

President Bush Welcomes President Preval of Haiti to the White House Oval Office

4:45 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT BUSH: I appreciate very much the President of Haiti joining us here in the Oval Office. Mr. President, welcome. I thank you for your courage. I thank you for having one of the toughest jobs in the world, and that is to bring prosperity and security to your country.

While there is still a lot of work to be done, there's progress being made on a variety of fronts. The security situation is improving somewhat, and the United States supports the U.N. mission in Haiti . The economy is improving, inflation is down, exports are up. Yet, there's still a lot of work to be done. And, Mr. President, I praise your efforts on establishing rule of law and routing out corruption. And the United States wants to help you.

The United States is proud to support the men and women of Haiti in a variety of ways. One among the most notable programs and one of which I'm particularly proud is our PEPFAR program, the program to help deal with HIV/AIDS. The President mentioned other ways that we can help -- in fighting drugs, drug traffickers. I was particularly pleased that he brought up the idea of helping the education system in Haiti . And I have instructed Secretary Rice, along with our Ambassador, to work with the government, see if we can help.

And, finally, the President was very concerned about the status of Haitians who are here in America . I assured him that I am working hard to get a comprehensive immigration bill passed out of the Congress this year. As a man who cares deeply about the people of Haiti , I am pleased that he has expressed his concerns. And I think, Mr. President, with hard work and goodwill, we can get a bill that will satisfy your concerns. We welcome you. Thanks for coming.

PRESIDENT PREVAL: (As translated.) I thank President Bush for his invitation, and this was a chance for me to describe to him our situation and the expectations of the Haitian people.

The purpose of this mission was to explain the situation in Haiti , and President Bush noted with interest the points that were raised. I'm not going to come back to them right now, but I would like to thank the United States for the fraternal aid it has given Haiti . And I would particularly like to thank President Bush for the HOPE bill and for the efforts made for its reinforcing the judicial system, the police force, and also to help strengthen the Haitian state.

I also took this chance to express my condolences to President Bush and to the American people for the tragedy that you've been through in Kansas . Each time someone suffers, we all suffer. And I would like to ask President Bush to transmit in my name, and in the name of the Haitian people, our condolences to the American people.

Peace has been restored, and the conditions for investment are here. Haiti is awaiting American investors. We've opened a campaign to fight against corruption and contraband so that all can be on a level playing field and for conditions for competition to be right. Therefore, investors will not have to fear in terms of security or corruption, and they can come to Haiti , because what we need in Haiti are jobs.

And I would also like to thank the President for his assistance in the fight against the plague, which is the drug trade. Drugs in Haiti represent a force, and Haiti alone cannot fight against the drug trade. It always weakens the state, and corrupts the state. And it doesn't -- the drug trade does not function well with a strong state, or a healthy state. It tries to corrupt the police force, it tries to corrupt the judiciary, and the executive. And drug trafficking thrives in a weak state. Drug traffickers invest in weakening and destabilizing the state. And I would like to thank the President who, through the DEA, is helping us in this effort against the plague of drugs.

And I will end on a note of hope, because we have countrymen who are here illegally and are living in a difficult situation. The President has promised to work on an immigration bill that will help improve the lives of our countrymen here in the United States.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good job. Thank you, sir.