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Barack Obama

Address to the People of Rio de Janeiro

delivered 20 March 2011, Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

President Obama: Hello, Rio de Janeiro!

Audience: Hello!

Audience Member: Many welcomes!

President Obama: *Alo! Cidade! Maravilhoso! Boa tarde, todo o povo brasileiro.*

Since the moment we arrived, the people of this nation have graciously shown my family the warmth and generosity of the Brazilian spirit. Obrigado. Thank you. And I want to give a special thanks to all of you for being here, because I've been told that there's a Vasco football game coming. Botafogo -- So I know that -- I realize Brazilians don't give up their soccer very easily.



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Now, one of my earliest impressions of Brazil was a movie I saw with my mother as a very young child, a movie called *Black Orpheus*, that is set in the favelas of Rio during Carnival. And my mother loved that movie, with its singing and dancing against the backdrop of the beautiful green hills. And it first premiered as a play right here in Teatro Municipal. That's my understanding.

And my mother is gone now, but she would have never imagined that her son's first trip to Brazil would be as President of the United States. She would have never imagined that. And I never imagined that this country would be even more beautiful than it was in the movie. You are, as Jorge Ben-Jor sang, "A tropical country, blessed by God, and beautiful by nature."

I've seen that beauty in the cascading hillsides, in your endless miles of sand and ocean, and in the vibrant, diverse gatherings of brasileiros who have come here today.

And we have a wonderfully mixed group. We have Cariocas and Paulistas, Baianas, Mineiros. We've got men and women from the cities to the interior, and so many young people here who are the great future of this great nation.

Now, yesterday, I met with your wonderful new President, Dilma Rousseff, and talked about how we can strengthen the partnership between our governments. But today, I want to speak directly to the Brazilian people about how we can strengthen the friendship between our nations. I've come here to share some ideas because I want to speak of the values that we share, the hopes that we have in common, and the difference that we can make together.

When you think about it, the journeys of the United States of America and Brazil began in similar ways. Our lands are rich with God's creation, home to ancient and indigenous peoples. From overseas, the Americas were discovered by men who sought a New World, and settled by pioneers who pushed westward, across vast frontiers. We became colonies claimed by distant crowns, but soon declared our independence. We then welcomed waves of immigrants to our shores, and eventually after a long struggle, we cleansed the stain of slavery from our land.

The United States was the first nation to recognize Brazil's independence, and set up a diplomatic outpost in this country. The first head of state to visit the United States was the leader of Brazil, Dom Pedro II. In the Second World War, our brave men and women fought side-by-side for freedom. And after the war, both of our nations struggled to achieve the full blessings of liberty.



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On the streets of the United States, men and women marched and bled and some died so that every citizen could enjoy the same freedoms and opportunities -- no matter what you looked like, no matter where you came from.

In Brazil, you fought against two decades of dictatorships for the same right to be heard -- the right to be free from fear, free from want. And yet, for years, democracy and development were slow to take hold, and millions suffered as a result.

But I come here today because those days have passed. Brazil today is a flourishing democracy -- a place where people are free to speak their mind and choose their leaders; where a poor kid from Pernambuco can rise from the floors of a copper factory to the highest office in Brazil.

Over the last decade, the progress made by the Brazilian people has inspired the world. More than half of this nation is now considered middle class. Millions have been lifted from poverty. For the first time, hope is returning to places where fear had long prevailed. I saw this today when I visited Cidade de Deus -- the City of God.

It isn't just the new security efforts and social programs -- and I want to congratulate the mayor and the governor for the excellent work that they're doing. But it's also a change in attitudes. As one young resident said, "People have to look at favelas not with pity, but as a source of presidents and lawyers and doctors, artists, [and] people with solutions."

With each passing day, Brazil is a country with more solutions. In the global community, you've gone from relying on the help of other nations, to now helping fight poverty and disease wherever they exist. You play an important role in the global institutions that protect our common security and promote our common prosperity. And you will welcome the world to your shores when the World Cup and the Olympic games come to Rio de Janeiro.

Now, you may be aware that this city was not my first choice for the Summer Olympics. But if the games could not be held in Chicago, then there's no place I'd rather see them than right here in Rio. And I intend to come back in 2016 to watch what happens.

For so long, Brazil was a nation brimming with potential but held back by politics, both at home and abroad. For so long, you were called a country of the future, told to wait for a better day that was always just around the corner.



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Meus amigos, that day has finally come. And this is a country of the future no more. The people of Brazil should know that the future has arrived. It is here now. And it's time to seize it.

Now, our countries have not always agreed on everything. And just like many nations, we're going to have our differences of opinion going forward. But I'm here to tell you that the American people don't just recognize Brazil's success -- we root for Brazil's success. As you confront the many challenges you still face at home as well as abroad, let us stand together -- not as senior and junior partners, but as equal partners, joined in a spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, committed to the progress that I know that we can make together. I'm confident we can do it.

Together we can advance our common prosperity. As two of the world's largest economies, we worked side by side during the financial crisis to restore growth and confidence. And to keep our economies growing, we know what's necessary in both of our nations. We need a skilled, educated workforce -- which is why American and Brazilian companies have pledged to help increase student exchanges between our two nations.

We need a commitment to innovation and technology -- which is why we've agreed to expand cooperation between our scientists, researchers, and engineers.

We need world-class infrastructure -- which is why American companies want to help you build and prepare this city for Olympic success.

In a global economy, the United States and Brazil should expand trade, expand investment, so that we create new jobs and new opportunities in both of our nations. And that's why we're working to break down barriers to doing business. That's why we're building closer relationships between our workers and our entrepreneurs.

Together we can also promote energy security and protect our beautiful planet. As two nations that are committed to greener economies, we know that the ultimate solution to our energy challenges lies in clean and renewable power. And that's why half the vehicles in this country can run on biofuels, and most of your electricity comes from hydropower. That's also why, in the United States, we've jumpstarted a new clean energy industry. And that's why the United States and Brazil are creating new energy partnerships -- to share technologies, create new jobs, and leave our children a world that is cleaner and safer than we found it.



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Together, our two nations can also help defend our citizens' security. We're working together to stop narco-trafficking that has destroyed too many lives in this hemisphere. We seek the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We're working together to enhance nuclear security across our hemisphere. From Africa to Haiti, we are working side by side to combat the hunger, disease, and corruption that can rot a society and rob human beings of dignity and opportunity. And as two countries that have been greatly enriched by our African heritage, it's absolutely vital that we are working with the continent of Africa to help lift it up. That is something that we should be committed to doing together.

Today, we're both also delivering assistance and support to the Japanese people at their greatest hour of need. The ties that bind our nations to Japan are strong. In Brazil, you are home to the largest Japanese population outside of Japan. In the United States, we forged an alliance of more than 60 years. The people of Japan are some of our closest friends, and we will pray with them, and stand with them, and rebuild with them until this crisis has passed.

In these and other efforts to promote peace and prosperity throughout the world, the United States and Brazil are partners not just because we share history, not just because we're in the same hemisphere; not just because we share ties of commerce and culture, but also because we share certain enduring values and ideals.

We both believe in the power and promise of democracy. We believe that no other form of government is more effective at promoting growth and prosperity that reaches every human being -- not just some but all. And those who argue otherwise, those who argue that democracy stands in the way of economic progress, they must contend with the example of Brazil.

The millions in this country who have climbed from poverty into the middle class, they could not do so in a closed economy controlled by the state. You're prospering as a free people with open markets and a government that answers to its citizens. You're proving that the goal of social justice and social inclusion can be best achieved through freedom -- that democracy is the greatest partner of human progress.

We also believe that in nations as big and diverse as ours, shaped by generations of immigrants from every race and faith and background, democracy offers the best hope that every citizen is treated with dignity and respect, and that we can resolve our differences peacefully, that we find strength in our diversity.



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We know that experience in the United States. We know how important it is to be able to work together -- even when we often disagree. I understand that our chosen form of government can be slow and messy. We understand that democracy must be constantly strengthened and perfected over time. We know that different nations take different paths to realize the promise of democracy. And we understand that no one nation should impose its will on another.

But we also know that there's certain aspirations shared by every human being: We all seek to be free. We all seek to be heard. We all yearn to live without fear or discrimination. We all yearn to choose how we are governed. And we all want to shape our own destiny. These are not American ideals or Brazilian ideals. These are not Western ideals. These are universal rights, and we must support them everywhere.

Today, we are seeing the struggle for these rights unfold across the Middle East and North Africa. We've seen a revolution born out of a yearning for basic human dignity in Tunisia. We've seen peaceful protestors pour into Tahrir Square -- men and women, young and old, Christian and Muslim. We've seen the people of Libya take a courageous stand against a regime determined to brutalize its own citizens. Across the region, we've seen young people rise up -- a new generation demanding the right to determine their own future.

From the beginning, we have made clear that the change they seek must be driven by their own people. But for our two nations, for the United States and Brazil, two nations who have struggled over many generations to perfect our own democracies, the United States and Brazil know that the future of the Arab World will be determined by its people.

No one can say for certain how this change will end, but I do know that change is not something that we should fear. When young people insist that the currents of history are on the move, the burdens of the past can be washed away. When men and women peacefully claim their human rights, our own common humanity is enhanced. Wherever the light of freedom is lit, the world becomes a brighter place.

That is the example of Brazil. That is the example of Brazil. Brazil -- a country that shows that a dictatorship can become a thriving democracy. Brazil -- a country that shows democracy delivers both freedom and opportunity to its people. Brazil -- a country that shows how a call for change that starts in the streets can transform a city, transform a country, transform a world.



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Decades ago, it was directly outside of this theater, in Cinelandia Square, where the call for change was heard in Brazil. Students and artists and political leaders of all stripes would gather with banners that said, "Down with the dictatorship. The people in power." Their democratic aspirations would not be fulfilled until years later, but one of the young Brazilians in that generation's movement would go on to forever change the history of this country.

A child of an immigrant, her participation in the movement led to her arrest and her imprisonment, her torture at the hands of her own government. And so she knows what it's like to live without the most basic human rights that so many are fighting for today. But she also knows what it is to persevere. She knows what it is to overcome -- because today that woman is your nation's president, Dilma Rousseff.

Our two nations face many challenges. On the road ahead, we will certainly encounter many obstacles. But in the end, it is our history that gives us hope for a better tomorrow. It is the knowledge that the men and women who came before us have triumphed over greater trials than these -- that we live in places where ordinary people have done extraordinary things.

It's that sense of possibility, that sense of optimism that first drew pioneers to this New World. It's what binds our nations together as partners in this new century. It's why we believe, in the words of Paul Coelho, one of your most famous writers, "With the strength of our love and our will, we can change our destiny, as well as the destiny of many others."

Muito obrigado. Thank you. And may God bless our two nations. Thank you very much.