

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

PANAMA

December 20, 1989

Mr. Chairman:

I would like to begin with a procedural point. The U.S. is very pleased that the outlaw regime of Noriega has given way to a government that reflects the will of the Panamanian people.

I think we are all aware that there is a rapidly changing and very complex situation in Panama. The origin and nature of this crisis need to be explored. In the view of my government, the legitimate representative of Panama is not present here in this meeting.

The President this morning directed United States military forces to execute at 1:00 AM this morning missions in Panama designed to protect American lives and to defend the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties. In accordance with the provisions of the Charter of this Organization, and of Articles 51 and 52 of the Charter of the United Nations, I have been instructed to brief you on this action of the United States.

United States forces have exercised their inherent right of self-defense under international law by taking action in Panama in response to armed attacks by forces under the direction of Manuel Noriega.

The situation in Panama under Noriega had become unsustainable. 35,000 citizens of the United States live in Panama. Their lives were seriously endangered. The integrity of the Panama Canal treaties was at risk as the result of the pressures, abuses, and -- yes -- force of a man who is under indictment for drug-related charges. The President made every effort to resolve the situation peacefully through negotiations under the auspices of the Organization of American States and Latin American leaders. Mr. Noriega rejected all these efforts.

I am certain that many of you heard President Bush at 7:20 AM this morning. I ask your indulgence:

BEGIN QUOTE:

My fellow citizens, last night I ordered U.S. military

forces to Panama. No President takes such action lightly. This morning, I want to tell you what I did and why I did it.

For nearly two years, the United States, nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have worked together to resolve the crisis in Panama. The goals of the United States have been to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty. Many attempts have been made to resolve this crisis through diplomacy and negotiations. All were rejected by the dictator of Panama, General Manuel Noriega, an indicted drug trafficker.

Last Friday, Noriega declared his military dictatorship to be in a state of war with the United States and publicly threatened the lives of Americans in Panama. The very next day, forces under his command shot and killed an unarmed American serviceman, wounded another, arrested and brutally beat a third American serviceman, and then brutally interrogated his wife, threatened her with sexual abuse.

That was enough.

General Noriega's reckless threats and attacks upon Americans in Panama created an imminent danger to the 35,000 American citizens in Panama. As President, I have no higher obligation than to safeguard the lives of American citizens. And that is why I directed our Armed Forces to protect the lives of American citizens in Panama and to bring General Noriega to justice in the United States. I contacted the bipartisan leadership of Congress last night and informed them of this decision, and after taking this action, I also talked with leaders in Latin America, the Caribbean, and those of other U.S. allies.

At this moment, U.S. forces, including forces deployed from the United States last night, are engaged in action in Panama. The United States intends to withdraw the forces newly deployed to Panama as quickly as possible. Our forces have conducted themselves courageously and selflessly. As Commander-in-Chief, I salute every one of them and thank them on behalf of our country.

Tragically, some Americans have lost their lives already in defense of their fellow citizens, in defense of democracy. My heart goes out to their families. We also regret and mourn the loss of innocent Panamanians.

~~The brave Panamanians elected by the people in the elections held last May -- President Guillermo Endara and~~

Vice Presidents Calderon and Ford -- have assumed the rightful leadership of their country. You remember those horrible pictures of newly-elected Vice President Ford, covered head to toe with blood, beaten mercilessly by so-called "dignity battalions." Well, the United States today recognizes the democratically elected government of President Endara. I will send our Ambassador back to Panama immediately.

Key military objectives have been achieved. Most organized resistance has been eliminated. But the operation is not over yet. General Noriega is in hiding. And nevertheless, yesterday, a dictator ruled Panama; and today, constitutionally elected leaders govern.

I have today directed the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State to lift the economic sanctions with respect to the democratically elected government of Panama, and in cooperation with that government, to take steps to effect an orderly unblocking of Panamanian government assets in the United States. I am fully committed to implement the Panama Canal treaties and to turn over the Canal to Panama in the year 2000.

The actions we have taken and the cooperation of a new democratic government in Panama will permit us to honor these commitments. As soon as the new government recommends a qualified Panamanian candidate to be administrator of the Canal as called for in the treaties, I will submit this nominee to the Senate for expedited consideration.

I am committed to strengthening our relationship with the democratic nations of this hemisphere. I will continue to seek solutions to the problems of this region through dialogue and multilateral diplomacy.

I took this action only after reaching the conclusion that every other avenue was closed and the lives of American citizens were in grave danger. I hope that the people of Panama will put this dark chapter of dictatorship behind them and move forward together as citizens of a democratic Panama with this government that they, themselves, have elected.

The United States is eager to work with the Panamanian people in partnership and friendship to rebuild their economy. The Panamanian people want democracy, peace, and the chance for a better life in dignity and freedom. The people of the United States seek only to support them in pursuit of these noble goals.

END QUOTE.

Mr. Chairman:

President Bush took this action only after exhausting every available diplomatic and multilateral means to resolve this crisis. From the moment Noriega had brutally annulled the May 7 elections, President Bush supported the arduous efforts of the Organization of American States to resolve the crisis by facilitating a peaceful transfer of power through democratic means.

Despite the most dedicated efforts of the Twenty-First Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers, Noriega steadfastly denied the rights of the Panamanian people to choose a democratic government. Instead, he flouted the decisions of the Meeting of Consultation as well as the constitution of Panama, which called for a transfer of power, through democratic means, by September 1.

Noriega's systemic and systematic violations of human rights of the people of Panama prompted the OAS General Assembly last month to take the unusual step of specifically endorsing the conclusions of the Special Report on Panama of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a report that can only be characterized as "devastating" in its impact. The Assembly adopted a resolution which resolves "to express its deep concern for the serious violations of fundamental rights and liberties in Panama, especially those bearing on the full observance of civil and political rights, as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has stated in its special report on that country."

In recent days, the crisis has grown far more dangerous. Noriega has acted in an increasingly unstable, unpredictable, and dangerous manner. First he declared himself "maximum leader" last Friday, then he declared a state of war with the United States. Following that declaration of war, the Panamanian defense forces felt free to fire at military personnel of the United States stationed in Panama under the Canal treaties.

The violent incidents which resulted in the death of an unarmed military officer of the United States and physical attacks on other U.S. military personnel provoked fears of new, more threatening acts of violence directed against our citizens in Panama.

Now that the President has acted, United States forces will take only the measures necessary to assure the safety of Americans and the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties. All feasible measures have been taken to minimize the risk of

civilian damage or casualties. The U.S. hopes to withdraw its forces as quickly as possible.

The United States is fully committed to upholding the Panama Canal treaties. Indeed, an additional reason the President was forced to act was to safeguard the Canal and uphold the long-term integrity of the treaties under steady attack from the deteriorating conditions imposed by Noriega.

The United States recognizes the democratically elected government of President Endara. It is important, in particular, that the international community rally around the new democratic government of Panama, just as it did when international observers supported Endara, Arias Calderon, and Ford when they were attacked and brutalized following the May 7 elections.

We hope that you will understand and support our actions as does the democratically elected government of Panama, which we consulted and which supports our action. We pledge our support for a complete transition to elected democratic government in Panama, to the full protection of the human rights of the Panamanian people, and to the economic recovery and development of the country. We are dealing with an extraordinarily complicated and complex situation and fast breaking developments.

The United States will continue to keep the Council informed as events develop.

Thank you.