

Kosovo Briefing  
The White House  
04/21/99

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**Humanitarian Relief for Kosovo News Conference  
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**The White House  
April 21, 1999**

Thank you, and I want to welcome all of you here today. And I very much appreciate your coming. I want to thank those whom you will hear from in a few minutes, including FEMA Director James Lee Witt and USAID Deputy Administrator Hattie Babbitt; and Congressman James Moody who runs Interaction. We also have with us OPM Director Janice LeChance and Morrison Webb, executive vice president of AT&T.

I also want to recognize the heroic contributions of Refugees International, an organization that is on the front lines of humanitarian disasters around the world. And they lost three relief workers in a terrible car accident this week in Albania, who were trying to reach the refugee camps.

Before I begin, I want to say a word about the terrible school shooting that occurred yesterday in Littleton, Colorado. I'm sure all of us are joined together in mourning the loss of so many young lives. And we are sending our prayers and sympathy to the families, the loved ones, the classmates of the victims and the entire community. It's hard to imagine this happening again. And at the extraordinary time that we heard about it, I think all of us hoped it were not true.

When we look into the eyes of our own children we cannot even imagine the fear that parents in Littleton must have felt waiting to find out if they had lost their children.

And it is very hard to just comfort a child who, seeing it on television, is afraid. Imagine what it is like for the young people who saw their friends die before their eyes. Even if we cannot comprehend or imagine the magnitude of the pain that is filling the hearts of the people of Littleton, we can help with our prayers and our hopes by doing all that is possible to make sure the children there receive the counseling and support they need -- whatever medical and psychological help might be required.

And more than that we can, once again, recommit ourselves to ensuring that all classrooms and schoolyards are filled with learning and the sounds of children who are enjoying the everyday give and take of life, and are not filled with violence and anguish.

We're here to talk about a very different tragedy in another part of the world, but one that is equally demanding of our response. The humanitarian disaster in Kosovo is almost incomprehensible.

You've come here because you do want to help. And for that we are grateful, because we need that help more desperately than ever. We've seen the horrifying images of children in trains, children separated from families, robbed of their childhoods, their homes and their memories.

Two out of three of the Kosovars have already been forced to flee their homes, often at gun point, without time to even snatch a family photograph from the wall or even to take identification papers or medications on their fearful journeys.

Like all Americans, I have been outraged by recent reports of paramilitary forces destroying health centers and hospitals, driving out doctors and nurses and depriving refugees of much needed medical care.

I've heard chilling examples of what is happening from a doctor whom I met with again just last week. I met with her first last summer when she came to the White House to tell me what was occurring even then as people were being driven into the mountains.

This brave woman, who had worked around the clock, has now become a refugee herself. Last week when she visited me, I could not only tell from her words, but by the haunted pain in her eyes, what she and the people around her have endured.

She had come here—luckily enough she still had her passport which she smuggled out in the diaper of a nephew she held on her lap—she'd come here to bear witness and to make sure we understood what was happening to the people of her country.

We are doing as much as we can to ease the suffering of the refugees, but we have a lot of work ahead of us. Some of you have seen firsthand what life is like in those camps as wave after wave of displaced people pour across the borders—exhausted and hungry and sick—where international relief agencies are working desperately against time to prevent outbreaks of cholera and other diseases.

You also are aware that, in addition to the camps, there are tens of thousands of refugees being housed in homes in Macedonia and Albania by people who've taken those refugees in. Oftentimes, 20, 30 people living in one room. And those host families are also stretched to breaking point.

To help the people of Kosovo rebuild their lives, we know we have to work as a team at every level of government, in international relief agencies and other charitable organizations, in our businesses, our houses of worship and our communities.

Since the violence began, the United States has contributed more than \$150 million in humanitarian aid including blankets, tents, water jugs and enough food to feed three quarters of a million people. A few weeks ago, I went to Dover Air Force Base and saw the service men and women who have literally been working around the clock loading the food onto pallets to be transported to reach the people of Kosovo.

This week the president called on Congress to pass his \$6 billion proposal for an emergency aid package which includes nearly \$800 million in humanitarian assistance.

The American people, as is the case when events like this occur, have responded with an outpouring of generosity and support. Here at the White House we are flooded with countless calls, letters and e-mails from people who want to know how to help. A woman from Indiana wrote asking whether there was anything the mothers of this country could do to help the mothers of Kosovo.

And another woman from Florida wrote, "We are so blessed in our beloved country. And I really believe that the majority of Americans would like to help in some way, but don't really know how." Well there are ways for everyone to help.

USAID and FEMA are working together to make sure that Americans can do our part through a toll-free number, 800-USAID-RELIEF, and the website [www.info.USAID.gov](http://www.info.USAID.gov) under the Kosovo listing.

Today I'm also pleased that the President will be sending a memo to every employee in the federal government encouraging them to find out what they can do to help as well.

Across the country, people are coming together to try to understand how they can make a difference. On Monday I met in New York with the heads and representatives of major foundations to talk about what more can be done in the foundation community to support those who are on the ground delivering the services.

I'm very grateful to former Congressman Jim Moody and everyone at Interaction for their leadership and commitment. I also know that the American business community has responded and is responding and wants to know what more it can do to be responsive.

Leading corporations from AT&T to Time Warner to Pepsico are urging their employees to help by matching their contributions dollar for dollar. One relief organization, Project Hope, has already received up to \$5 million worth of pharmaceutical supplies.

UPS has donated cargo space to transport food and other goods into the refugee camps. Slimfast is also involved in the relief effort, and I'm pleased that their president, Danny Abraham, could be with us today.

Major Internet companies, from Yahoo! to Amazon.com to eBay.com, are donating prime space on their home pages to the Red Cross, CARE and other organizations. I'm especially pleased that Yahoo! and Broadcast.com are running public service announcements as a way of getting more people involved.

These are only a few of the major contributions that we're hearing about and that NGOs are receiving.

All told, I believe NGOs have already received \$25 million in cash, in-kind donations. This is setting, yet again, a new standard in corporate—indeed, international—citizenship.

I cannot tell you how proud I am every time I travel around the world on behalf of our country and I see what American corporations are doing, not only to provide jobs—which is the first and most important way to help any country—but also by setting an example of philanthropy and corporate citizenship that is literally helping to transform the way business is conducted and what can happen in a society.

That's why we want to encourage you to continue to be creative about ways you can make a difference. In a few minutes, we're going to find that cash contributions, as you'll hear from our speakers, are often the most effective way to help in an ever-changing situation.

But every donation counts, and every donation is helping. I want to say a special word though about Macedonia and Albania, because here perhaps as much as any way, the business community in America and your counterparts in Europe and Japan and elsewhere can make a very big difference.

I just met with the Macedonian ambassador and representatives of the Macedonian government to hear firsthand the impact that this crisis is making on their economy and their country. I thank them on behalf of the President and the American people for what they are doing.

Because think about what it must mean to be in small, poor countries and having to deal with the tens of thousands—now hundreds of thousands—of displaced people coming across your borders seeking all manner of help and having all kinds of needs that must be met.

Macedonia, for example, is providing safe haven already for more than 100,000 refugees. But because of the conflict, it's trade routes through Serbia have been severed. Foreign companies are canceling contracts, thereby putting people out of work, particularly in the textile manufacturing sector because companies are concerned about continuing to do business in Macedonia given the instability there.

Now when that happens, it exacerbates enormously the strain on the government and the people of Macedonia. Oftentimes these contracts are being canceled at plants that are of considerable distance away from the refugee camps. They are often in plants that are in the center of the Albanian population in Macedonia which is attempting to help host families to take in a lot of refugees. But now people are losing the jobs that they had that supported, in a meager way, the caring of these people because of these kinds of cancellations.

We cannot let this conflict derail the social, economic and political progress that Macedonia and its neighbors have struggled so hard and for so long to achieve. We also want to be sure that insofar as possible, existing contracts and even new investments continue in the region.

And in addition, if there are ways of buying supplies from local producers and suppliers to supply both military and civilian relief needs, I hope we will do as much as we can to continue to boost the local economies in both Macedonia and Albania.

I think that those governments and those people need our support now, and they will continue to need our support in the future.

Because as we work and pray for peace, we cannot lose sight of the fact that there will be a lot of work to do if we are eventually to realize our goals of returning the Kosovars to Kosovo and rebuilding the economies there, as well in the neighboring countries.

So thank you, thank you for what you've done and what you will do. It is a unique public/private partnership that is one of the hallmarks of the American experience that is not matched anywhere else in the world and has never been matched in history.

It's now my pleasure to introduce someone who's working very hard every day on making sure that our relief efforts are effective on the ground, and that's USAID Deputy Administrator, Hattie Babbitt.