

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.