

Statement of
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The March Elections in El Salvador

Meeting of the OAS Permanent Council
February 14, 1991

Madame President, I take this opportunity to inform the Council of the views of my government with respect to the relationship between peace and the consolidation of democracy in El Salvador -- issues with which the OAS, to its great credit, is actively involved.

At Puntarenas in December, the Presidents of Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras emphasized the importance to peace, stability and development in Central America of a democratic resolution to the conflict in El Salvador. Mincing no words, they called on the FMLN to accept an immediate and effective cease-fire, to accept agreements leading to a true and lasting peace in the region, to not create obstacles to elections, and to abandon the armed struggle so as to incorporate itself into the democratic process.

The direction is clear. A negotiated political solution and a ceasefire leading to free elections should be at the top of our regional agenda. There has been enough suffering in El Salvador on all sides; the Salvadoran people want peace; they want democracy. All sides need to put maximum efforts to achieve peace in democracy and justice now. The United States commits itself to support these efforts. This opportunity to reconcile the Salvadoran family cannot be allowed to pass.

In recent weeks we have sensed greater possibilities for movement in the negotiations to bring peace to El Salvador. The United States has therefore sought to do everything possible to encourage constructive positions and to intensify the pace of negotiations.

The March 10 elections present a genuine opportunity for national reconciliation due to the participation in these elections of a very broad spectrum of political parties, including the Democratic Convergence and the National Democratic Union.

These elections are an integral part of a peace process that includes national dialogue and reconciliation. The work of the Interpartidaria, a grouping that for the first time brings together political parties whose ideological positions are not only different but opposed, demonstrates how much progress El Salvador has made. The consensus recommendations of the Interpartidaria served as the basis of major changes in electoral law to broaden electoral participation and representation. Among other changes, representation of diverse viewpoints has been facilitated by increasing the size of the Legislative Assembly from 60 to 88. It is not utopian to suggest that democracy can be the basis of peacemaking.

The decision of our Secretary General to observe the March 10 elections "strengthens the basic process that makes it possible for Salvadorans to take their political differences to the ballot box." The words are those of Secretary of State Baker in a letter to Ambassador Baena Soares dated February 2. The comprehensive observation of these elections, begun by the OAS on December 3 in response to a request conveyed to this very Council by Salvadoran Foreign Minister Pacas on September 14, is critical to ensuring that they are conducted in an atmosphere free from violence and conducive to national reconciliation.

We are encouraged by the fact that arrangements for a comprehensive observation are well along, that the OAS has fielded some 60 observers in El Salvador to date, that it plans to provide some 160 by election day, and that the government of El Salvador has demonstrated its commitment to free and fair elections by total cooperation with the OAS and an open invitation to electoral monitoring by other organizations. The Salvadoran Government has also issued strict guidelines to military units to safeguard the process and not in any way interfere with the vote count.

We are disturbed, however, by continuing violence. The attack last weekend on the newspaper Diario Latino is particularly disturbing because of its impact on the freedom of expression required for democratic elections. We call upon all parties involved to enable the upcoming elections to make their contribution to the process of national reconciliation. This is a time for all concerned to act with the greatest possible calm and serenity.

To the FMLN we point out that, at a time when an opportunity exists to expand political participation by a very broad spectrum of political parties in the Salvadoran

democratic process, an attack on the elections would seriously call into question the FMLN's stated commitment to a negotiated settlement. Those who took up arms when the system was closed must themselves realize in what they see about them how greatly El Salvador has changed, how greatly the channels for dissent and constructive participation have increased.

For its part, the United States remains committed to support a political solution and the safe and secure reintegration of the FMLN and all elements into the democratic process.

On January 15 President Bush reported to the Congress that he had determined that the 50 percent of FY 91 U.S. military assistance to El Salvador withheld under the foreign assistance legislation could now be released in response to FMLN actions.

Absent a compelling security need for the immediate delivery of this additional military assistance to El Salvador, however, the President of the United States also delayed delivery of those funds to encourage the FMLN to agree to an intensification of the negotiations for a political accord and ceasefire.

The completion of that 60-day period coincides with the elections for the Salvadoran National Assembly scheduled for March.

These funds could still be utilized for peaceful purposes. The United States would much prefer to devote this military assistance to the other purposes permitted under the act: "to assist with the costs of monitoring a permanent settlement of the conflict, including a ceasefire and the demobilization of the combatants, and their transfer to peaceful pursuits."

This too need not be utopian aspiration. The member states of the OAS are well aware of the highly regarded work of CIAV-OAS, operating in Nicaragua in support of the demobilization, repatriation, and reintegration of former combatants once free elections had brought a democratic outcome in that country.

Early progress is particularly important with respect to possible constitutional changes. Any changes agreed to by the two sides must be approved by two successive Salvadoran legislative assemblies. The current legislature has until its dissolution in April to ratify any proposed constitutional reforms.

Madame President, I wish to take this opportunity to express once again my government's strongest possible condemnation of violations of human rights.

-- I begin with the murders of two U.S. citizen military officers by FMLN guerrillas.

-- The simple, material facts of the case are known. The helicopter in which the officers were travelling was shot down. The wreck did not cause the death of either Lt. Col. Pickett or his colleague Dawson. Both were shot dead at point blank range.

-- If the FMLN is serious about justice, it should turn the accused over to the Salvadoran justice system.

-- I continue with the brutal murder of my friend Ignacio Ellacuria and his colleagues at the University of Central America.

-- More than a year has passed. The early rapid progress in the investigation and prosecution of these brutal murders was followed by long delays and seeming inertia.

- The December 7 decision to move this case to the trial stage was welcome news. Let us hope that it signals renewed determination to do justice not only in this case, but also in the as yet unresolved cases of the murders by guerrilla forces of former Supreme Court Justice Guerrero and Minister of the Presidency Rodriguez Porth.

Madame President, my comments have ranged from general policy to particular cases. However one views the situation in El Salvador it is clear that killing must stop, the fighting must cease. The time for war in El Salvador is over; the time for a lasting peace settlement founded on respect for human rights and commitment to the democratic process is now.