us in advancing a basic freedom for the Iranian people: the freedom to connect with one another and with their fellow human beings.

Over the last year, we have learned once more that suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. The Iranian people are the heirs to a great and ancient civilization. Like people everywhere, they have the universal right to think and speak for themselves. The Iranian Government has a responsibility to respect these rights, just as it has a responsibility to meet its obligations with regard to its nuclear program. Let me say again that if the Iranian Government pursues a responsible path, it will be welcome once more among the community of nations and the Iranian people will have greater opportunities to prosper.

So, in this season of new beginnings, the people of Iran should know that the United

States of America seeks a future of deeper connections between our people, a time when the electronic curtain that divides us is lifted and your voices are heard, a season in which mistrust and fear are overcome by mutual understanding and our common hopes as human beings.

Thank you, and *Eid-eh Shoma Mobarak*.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded at approximately 12:05 p.m. on March 19 in the Blue Room at the White House. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20. The Office of the Press Secretary also released Persian and Arabic language transcripts of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Enda Kenny of Ireland March 20, 2012

President Obama. Well, it is my great pleasure to welcome once again Taoiseach, Mr. Kenny, who has done, I think, extraordinary work during a very difficult time. Over the last several years, we've been able to strike up a friendship. And you'll notice that even though technically it is not St. Patrick's Day, we like to prolong the party around here. Technically, most of the Americans who celebrate St. Patrick's Day aren't Irish anyway—[laughter]—so we shouldn't go on technicalities.

I want to thank the Taoiseach, his lovely wife, and all of the people of Ireland for the extraordinary hospitality they showed Michelle and I when we had the chance to travel there recently. It was a magical day. It was too short, so I provided assurances that we will be returning. But the warmth and the good will that was expressed towards us I think was really representative of the deep bonds that exist between the United States and Ireland, bonds that are almost unique among two countries around the world. And the impact obviously that Ireland and Irish American—that Irish culture has had on the United States is almost unparalleled.

We have had a terrific discussion about a wide range of issues. Obviously, for both of our countries, one of the biggest priorities is getting the economy moving in the right direction

and putting our people back to work. And the Taoiseach described to me the steps that they've taken to try to stabilize the banking system there, to get control of their budget, and to be in a position to grow in the future.

And it is important that both the people of Ireland and the American people understand the extraordinary benefits of trade, commerce, and investment between our two countries. We are obviously an extraordinary contributor to investment in Ireland, and that's something of great importance to the people of Ireland. Conversely, Irish businesses invest and employ huge numbers of Americans as well.

And so we are continuing to identify and describe additional areas where we can strengthen those strong economic bonds. And I expressed to the Taoiseach my confidence in not only his government's ability to get Ireland moving again, but also we consulted on the broader issue of how Europe can begin to grow again, which obviously has an impact on our economy.

I also had an opportunity to thank him for the continued exemplary efforts by the men and women in uniform in Ireland who contribute to peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts all around the world, from Kosovo to Lebanon. As I've said before, Ireland punches above its