



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Celebrates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

The East Room

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PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you for coming. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. I am glad you're here. I'm proud to be with you to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. And we are joined by a very special guest, a close friend of America, a man with whom I just had a very good visit, President Yudhoyono from Indonesia. Welcome, Mr. President. (Applause.)



Before we award our Volunteer of the Year awards, the President has graciously offered to give some remarks. And, unfortunately, I'm going to give some, too. (Laughter.) Before I begin I do want to introduce Agus and Edhie, the President's sons. Welcome. We're glad you're here. Agus will be getting married on July the 8th. (Applause.)

This is a time to celebrate the achievement of millions of Americans of Asian Pacific ancestry. Today, Asian Pacific Americans are making their mark in all walks of life, including business and politics, and education and community service, and the arts and science.

I'm fortunate to have many Asian American in my Cabinet and in my administration, two of who are here with us today. I want to thank the Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao, for joining us. (Applause.) And the Secretary of Transportation, Norm Mineta. (Applause.)

Andrew Natsios, of USAID, is here. Andrew, it's good, it's good you're here, because we're going to be talking about tsunami relief in a minute. I want to thank Betty Wu, who is the Chairman of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders. I want to thank all the commission members who are here today.

I want to thank my friend, Ambassador Sichan Siv, from the United Nations. Where is he? Where is Sichan? There he is. Welcome, Sichan. You did a fine job. (Applause.) I'm glad Martha is here. Delegate Eni from Samoa, thank you for coming, sir. Proud you're here. Is Lisa here? Senator Murkowski just came in from the state of Alaska. Proud you're here. (Applause.) I see we got a lot of members of the Diplomatic Corps who are here. Welcome, Ambassadors. Thank you for coming. Proud you're here. And again, Mr. President, thank you for joining us as we celebrate Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

Indonesia and America may be on the opposite sides of the ocean, but we have a lot in common. We are both among the world's largest democracies. We both share a belief that our great diversity is a source of strength. And when the tsunami hit, citizens from both our countries took it upon themselves to come to the aid of those in distress.

The tsunami that began in the Indian Ocean struck Indonesia just two months after the President came into office. I understand that when the tsunami hit, His Excellency was in a remote province of his country. And the moment he heard what happened, he rushed to the scene. He didn't hesitate. He rushed to not only help, but to make a personal assessment of what needed to be done. After declaring a national

emergency, he moved quickly to clear away the bureaucratic obstacles and visa requirements so that the path would be clear for international relief workers.

By acting with skill and courage, Mr. President, you helped bring your country together in a time of great crisis. And thank you for that kind of leadership. (Applause.)

And the people of Indonesia responded in kind. Religious organizations and business people and the Indonesian Red Cross and thousands of ordinary citizens traveled at their own expense to the hard-hit province of Aceh to pitch in, to do their duty as a citizen of a free democracy.

And the need was great. More than 125,000 Indonesians have been confirmed dead. Think about that. Another 37,000 are missing. More than half-a-million have been forced from their homes. Your fellow citizens provided first aid and you helped evacuate victims and distributed relief supplies. And it was a good example of how government and individuals work together.

But it was also important for the world to respond. And I'm proud of the response of the United States government and her people. Our United States military was on the scene with an aircraft carrier. And we had sailors and Marines working around the clock to show the people of your part of the world that our hearts are big, that we care about people from all walks of life, that the compassion of America runs deep and strong.

Shortly after the disaster struck, the United States pledged \$350 million in aid for the region. Providing relief, our country has really, I hope, showed that we're a friend when you've got a problem. But a friend doesn't quit when a problem persists. And so, earlier this month, Congress approved my request for additional tsunami relief and reconstruction help, bringing total U.S. aid to more than \$850 million.

The people of your country need to know, and the people of the countries affected by the tsunami relief need to know, that when America gives a pledge to help, we'll keep our word, and that when America says that we stand with you, we mean it. So, Mr. President, please take this message back to the people of Indonesia. (Applause.)

Finally, I'm proud that volunteers from our Asian Pacific American community were among those who stepped forward to help the victims of the tsunami relief -- of the tsunami. Their efforts ranged from serving on humanitarian missions to raising money, to rebuilding an orphanage. Americans from all over our country, from all walks of life, used their time and talents and compassion to make a difference. Heck, I even called on two former Presidents -- (laughter) -- 41 and 42 -- (laughter) -- Bush and Clinton -- (laughter) -- to join together to send a message that we're not talking politics, we're talking about helping people get their feet back on the ground -- get their feet back on the ground. We're talking about helping to save lives. That's the American spirit, Mr. President. That's how we like to do things in this country. (Applause.)

And today, we've gathered to honor some of our fellow citizens with volunteer service awards. People from the Asian Pacific community have heard the call to serve something greater than themselves. And before we present those awards, however, Mr. President, I'm honored to welcome you to the White House and welcome you to the podium so that you can deliver a few remarks.

Please welcome the President. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT YUDHOYONO: President Bush, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to join you here today. I stand before you here to deliver a message of thanks from a grateful nation halfway around the world.

My country, Indonesia, suffered most from the horrible tsunami last December. Some 200,000 people were killed in a matter of minutes, and over 500,000 survivors lost their homes.

When I arrived in Aceh the day after the tsunami, almost everything close to the sea had been destroyed, flattened to the ground, swept by the waves. Nothing had ever prepared us for something like this -- nothing. It was under these circumstances that we experienced an incredible display of global solidarity immediately after the tsunami. And it was during this desperate time that American servicemen came and helped.

The USS Abraham Lincoln arrived with its much needed helicopters to help deliver food and supplies to survivors that could not be reached by land. And USS hospital ship Mercy provided medical care to the injured and the sick, at a time when we were all worried that more people would die from diseases than from the tsunami.

I remember my heart almost sank one day when I heard that a U.S. Seahawk helicopter had crashed. But I was glad to hear directly from Ambassador Lynn Pascoe that the crews were all right, even though their Seahawk had to make an emergency landing on a paddy field. And not surprisingly, the crews were itching to get back into action to save lives.

America has every reason to be proud for what your government, your heroism, and your volunteers have done for the tsunami victims. This was a time for valor and selfless sacrifice. The tsunami produced a lot of heroes: heroes who saved lives, heroes who gave hope to those who are suffering, and Americans were among these heroes. You all should be proud of that.

The funds that have been collected from millions of Americans will be very helpful to help the Acehnese rebuild their lives. But I want you to know what really mattered was that they all came from the heart. What really mattered was that each of you reached not so much into your pocket as into the new depth of your conscience, compassion and solidarity. What really mattered was that you saw the pain of others and tried to help. And with all our tears, words and deeds, what we all did together was to prove that the greatest wrath of nature was no match for the greater force that is the human spirit.

I said something earlier about reaching out. Let me read you a letter from Maggie, a third grader from K-4 Elementary in Charlevoix, Michigan, which, through some good fortune, I managed to obtain from AmeriCorps. Maggie was writing to a tsunami kid she did not know. This is what Maggie wrote: "Dear friends: Hi. My name is Maggie. I am sorry what happened in your country. I have heard some things about it. I hope your family and friends are okay. In church, I pray for you and your country. In school, we are raising money for your country. We have a loose-change bucket, and kids bring money in. Also, we are making tsunami bracelet to raise money, too. I have made you one. I hope you like it. I will continue praying for you and your country in church. Your friend, Maggie."

I faxed Maggie's letter to Aceh, to be passed on to an Acehnese youngster, and a few days later I received a response letter from Nada Lutfiah, a young girl from Banda Aceh. That is what Nada looks like.

PRESIDENT BUSH: There's your picture. Is this her?

PRESIDENT YUDHOYONO: Yes, sorry. This is her. (Laughter.) Nada looks like -- (applause.) Nada Lutfiah. (Applause.) Nada wrote to Maggie, and I translate into English. "My good friend: Hello, friend. My name is Nada Lutfiah. I was so happy and my heart was touched to receive the letter you sent us. My family, my dad, mom, older brother and younger brother have disappeared, and now I live with my cousins. I hope you are healthy and well where you are. I am so glad you are paying attention to us here. I hope to receive your bracelet in the coming days, because I want to wear it on my arm to remind me that I have new friend. Your friend, Nada."

I have asked my Ambassador Soemadi to personally deliver Nada's letter and photo to Maggie in Michigan.

These two letters are extraordinary, both in the words they conveyed, and in the fact that two youngsters from entirely different background made a connection: An American girl who prays at church, collects lose change and make bracelet for tsunami kids two oceans away; an Indonesian Muslim girl who lost all her family, and wants to kill the pain and is eager just to be a kid again, just like Maggie. I think the world will be a better place if all of us start to have connections and conversation the way Maggie and Nada did.

I thank you very much. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. President, thank you very much for such a powerful speech. And it's in that spirit of compassion that we -- it's my honor to now award the volunteer awards.

Commander, please read the citations.

(The awards are presented.) (Applause.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. President, I hope you can tell by the short presentation of -- to some of our great citizens that the true strength of America, our true strength lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens.

I'm proud that you've joined us today. Thank you all for coming. May God bless our respective countries, and may God continue to bless the American people. (Applause.)

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