

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

at the Permanent Council Session Honoring  
the Late Jose Napoleon Duarte  
Former President of El Salvador

March 15, 1990

I would like to begin by reading the statement issued by the White House on February 23.

"THE PRESIDENT AND MRS. BUSH ARE DEEPLY SADDENED TO HEAR OF THE DEATH OF FORMER PRESIDENT DUARTE. PRESIDENT DUARTE WAS THE FATHER OF SALVADORAN DEMOCRACY, A DEDICATED SERVANT TO THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR, AND A FIRM FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES. HIS WISDOM AND DEDICATION TO THE GROWTH OF DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AMERICA WILL BE LONG REMEMBERED. PRESIDENT DUARTE WAS ALSO A STRONG SUPPORTER AND EXPONENT ON BEHALF OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HAS LEFT A STRONG LEGACY IN THIS AREA.

"THE PRESIDENT ENJOYED A WARM, CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT DUARTE. THE PRESIDENT ADMIRES THE COURAGE HE EXHIBITED IN BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN EL SALVADOR AND THE MESSAGE OF HOPE HE BROUGHT TO ALL OF CENTRAL AMERICA. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE JOIN THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR IN MOURNING THEIR LOSS."

My own mind equates Napoleon Duarte with courage. Physical courage as in 1972 when his reward for winning the presidential election was arrest, beating, and deportation. Moral courage as in 1980 when this great civilian and democrat agreed to participate with military officers in an unelected Junta to guide his country to make the reforms essential to begin the democratic process.

The history of the world is filled with stories of men who failed at the critical moment. Napoleon Duarte knew the odds. In his biography he refers to the period of the juntas of 1979 and 1980 as "the worst of times." But he never hesitated.

Physical courage and moral courage came together when he was struck by liver cancer. Duarte at the height of his powers was a dominant figure. I remember him, for example, at Sesori at nine in the morning of the 20th of September, 1986, when as President he went to meet the leaders of the FMLN guerrilla to discuss peace. The guerrillas did not come, but the plaza of this provincial town in one of El Salvador's most conflictive zones was filled -- with people and filled with the physical force of Napoleon Duarte and his optimism.

Two years later, the disease and the chemotherapy had consumed 40 pounds of weight and nearly all his hair. But his vigor and his vision were untouched. I was not present at the Christian Democratic Party Congress in September 1988 when he appeared in public for the first time after his return from treatment at Walter Reed, but I am told that all who were will never forget: the man was shockingly shrunk by physical ailment, yet he was the same giant, unchanged, the man of political struggle passing on the flag of his beloved Party to Fidel Chavez Mena, recalling the many battles he and Fidel had fought together since 1960.

By November of that year of 1988, Duarte had put back on almost half the lost weight and some hair. Many of us here today remember the moment, on November 14, 1988, when President Duarte addressed the inaugural session of the Eighteenth Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly in San Salvador. His speech was powerful in content and powerful in delivery. It was also short. That afternoon, a U.S. diplomat said jokingly to President Duarte that his excellent speech had been almost anglo-saxon in its brevity. The President looked horrified. "Not at all," said he, "it was simply that this morning the pain in my stomach was too great. I could not have continued had I wanted to." His improved appearance had conspired with his indomitable spirit to project the illusion of normalcy. What we had witnessed was not normalcy; we had witnessed Napoleon Duarte's courage.

The images evoked by this extraordinary life overwhelm the senses. He was quintessentially a man of El Salvador, but he studied in the United States, lived in exile in Venezuela, and enjoyed enormous respect in Europe. He was a Christian Democrat who took both his democratic principles and his Catholicism seriously, but he was also a man open to all views and faiths, open to all humanity. That morning at Sesori, he had promised to be there, waiting for the FMLN at 9:00 a.m. And so he was, standing on the steps in front of the Church in the town square. At 10:00, after waiting in vain an hour for the guerrillas to show up, he invited the crowd to join him in the Church to pray for peace. He started to turn, then stopped. Looking over the crowd, this President of the country named The Saviour and leader of a party whose origins are rooted in the doctrines of the Catholic Church, this man Napoleon Duarte looked out at us and said "And remember, you do not have to be Catholic to enter the Church to pray for peace."

This was a man who reached into all corners of our lives, from boy scouts bursting with enthusiasm to the crippled asking nothing more than a chance. Ruth Mondschein of the United States Department of Education wrote asking that I mention

today that it was President Duarte who issued a proclamation to support the "International Decade of the Disabled" at the Sixth Inter-American Symposium for the Handicapped. President Duarte was, she wrote, "a tower of strength and a tower of patience."

And this, finally, is what I want to emphasize. In the affairs of mankind, it is important to have goals. And it is important to have the tenacity to achieve them. It is no accident that Napoleon Duarte came to symbolize democracy and human rights. They were his ideals, and he never gave up. I remember once, in 1980, during the Carter Administration, when Duarte visited Washington on a networking visit organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. I commented to him that I thought it was important to establish links among the political leaders of the Americas that were at least as good as those among our bankers and generals. And, I added, the increasing emphasis on democracy in U.S. foreign policy created opportunities for us to establish new relationships. Two years later, we met again. He reminded me of our conversation, then said: "I am still waiting." The statement was gentle, not bitter. Two more years passed. And then, under the Reagan Administration, the Congress of the United States approved the legislation creating the National Endowment for Democracy, whose fundamental purposes turn around the fostering of political communication and solidarity.

In Napoleon Duarte, vision was tempered by tenacity. If you do not succeed the first time, try, try again. It is an example for our children and our grandchildren. In 1972, Duarte fought an election in behalf of decency and modernity and was run out of his country. Duarte did not look back. He looked to the future. Ten years later, Napoleon Duarte fought again, and this time, he was supported at critical moments by democratic forces throughout the world.

Who changed between 1972 and the 1980's? Duarte, or the world? The safe answer is probably "Both." I believe the better answer is that the world, including the United States, changed a lot while Duarte changed very little. Duarte remained a Christian Democrat in the tradition of what the French once called a "party of movement," a party advocating social change. The United States did not become Christian Democratic, nor did it become blindly a party of movement. But in the troubled decade that spanned the late 1970s to the present, the United States did change. The United States gave increasing emphasis to human rights and democracy. --

Let me be clear: The United States supports democracy, but the United States is not partisan among democrats. Historians will record that El Salvador has had other outstanding democratic Presidents during this decisive decade:

-- Alvaro Magana, who between 1982 and 1984 held the polity together by making politicians talk to each other and by asking military leaders to think in modern terms and to give their allegiance to the nation; and

-- Alfredo Cristiani, who is today proving that a "party of order" can also be democratic, and can play a critical role in consolidating democratic gains, in restoring an economy gutted by war, and in bringing peace.

So let me repeat: The Duarte my country celebrates is not Duarte the Christian Democrat; it is Duarte the democrat with a small "d," Duarte the defender of human rights, Duarte the man who never gave up. His legacy can be put as a set of challenges: How can democracy be possible without respect for the rights of others? How can negotiations be possible where human rights are not respected? How can there be confidence in a negotiated agreement, even the best of agreements, if it takes place in an atmosphere of abuse?

What President Duarte had to say to the assembled Ministers of the Organization of American States that day in November 1988 is worth remembering today. "Looking to the . . . future," he said, "I see my country at peace, in harmony, secure in the serenity of natural justice. And when I say my country, I am not referring just to this beloved patch of earth where my fellow citizens live, suffer and dream, but to all of Central America, which must once again take up its single destiny, in response not only to the living force of tradition and the national soul, but to the force of the ideals espoused by our statesmen and the compelling historic need to join forces in meeting the powerful challenges facing us."

The fundamental opportunity in Central America today is as President Duarte defined it before the OAS in 1988. It is the achievement of peace throughout Central America on a basis of democratic practices, respect for the national interests of all countries and regional cooperation to control arms and stimulate the productivity that is possible only in a secure and equitable environment.

The United States will remember President Duarte by redoubling its commitment to human rights, democratic freedoms, and a negotiated political settlement to the war in El Salvador.

Let me close by reading the statement issued February 23 by Secretary of State James A. Baker, III:

"PRESIDENT DUARTE STAKED HIS LIFE AND REPUTATION MORE THAN ONCE IN THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY. AS PRESIDENT, HE SHOWED

FORTITUDE AND COURAGE IN FIGHTING THE VIOLENT EXTREMISTS FROM BOTH THE LEFT AND RIGHT WHO SOUGHT TO DERAIL THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS FOR WHICH ALL SALVADORANS YEARN.

"JOSE NAPOLEON DUARTE WAS A TRUE LEADER AND A TRUE PATRIOT. HIS PASSING REPRESENTS A LOSS FOR ALL DEMOCRATIC PEOPLES. THERE COULD BE NO MORE FITTING TRIBUTE TO HIS MEMORY THAN FOR HIS COUNTRYMEN TO FOLLOW HIS LEAD AND TO ENSURE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS GROW AND STRENGTHEN IN THE COUNTRY HE LOVED SO DEEPLY AND TO WHICH HE GAVE SO MUCH. THE UNITED STATES, FOR ITS PART, WILL REMEMBER PRESIDENT DUARTE BY REDOUBLING ITS COMMITMENT TO THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS AND TO FOSTERING A NEGOTIATED POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO THE WAR."

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.