

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Christine O'Brien, New Jersey organizer, who introduced the President, and Donna Dees-Thomases, founder, Million Mom March; and Michael D. Barnes, president, Handgun Control, Inc. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on the Death of Former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi of Japan

May 14, 2000

Hillary and I are deeply saddened by the death of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. I want to extend our deepest condolences to his wife, Chizuko, his family, and his nation.

Japan has lost a strong and vibrant leader. The United States has lost one of our closest friends.

I had the honor of meeting with Prime Minister Obuchi several times after he became Prime Minister in 1998. I visited him in Tokyo that fall, and he came to Washington for a memorable visit in May 1999. In all our meetings, I was impressed by his effective statesmanship and his personal warmth. He believed ardently, as I do, in a U.S.-Japanese partnership built upon shared values and mutual respect. The personal friendship he and I forged helped us act on that belief and strengthened our desire to address all the issues affecting our two countries in a spirit of true friendship. The bonsai tree he gave me, and which he tended himself, is a living symbol of our alliance.

The job of Prime Minister is never easy, but Keizo Obuchi met every challenge with courage and confidence. He embodied before the world the famous Japanese virtues of honor, loyalty, and determination. He became known for imitating the art and skill of an orchestra conductor in finding harmony among people of different views. From his first days in office, he took swift steps to meet the economic challenges facing Japan, and he also gave strong support to the cause of peace—from Kosovo to East Timor. Prime Minister Obuchi worked hard in countless ways to strengthen our alliance and to place

it on a new foundation for the 21st century. The friendship between our peoples remains the cornerstone of stability in east Asia and was greatly strengthened by his lifetime of building bridges between us.

Prime Minister Obuchi touched the hearts of Americans in simple, human ways: when he threw out what he called an unhittable pitch to Sammy Sosa; when he reminded us of the honor he felt meeting Robert Kennedy as young man; when he told us how he drew from that meeting new inspiration for the noble privilege of serving a great people.

On behalf of all Americans, I am grateful for Prime Minister Obuchi's dedicated, principled public service and for all he did to build for us a brighter future. I will work closely with Prime Minister Mori to continue our close cooperation with Japan.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Situation in Sierra Leone

May 12, 2000

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Military forces of the Government of Sierra Leone and Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) forces provided by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were engaged in military operations in Sierra Leone against the insurgent Revolutionary United Front (RUF) until mid-1999. At that time, the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF signed the Lome Peace Agreement, which provides for an end to hostilities and the disarmament, demobilization, and resettlement of the insurgent RUF forces. The United Nations Security Council in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1270 and 1289 established the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to facilitate implementation of the Lome Agreement and provide security at key locations and government buildings and at all sites of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program, among other tasks.

Recently, as UNAMSIL expanded its efforts to establish monitoring and disarmament sites in or near RUF-controlled territory, RUF forces initiated military activity

in those areas, killing at least four peacekeepers, and capturing or isolating hundreds of UNAMSIL personnel. The situation is critical. The United States is consulting with the United Nations, members of the U.N. Security Council, troop-contributing countries and West African States on ways to resolve the crisis.

The U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone has drawn down its Embassy personnel and evacuated U.S. citizens to minimize the number of U.S. citizens exposed to risk. The Ambassador and a small support staff will remain in Freetown for the time being to monitor the situation. As a prudent planning measure, a U.S. coastal patrol vessel, USS THUNDERBOLT (PC 12), has deployed to the region to participate in an evacuation operation of U.S. personnel should such action become warranted. This vessel and her crew are equipped with the normal complement of weapons.

The United Kingdom informed us that it was deploying an aircraft carrier and an amphibious readiness group to Sierra Leone to prepare to participate in evacuation operations if necessary. Some of the units identified to participate in such an operation include U.S. military personnel on exchange programs with the British military. The British government requested permission for a small number of U.S. military exchange personnel to deploy with their units if they were directed to participate in evacuation operations in Sierra Leone. Secretary of Defense Cohen has authorized these U.S. exchange personnel to deploy to Sierra Leone with their host units in support of these activities.

On May 12, a U.S. C-17 aircraft is scheduled to deliver urgently required ammunition and other supplies and equipment to Sierra Leone for the Jordanian contingent in UNAMSIL. The United States will provide further transportation support for the U.N. mission and its contingents. Such transportation support may result in the temporary presence of logistics aircraft and associated support personnel, including, as appropriate, force protection elements at the international airport near Freetown. In addition, the United States has sent an advance party of military logistics planners of the U.S. European Command to Nigeria to discuss with

Nigerian officials their specific airlift requirements should it become necessary to move military forces from Nigeria into Sierra Leone.

These actions have been taken pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive. I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution. I appreciate the support of the Congress in these matters.

Sincerely,

William J. Clinton

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Strom Thurmond, President pro tempore of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 15.

Remarks at a Peace Officers Memorial Ceremony

May 15, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you, Gil Gallegos, for your kind remarks and your leadership and all these years we have spent working together. I want to say to you and all the other leaders of this organization and the auxiliary—Lmae Tull, Steve Young, Jim Pasco, and others—how much I appreciate what you have done in working with me and Attorney General Reno, Secretary Summers, and the other members of our administration.

I also want to thank the Members of Congress who support us every year. I see Congressman Gilman and Senator Kennedy over there. There may be others from Congress here, but I thank them for coming.

I thank the law enforcement executives, chiefs, and the rank and file members across America who are here today. And most of all, I thank the many family members of our fallen officers who have come here to observe this event in the midst of all their pain and loss. I appreciate the support of our fellow Americans for your endeavors.

Today they were embodied by the wonderful song my long-time friend Tony Bennett sang—I thought he was terrific. And they are embodied by the prayers and actions of so