The peace talks in Rambouillet, France,

are a significant step forward in the search

for a fair and lasting peace in Kosovo. In the

last three weeks, the negotiations have produced

more progress than we have seen in

the decade since Kosovo’s autonomy was

stripped away by the Government in Belgrade.

By agreeing in principle to a strong plan

that would provide substantial self-government

for the people of Kosovo, the negotiators

on the Albanian side have shown courage

and leadership. The agreement by the

Serb side to substantial autonomy for Kosovo

also represents an important, but incomplete,

recognition that only by allowing the people

in Kosovo control over their day-to-day lives

can there be a lasting peace.

The Kosovar negotiators have asked for

time to consult with their constituents before

formally signing the peace plan. I believe that

the Kosovar Albanian people will strongly

support what their negotiators have done, because

the agreement represents the opportunity

for a better life after years of repression

and fear. The Serbs should be prepared

to return to the negotiations on March 15

with a commitment to sign the full agreement—

including the indispensable provisions

on the withdrawal of most Serb security

forces from Kosovo and the deployment of

a NATO-led peace implementation force.

In the meantime, it is imperative that all

sides avoid provocations that would imperil

this progress. NATO Secretary General

Javier Solana retains the authority given to

him by the NATO Council to act if necessary.

I want to thank Secretary Albright and all

her negotiators for their tireless efforts that

led to hopeful developments, and commend

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine,

the cochairs of Rambouillet, for their leadership.