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PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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## Background Briefing on President Bush's Visit to Nigeria

Filing Center Abuja, Nigeria

12:51 P.M. (Local)

MR. MCCORMACK: Good afternoon once again. We have a second background briefing this afternoon with a senior administration official who is going to be talking about the President's meeting this morning with President Obasanjo, as well as other aspects related to his visit here today. I'll turn it over to our briefer now.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thank you. Good afternoon. I will first read out the President's day in Nigeria so far, and then talk a little bit about the trip as a whole.

As you know, he went to the National Hospital this morning, he met with mothers who are benefiting from the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of funding. They also held a roundtable in which he met with some of the doctors and nurses and beneficiaries of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission initiative.

The President asked questions specifically related to how we would implement the emergency plan, questions about the distribution of ARVs, the capacity of the Nigerian people and government and states to develop a health infrastructure, and what work are they doing on prevention education strategies. The purpose, as he said in that meeting, is really to save a generation. And so he felt it quite beneficial to actually meet with the people who are implementing that initiative.

In the bilateral meeting with President Obasanjo, they covered a wide range of issues -- economic reform. President Obasanjo particularly laid out his new program for reform in addressing cooperation. They talked about Liberia extensively, and the nature of USG cooperation with Nigeria, ECOWAS, and the U.N.

President Obasanjo talked about our anti-crime cooperation, particularly on drug trafficking and money laundering. And obviously, they discussed their joint commitment to addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the role of AGOA in building a trade relationship.

At one point, the President said to President Obasanjo -- and I think that this really captures the spirit of his whole trip to Africa -- he said to President Obasanjo: As I fly over Africa and see the vast fertile landscape, I know that Africa can be feeding itself and the world. Africa can be the world's bread basket. This is a continent of vast potential. And the United States wants to find out -- my purpose here

is to find out what we can do to help the continent become more self-sufficient.

And I think that really sort of reflects both the last meeting, the last day, and the entire trip. He's been -- the President has been very focused on trying to better understand the challenges that are facing Africa, and looking at how, one, his initiatives currently underway can support and solve those challenges, but also looking to African leadership in addressing the challenges. He's repeatedly stated that it's not going to be the United States or any other power outside of Africa that's going to really address these challenges. It needs to come from within. So I think that he's met with African leaders that he sees as real partners in addressing the challenges and realizing the vast potential of the continent.

Q Very quickly on today bilat, do you know if the subject of oil came up? Did they talk about that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It did, in fact. More than three-quarters of the way into the meeting, they realized that they hadn't talked about the oil industry. And normally, the President is used to seeing the Minister of Energy in the meetings; he was not in this meeting. And so the President asked President Obasanjo how was the oil industry, what are they doing in terms of using gas to leverage their economic growth and development.

The President was particularly interested in sort of looking over the horizon. It came up in the context of the discussion on AGOA. And the President was making the point that it's very unlikely that Africa's future will rest in developing textiles, specifically when preferences for textiles are eliminated entirely and you have a main competitor like China. And he was asking President Obasanjo, how can you go into high-tech and other areas to build your economy? And in that context, oil came up in terms of using the gas, the gas reserves that they have here.

Q And that was pretty much it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That was it.

Q How much time did they spend on it? What percentage of the meeting did they spend on oil? I mean, I'm just trying to get an idea of --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Very, very limited. I can look in my notes. First they talked about the economic reform agenda, spent quite a lot of time -- President Obasanjo spent quite a lot of time and detail on his new economic program and what measures he's taking, again, as I said to deal with corruption. The second topic that they spent significant time on was Liberia and Charles Taylor. And the third topic was in HIV/AIDS.

It was three-quarters of the way into the meeting that, in the context of AGOA -- they then went to AGOA, and in the context of AGOA, the issue of ag and oil came up together as how can you build out -- not look at AGOA just as textiles, but what do you have, what natural resources do you have in-country. The President asked what other minerals does Nigeria have to develop. And they talked about they have gold, they have bauxite and they have other minerals. And so it was in the context of looking beyond textiles for AGOA. So it was a limited portion of the meeting.

Q On economic reform, did President Bush push the President to do more?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, President Obasanjo went through an extensive agenda of what economic reforms he's taking, what economic measures he's taking. And so there wasn't really a need to press for more, because it was a full brief with his new Minister of Finance, who comes from the World Bank, also participating in that part of the conversation.

Q Could you be a little bit more specific about what they discussed as far as Liberia? And in particular, did President Obasanjo give him any update on negotiations to get Taylor to leave?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes. There was there was discussion about Taylor, and specifically President Bush welcomed President Obasanjo's leadership in talking to Charles Taylor about leaving and the conditions for his leaving. I think the thing that came out in this meeting that was a bit different was a fuller brief on what President Taylor was expecting when he if he comes to Nigeria. And President Obasanjo briefed President Bush on his conversations with other heads of state at the AU, President Mbeki and others, about how they can assist in ensuring that Taylor leaves Liberia.

Q Specifically, what is it he's looking for? Immunity from war crimes, obviously, perhaps?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, it was actually more so him and his family leaving, who he was bringing with him was much more of the conversation.

Q Did they discuss

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for one last question.

Q Well, I wouldn't like this to be the last since it's a follow-up. Did they discuss President Obasanjo's feeling that Mr. Taylor, should he come here, should not face the War Crimes Tribunal? And did they discuss President Obasanjo's feeling that Taylor is right to not want to leave before the peacekeepers arrive?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They discussed the latter point. The issue of the War Crimes Tribunal didn't come up in the bilateral meeting with all of us.

Q And the President -- President Bush was comfortable with Mr. Obasanjo's feeling that Mr. Taylor should not leave Liberia until the peacekeepers arrive?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There was a discussion about needing to make sure that the conditions were in place when Taylor leaves that Liberia doesn't break out into chaos. So it wasn't so much the specific timing of Taylor leaving, but the recognition that the situation has to be such that his departure won't lead to a vacuum.

Q Just real quick on the national security issue on HIV and AIDS. President Bush keeps talking about the heart issue. A while back, Colin Powell said something about the fact that AIDS was a national security issue. Can you go into the reasoning as of why AIDS in Africa is a national security issue here and abroad?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think that when President Bush is talking about HIV/AIDS, and this administration is talking about HIV/AIDS, we've always said that we have an integrated strategy. And the importance of it was that HIV/AIDS, the scale of the pandemic in Africa can so undermine societies -- it's killing off teachers, it's killing off the military, the civil service, your police. And so it probably -- and the President has said many times, it's the biggest threat that Africa is facing. And so it has the capacity to completely undermine all positive reforms economically, socially and politically.

And so I think that that's the sense in which the HIV/AIDS is a global threat. It's a threat that the world has to take very serious, because it so undermines the societies.

Q Is it almost viewed to a point with the SARS issue, trying to contain it, reduce it and contain it here, to prevent it from spreading even more so, into the United States from persons coming here -- from here to there?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, no. Not at all. It's not an issue of containing it; it's an issue of, as the President says, over and over, actually wiping out this pandemic. So we're not trying to prevent its spread any particular place, we're trying to prevent its spread in human beings and individuals. It is a health threat. It's a virus that attacks the body and kills you. So what we're trying to do is wipe out this virus. And so it's not a containment strategy; it is a strategy to actually defeat what has become a global health threat.

MR. MCCORMACK: Thank you very much.

END 1:01 P.M. (Local)

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