

Statement by Ambassador Luigi R. Einaudi
U.S. Permanent Representative to the
Organization of American States

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PANAMA

Mr. Chairman:

I speak to the resolution introduced by Venezuela.

The discussions during this meeting have revealed that the view is almost universal throughout the hemisphere that Mr. Noriega is an oppressor of the Panamanian people, and a disgrace to the hemisphere.

That is hardly a surprise. Mr. Noriega's actions of September 1 demonstrated with chilling finality his callous disregard for the international community and for Panama's own constitution. On that day, Mr. Noriega rejected the transfer of power called for by the OAS Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers, agreed to by his representatives, and required by the Constitution of the Republic of Panama.

The outrageous actions of Mr. Noriega -- his corrupt dealings with drug cartels and the instability his regime poses for the safety of transit of the Canal, as well as his disdain for the most elemental norms of democratic legitimacy -- are threats to the Inter-American community.

From May to August of this year, the United States fully and faithfully supported the efforts of this organization, including four Meetings of Consultation and the OAS Foreign Ministers' Mission to Panama, to facilitate a democratic transfer of power by September 1. Despite our responsibility for the security of the Panama Canal and the Noriega regime's gross provocations, we have carefully abided by the spirit and the letter of the Panama Canal Treaties.

As President Bush announced last May and reaffirmed on September 1, the United States will continue to support multilateral diplomatic efforts designed to bring about a democratic transition in Panama. We will continue to assert and defend our rights under the Canal Treaties and will take the steps necessary to protect the lives of our citizens.

In a world of rising democratic expectations, a political system other than a functioning democracy cannot provide the political stability and the economic strength which is indispensable for the Canal's continuing safe and efficient operations. As we have stated consistently since Mr. Noriega brutally and illegally aborted the democratic elections of May 7, a return to democracy requires that Mr. Noriega leave power as a necessary first step toward a national reconciliation.

Let us be clear. The interest of my government is not in installing a particular individual or party in power in Panama. To do so would only sow the seeds of a new crisis in the future. The citizens of Panama have shown that, left free, they are perfectly capable of deciding their own affairs democratically. Moreover, the rest of us in the Americas have no interest in attempting to meddle in the internal affairs of Panama: what we all seek is a solution to Panama's travails that does not involve intervention. That is why we are here today. Our interest lies in a democratic process that will ensure that successive Panamanian governments truly reflect the will of the Panamanian people. Justice and a commitment to the principles of the OAS Charter require no less.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has documented grave violations of Human Rights in Panama. The report presented to this assembly is devastating.

The Special Report is an immediately relevant contribution to the embattled cause of human rights in Panama. The report is a clear indictment of the flagrant abuses of the political and civil rights of the Panamanian people.

The Report documents what the Commission calls a pattern of abuse. I quote "since the crisis of June 1987 a pattern has emerged in the behavior of the Panamanian authorities toward the opposition in the form of violations to personal integrity."

The Commission's findings on conditions in Panamanian jails are particularly revolting. In the jails, political prisoners "have been placed in overcrowded cells together with common criminals, and in some instances ...sexually assaulted."

The Commission finds that "the right to personal liberty has been seriously curtailed in Panama. The illegal detention of political dissidents without even the most elementary formalities or guarantees has become standard practice. Several cases have been reported in which even the relatives of the suspect or prisoner are detained."

The list is long and depressing.

I quote the report once again: "the freedom of expression and information recognized in Panama's Constitution cannot be exercised by Panamanians and their institutions."

The Commission has documented in careful detail the events surrounding the aborted May 7 elections; I need not expand on that here. The Commission concludes: "The annulment of the elections of May 7, 1989 by the Electoral Tribunal and the lack of agreement between the leading political participants in Panama have left the current provisional Government devoid of constitutional legitimacy." The corollary to that conclusion is also obvious: "the resulting lack of legitimacy, coupled with an obvious absence of popular support, make it likely that under the current government, developments in the areas of human rights in general and of the exercise of political rights in particular will be negative."

Mr. Chairman:

In the absence of a democratic transition to constitutional government as of September 1, the overwhelming majority of OAS member states have withdrawn their Ambassadors from Panama. This little known fact attests to the effectiveness of this organization as sounding board or *caja de resonancia* to share information and ideas of concern to member states.

Last August, Secretary Eagleburger shared with the Permanent Council some basic facts and views of the United States on the true nature and origins of the crisis in Panama. I will only note here that they covered the content of the indictments against Mr. Noriega in two U.S. Federal District Courts and the substantiation of the charges; betrayals by Mr. Noriega of his word, his uniform and his colleagues as well as his people; a rebuttal of calumnies against the United States; and finally a restatement of the fundamental commitment of the United States to the full and faithful implementation of the Panama Canal treaties and to a peaceful and democratic solution to Panama's problems.

Mr. Chairman:

We have before us a resolution on Panama co-sponsored by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. This resolution does not contain everything the United States might have wanted. Nonetheless, it meets two decisive tests:

First, the resolution demonstrates to the people of Panama that the inter-American community is on their side in their struggle to end a corrupt dictatorship and make the transition to freely elected democratic government committed to the full protection of their human rights.

Second, the resolution is the product of serious and repeated exchanges among a very large number of delegations in this hall. The views expressed were many, well-stated, and in defense of important perspectives and principles. But as I noted in opening this statement, they also reflected a single underlying truth: Mr. Noriega had no defenders. Inter-American solidarity is with the people of Panama.

In his toast at his lunch on Tuesday, Secretary of State Baker said that he believed that "we can and must move forward without in any way damaging fundamental principles like non-intervention and self-determination. In fact," he continued, "democracy lies at the core of those principles. Democracy is the best guarantee of non-intervention, peace, and development."

Mr. Chairman:

The United States will vote in favor of the resolution co-sponsored by Argentina and nine other states and presented by Venezuela before this Assembly.

Thank you very much.
