

Press Releases: Remarks to the Staff and Families of U.S. Mission Geneva

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Secretary of State

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MR ALLEGRA: Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. As many of you know, this is the Secretary's final stop of a very impressive journey. Over the past week he has navigated the substantive and the logistic challenges of Riyadh, of Doha, of Baghdad and Kabul the very same day, and of Islamabad and Delhi, all in a single trip. And today he has added Syria to the mix here in Geneva, which of course has had a long tradition of hosting world leaders to confront the toughest issues of the day. Mr. Secretary, our platform for visiting secretaries, presidents, and the like is part of this mission's DNA. It is itself testimony to the agility, the flexibility, and the know-how of our American and our local staff.

In fact, to best describe this team – and especially with a Scout troop in the house – I did not need to look too far to find the characteristics that matter most. We are trustworthy and we are loyal. We are helpful and friendly to a fault. We are courteous and kind even in the face of provocation. We are obedient and cheerful even as we lack of sleep. We are thrifty in our own work and that which we expect from others. We are brave in confronting our adversaries. We are clean because, well, this is Switzerland. (Laughter.) And we are reverent to the calling of public service, and we are all very, very glad to have you here today.

With that, Mr. Secretary, thank you for taking the time to spend a few moments with us, and welcome to Geneva. (Applause.)

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, thank you, and it is a real pleasure to have a few minutes to spend with you. It's – that's the high point of each of those stops along the way. I didn't quite get to make it to the mission in Afghanistan. There were some logistical challenges there, but I look forward to going back.

I really appreciate the work of Charge d'Affaires Allegra, and we found we

have a common bond that we didn't realize, or I didn't realize. As it turns out we were both at the Boy Scout Jamboree in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho back in 1969, if I'm remembering right – somewhere in there. (Laughter.) So here we are standing on the same turf a half a world away – and I won't tell how many years later, but anyway.

And I think that recitation of the Scout law as a guiding set of principles – I've used that in my former career. I did a lot of speaking to groups of business leaders and graduate business schools, and they would always say, "Well, what's the best way to build an organizational values system around?" I said, "Just get the Boy Scout handbook out. It's all right there. Everything you need to create the proper culture for an organization are right there in those 12 points of the Scout Law." And that has always governed my values system having grown up with that. And I also have told people that everything I learned about leadership I learned in Boy Scout junior leader training. It was all just downhill from there. (Laughter.)

But again, a real pleasure to be here with the mission here in Geneva. And as Ted was saying, you have a very different role than most of the missions I visit. Most missions, of course, it's country-focused, country-specific, heavy in development and aid programs on the ground, so a very different kind of work than you do here. Here you have a very diverse set of requirements, and you have people like me and others kind of parachuting in and out on you at all times, and your need to be prepared to facilitate the important work that we have to do here that's so vital to moving these – some of our most challenging issues forward. So it does take a different kind of mindset and it takes a different skillset, and we recognize that each of you provide that unique capability for us, and it's so vital to our success here in Geneva.

So we appreciate all of you and we appreciate the families that are here. Our families are so important to our success – our spouses supporting us. I know Geneva's not a real hardship duty place, but it's a long way from home, and so all of the same sacrifices when you miss some family events back home. I know from having been deployed overseas myself on an unaccompanied basis you miss some birthdays, you miss some weddings, you miss some graduations, and that's a sacrifice on everyone's part. Hopefully down the road you'll reflect back on that time that you had here – and many of you, I know, have been in postings elsewhere – and the richness of what you experienced is going to more than outweigh the sacrifice that went with it. But we know it doesn't come free. It does come with a sacrifice, and we appreciate that.

So again, I'm really pleased to be here. I'm going to talk about three important values that I articulated the first day I walked into the State Department and gave my remarks on the steps. There were three things I said that were important to me coming to an organization that I do not know. I don't know the culture of the organization. I certainly know its reputation and its history and patriotism.

But there were three things that I told people that this is – these are three things I want everyone to try to work hard to do. And the first is safety and security, that we simply have to take care of ourselves first and you have to take personal responsibility for that. And then once you do that, take

responsibility for those around you. Many of the assignments – and many of you have been in those assignments – involve a great deal of risk. We feel an obligation to ensure that every day you are protected and taken care of, but you own a part of that as well.

So we are very committed to the safety and security of each of you. We want you to be committed to each other as well. As some of the folks back at the State Department will tell you, every meeting I have starts with, “Are all of our people safe?” And we go around the room in case anybody’s got any concerns. If they have any worries whatsoever, they get dealt with that day. That’s how serious I take it.

The second thing is that we wanted to be accountable. I say we have to hold ourselves accountable for what we do, for what people expect of us. And when we deliver, we’re accountable. When we fail or we have shortcomings or mistakes, we own those as well. And that’s okay. We learn from them. We understand how to fix it the next time. But we hold ourselves accountable. And if we do that, we can hold others accountable. And in particular, we can hold our foreign counterparties accountable, because we can’t hold them accountable if we don’t hold ourselves accountable.

And the last thing is respect. Every human being has an important role to play in this department. It doesn’t matter what role they may be playing, whether they’re in the mail room, driving a vehicle, or they’re at one of the most complex Foreign Service officer desks. Every one of those roles is important, because everything everyone does enables someone else to get their job done. So we should treat each other with that respect. And if we treat each other with respect, it becomes just a practice, a habit. We will treat others externally with respect as well, and that projects the best of America – a compassionate, caring people. And you’re that face of America on this – in this mission here, and so I’d ask you to be safe, take care of yourself, be accountable, own your responsibilities and hold yourself accountable, and treat each other and everyone with the respect they deserve. We’re all just human beings trying to do our job the best we can.

So it’s a pleasure to be with you and a pleasure to see the faces that are here. It connects me when I get back home that out here it’s not just a bunch of action memos and info memos. (Laughter.) There’s real people out there working hard every day on behalf of the American people, and I want you to know I appreciate it. I appreciate it very much. So great to see you. (Applause.)

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