

THE WHITE HOUSE

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REMARKS BY PRESIDENT OBAMA AND PRESIDENT NAPOLITANO OF
ITALY AFTER BILATERAL MEETING

Quirinale Palace

Rome, Italy

12:03 P.M. (Local)

PRESIDENT NAPOLITANO: (As translated.) Good morning. President Obama will leave shortly, so this will be a very short press conference.

And first of all let me express my deepest appreciation for the visit of President Obama, who came here today with his delegation -- and for meeting him there today.

We have followed very closely all through the recent months the position that the Obama administration has taken, and this has been subject to a wide consensus by the Italian government -- both by the Italian government and the opposition.

I would also like to stress that the compliance -- the position of the Italian government is fully shared by the other countries. And over the years it has also been translated into the participation by the Italian government in various peacekeeping missions in crises area. And I would like to mention Afghanistan, and President Obama has expressed his appreciation in this connection.

We have also addressed a number of other issues. We're just trying to stress that we have agreed on the need for Europe to play its role in a scenario which has radically changed, and where the center of gravity of economic and political relations has drifted away from Europe.

But Europe still has many important roles to play because of experience of integration, where it's a model of a market economy, and for the historic values which it inspires itself for, indeed, the European constitution.

We can still set an example to the international community, provided that Europe is united and more efficient and speaks with one single voice. And I think that this is widely shared by President Obama.

We are on the eve of the G8 summit, which will take various formats, as we all know, these three days. And this trust in the preparation of this important event, especially when it comes to the financial economic crisis and the measures that have to be taken up to address this crisis, we have a wide convergence of ideas and propositions between President Obama, the U.S. administration, and the Italian government.

Thank you and I wish you (inaudible) in L'Aquila.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, let me begin by thanking the Italian people and President Napolitano for their extraordinary hospitality. I will be leaving right after this press discussion to L'Aquila, where we'll be joining other world leaders at the G8 summit. I'll also have an opportunity to take a tour of the damage that was done in L'Aquila.

Obviously our hearts were broken by the death and destruction that took place after the earthquake. And I'm very pleased that the United States, like many other countries, will be contributing to help the rebuilding process. In fact, we have, along with the **National Italian American Foundation**, already identified projects to help rebuild facilities at the University of L'Aquila and to provide scholarships and summer programs.

And so that's a nice, concrete affirmation of the extraordinary friendship between the Italian people and the United States. As I was mentioning to the President, that bond is not just between the military but is between our peoples. A lot of American citizens trace their roots back to this country and the traditions of Italy have greatly enriched America.

And so it is a wonderful pleasure to be here. It is particularly a pleasure to be here because the Italian

government I think has been such a great friend to the United States on a whole range of issues, and President Napolitano mentioned some of those. We are working hand in hand in places like Afghanistan to ensure that we are isolating extremists and strengthening the forces of moderation around the world.

On the international front, we discussed the importance of Europe and the United States raising standards on financial institutions to ensure that a crisis like the one that's taken place will never happen again. President Napolitano was keenly interested in the work that we were doing in Russia around nuclear nonproliferation.

And he agreed that even as the United States and Russia find ways to fulfill our responsibilities to reduce our stockpiles, that it's very important for the world community to speak to countries like Iran and North Korea and encourage them to take a path that does not result in a nuclear arms race in places like the Middle East, and that there are other means by which countries can ensure their sovereignty and gain respect around the world.

So the topics that will be discussed at G8 -- whether it's climate change, issues of world poverty, the global financial crisis, issues of nuclear nonproliferation -- these are all issues in which the Italian government has already shown extraordinary leadership, and we are grateful that we will, for many years to come, be able to call Italy a friend.

And just a personal note: I had heard of the wonderful reputation of President Napolitano as somebody who has the admiration of the Italian people because of not only his longstanding service but also his integrity and his graciousness. And I just want to confirm that everything about him that I had heard is true. He's an extraordinary gentleman, a great leader of this country, and the fact that he has been such a gracious host is something that we all greatly appreciate.

So thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership. Thanks to the people of Italy for your great friendship to the United States. (Applause.)

END 12:10 P.M. (Local)