

# **FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA AND JILL BIDEN DELIVER REMARKS AT THANK YOU EVENT**

CQ Transcriptions

April 13, 2010 Tuesday

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## **Body**

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**EVENT DATE:** April 13, 2010

**TYPE:** NEWS EVENT

**LOCATION:** HAITI

**SPEAKER:** FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA AND JILL BIDEN

**DR. BIDEN:** Thank you Mr. Mulet for that introduction, for hosting us on this important visit, and for the ongoing leadership that you and the United Nations team have provided here in Haiti. And good afternoon and thank you to everyone gathered here today.

It's truly an honor to be with all of you -- individuals from across the world, along with many Haitians, who have been at the core of the relief and the recovery efforts.

I am honored to be with you today and want to simply say thank you for your heroic actions in recent months. Your commitment and compassion in the face of unthinkable challenges has inspired the entire world.

Some of your very own here have lost lives, others have risked their lives, and all of you have made us incredibly proud with your determined efforts to save men, women and children -- to provide comfort, and to put Haiti on a path to a brighter future.

All of you in this room know that the devastation in Haiti was unconceivable, and that there is much work to be done. But after visiting for just a day, I will leave with a renewed sense of hope and optimism because of the will of the Haitian people and the steadfast commitment of those of you standing here today and the international community you represent.

As a teacher, I was especially pleased to visit a school this morning that is providing a sense of normalcy and hope for the children in this area. And I spoke with Mrs. Preval about the importance of a strong education system to provide young Haitians the chance at a better life.

I also saw rebuilding efforts that will result in more schools. And with the leadership of the Haitian government, your help and that of the international community, I know these schools will educate Haiti's future leaders of government, arts, science and business.

Each of you is essential to these efforts. There is much hard work ahead. But I know that together with the leadership of the Haitian people, the commitment of the global community, and the ongoing sweat and compassion of those in this room today, we will help Haiti **build back better**. (Applause.)

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The First Lady and I came here to listen and learn, but also to deliver a sincere and simple message: Thank you for what you have done and what you will do for this ongoing mission.

I am honored to join First Lady Michelle Obama for this meaningful visit to Haiti.

The President asked Michelle to come here to reiterate the commitment of the United States to Haiti as a steadfast partner, and he could not have asked a more able, dedicated, or compassionate person to deliver this message on behalf of the United States.

I am so proud -- (applause) -- I am so proud and honored to introduce my friend, and a woman we are so fortunate to call our First Lady: Michelle Obama. (Applause.)

**MRS. OBAMA:** Well, thank you. Thank you, all. First let me start by thanking my friend, Jill -- Jill and her husband, that character you know, Vice President **Biden**, for all that they've done over these past few months, especially in support of our wonderful Haitian American communities, in South Florida and across the United States. Let's give Jill and Vice President **Biden** another round of applause. (Applause.)

And also to Ed Mulet, to David Harland, to Nigel Fisher, General Cruz, and all the United Nations personnel who are here today, thank you. Thank you for hosting us. This has been an incredibly warm welcome. It's been an incredibly informative visit. And I want to thank you all for your remarkable service under truly extraordinary circumstances, by any measure.

The mission to help Haiti recover and rebuild is truly, as Dr. **Biden** said, an international effort -- an international effort that is here at the invitation of the Haitian government and in support of -- by the Haitian people.

And we're joined today by representatives from many countries, international institutions and NGOs who are playing a vital role in this rebuilding effort. It is truly an honor to be here with all of you.

This has been a deeply moving day for Jill and I, a very emotional day in so many ways. And Jill and I first and foremost were grateful for the opportunity to be able to -- sat down with President Preval and the First Lady. We again expressed to them, as Jill said, America's deepest condolences, first of all, to the Haitian people for this terrible and tremendous loss.

My husband, the President, asked that we remind President Preval and the people of Haiti that we are going to keep standing with them. That is for sure. (Applause.)

So I repeated to President Preval the pledge that my husband made to him at the White House during his visit last month -- that is, as Haiti recovers and rebuilds, you will have a steady and reliable partner in the United States of America.

We had the opportunity also to visit some of the places that reflect the enormous needs of the Haitian people, but also it reflects their amazing strength and resilience.

We visited families living in the tent cities in Champs De Mars -- families who've lost everything, everything, and for whom every day is a struggle to stay dry, to feed their children.

We visited a school -- more so, a classroom in buses donated by the Dominican Republic -- where some truly amazing kids were rebuilding and playing and dancing and laughing, even under the circumstances.

We also visited a school that is being rebuilt so that children can realize their dreams of an education and a better life.

We just had a very moving visit at our U.S. embassy with Ambassador Merten, our embassy staff -- Americans as well as Haitians. They have worked so hard for the past three months. And some of the civilian and military personnel who've been part of the Americans' contribution to this international effort, we got to spend some time with them.

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And like so many of you, they lost colleagues and friends and loved ones. And our purpose for these visits was to mainly say thank you -- to thank them for their extraordinary service and for delivering on America's enduring commitment to Haiti.

But we wanted to come here today because, as I said, helping Haiti recover and rebuild has been an international effort.

And those of you here -- those of you here at the United Nations, our many partner nations, these incredibly -- incredible NGOs have really been at the heart of this huge undertaking.

And all of you have displayed such a spirit of compassion and partnership that, frankly, we could use a whole lot more of in the world today. You all are showing us all how it's done.

You've done this even though so many of you have endured heartbreaking losses yourselves.

Here at the U.N., you lost Hedi Annabi and so many leaders and colleagues and members of the Stabilization Mission.

For the U.N., I understand it has been the single largest loss of life in history. For each of you, it was the loss of a co-worker, a friend, a fellow peacekeeper. For those of you in the NGO community, I know that the loss was just as devastating -- friends and partners and neighbors who you worked with every day.

And as we mark the three-month anniversary of this terrible day, I'd like to ask us all to just take a moment of silence to honor all those that we've lost.

(There is a pause for a moment of silence.)

We honor every single one of these victims -- people from dozens of nations.

And every day that each of you gets up and go back to work and into the communities that you love, you should know that you're not only carrying on their work, you're also honoring their lives and you're keeping their legacy alive. So please don't ever forget that in these times of struggle.

And despite all your loss, you have shown amazing courage and commitment, especially in those first hours and those first days.

One of the first Secretary Generals of the U.N. famously said that the U.N. -- and this is a quote -- was "not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell." And that's just what you did for so many people here. You saved them from devastation that was nothing like it on Earth.

You've worked around the clock, day after day, clearing rubble, and building shelters, and delivering food, and water, and medicine and supplies to millions of people. And you've done this all with a true spirit of partnership.

Yes, the United States is proud to play a leading role in this effort. But let's never forget that this has been one of the largest and most complex relief operations the world has ever attempted -- the world. And in one way or another, more than 140 nations has helped to make this a reality.

General Peixoto and peacekeepers from dozens of nations restored security so the relief effort could proceed.

And when more peacekeepers were needed, nations around the world stepped up -- especially Brazil, even though it too lost so many in the quake.

And because you live and work in the communities that you serve, those of you in the NGOs were often the first ones on the scene, providing food, and medical care and shelter under nearly impossible conditions.

And I want to salute these inspiring organizations, especially all the Haitian NGOs -- Haitians serving Haitians. (Applause.)

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And so much of your work would be impossible without the generous support of Haitians living abroad, including in the United States. (Applause.)

To all these NGOs that you all represent, you represent them with the best spirit of service. And I commend you for joining forces, and working together, and pursuing a common vision of reconstruction. And as Haiti recovers and rebuilds, you're going to be indispensable, and America is going to be your partner, too.

So this has truly been a global effort -- an amazing example of what nations and what people can do when they come together to do what's right.

The road ahead, as you know, is not going to be easy. And it's not going to be quick. As you know, the rainy season is coming soon; it is here. The hurricane season is coming, too.

But I heard a wonderful Haitian proverb that puts this all in perspective. And some of you probably know it. It says, "Little by little, the bird builds its nest."

And today, the needs of the Haitian people are still overwhelming. We know that. I saw that firsthand. But every day -- and thanks to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's unprecedented Humanitarian Appeal -- this international effort is bringing more supplies and more shelter so that little by little, daily life will improve.

President Preval and the Haitian government have been working under unimaginable difficulties. But they have a vision for the future and they have a roadmap to get there. So little by little, Haiti will move forward.

The destruction is catastrophic. But last month, the world came together -- dozens of nations, including the United States; the U.N. and other international institutions; and NGOs -- and they made an historic commitment to Haiti's long-term reconstruction. So little by little, Haiti will rebuild.

Now, some might ask, after so much misery, how can we still have faith? After so much ruin, how can Haiti rise again? After so much loss, how on Earth can you still have hope?

Well, we have hope because we've been inspired -- inspired by the resilience and the faith of the Haitian people -- (applause) -- people who have lost everything, except their belief that tomorrow can be a little bit better than today.

And we have hope because the people of Haiti are not alone. America is standing with Haiti. (Applause.) The world is standing with Haiti. You are all standing with Haiti. And your commitment and dedication to this country is truly inspiring.

It's the commitment reflected in an e-mail that I received from one of your embassy staff before I came for this visit, Sonia Kim, who I just got to meet. And I think that her beautiful words speak to the commitment that all of you bring to this work, wherever you're from, whatever language you speak.

She wrote: "We are exhausted, traumatized and heart-broken. But we choose to stay here and work. We choose to stay because we love Haiti and its people. We choose to stay because we believe in our duty to help the people here in their greatest hour of need. We choose to stay because we believe in our mission. We choose to stay because we still hold out hope...for recovery and renewal...and for a Haiti built back better than ever before."

And that's why I came here today. (Applause.) That's why we have hope. And that's why, little by little, we're going to keep making tomorrow better than today.

Thank you for your incredible service. We are so proud of you. The world is proud of you. The world is watching. And we wish you nothing but the best. God bless. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

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**Load-Date:** April 15, 2010

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