

President Bush. I think that's a better, more fair way to handle it so others can be there. That's the way we like to do it, too.

But I commend you on what you're doing in that and many other cases there, too—many other moves towards true and open democracy. Let there be no—this administration for this President, strong.

Q. Happy birthday.

President Bush. It's been a good one so far.

Q. Will you call on me at your next news conference, sir? I was kinder and gentler this time.

President Bush. You were. I noticed that. We're got to have one soon, provided you throw me a slow ball, softball.

[At this point, another group of journalists entered the room.]

President Bush. May I say to the journalists—I want to repeat what I said in front of the last wave, which is that we strongly support this President and what he is doing carrying his country inexorably down the democratic path. And let there be no doubt about it, he has the full support of this administration. He's taken on tough problems, handled them with dispatch. Some tough problems remain, but there is no question in my mind that this President

and his administration merits the full, all-out support of the United States.

And it is not his government that is keeping peace from coming to his country that had open and free certified elections, many more times than one. And it is the opposition; it is people who think they can use the gun to get what they should be willing to fight for at the ballot box.

And so, I'm proud to have President Cristiani at my side. Today we've got lots to talk about, so you guys are almost history here—[laughter]—but thank you for coming. And I don't take questions in the Oval Office, as I'm sure most of you know. And I think the President will be having a press conference tomorrow some time. But I wanted to violate a rule that I have of not making comments because I feel so strongly about the need to support the President and the steps he's taking there.

Thank you all, and I hope you feel welcome here in the States.

Q. Thank you. Happy birthday again.

President Bush. Oh, thanks. I thought I'd hate it, but so far it's been very good.

Note: President Bush spoke at 11:07 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Alfredo Cristiani Buckard of El Salvador and an Exchange With Reporters

June 12, 1991

President Bush. Mr. President, with your permission, let me just say that I was delighted to spend time talking and working today with a close friend of the United States, President Cristiani of El Salvador. And in greeting one of your predecessors, Dwight Eisenhower declared that: "Friends and countries are not measured by the extent of territory or the size of their population. They are measured by their dedication to their friends, to common values, priceless values that free men possess above even life itself."

Thirty years later, those words still ring

true. Through trying circumstances, El Salvador holds fast to its democratic traditions. And seven times in 10 years, your courageous countrymen have voted in free and fair elections, proving to the world that, in Lincoln's words, "the ballot is stronger than the bullet."

Mr. President, time and again you and the people of El Salvador have proved your doubters to be wrong. Political rights have flourished despite hardship and despite war. And your people enjoy freedom of speech like never before. Exiles who once feared for their lives have returned, come back

home to campaign for office and build parties.

You also have begun to lay liberty's cornerstone, the rule of law. And you've strengthened the judicial system. You've expanded civilian authority over the police and military and you've committed yourself to dramatic reductions in armed forces. And you've strengthened protections for human rights.

Soon, the trial of those accused in the 1989 Jesuit murders will begin, and we know that you will press to see justice done in the case of this despicable crime.

But as newly-freed people around the globe are learning, political freedom is connected to economic freedom. And here, too, your nation has taken dramatic strides. When you freed exchange rates, wiped out price controls, and clamped down on government spending, your farmers, your workers, your investors responded with a burst of creativity and growth. Inflation fell last year, and exports rose by 17 percent. And in spite of guerrilla attacks on economic targets, your economy grew faster than it has since 1978, up 3.4 percent.

This progress cannot continue indefinitely unless peace finally comes to El Salvador. Fortunately, you have led your people toward peace and reconciliation. You extended the hand of forgiveness in your Inaugural Address, and you told your country that time for negotiations had come and you offered to negotiate without precondition. Throughout your country and the world, people of goodwill agree that time for peace has come.

And now the FMLN guerrillas must show in word and deed that they want peace and its natural counterpart, democracy. The guerrillas agreed to negotiate a cease-fire for September of 1989. They showed no eagerness at all to meet that deadline. And then they promised the foreign ministers of the European Commission a cease-fire by May 30th. But they were not truly committed to that deadline either. And the killing and destruction, regrettably, continues.

So, the world must ask: How many more Salvadorans must die before the guerrillas understand that Salvadorans want peace and freedom, not violence and war? I urge the guerrillas to return to the negotiating

table and stay there until a cease-fire is reached.

Mr. President, difficult steps lie ahead. But the world understands your commitment to peace, and democracy. The United States and the international community fully support your efforts for peace, and we will support sound peace accords in your brave land.

We both serve at a time when freedom and democracy are sweeping the globe. Here in the Americas we are building something unprecedented in human history—the world's first completely democratic hemisphere. And under your leadership, El Salvador has taken a place in that democratic community, and within your borders hope flourishes. People have gotten into the spirit of national reconciliation and they now tolerate opposing views and they support democratic institutions, and they have dedicated themselves to preserving human rights. These ingredients cannot help but produce peace. And when they do, your people will remember that your leadership made peace possible.

Mr. President, I salute you, sir, for your courage and your leadership. You have my full confidence and support, the full confidence and support of our entire administration. And Godspeed you, and God bless your work on the road to peace for El Salvador. We are delighted you came here, sir.

All yours.

President Cristiani. Mr. President, first of all, I would like to not only thank your kind words that you have just expressed, and I certainly receive them not personally, but in the name of all Salvadorans.

As you have expressed, the people of El Salvador have undergone quite a task. Hardship has been the name of the game in El Salvador for the past 10, 12 years. And the Salvadorans have always shown in general that they want peace, that they want democracy, and they want freedom. And the freedom of those who want their rights respected is also something that is cherished by all Salvadorans.

And let me just say that the appreciation of the people of El Salvador because they have found that in this quest for peace, freedom, and democracy, that we have

found a true partner in the United States. And certainly under your leadership, Mr. President, this has been increased to levels where we cannot but be grateful forever.

We believe that it has been with the support of the United States and other friendly nations that El Salvador has been able to overcome the hardships, and that, because of this support, it certainly motivates us to continue to work even harder to achieve what we all want to see in El Salvador, a truly peaceful society living and progressing as any other country in the world is doing.

I would like to also thank you in the name of all our delegations for the kindness that you have shown and also the support that we have received from your words and that we go back encouraged to even work harder in order to get peace for our people as soon as possible.

And just let me end by saying also that we lived through your endeavors in the Persian Gulf and that from the Salvadoran people there is nothing but admiration as to your leadership. The way you handled the situation in the Gulf war was something that should be copied by anyone who wants to become a leader in their own countries. And we certainly can understand the difficulty of that decision that you had to take when you had to send young people to die for a cause, but a cause that was just and was right. And a cause that we certainly respected, and not only respected but also supported fully from our position in El Salvador. And we certainly would like to say that there is great admiration for yourself and for the people of the United States for risking everything in order to preserve the rights anywhere in the world. And this is something that also encourages to move forward in this task.

Please let me just end, Mr. President—I know that you have expressed once before that you do not like this to be remembered very often, but also we would like to wish you a very happy birthday. We hope that

the difficulties that you just went by with your health are certainly over and gone with. And we hope that you can certainly say—we can certainly say happy birthday for many, many years more.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you so much.

Address on Democratic Policy

Q. Mr. President, are you going to bash the Democrats tonight?

President Bush. Stay tuned.

Q. They're saying all kinds of nasty things about you today.

President Bush. Oh, it's so discouraging. All I have is pleasant things to say about them, because we've got to work together to get a lot done. That's what we're trying to do.

Q. Are you going to release the other \$40 million for El Salvador?

President Bush. I'll tell you one thing—you're not going to hear anything if this thunderstorm comes through here and blasts us off our own lawn.

Q. Sir, do you think you can change perceptions that you're more of a foreign policy President than a domestic President?

President Bush. Well, the truth always will out—that's the way I look at it. It will be good. This isn't going to be a harsh attack—and that's what this is going to be about—

Q. Are you going to take the high road?

President Bush. —feel the one I feel most comfortable on. However—[laughter]

Note: President Bush spoke at 1:21 p.m. at the South Portico of the White House. Prior to his remarks, the two Presidents met privately in the Oval Office and with U.S. and Salvadoran officials in the Cabinet Room, and then attended a luncheon in the Old Family Dining Room. A tape was not available for verification of the content of the question-and-answer session following the Presidents' remarks.