

Thank you Judge Woodlock.

It is my great privilege to welcome each of you officially into the community and political system of the United States of America. Today you have taken perhaps the most important step of your lives. By becoming citizens of this great country you have acquired rights and assumed responsibilities which will affect the rest of your lives and the lives of your children -- and the lives of all the rest of us who are citizens of the United States.

In today's world, it is very clear that citizens of the United States have responsibilities to the people of all nations -- including those from which you have come. We all share, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, "a world house" where what happens in one corner of the globe affects often directly and immediately other nations. Because of the strength and example of America -- and how we examine our rights and assume our responsibilities -- we have had a profound impact on peoples everywhere. Our example has inspired the peoples of Eastern Europe and the students of China to demand democracy. With your help, the United States will continue that proud tradition.

The people of the United States need to better understand the realities and needs of the world's people and, as new Americans, you need to teach the rest of us and to become active participants in the affairs of this nation.

Let me share with you now a few specific ideas about the rights you now enjoy as full citizens of this country and the responsibilities that you now have assumed.

First, it is important that you recognize that your rights have been won by the sacrifice and vision of those new Americans who have come before you. You must appreciate the history of the United States in order to appreciate the importance of your new citizenship.

The American revolution began right here, just up the road, in Concord, Massachusetts. The shot heard 'round the world, over 200 years ago, began a revolution that continues to this day both here and, indeed, worldwide. And the revolution is about human rights. The founders of our nation believed that "all men are created equal and that we all are endowed by our Creator with the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." So, you and I and Judge Woodlock and so many others owe a great debt to those who gave their lives in the American Revolution in order to create this nation based on the respect for human rights.

And throughout the world -- in China, in El Salvador, in Ethiopia and in many other countries -- people continue to struggle to secure these rights that sometimes we in the United States take for granted. As new Americans, you must help the rest of us never to take for granted our rights. And this is one of your new responsibilities.

~~As new citizens~~

This country also fought a deadly civil war in which slavery and the human rights of Africans forcibly brought here as slaves was the primary issue. The civil war was a moral struggle. Thousands upon thousands sacrificed their lives in order to secure freedom for all. As new Americans, you owe them, too, a great debt.

And more recently, in the 1950's and 1960's, Dr. Martin Luther King, John and Robert Kennedy and others led this nation in an effort to make real the promise of America that "all men and women are created equal" and are all entitled to basic human and civil rights. We all owe a great debt to those who expanded the rights and secured the freedoms for all.

It is your responsibility not only to understand this history -- but to embrace it. For even in America, rights and freedoms must continue to be protected and expanded. This is a responsibility we all must share. Thus, as new citizens, you have new responsibilities to protect the rights of others -- both here and throughout the world.

As new citizens, you have a responsibility not only to meet the needs of your own family but to help meet the needs and secure the freedoms for the human family. The exercise of these responsibilities takes work and dedication. Here in Boston, you must become part of the life of your neighborhood. You must share in the responsibility to make the schools better for your children and all children. You must share in the responsibility to end crime--against your family and all families. You should share the responsibility to provide help and hope to those in need -- to the ill, to the impoverished and to the most vulnerable in our society.

In closing, let me emphasize the importance of your full participation in the political life of this country. As new citizens you have the right to vote. Use it.

If you do not participate in our elections you give up the greatest right you have now secured and you abandon the greatest responsibility you have now assumed. Only through participation can our rights be protected and our responsibilities to ourselves and others be carried out.

America has always been strengthened by the immigrant and refugee who come here in search of freedom and a better life -- and, in turn, contribute to the well being of their new community. You embody the American dream. I welcome you and I thank you -- for you are the people who continue to make America a great nation and a beacon of hope for all people worldwide.

It's this simple. If military impunity does not end, the war will not end.