

course, brought up the issue. And he was very firm about the need for a friend to treat a friend as a friend when it comes to visas.

Look, this is a tough issue. And we changed law. And now there are ways forward for the people applying for visas. A lot of it has to do with rejection rates. And as the Prime Minister noted, the rejection rates are changing quite dramatically. And so of course this will be taken into account.

I fully understand the frustrations. And if I were living in Poland, I'd be—and wanted to come to America, I'd be frustrated too. And the truth of the matter is, we're going from one era to the next. We're going from a time when the—during the Soviet era, when there was a different motivation by the people. And we're adjusting. And I fully understand the pace of adjustment doesn't meet expectations inside Poland.

And so I'm very sympathetic. But the law is changing. The paradigm is shifting. And I hope at some point in time, obviously, that the frustrations of our friends and allies are able to be eased with more moderate visa policy.

Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; Lt. Gen. William M. Fraser III, USAF, U.S. monitor of the Israeli-Palestinian roadmap peace plan; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. Prime Minister Tusk spoke in Polish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Celebration of Women's History Month and International Women's Day

March 10, 2008

Thank you all. Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House for this celebration of Women's History Month and International Women's Day, and we're glad you're here.

Every March, people around the world recognize accomplishments of strong, fearless women. I see a lot of many strong, fearless women in this room. *[Laughter]* And I

feel right at home. After all, I was raised by one, and I married one. *[Laughter]*

My advice to the next President is to surround him or her—*[laughter]*—with strong, fearless women. That's what I've done. People have served—as Laura mentioned, people serving in senior positions in my administration have made great contributions to our country, people like Secretary Rice, Secretary Chao, Secretary Peters, Secretary Spellings, Trade Representative Schwab, White House spokesman Dana Perino.

We've got a lot of strong women throughout our Government, and that's the way it should be. And it's made my job a lot easier, and I appreciate them serving our country with such class and dignity.

I too welcome the Members of the United States Congress. Thank you all for coming. We're honored you're here. Thanks for serving.

Members of the diplomatic corps—Laura and I had a opportunity to meet representatives from our U.S. Armed Services who are here, and we've got representatives of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for wearing the uniform. Appreciate it.

Appreciate the members of the diplomatic corps joining us. And I too want to congratulate the recipients of the International Women of Courage Award. Thank you all for coming. Why don't we have our award winners stand up. *[Applause]* Yes, thank you all. Thank you all.

During Women's History Month, we honor the courage, foresight, and resolve of women who have strengthened our democracy. Pioneers like Amelia Earhart, suffragists like Sojourner Truth, healers like Clara Barton, writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe: These women have helped our Nation live up to its ideals of liberty and justice for all. At the same time, they have changed the way America views its women, the way both men and women view America.

We take pride in the progress women have made here at home, and we know that millions of women abroad are still working to secure their basic rights. And as they do, the United States of America proudly stands with them. We do so because we know that liberty

is the birthright of every person. And we do so because it's in our national interest. Societies where half the population is marginalized, or worse, are less likely to be prosperous and hopeful and more likely to become incubators for hateful ideologies.

So the United States is working to help build more hopeful and just societies for women. In Africa, our Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, called PEPFAR, and our malaria initiative are saving millions from the disease that devastate women. Our Millennium Challenge Corporation provides microloans that help women start their own businesses. Our international education initiatives have trained thousands of teachers and have provided hundreds of thousands of scholarships to help girls go to school.

The United States works to help build more hopeful and just societies throughout the world and, in particular, the Middle East. In Afghanistan, the Taliban once beat women without reason and executed them without remorse. Today, because we acted, Afghanistan's women serve as teachers and doctors and journalists and judges. More than 80 members of Afghanistan's parliament are women. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein once used rape rooms to brutalize women and dishonor their families. Today, because we acted, Iraq's women voted in a free and democratic elections. They live under a Constitution that protects women's rights. Freedom is powerful, and freedom is precious, and freedom belongs to all, and freedom will yield the peace we long for.

The United States is proud to be a part of the global advance of women's rights. Yet one thing history shows us is that the cause of women's rights is inseparable from the cause of human rights. So on this International Women's Day, we honor the women who work to secure both their liberty and the liberty for others.

America honors women like Madawi Al Hassoun of Saudi Arabia. An educator turned entrepreneur, she was one of the first Saudi women to work alongside men in a mixed business environment. Ms. Hassoun was the first female director of the women's branch of one of Saudi's largest banks. She manages her own successful business now. Ms. Hassoun was also one of the first female can-

didates in Saudi Arabia to run for office. And today, she serves as an appointed member of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce. As she has broadened the possibilities of Saudi women, Ms. Al Hassoun has also worked to bring greater economic freedom and prosperity to her own nation. She's on the forefront of change, and the United States strongly supports her.

America honors Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. Early in her life, this woman waited tables to put herself through school at Harvard. She became an economist who returned to Liberia to serve her country, only to see it destroyed by brutal warlords and dictators. In 2005, Liberians reclaimed their freedom and chose Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to become the first woman ever elected President on the continent of Africa. Laura and I just recently visited the President.

I was impressed by how strong she is as a leader, and she's committed to fighting disease and working to make Liberia's Government more transparent and honest. You know, the Liberians call President Johnson the "Iron Lady" and "Ma." [Laughter] I'm proud to call her friend. She's a great lover of liberty, and we will support her.

America honors women like Irina Kozulina. Irina's husband, Aleksandr Kozulin, is serving a 5-year prison sentence for protesting Belarus fraudulent 2006 elections. Irina worked relentlessly for her husband's freedom. In doing so, she became a leading voice for all political prisoners held captive by the Lukashenko regime.

Irina was also very prominent in the breast cancer awareness campaign in Belarus. A few weeks ago, the disease claimed her life. The Lukashenko regime refused to release her husband to be with his wife in his final days. That's the definition of brutality. And the United States calls upon that Government to release Aleksandr Kozulin immediately, just like they ought to release every other political prisoner in Belarus. It's important for people to understand that this good woman, Irina, set the stage for what we hope Belarus to become, a free and just and open society.

America honors women like Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello of Cuba. An economist and former math professor, Marta Beatriz is now a leader of a movement for a free Cuba. She

spent years in Castro's dungeons for her activism. Because she spoke out about the universality of freedom, she has spent time in jail. She was recently released from her prison term because of her poor health. Yet neither her health nor the threat of danger has deterred this good woman, this pioneer for liberty.

Just last week, Marta was one of the 10 opposition leaders beaten by Cuban police and security forces for distributing copies of the universal declaration for human rights. This courageous woman knows that freedom is not going to come to Cuba by trading one oppressive Castro regime for another. Today I have a message for the people of Cuba: *Viene el día de su libertad*. Your day of freedom is coming. And until that day, the United States will stand with all the dissidents working together to bring freedom to Cuba, including a brave woman named Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello.

America honors women like Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. For 12 of the last 18 years, this extraordinary woman has been kept under house arrest by Burma's brutal military regime. Her only crime was to lead a political party that enjoys the overwhelming support of the Burmese people. During the long and lonely years of Daw Suu Kyi's imprisonment, the people of Burma have suffered with her. Aung San Suu Kyi has never wavered. Her courage and her writings have inspired millions, and in so doing, have put fear into the hearts of the leaders of the Burmese junta.

And that's why the regime has called a vote in May to ratify a dangerously flawed constitution, one that bars Suu from ever leaving her country. Aung San Suu Kyi has said to the American people: "Please use your liberty to promote ours." We're doing all we can, and we will continue to do so until the tide of freedom reaches the Burmese shores and frees this good, strong woman.

Americans are inspired by the examples of these women and the women we honor here today. We will continue to support their work and the work of women across the world who stand up for the freedom of their people.

One of America's finest poets was a woman named Emma Lazarus, who is most famous for writing the verses carved into the base of the Statue of Liberty. Those verses de-

scribe the copper icon as "a mighty woman with a torch" to light the way for all "yearning to breathe free." During Women's History Month and at this celebration of International Women's Day, we are proud that the most recognizable symbol of America's love for freedom is "a mighty woman." And we reaffirm our commitment to light the way for all—both women and men—"yearning to be free."

And now, I'd like to ask Laura and Secretary Chao and Secretary Peters and the Members of Congress who are here to join me on stage as I proudly sign Women's History Month proclamation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:17 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Press Secretary Dana Perino; President Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus; and former President Fidel Castro Ruz and President Raul Castro Ruz of Cuba. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Proclamation 8225—Women's History Month, 2008

March 10, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During Women's History Month, we celebrate the courage, foresight, and resolve of women who have strengthened our democracy.

America has been transformed by strong women whose contributions shaped the history of our country. Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, and she inspired generations of women to follow their dreams. Physicist Chien-Shiung Wu helped advance our knowledge and understanding of the world through her achievements in atomic research. Harriet Tubman fought racial injustice and opened doors for more Americans to participate fully in our society.

Today, women are continuing this legacy of leadership as entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers, scientists, lawyers, artists, and public officials. They are also providing guidance