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## **Americans pay tribute to 500 thousand victims of the pandemic. Biden: “A truly grim, heartbreaking milestone”**

(from New York) Americans gathered for a moment of silence nation-wide, with flags flown at half-staff in all public buildings and grounds and 500 lit candles on the steps of the White House at dusk. The United States mourns the half a million lives lost to COVID-19, celebrated as a collective memory by its President and by Americans who joined him in grieving for those who are no longer with us and seeking to strike a new balance between mourning and hope. Last night, 22 February, US President Joe Biden delivered a funeral eulogy from the White House Cross Hall for 500,071 Americans who died from COVID-19, higher than the death toll from World War One, World War Two, and the Vietnam War combined.

### **“A truly grim, heartbreaking milestone”**

Biden said. We often hear people “described as ordinary Americans,” he pointed out. “There's no such thing, there's nothing ordinary about them. The people we lost were extraordinary. Born in America, emigrated to America. So many of them took their final breath alone.” He insisted that they must not be seen as a statistic or a blur or on the news and made a renewed appeal for unity, as *“It's not Democrats and Republicans who are dying from the virus. It's our fellow Americans. We have to fight this together, as one people, as the United States of America.”* Biden, whose own life has been marked by family tragedy, spoke in deeply personal terms of mourning and loss, in an effort to comfort and console those Americans whose lives have been forever changed by the pandemic. “I know all too well — *I know what it's like to not be there when it happens.* I know what it's like when you are there, holding their hands. There's a look in your eye, and they slip away”, the President said, asking the people of America “to join us to remember, so we can heal; to show that there is light in the darkness.” Biden called on all American people “to act; to remain vigilant, to stay socially distanced, to mask up”, to get vaccinated when it's one's turn; to end the politics and misinformation “that has divided families, communities, and the country, and has cost too many lives already.” In an effort to rekindle hope in the hearts of his fellow citizens, he said: *“This nation will smile again. This nation will know sunny days again”, and it will do so remembering “each person we've lost, the lives they lived, the loved ones they left behind.”* At the end of his speech, the President, together with the First Lady Jill Biden, Vice-President Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff, paused in front of the White House for a moment of silence, with a black drape covering the entrance and 500 lit candles on the stairs, each one representing a thousand people lost to the coronavirus. The Marine band played the Christian hymn 'Amazing Grace'; and Joe Biden made the sign of the cross, praying for America and for the American people.

Maddalena Maltese