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Remarks on 20th Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall President Barack Obama November 9, 2009

It is an honor to extend my congratulations to the people of Germany – and the people of Europe – on this 20th Anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. While I'm sorry that I could not stand there today with so many friends, I am pleased that Secretary Clinton is leading a delegation of Americans who represent our respect for this extraordinary event in history.

November 9, 1989, will always be remembered – and cherished – in the United States. Like so many Americans, I will never forget the images of people tearing down the Wall. There could be no clearer rebuke of tyranny. There could be no stronger affirmation of freedom. This anniversary is a reminder that human destiny will be what we make of it.

For Germans, the Wall was a painful barrier between families and friends. And for so many across Eastern Europe, it was one symbol of a system that denied people the freedoms that should be the right of every human being.

And yet even in the face of tyranny, people insisted that the world could change. In those countries that got trapped on the other side of an Iron Curtain, they had the courage and resolve to hold fast to the belief in a better future.

In America, we stood for decades with our friends in Europe on both sides of the iron curtain – through the support to rebuild what had been destroyed by war, and our soldiers who kept watch to prevent another; through enduring bonds forged across an ocean, and above all, through a commitment to common values.

In our Declaration of Independence, it reads that “all men are created equal,” and that they have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” In Germany’s Constitution, it reads that, “human dignity shall be inviolable.”

Even as we celebrate these values – even as we mark this day – we know the work of freedom is never finished. In a Berlin under siege, President Kennedy said, “Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free.” Few would have foreseen – in that day – that a united Germany would be led by a woman from Brandenburg, or that their American ally would be led by a man of African descent. But human destiny is what human beings make of it.

Today, there are still those who live within walls of tyranny – human beings who are denied the very human rights that we celebrate today. And that is why this day is for them – as much as it is for us; it is for those who believe – even in the face of cynicism and doubt and oppression – that walls can truly come down.

Let us never forget November 9, 1989, nor the sacrifices that made it possible. Let us sustain the friendship across the Atlantic that must never be broken. And together, let us keep the light of freedom burning bright for all who live in the darkness of tyranny, and believe in the hope of a brighter day. Thank you.