

Statement

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Déclaration

Secrétaire d'État
aux Affaires
extérieures

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AS DELIVERED

AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE BARBARA McDOUGALL,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
TO THE
SPECIAL ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)
MINISTERIAL MEETING ON GUATEMALA

WASHINGTON, D.C.
JUNE 3, 1993

Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Mr. Chairman:

We in Canada were extremely distressed over the efforts of President [Elias] Serrano to stage an "auto-coup" in Guatemala. This backward step, coming so quickly after the coups in Haiti and Peru, would have led to widespread disappointment in Canada, as a further setback to the progress towards democracy in our hemisphere. Canadians, and hence Canadian governments, have no interest in strengthening our ties with dictatorships.

Therefore, I am pleased to join with others today in expressing my satisfaction that Mr. Serrano's attempt to rule by himself seems to have failed. It failed thanks to the courageous stand taken by all sectors of Guatemalan society and by individual Guatemalans. It failed thanks to the strong reaction of the international community led by the OAS [Organization of American States] and most of its member states.

Before going further, allow me to commend you, Mr. Secretary-General, and our colleagues from Nicaragua, Barbados and Uruguay, for your decisive, highly skilled intervention on behalf of the hemispheric community and the cause of democratic principles.

I agree with those who have already cautioned that the restoration of full representative democracy under the Constitution in Guatemala has not yet been completed. The OAS, therefore, must keep this ad hoc meeting open until this task has been fully completed.

If events dictate, we must be prepared to persevere both through this organization and bilaterally to ensure that representative democracy is restored. We must be prepared to tighten individual and collective sanctions if there is any backsliding. We must ensure that the OAS sends a clear and unambiguous message to the hemisphere and to the world: attempts to overturn democratically elected institutions by extra-constitutional means will not be tolerated.

Mr. Chairman, like a number of other countries in this hemisphere and therefore a number of members of this organization, Guatemala is a relatively new democracy. Its democratic organizations are still new and, in some cases, weak. These institutions are also threatened by the continuation of a long-standing insurgency that saps the energies of the government, its institutions and the entire society.

While we support efforts such as those just undertaken by this organization to turn back the clock on would-be dictators, we are firmly convinced that a more productive, long-term approach by the OAS and its member states is called for.

What we have in mind is a much more active role for the OAS in the promotion and strengthening of democracy. The Unit for the

Promotion of Democracy (UPD) should be used for more than election monitoring, although that is certainly an important aspect of its work. We see several needs that the UPD should be addressing in Guatemala and in those other countries that are anxious for assistance from the OAS:

- 1) seminars, workshops and training opportunities for the judiciary and those responsible for law enforcement;
- 2) education of the military on its role in a democratic society;
- 3) technical assistance on judicial reform;
- 4) financial and technical assistance for human rights organizations;
- 5) education at the local level on the role and function of democracy; and
- 6) more exchanges between democratic institutions within the hemisphere.

We see no reason why the UPD could not be working on these needs. If it had been doing so in Guatemala, we might not be confronted with the situation we face today.

It is not my intention, Mr. Chairman, to dwell on lost opportunities. My point is that we have an obligation to ensure that we are not continually confronted with these situations. I am confident that the OAS can take action that will help prevent such situations from occurring.

We should mandate the UPD to begin to work in Guatemala on the needs I have just identified. I know there are other needs as well. My government also believes that there is a role for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and urge that it be asked to send a mission to Guatemala as soon as possible.

When this organization begins to implement a long-term approach to the promotion of democracy, its real value to the hemisphere will become more evident. The crisis management of coups is not what the Santiago Commitment was all about. I believe it was about building democratic societies. My government expects us here today to start building, and I think that strong support for strengthening democratic institutions in Guatemala is a good place to start.