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87/57

Toast by the  
Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for  
External Affairs, at the  
dinner given in honour of  
Mr. Sergio Ramirez Mercado,  
Vice-President of Nicaragua

OTTAWA

October 21, 1987.

Mr. Vice-President, Senora Guerrero, Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests, Colleagues:

Maureen and I are pleased to welcome you, on behalf of the Government of Canada, on your first official visit to this country. I know that your Ambassador has ensured that you will have had the opportunity to meet a large number of Canadians in Ottawa and Toronto. I have seen your program and it has that 'fully loaded' appearance that I thought had been exclusively designed for some of my visits. I wish you 'courage' as you make your way through it. However, I believe that you will be well received, and I hope that the visit will prove to be rewarding for you personally and for Canada/Nicaragua relations.

From our point of view, the timing of your visit is excellent. You are one of the major participants in the Central America peace process, and I look forward to receiving a first-hand account of this process and its prospects. You are also the senior government representative on the National Reconciliation Commission, set up under the peace plan, and we all appreciate the priority you are giving Canada in taking time away from these critically important activities to visit us.

From the many Canadian visitors that you receive: journalists, persons from the church and NGO communities and ordinary Canadians seeking to inform themselves about the crisis and the nature of your revolution - you will know that you have an attentive Canadian audience.

You, your Sandinista colleagues, your many compatriots who do not belong to that Party, and, indeed, some who are now ranged in opposition to you, successfully created a revolution. In terms of Nicaragua's past and the long dark Somoza dynasty, we share your view that the revolution is irreversible. But yours is also a revolution whose internal dynamics and long-term orientation cannot but give rise to a measure of concern. I would not be faithfully representing my government and numerous Canadians were I to gloss over this delicate matter. I earnestly desire to enlarge my understanding of Nicaragua in our discussions tomorrow and, of course, during my visit to your country in November.

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These issues are inextricably, but not wholly, linked to the peace process in Central America. This process is, without question, the most important regional development of the past five years. It was as surprising as it was welcome that the five Presidents could make significant concessions and create the collective political will which led to the Guatemalan Agreement. I can say to you that we are also agreeably surprised that, despite many serious obstacles, the momentum of this initiative has been sustained. We are all delighted that it has been so eloquently recognized by the conferring of the Nobel Peace Prize on its principal architect, President Arias of Costa Rica. I believe that the other four Presidents all share in that achievement.

Your government has made an impressive contribution to the process over the past several weeks. In our view, these are real commitments which carry for you, your government and the people of Nicaragua real political implications - the reopening of an uncensored La Prensa, a voice again for Radio Catolica, and the opening of a dialogue with the political opposition. We encourage you to move toward the original goals of the Sandinista revolution, including a commitment to political pluralism and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. We hope that the resolve that you have shown in these recent measures will continue, will be steady, and will increase if and when, as we hope, the sound of war recedes.

I note with satisfaction that El Salvador and Guatemala have entered into direct discussions with the guerilla movements in their countries; and that despite some misgivings Honduras has now established a National Reconciliation Commission. Another hopeful sign was the repatriation ten days ago of over 4,000 Salvadoran refugees from their camp in Honduras.

There has been progress. And there is no doubt a palpable will on the part of the peoples of Central America, torn, impoverished and fatigued by war and dislocation, to support the efforts which their leaders are making.

As I said to the United Nations General Assembly last month, Canada is prepared to contribute to the peace process in any direct and practical way open to us. We support the process and we have provided, and will provide, more than rhetorical support. Canada has given over \$40 million in development assistance to Nicaragua over the past five years through official bilateral and international programs and also

through a number of non-governmental organizations - some of whom are represented here tonight. In terms of per capita assistance, the Central American program is the second most important operated anywhere in the world by the Canadian International Development Agency.

We will have the opportunity next month on my visit to Nicaragua and to other Central American countries to pursue these issues on your soil. Maureen and I are looking forward to our visit and hope that more of the bridges on the road to peace will have been built by that time.

May I propose a toast to a more prosperous and more peaceful future for Nicaragua and for her Central American neighbours.

Salud.