



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – September 11 Ceremony

Remarks of Ambassador Bleich at September 11 ceremony, Canberra

(As prepared for delivery – September 11, 2012)

It has been exactly eleven years. But none of us can or will forget that day. We remember where we were; and precisely what we were doing. The image of a plane filled with travelers exploding into the side of an office building haunts each and every one of us.

Each year we gather to remember the nearly 3,000 men, women and children, killed by terrorists on a single day in New York, in Virginia, and in Pennsylvania. They were innocent people: families on trips, people working at their desks, local heroes rushing in to save them. They are not statistics; they were people -- who loved and were loved. When I recall their photographs, I think particularly of one girl, Christine, who was two years old. She was on her way to Disneyland for the first time.

Each of the 2,997 flags on the gate of our Embassy represents one of the people who perished on September 11, 2001. They are represented by the flags of the 90 nations from which they came. Each represents a person whose life, whose future, was as precious as Christine's.

We cannot bring them back, or the lives they were meant to lead. All we can do is to honor them – by sparing others their fate, and by leading the lives we wish they could have lead: honorable, positive, giving, and joyful lives. In the days and months since September 11, we have dedicated ourselves as friends and as nations to that noble cause.

Eleven years ago, Osama bin Ladin was secure in Afghanistan. He even videotaped himself there, celebrating the deaths of thousands of innocent people. The Afghan nation was ruled by a government that endorsed terror, that gave safe harbor to al-Qaeda, that subjugated women, and ruled through violence and fear. It was the land from which al-Qaeda launched its deadliest attacks – targeting innocent civilians from Bali and Nairobi to New York City and Washington D.C.



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Today, eleven years later, Afghanistan is a different nation. It is an ally. It is our partner. I look at the face of my good friend, Nasir Andisha, the Afghan Ambassador, and this is proof of our progress. The extremist Taliban regime has been replaced with democratically elected leaders, who reject terror in all of its forms. Osama bin Ladin is dead, and most of his senior deputies have been killed or captured. Rather than breeding terror, Afghanistan is now a place whose terror networks have been destroyed, and where hope can emerge. Girls are going to school. The majority of children and adults in most provinces have learned to read. Ten times as many Afghans have access to health care. People are investing, trade is increasing, and the economy is growing. When we go to Kabul, and Khandahar, and Tarin Kowt, and hug our Afghan brothers, that is progress. This is what we've done together -- with allies like Australia and friends around the world. This is what the people here – Australian leaders, members of the Embassy, the diplomatic corps, the defense forces, and first responders – have accomplished.

But dismantling al-Qaeda is only part of how we honor those who perished. We also serve. We reach out to those less fortunate – whether in the devastation of Fukushima or in the homeless shelters of our own communities. We donate blood, and help our churches, and volunteer at our schools. Together, we help restore the charity and love that these terrorists sought to take away. From the pit of Ground Zero, we've built a new magnificent tower in New York City. And in the scarred fields in Pennsylvania, we've planted trees that today reach back to the sky.

We gather to honor those who each day for 11 years have responded with open and fearless hearts. We honor the men and women who serve in our armed forces and law enforcement and intelligence services and the foreign service who have put their lives at risk to make us safe again. We honor the aid workers, and priests and rabbis and imans and those of all faiths who reach out to create a new era of understanding. We honor the volunteers who give the most precious gift that any of us has – our short time on this earth – to make a better world for others.

We mark this day as a reminder of the spirit of service that has brought us this far. And together we replace images of terror with images of beauty. Tonight, together, we will light candles to honor the 2,997 innocent lives that were extinguished. We honor their darkest moments, by restoring light.

So that is why we gather here today. To mourn those who died and suffered on September 11, 2001; and to pause and prepare to rededicate ourselves for another year to the vital work of peace.