

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:37 a.m. at the Emirates Palace Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion With Young Arab Leaders in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

January 14, 2008

The President. Thank you, sir. I'm proud to be with you. Your Highness, thank you very much. I appreciate you picking this particular location. It is a fantastic view of your—of Dubai.

First of all, just a couple of impressions—I'm most impressed with what I've seen here. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong and, equally importantly, the desire to make sure that all aspects of society are—have hope and encouragement. And I appreciate your leadership, Your Highness.

And I want to thank you, sir, for having me. I'm looking forward to talking to the young leaders from around the region. I will answer your questions. And I also want you to understand something about America: that we respect you; we respect your religion; and we want to work together for the sake of freedom and peace.

And I thank—I'm particularly pleased to know that you have set up interchanges with some of the young in my country. You'll find them to be compassionate, decent people who share the same goals and dreams. And so I want to thank you for coming.

Your Highness, I'm so honored by your hospitality.

Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktum. Thank you, sir. It is our pleasure to have you.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:22 p.m. at the Burj Al Arab Hotel.

Proclamation 8215—Religious Freedom Day, 2008

January 14, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Thomas Jefferson counted the freedom of worship as one of America's greatest blessings. He said it was "a liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government, and yet proved by our experience to be its best support." On Religious Freedom Day, we celebrate the 1786 passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

The freedom to worship according to one's conscience is one of our Nation's most cherished values. It is the first protection offered in the Bill of Rights: that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In America, people of different faiths can live together united in peace, tolerance, and humility. We are committed to the proposition that as equal citizens of the United States of America, all are free to worship as they choose.

In an era during which an unprecedented number of nations have embraced individual freedom, we have also witnessed the stubborn endurance of religious repression. Religious freedom belongs not to any one nation, but to the world, and my Administration continues to support freedom of worship at home and abroad. On Religious Freedom Day and throughout the year, we recognize the importance of religious freedom and the vital role it plays in spreading liberty and ensuring human dignity.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim January 16, 2008, as Religious Freedom Day. I call on all Americans to reflect on the great blessing of religious liberty, endeavor to preserve this freedom for future generations, and commemorate this day with appropriate events and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of January, in

the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., January 16, 2008]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on January 17.

Interview With Journalists in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

January 15, 2008

Press Secretary Dana Perino. We'll start on the record, just some general comments and answer a couple of questions. And then if you feel like you want to go off the record, then we'll ask them to turn their tape recorders off.

The President. Okay, I'd like to go off the record. [Laughter]

Q. Give us a couple. [Laughter]

The President. We'll start with the older people first. [Laughter]

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice/Iraq

Q. Well, one of the things that we were all interested in is Secretary Rice going to Iraq. When did you decide about that, and what's that all about?

The President. Decided when it looked like that there was serious momentum on the legislative front, that she could help push the momentum by her very presence. So I can't remember the exact moment; I would say it was maybe 10 days ago or something like that, when we were getting word that their budget moving, the deBa'ath law was on its—it had gone through two readings, I think, before the holidays. So it seemed to make sense that she go sit down with the—and the Presidency Council happened to meet yesterday, which was good. So she's going to go and sit down with the leaders and encourage them to continue making progress.

Q. But not you—you decided it wasn't right for you to go.

The President. Yes. Yes, I decided it was best for Condi to go. I'm not going.

By the way, I talk to the Prime Minister quite frequently on secure SVTS, which is

a real-time feed from our Embassy in Baghdad to the Situation Room in the White House. And we meet biweekly. I meet with Ryan Crocker and David—General Petraeus weekly, and it's like a meeting.

Q. So she's just in and out? This is real quick?

The President. Yes, she'll be back this evening; probably hold a press conference here this evening. The Saudis want to have a press conference with the Foreign Minister and Condi. Yes, it's just a quick trip.

Press Secretary Perino. Timing and location are still being worked out.

The President. Time and location because, you know, you don't want to set the time and have her not be back for it. But her intention is to get back here for dinner at the King's ranch.

Q. What time—

The President. She left this morning at 6:40 a.m.—or left the facility here at 6:40 a.m. And I presume it's, like, on the news, right?

Q. Yes.

The President. I haven't seen the news.

Q. It's been reported.

Q. So is it basically to promote—

The President. It's to, first of all, be there. And secondly is to—there's a momentum; there's a political process that has been working that is—with some of those laws coming to fruition. Her job is to be there, sitting down with them, explaining how much we appreciate what they've done, how they need to do more and keep moving the process.

Progress in Iraq

Q. You know, we've been talking about these benchmarks for so long. Do you really feel like maybe now it's starting to turn a corner a bit, or is that too early to say?

The President. First of all, I think—we've been talking about the benchmarks for how long? When you say "so long"—

Q. Almost a year now, isn't it?

The President. Yes, I think that's right; it has been almost a year. A political system evolves and grows. It grows when people have confidence. It grows when the grass-roots begins to agitate for change. It grows