

President Calls for Free Trade Agreement with Morocco

Remarks by the President and His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco in Photo Opportunity
The Oval Office

11:55 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It's my honor to welcome His Majesty the King of Morocco, to the Oval Office. We've had a really good discussion about a number of matters. No question that Morocco is a great friend of the United States of America and for that, Your Majesty, we are very grateful. I appreciate your steadfast support when it comes to the war on terror. I appreciate your leadership in the region.

President's Remarks

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Today, I've informed His Majesty that our government will work to enact a free trade agreement with Morocco. It's in our nation's interest that we do so. His Majesty believes it's in his nation's interest that we have a free trade agreement, as well.

To this end, it's very important that the United States Senate act on free trade, to give me the trade promotion authority, as well as to work on -- and the extension of the Andean Trade Preference Act. Trade is an important part of good foreign policy, it's an important part of making sure Americans can find jobs. And the Senate needs to act, and it needs to act now.

We will continue our discussions over lunch. I look forward to those discussions. His Majesty brings a lot of knowledge, a lot of vision and it's my honor to welcome him here to the Oval Office. Your Majesty.

KING MOHAMMED: Thank you. Well, I as I told you, I would ask that it's easier to translate me and it'll be easier for me and safer for you. (Laughter.)

His Majesty wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for the words you have just expressed about Morocco, and words which honor His Majesty personally, the Royal Family as well as the entire Moroccan people.

We are honored for the relations we have enjoyed so far with the United States. But I think it's time that we have to shift the gear to go on higher speed. And we have also -- we are determined to carry out all kinds of programs dealing with our cooperation, our collaboration, all fields.

With respect to terrorism, Mr. President, we are also determined to go ahead with you in fighting terrorism. And this is something of concern to Morocco as much as it's of concern to the United States and all democratic people in the world.

With respect to the free trade zone which you have just announced, Mr. President, I would like to thank you and to tell you how much we appreciate this initiative coming from yourself, Mr. President, and to the United States. We will work closely with your collaborators, in particular, Mr. Zoellick, who I have met twice and who will be visiting Morocco together with his colleagues. We will work very closely with them in order to bring about the democratization of this program of cooperation and friendship between the United States and Morocco.

His Majesty wishes, Mr. President, to praise the efforts you personally make and your administration to promote peace and understanding in the world. He wishes also to thank and to praise Mr. Secretary of State Colin Powell for what he has done so far, and especially the effort he just deployed lately and the visit in the region of which we are beginning to see the results.

And His Majesty wishes that the Secretary of State would have recovered by now from the trauma he has had when he first met with His Majesty in Agadir. (Laughter.)

And I would like to thank also Mrs. Tutweiler for the excellent work she has been doing since she arrived in Morocco.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Your Majesty. We'll answer a couple of questions, or I will. Barry.

Q Mr. President, on that trip, the Secretary came home with an Israeli idea, but others said similar things, for an international peace conference. And since he's been home, the White House reaction seems to be a little lukewarm. Is that something you think is a viable idea, a foreign ministers conference, perhaps?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it's first important to know that our government means what we say, and we said that the only way for there to be lasting peace is for there to be two states living side by side at peace with each other.

And, secondly, that in order to achieve that vision, all parties have responsibilities. The Arab world has responsibilities, and we'll work with them to delineate those responsibilities and to encourage them to accept those responsibilities. Mr. Arafat has got responsibilities, and that is not only to renounce terrorism, but to fight terror. Mr. Sharon has got responsibilities, and that is to continue withdrawal.

There is a strategy in place. We're analyzing all options to help achieve this vision. And I look forward to visiting with His Majesty about ideas, such as a conference. The key is, however, for the leaders of the world to work toward that vision by assuming, accepting and acting on the responsibilities necessary to achieve peace.

Q Mr. President, are you concerned that the long hours and the pressure of working in this building will drive away more people, like Karen Hughes? And would you be here without her?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, Your Majesty, one of my close friends and advisor has informed the White House today that she is moving back to Texas. And the reason why is, is because her husband and son will be happier in Texas, and she had put her family ahead of her service to my government. And I am extremely grateful for that approach and that priority. And Karen Hughes will be changing her address, but she will still be in my inner circle. I value her judgment and I will have her judgment. I value her advice, I have her advice. And I value her friendship, and I will have her friendship.

END 12:04 P.M. EDT