Distinguished guests,
Dear friends of Indonesia,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening.

That was a wonderful dinner. Thank you, Wayne and Alan. Now, its time to go home.

It’s good to be here in New York. I arrived here on Monday, and I have been driven around in a fancy car, with a convoy of secret service agents. I like it, because everywhere I go, people on the streets think I am a big rock star. Until they see me stepping out of the car. That’s when I tell them that I once sang for the hit show “Indonesian idol”.

I have been looking forward to this opportunity to speak here tonight. This is because at the United Nations, I am usually only allowed 3 minutes to speak. And of course, tomorrow the UN will be very generous to me: they will give me 5 long minutes to speak about world peace. So to console me, Wayne Forrest has promised me I could speak for as long I want. But he also diplomatically reminded me that this room is charged by the hour…

But seriously, I do not wish to abuse this privilege. Wayne assured me that you are a friendly audience, and I want to keep it that way.

Jokes aside, I know that this is a difficult time, a time of mourning for Americans. Just as nature unleashed the tsunami upon us, nature’s wrath has turned to your Gulf Coast. We know how you feel, and our hearts go with you. I sat next to President Bush at the UN lunch yesterday, and we spent much of the time talking about the rescue efforts in New Orleans. Consolation can feel hollow right now. I saw this for myself in Aceh, how utter devastation can leave one numb. But we must reach out to one another. So Indonesia at once sent volunteers—and they were amongst the first international aid workers to arrive in Houston.

And as you did during our moment of grief, we offer moral support, Please allow me now read you a letter, written by an Acehnese child.

(ACEH KIDS LETTER)

Banda Aceh, September 3, 2005

To my dear friends
In America

Dear Friends,
That morning, I was very shocked to see and hear the natural disaster which happened in your country, the Katrina Hurricane that hit your country. I remembered similar tragedy happened to me in Aceh a few months ago, the earthquake and tsunami waves. That tragedy took the live of my mother, my father and my little sister. They are people whom I loved dearly. I can imagine you are facing the same sadness, missing your loved ones, your father and mother, your brother and sister, your home and friends. Even you cannot go to school and play as usual. But, we can not give up and be sad all the time. All that happened to us are God’s will.
My dear friends, you can imagine that I have to live alone from now on. My home is crushed, flat to the ground and gone with the wind. The remaining of my father, my mother, and my sister were never been found. I survived because at that very night, I stayed at my grandmother's home which is far away from the tsunami area. One week after the tsunami, I still remembered the presence of my parents and my little sister, I was so sad, I lost all my family that I loved so much. Dear God, please give me the strength to bear this sorrow.

But, I can not keep drowning in my sadness. I still study hard and go to school every day to achieve my dreams. I still have my teachers, other families, and friends, who are very supportive to me. I know you can learn from me and follow my steps, and believe that in every problem, there is always a lesson that we can learn.

Warmest regards to my friends in America

Ricky

I will send these letters to New Orleans. I hope the letter conveys not only the deep camaraderie between Indonesia and the United States, but also the optimism of the Acehnese. Yes, optimism. The letter reminds us: have faith, things do get better.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Tonight, I would like to remind you of certain things that I would want you to remember about Indonesia. These things are important for my Government, but they could be of interest to you also.

The first is that the reconstruction of Aceh is proceeding very well. Dr. Kuntoro is leading a very exemplary effort managing the Government funds and as well as international assistance, both official and private, and in overseeing the reconstruction in accordance with the blueprint.

Today, children are going to school again, families are being reunited, the Government is functioning, homes are being erected, infrastructure is being rebuilt, roads are being constructed, and national and international funds are being disbursed. With generous US assistance, a road is being built connecting Banda Aceh and Meulaboh—a strategic road that was literally washed away by the tsunami. We are also actively developing a tsunami early warning system so that we can save more lives if natural disaster were to strike again.

The second thing I want to tell you is that the Aceh peace process is moving on.

As you know, my Government began negotiations with the GAM leadership in February this year, and after 5 meetings, we were able to strike a historic peace deal on August 15th in Helsinki. With that peace deal, we hope to permanently terminate this long-festering conflict which has claimed too many lives.

GAM has accepted Aceh’s special autonomy status, and has agreed to dissolve itself and hand over its weapons. In return, they can openly enjoy political participation in Aceh. And as security improves and the threat dissipates, we will relocate our non-organic military and police from Aceh.

Through that peace, the Acehnese will enjoy the fruits of reconstruction in a climate of peace, which they so deserve. And through that peace deal, Indonesia is breaking that silly myth of Balkanization.

Congressman Robert Wexler who came into my office in Jakarta a few months ago said that the Aceh peace deal is an achievement as huge as peace in Northern Ireland, in Sri Lanka, in the Korean Peninsula or in the Middle-East. I do not disagree with his observation.

The next three months will be crucial to the peace process. This is the time when GAM will hand-over their weaponries to be destroyed, and this is the time when the TNI and police will start relocation. We are already seeing some incidence on the ground, but the Monitors have already
established who is at fault and what needs to be done against these violators. As in any other conflict situation, the road to permanent peace is never easy, and but we will walk that road to its final destination. The third thing I want to tell you is that despite the rising price of oil, the Indonesian economy is coping.

As you all know, the higher the price hikes, the more subsidies on petroleum products the government must pay for. I reduced some of these subsidies earlier this year, and people protested, but we held our ground. Unfortunately, the problem remains. Our budget assumed oil prices at 40 US dollars. With current oil prices, we are paying some 140 trillion rupiah in subsidies, which I think is roughly equal to Mr. Wayne Forrest’s annual salary. That is almost a quarter of our national budget. That money can build schools, hospitals, roads—that money can stimulate growth and productivity. We need that money elsewhere.

We are also aware that middle-class recipients of these subsidies can pay international market prices. So we must, and we will, rationalize our spending. And we will do it in a way that ensures fiscal sustainability, and my target for the budget deficit this year is 0.09 %. We will also do it in a way that protects the poor, particularly in regard to subsidies for kerosene. But despite the oil price, and despite the tsunami, our economy is doing quite well. I can confidently tell you that the Indonesian market remains promising and one of the most attractive baskets you can invest in.

Last year, it reached its highest rate of growth since the Asian crisis: 5.1 percent. Remarkably this growth, which surpassed all forecasts, was achieved when the global trend was the opposite: a decline in consumption and investment in major countries due to the rise of the Fed Fund rate. In the first semester this year, our economy rose by 5.9 per cent in the first half of the year—we can thank the upsurge in investment for that. Our trade surplus grew by 12.2 billion dollars. Yesterday the JSX Composite Index was closed at 1,058, and Alhamdulillah, our exchange rate strengthened to around 10,000 Rupiah per 1 USD, compared to almost 12,000 two weeks ago. I believe that the Indonesian economy is poised for sustainable growth. Paul Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank, told me yesterday that Indonesia today has done remarkably well, in ways that would be hard for many to predict 6 or 7 years ago. Of course, who am I to argue with Paul Wolfowitz.

Still, our present growth would not be enough, however, to absorb the 2.4 million Indonesians who joined the labour force last year. We have no choice but to gear our policies for more growth and stability.

The fourth point: my Government is going on cruise control in the fight against corruption. It is my promise to the Indonesian people during my elections campaign, and it is a promise that I intend to keep. I am also a very practical man: I know we in Indonesia cannot improve productivity and competitiveness so long as corruption prevails and pervades our system. So the fight against corruption continues, and we everyday make progress inch-by-inch. Our biggest catch recently was to unveil an oil smuggling syndicate which is operating throughout Indonesia, in Riau, Kalimantan, East Java, and which is robbing us billions of dollars. I do not know how they could do such a thing for so long without being caught. As Police Chief Sutanto has found out, this heartless smuggling ring involve Pertamina and rogue police officials. Believe me, they WILL pay dearly for their crimes.

I have tons of these successful anti-corruption stories for you. My wife has made it my favorite bed time reading. But, as Wayne reminded me earlier, the room is charged by the hour. But I hope that the message is being sent out loud and clear. In today’s Indonesia, under my watch, we will fight corruption with competence and determination. My ambition is that at the end of my term in office, corruption will be the exception rather than the rule.

My final point is about US-Indonesia relations. It has been a good year. I had a very good visit to Washington DC in May this year. And I had very good conversation with President Bush yesterday during lunch hosted by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. We both see eye to eye on things, and I think I speak for the both of us in saying that we are both committed to strengthen
our relations.
It is time for us to move on with this very important relations unconditionally. Now is the time to upgrade our relations, and to promote relations without burdens and restrictions.

There is also some concern in Indonesia about a certain draft bill in the US Congress which mentions about Papua. We know this does not reflect the view of the US Government and does not even reflect the view of the US Congress as a whole. But small things can create large misunderstandings. Do not underestimate the political and psychological impact of this draft bill among Indonesians, who want to do their best to sort out our internal problems but who are very sensitive about things which are reflected in that draft bill. So I ask our friends in America to make their views known on this important issue.

So these are the 5 points I want you to bring home tonight. If you digest these 5 points as well you digested your beef tonight, you will undoubtedly share my optimism for Indonesia and my conviction that Indonesia is on to better, bigger things.

I have spoken for way too long. My purpose in coming here tonight is simply to honor you and to thank you for your friendship for Indonesia.

I look forward to seeing you again, and once again, thank you for coming here tonight.

Source: *Web site of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia*

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