

*Statements by Ministers*

and unreservedly subscribes to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of States. The use of force is clearly a very serious matter. The Canadian government has already clearly expressed its regrets with respect to the U.S. intervention in Panama. However, we must not forget the pressing reasons that forced President Bush to authorize the intervention of U.S. troops.

• (1820)

[English]

Over the past two years the world has been witness to one of the most systematic betrayals on record. It is a betrayal in Panama of those democratic values which we hold dear in this House and, indeed, which are respected by most of our neighbours in Latin America and in the Caribbean. Even before that, the governments of Presidents Barletta and Del Valle were very much subject to the whims of General Noriega as commander-in-chief of the Panamanian Defence Force.

Canada has not traditionally maintained the most cordial relations with those successive regimes, which we regarded as being democratic in name only, but we were able to carry on correct business-like relations with them based on mutual interest. In 1987, when General Noriega was indicted by an American court on narcotics trafficking charges and the United States imposed an economic embargo, we did not follow suit.

When the May 1989 elections were called, we held out some hope that the Panamanian people would be permitted to express their democratic will at the polls. When, however, it became obvious that those elections were going decisively against Noriega's chosen candidate, the regime abruptly had the process declared void.

Canada condemned that denial of free elections. All of us were shocked by the images of the violent public beatings of the leaders whom the people of Panama had chosen to govern them. It was a temptation then to respond with violence. That temptation was strong and outspoken among some in the United States. It was resisted, it was resisted everywhere including, principally and most importantly, by the United States administration.

Various efforts were launched to achieve a peaceful solution to this very difficult problem. Some of them were bilateral, some of them were individual efforts by

leaders of other countries. One of the most important was through the Organization of American States. On July 20 of this year, the Organization of American States passed a formal resolution which called for a transfer of power, taking effect on September 1 this year, from the Noriega regime to the people who had been elected in the May elections.

The OAS also launched a diplomatic mission headed by the foreign ministers of three of its member countries who travelled extensively and worked hard to try to find a peaceful way in which this transfer of power could be achieved. What is lamentable, but evident, is that that peaceful solution did not work.

There was, as we all know, recently an aborted coup. In the past week there have been developments that were particularly alarming, would be to anyone in this House and were to many of us, including the statement by General Noriega that Panama is in a "state of war" to us his words, with the United States.

That declaration unilaterally by General Noriega was followed by harassment of Americans stationed, by treaty, in Panama. Indeed, it was followed by the murder of an off-duty member of the American services and threats to the family of that individual.

It is important here, Sir, to emphasize two facts which distinguish the situation in Panama from that which might exist in other parts of the world. One of those facts is that the United States presence there is a result of a treaty. It is not a presence that is the result of an occupation. It is not a presence that is the result of an uninvited presence by the United States in that country. The American troops are there as the result of a legal agreement. They are there as the result of an international treaty. They have a right to be there and they have a right to be protected while they are there. That is one distinguishing factor and feature about the situation in Panama today.

A second fact that I want to underline is that peaceful solutions had been sought and peaceful solutions had failed. In fact, what was remarkable for so long was the willingness of the Bush administration to put its faith in mediation, to put its faith in negotiation, to put its faith in peaceful processes. The response to that was the declaration by General Noriega, unilaterally, of a state of war. The response to that was the murder of an off-duty American stationed there. The response to that