

Remarks by US President Obama after Bilateral Meeting with Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti

9th Feb 2012 – Oval Office

Distinguished guests,

I'd like to welcome Prime Minister Monti to the White House for his first visit. I already had the opportunity to congratulate him after he took on the extraordinary responsibilities of his mandate.

Let me begin by saying that it's nice to be able to return the hospitality of the Italian people. Every time I've been to Rome and L'Aquila, the warmth that has been extended not just to me but to my family has been extraordinary. And obviously we have a deep and special connection with the Italian people. The Italian-American community here in the United States has had as much of an impact as any group within our country.

The Prime Minister came in at a very difficult time in Italian politics and the Italian economy. And I just want to say how much we appreciate the path that he has embarked on and the very effective measures that he is promoting inside of Italy. You've already seen that he has not only boosted confidence about a reform agenda within Italy, but he's also been able to generate confidence throughout Europe and in the marketplace. Italy now has a plan that takes seriously its fiscal responsibilities, but also emphasizes the need for structural reforms that can promote growth.

Prime Minister Monti is also the leader of one of our most important friends and allies when it comes to security issues. We appreciate the sacrifices and outstanding work that are made by Italian forces in Afghanistan, while we reaffirm our commitment to the Lisbon schedule for a transition to full Afghan autonomy by the end of 2014.

I've already emphasized the fact that we could not have been successful in our Libya campaign without the extraordinary contribution of our Italian partners, and we are both interested in working with the transitional government there to create a stable pathway towards democracy and economic prosperity.

Overall, I think that the relationship between Italy and the United States has never been stronger. I personally have great confidence in the Prime Minister's leadership and his ability to navigate Italy through this difficult time, and to stabilize the economic situation there so as to put it on a footing so that it can grow and prosper over the long term.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. We thank you very much for your friendship, and we wish you the very best in the months to come.