

President Valentine's Speech to Students at the International University of Kyrgyzstan

Salaam AleiKim (Peace be unto you). I am very pleased to be here today at this great university. Speaking with students is always an encouraging experience; encouraging because students represent the future. You will be the ones who build on the efforts of my generation. Hopefully you can learn from our mistakes and build on our successes.

I am highly encouraged by the cooperation between the State of Utah and Kyrgyzstan started in 1999 when Utah Valley University (UVU) hosted the visit to my state of the Kyrgyz Ambassador. Subsequent visits came from Kyrgyz ministers and other dignitaries. As a result, UVU has placed student interns in several Central Asian embassies in Washington DC, in missions at the United Nations and has provided scholarships to a number of students from Central Asia at UVU.

Cooperation has continued with exchanges at the highest level, including the visit of Utah Governor Olene Walker to Kyrgyzstan during the summer of 2003. This was followed by the visit of the President and First Lady of Kyrgyzstan to Salt Lake City in September of 2004. These visits demonstrate an increased level of cooperation between our two countries in business, education and humanitarian endeavors.

An important project has come out of these exchanges, that of the publication of an EU Asian book series beginning in 2003. This series has included publications in two languages of the best historical and philosophical manuscripts of the countries of the great Silk Road. Under discussion in this visit is the publication as a joint effort of the famous manuscript from the 11th Century Kutadgu Bilig. This would be published as a bilingual text. It is equal to the Magna Carta of English Jurisprudence, outlining the principles of good governance and the Rule of Law.

I would like to recognize a few people in our visiting delegation today. The first, of course, is the First Lady of the Utah Senate, and my best friend, my wife, Karen. It has also been my great pleasure to come to Kyrgyzstan with Senator Carol Williams, the Majority Leader of the Montana State Senate and Dr. Rusty Butler of UVU. Dr. Butler's wife, Dr. Danielle Butler, was appointed in 2003 as the Honorary Consul General of the Kyrgyz Republic, the first from Central Asian in the Rocky Mountain States.

This visit today grew out of a visit in February of this year to my state, Utah, led by Speaker H. E. Marat Sultanov. The delegation visited Utah at my personal invitation. During the visit, Speaker Sultanov and I agreed to pursue a number of events directed to the strengthening of relations between legislators of Kyrgyzstan and the United States. In particular:

1. As I mentioned, this visit today;
2. A follow-up visit next February by a delegation from a couple of members of the Kyrgyz parliament during our legislative session;
3. With support of the United States Library of Congress, to expand the visits between Utah and the Kyrgyz Republic to involve judges, business leaders and new generations of leaders. The Open World Leadership of the Library of Congress has already followed up on these commitments, arranging visits to Montana last June and to Utah last month of judges and other leaders. I particularly enjoyed interacting with the 15 judges who visited Utah.

The story would not be complete without mention of several important conferences that have resulted out of the exchanges:

1. Central Asia Conference in March of 2006, which was hosted on the campus of UVU. Representatives of five Central Asian countries participated, including the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic, the ambassador of Turkmenistan and numerous scholars and US State Department Officials.
2. International Conference on March 8-10, 2007. UVU, together with the Kyrgyz National Center for Development of Mountain Regions sponsored the very successful "Women of the Mountains" Conference. More than 110 representations from 20 mountainous nations from all continents of the world participated in discussions on sustainable mountain developments.

I commend all of you and the International University of Kyrgyzstan for such continued and sustained efforts, which was initiated and hosted by Kyrgyzstan in 2002.

I hope these remarks accurately reflect the true commitment between the Kyrgyz Republic and the United States, particularly the state of Utah. I am honored to be here and accept this prestigious award.