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For Immediate Release
January 29, 2005

President's Radio Address

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning.

Tomorrow the world will witness a turning point in the history of Iraq, a milestone in the advance of freedom, and a crucial advance in the war on terror. The Iraqi people will make their way to polling centers across their nation. On the national ballot alone, voters will choose from nearly 19,000 candidates competing for seats in the Transitional National Assembly, in the country's 18 provincial councils, and in the Kurdistan National Assembly.

This historic event will be overseen by the Independent Election Commission of Iraq, and will mark the first genuine, nationwide elections in generations. The terrorists and those who benefited from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein know that free elections will expose the emptiness of their vision for Iraq. That is why they will stop at nothing to prevent or disrupt this election.

The terrorist Zarqawi -- who plans and orders many of the car bombings and beheadings in Iraq -- recently acknowledged the threat that democracy poses to his cult of hatred. "Of democracy in Iraq," he said, "we have declared a fierce war against this evil principle." He denounced as infidels all who seek to exercise their right to vote as free human beings.

Yet in the face of this intimidation, the Iraqi people are standing firm. Tomorrow's elections will happen because of their courage and determination. All throughout Iraq, these friends of freedom understand the stakes. In the face of assassination, brutal violence and calculated intimidation, Iraqis continue to prepare for the elections and to campaign for their candidates. They know what democracy will mean for their country: a future of peace, stability, prosperity and justice for themselves and for their children. One resident of Baghdad said, "This election represents what is possible. To me, it's the start of a new life."

This election is also important for America. Our nation has always been more secure when freedom is on the march. As hope and freedom spread, the appeal of terror and hate will fade. And there is not a democratic nation in our world that threatens the security of the United States. The best way to ensure the success of democracy is through the advance of democracy.

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Tomorrow's vote will be the latest step in Iraq's journey to permanent democracy and freedom. Those elected to the transitional National Assembly will help appoint a new government that will fully and fairly represent the diversity of the Iraqi people. This assembly will also be charged with drafting a permanent constitution that will be put to a vote of the Iraqi people this fall. If approved, a new nationwide election will follow in December that will choose a new government under this constitution.

As democracy takes hold in Iraq, America's mission there will continue. Our military forces, diplomats and civilian personnel will help the newly-elected government of Iraq establish security and train Iraqi military police and other forces. Terrorist violence will not end with the election. Yet the terrorists will fail, because the Iraqi people reject their ideology of murder.

Over the past year, the world has seen successful elections in Afghanistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Palestinian territories. In countries across the broader Middle East, from Morocco to Bahrain, governments are enacting new reforms and increasing participation for their people.

Tomorrow's election will add to the momentum of democracy. One Iraqi, speaking about the upcoming vote, said, "Now, most people feel they are living in darkness. It is time for us to come into the light." Every Iraqi who casts his or her vote deserves the admiration of the world. And free people everywhere send their best wishes to the Iraqi people as they move further into the light of liberty.

Thank you for listening.

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