

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks on the Situation in Venezuela at Florida International University in Miami, Florida

February 18, 2019

The First Lady. Thank you. It is wonderful to be here today in the beautiful city of Miami. The President and I are honored to stand with all of you as we together support the people—great people—of Venezuela. I'm proud to be here with you in the United States of America as your First Lady. Many of you in the room know what it feels like to be blessed with freedom after living under the oppression of socialism and communism. In Venezuela, the people are on the brink of reclaiming their own liberty.

Today we must let the Venezuelan people hear us all with one united voice. There is hope, we are free, and we pray together loudly and proudly that soon the people of Venezuela will be free as well. My husband is here today because he cares deeply about the current suffering in Venezuela. This afternoon he has an important message to share.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to introduce my husband and the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump.

The President. Thank you very much, Melania. America is truly blessed to have such a—an extraordinary—right? Extraordinary First Lady. She's extraordinary. She really is. She cares about people.

Hello, Miami. I am thrilled to be back in the State I love with so many proud, freedom-loving patriots. We're here to proclaim, a new day is coming in Latin America. It's coming. In Venezuela and across the Western Hemisphere, socialism is dying, and liberty, prosperity, and democracy are being reborn.

Today our hearts are filled with hope because of the determination of millions of everyday Venezuelans, the patriotism of the Venezuelan National Assembly, and the incredible courage of Interim President Juan Guaidó. The people of Venezuela are standing for freedom and democracy, and the United States of America is standing right by their side.

Let me begin by thanking the great leaders here today who have been such incredible champions for the cause of liberty. And these people love you, and they love Venezuela, and they love Cuba. And they love all of the places that we're fighting for. Newly elected and already doing an incredible job, Governor Ron DeSantis. A man who I call, especially when we're talking about Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua—he knows a lot, and he's a friend of mine: Senator Marco Rubio. A great Governor—he gave Ron a little bit of a head start—he did a fantastic job in Florida, former Governor, and now Senator, Rick Scott.

Somebody that I've gotten to know very well, especially as to the fact that my heart is in Venezuela, Representative Mario Diaz-Balart. Ambassador Carlos Trujillo. Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Núñez. Your new and great attorney general, Ashley Moody. And to so many other dedicated public officials that are in this room right now, we thank you very much for being with us.

Audience members. We love you!

The President. Thank you.

Thank you also to Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, who is with us, and Ambassador Lighthizer. Ambassador Lighthizer, I have to say, just got back from a place called China. And, boy, oh, boy—we're making a lot of progress. Nobody expected this was going to be happening. We're making a lot of progress.

In the meantime, billions and billions of dollars are coming into our Treasury. It's very simple. All works. That never happened before. We don't know the feeling in this country, but now we know the feeling.

We also want to extend our deep appreciation to the president of Florida International University, Dr. Mark Rosenberg, for hosting this important event.

Finally, I want to thank each and every person in this wonderful audience who has made your own stand for human dignity. And that's probably just about all of you. And I want to especially thank the Venezuelan exile community that has done so much to support President Guaidó, to organize aid for their compatriots, and to do just a lot back home. Thank you very much for being here. Thank you. We're with you.

We are profoundly grateful to every dissident, every exile, every political prisoner, and everyone who bears witness to the horrors of socialism and communism and who has bravely spoken out against them. Thank you very much.

The fact is, you've seen the crimes, and you've seen the corruption. You have seen the hunger and the suffering. You have heard the anguished pleas for help. You have protested and protested with respect, but loudly. And you have prayed for the day we can now see—which is just ahead—the day when all the people of this region will at last be free.

Audience member. Amen!

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. As we meet today, the people of Venezuela stand at the threshold of history, ready to reclaim their country and to reclaim their future. Not long ago, Venezuela was the wealthiest nation, by far, in South America. But years of socialist rule have brought this once-thriving nation to the brink of ruin. That's where it is today.

The tyrannical socialist government nationalized private industries and took over private businesses. They engaged in massive wealth confiscation, shut down free markets, suppressed free speech, and set up a relentless propaganda machine, rigged elections, used the government to persecute their political opponents, and destroyed the impartial rule of law.

In other words, the Socialists have done in Venezuela all of the same things that Socialists, Communists, totalitarians have done everywhere that they've had a chance to rule. The results have been catastrophic.

Almost 90 percent of Venezuelans now live in poverty. In 2018, hyperinflation in Venezuela exceeded 1 million percent. Crippling shortages of food and medicine plague the country. Socialism has so completely ravaged this great country that even the world's largest reserves of oil are no longer enough to keep the lights on. This will never happen to us.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. Thank you.

Already, more than 3 million Venezuelans have fled Maduro's brutal opposition—and brutal it is. Today we are honored to be joined by Aminta Pérez, the mother of Oscar Pérez, a courageous Venezuelan police officer. You know the story.

In June of 2017, Oscar piloted a helicopter over the city of Baruta with the banner, "350 Liberty," a reference to article 350 of the Venezuelan Constitution, which states: "The people of Venezuela . . . shall disown any regime, legislation or authority that violates democratic values . . . or encroaches upon human rights."

Oscar said he wanted to give the people hope. He loved the people. He fought for the people. And they loved Oscar. But Oscar was gunned down and killed by Venezuela's—you know this very well; you all know the story—by the Venezuelan security forces, viciously.

Aminta, our hearts break for your loss. Oscar gave his life for the freedom of his people. We all have hope today because of great, great people and patriots like Oscar. Please, Aminta.

I said, "How about saying something in Spanish?" She likes Spanish. She's a little bit better in Spanish. Please. Please.

Audience members. [Inaudible]

[At this point, Miami, FL, resident Aminta Pérez made remarks in Spanish, and no translation was provided.]

The President. I don't know what she said, but I think I know what she said. And she is an incredible woman. And Oscar was an incredible man who will not have died in vain.

A few weeks ago, on January 23d, Venezuela's National Assembly invoked the Venezuelan constitution to declare the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as the country's legitimate leader. In one of his first acts, President Guaidó invoked the same constitutional article that Oscar carried through the skies to notify the world that Maduro was illegitimate.

Within 30 minutes, the United States was proud to be the first nation in the world to recognize President Guaidó.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. And by the way, John Bolton is here. Where is John? Working hard.

Today, more than 50 countries around the world now recognize the rightful Government of Venezuela. And the Venezuelan people have spoken, and the world has heard their beautiful voice. They are turning the page on socialism, turning the page on dictatorship, and there will be no going back.

Peace-loving nations are ready to help Venezuela reclaim its democracy, its dignity, and its destiny. All the nations in our hemisphere have the shared interest in preventing the spread of socialist tyranny. Socialism, by its very nature, does not respect borders. It does not respect boundaries or the sovereign rights of its citizens or its neighbors. It's always seeking to expand, to encroach, and to subjugate others to its will.

The twilight hour of socialism has arrived in our hemisphere and, frankly, in many, many places around the world. The days of socialism and communism are numbered not only in Venezuela, but in Nicaragua and in Cuba as well. [Applause] Do we love Cuba? Do we love Nicaragua? Great countries. Such great potential. Remember that word. Such unbelievable potential.

In the meantime, we must all work together to end a humanitarian disaster. As we speak, there are truckloads filled with hundreds of tons of desperately needed humanitarian supplies stopped at the borders of Venezuela and waiting to help the millions and millions in need.

Two days ago, the first U.S. Air Force C-17—that's a big, beautiful plane—[laughter]—landed in Colombia loaded with crucial assistance, including thousands of nutrition kits for little Venezuelan children. Unfortunately, dictator Maduro has blocked this lifesaving aid from entering the country. He would rather see his people starve than give them aid, than help them.

Millions of Venezuelans are starving and suffering while a small handful at the top of the Maduro regime plunder the nation into poverty and into death. We know who they are, and we know where they keep the billions of dollars that they have stolen.

Incredibly, there are members of the Venezuelan military still barely supporting this failed dictatorship. They are risking their future, they are risking their lives and Venezuela's future, for a man controlled by the Cuban military and protected by a private army of Cuban soldiers. Maduro is not a Venezuelan patriot, he is a Cuban puppet. That's what he is.

And remember that hundreds of millions of dollars used to be paid to Cuba, but no longer, because they no longer have that kind of wealth to be able to do it. So things are changing, and they're changing fast.

And today I have a message for every official who is helping to keep Maduro in place: The eyes of the entire world are upon you today, every day, and every day in the future. You cannot hide from the choice that now confronts you. You can choose to accept President Guaidó's generous offer of amnesty, to live your life in peace with your families and your countrymen. President Guaidó does not seek retribution against you, and neither do we. But you must not follow Maduro's orders to block humanitarian aid, and you must not threaten any form of violence against peaceful protesters, opposition leaders, members of the National Assembly, or President Guaidó and his family.

Audience member. Send the troops.

The President. We seek a peaceful transition of power, but all options are open. We want to restore Venezuelan democracy, and we believe that the Venezuelan military and its leadership have a vital role to play in this process. If you choose this path, you have the opportunity to help forge a safe and prosperous future for all of the people of Venezuela.

Or you can choose the second path: continuing to support Maduro.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. If you choose this path, you will find no safe harbor, no easy exit, and no way out. You will lose everything.

So today I ask every member of the Maduro regime: End this nightmare of poverty, hunger, and death for your people. Let your people go. Set your country free. Now is the time for all Venezuelan patriots to act together as one united people. Nothing could be better for the future of Venezuela. And nothing could be better for the future of another captive nation—Cuba—than the rebirth of freedom and democracy in Venezuela.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. For decades, the socialist dictatorships of Cuba and Venezuela have propped each other up in a very corrupt bargain. Venezuela gave Cuba oil. In return, Cuba gave Venezuela a police state run directly from Havana.

But this is a much different day, and those days are over. The ugly alliance between the two dictatorships is coming to a rapid end. A new future is beginning. All of us in this arena, and thousands and thousands and thousands of people outside—you have to see it—are united because we know the truth about socialism in Venezuela, in Cuba, in Nicaragua, and all around the world.

Socialism promises prosperity, but it delivers poverty. Socialism promises unity, but it delivers hatred and it delivers division. Socialism promises a better future, but it always returns to the darkest chapters of the past. That never fails. It always happens.

Socialism is a sad and discredited ideology rooted in the total ignorance of history and human nature, which is why socialism, eventually, must always give rise to tyranny, which it does. Socialists profess a love of diversity, but they always insist on absolute conformity.

We know that socialism is not about justice, it's not about equality, it's not about lifting up the poor. Socialism is about one thing only: power for the ruling class. And the more power they get, the more they crave. They want to run health care, run transportation and finance, run energy, education—run everything. They want the power to decide who wins and who loses, who's up and who's down, what's true and what's false, and even who lives and who dies.

In short, all of us here today know that there is nothing less democratic than socialism. Everywhere and anywhere it appears, socialism advances under the banner of progress, but in the end, it delivers only corruption, exploitation, and decay.

With us today is David Smolansky. David was one of the youngest mayors in Venezuelan history when the Maduro regime removed him from office and issued a warrant for his arrest. David fled into Venezuela's treacherous southern jungle. Eventually, David reached Brazil, where he was welcomed with open arms.

Today, David lives in exile in the United States, where he continues to speak up for the Venezuelan people. Sadly, David is the third generation of his family to flee the agony of socialism and communism. David's grandparents fled the Soviet Union in 1927, and his father fled communist Cuba in 1970.

As David said, "The difference I want to have from my father and my grandfather is to go back to my country." "My grandparents never went back to Kiev . . . my father has not been back to Havana. I hope I can [soon] return to Venezuela." I think that will happen, David.

Thank you very much, David. I think it will soon happen. Your courage, David, is an inspiration. And not only David; many of the people in this room. You've been through much, but you see it coming to the end. You see it really coming to an end for the first time. For the first time, you're seeing it, because the United States, a true great nation, is behind you.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. And so as the United States stands up for democracy in Venezuela, we reaffirm the solidarity with the long-suffering people of Cuba and Nicaragua and people everywhere living under socialist and communist regimes.

And to those who would try to impose socialism on the United States, we again deliver a very simple message: America will never be a socialist country. We are born free, and we will

stay free, now and forever. We know what freedom can do in Venezuela, because we have seen that future right here in Doral. We know what freedom can do in Cuba, because we have seen that future right here in Miami. We know what freedom can do in Nicaragua, because we have seen that future in Sweetwater.

And one day soon, with God's help, we are going to see what the people will do in Caracas and Managua and Havana. And when Venezuela is free and Cuba is free and Nicaragua is free, this will become the first free hemisphere in all of human history.

It was my great honor to be with you today, and the First Lady's great honor to be with you today. We are winning. We are winning on every front.

Thank you. God bless you, God bless the people of Venezuela, God bless the people of Cuba, God bless the people of Nicaragua, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 4:50 p.m. at the Ocean Bank Convocation Center. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States Carlos Trujillo; National Security Adviser John R. Bolton; and former Mayor David Smolansky of El Hatillo, Venezuela.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Venezuela situation at Florida International University in Miami, FL.

Locations: Miami, FL.

Names: Bolton, John R.; DeSantis, Ronald D.; Diaz-Balart, Mario R.; Guaidó Márquez, Juan Gerardo; Lighthizer, Robert E.; Maduro Moros, Nicolás; Moody, Ashley; Núñez, Jeanette; Pérez, Aminta; Rosenberg, Mark B.; Ross, Wilbur L., Jr.; Rubio, Marco A.; Scott, Richard L.; Smolansky, David; Trujillo, Carlos; Trump, Melania.

Subjects: China : Trade with U.S.; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Cuba : Venezuela, role; Florida : Florida International University in Miami; Florida : Governor; Florida : Lieutenant Governor; Florida : President's visits; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Trade Representative, Office of the U.S.; Venezuela : Democracy efforts; Venezuela : Human rights issues; Venezuela : Interim President; Venezuela : International diplomatic efforts; Venezuela : Political unrest and violence; Venezuela : Poverty and economic instability; Venezuela : U.S. assistance; Western Hemisphere : Organization of American States; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900086.