

A hurricane, a mudslide—they can destroy lives; they can destroy homes; they can destroy a life's work. But they must not be allowed to destroy hope. Not so long ago, your country overcame a terrible war and emerged even stronger. You will overcome this adversity as well. And we will work with you every day until the task is done.

Thank you. God bless you. *Muchas gracias.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the outdoor field at Jose Dolores Toruno Lopez High School. In his remarks, he referred to President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua; Mayor Felicita Zeledon of Posoltega; Mayor Eligio Palacios of Chichigalpa; Monsignor Bosco Vivas, Bishop of León; and Maria Andres Chamorro, who sang the national anthems.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Las Casitas Volcano Mudslide Survivors in Posoltega

March 8, 1999

[President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua opened the discussion by presenting four survivors of Hurricane Mitch and directing them to tell their stories to President Clinton and to express their needs for assistance.]

President Clinton. Could I just say one word? This is Senator Graham, who is from the State of Florida in the United States. First of all, thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I know it must be hard to relive your story. But I think it is very important for us to be able to go home to the United States, having seen not only the President, who is my friend—I enjoy that—but also the people who have lived personally through this terrible tragedy.

It is also important for the health of Nicaragua's democracy that he and I, when we respond to this terrible tragedy, respond in a way that helps you the most and that is consistent with your wishes. So I would like it if, in your own words, you could just tell us a little about what happened to you and your family and what would help most going forward.

[Survivor Ricardo Santeliz thanked the President for his visit and for the assistance from

U.S. and international relief organizations. He described Hurricane Mitch and the resulting mudslide down Las Casitas Volcano as a tragedy which devastated his community and altered its future. Mr. Santeliz described his family's experience attempting to flee from harm and said that he had lost 22 relatives, and his wife had lost 45. President Aleman asked Mr. Santeliz about the death toll from Posoltega and El Porvenir, a neighboring community, and Mr. Santeliz said it must have been about 4,000. President Aleman asked about the experience of a little boy, Juan Pablo Montoya Narvaez, who was present. Mr. Santeliz described finding the boy beneath enormous tree branches and said that Juan Pablo lost his parents, but two of his brothers survived.]

President Clinton. So he has two brothers now?

Mr. Santeliz. One is 13, and one is 21.

President Clinton. And are both of them living with him—he's living with both of them?

President Aleman. Are you going to school, Juan Pablo?

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. Why not, sweetie? You were going to school back in—

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. No? Didn't you go to school back in—but there was a school there, wasn't there?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

President Aleman. Is your other brother going to school?

Juan Pablo. Tonio.

President Aleman. Tonio, is he the one going to school?

Juan Pablo. No, he's not.

President Aleman. And how many of your brothers and sisters died?

Juan Pablo. Three.

Mr. Santeliz. And his mother died.

President Aleman. And you have uncles and aunts?

Juan Pablo. No.

President Aleman. Did your father have any brothers or sisters? What about your mother?

Juan Pablo. One.

President Aleman. And where are your uncles and aunts? Did they die?

Juan Pablo. Yes, the whole family.

President Clinton. So now it's you and your two brothers?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

President Clinton. And you have to stay close with them.

Juan Pablo. Yes.

[Survivor *Diega Olivia Cortes Pantoja*, from neighboring Rolando, explained that during the hurricane she was away at a clinic for an operation and was consequently spared. However, she lost most of her family and relatives in the tragedy. She described the danger and difficulty her surviving children experienced in searching the mud for family members. President Aleman asked how many survived in Rolando, and Ms. Pantoja estimated 2,000 to 2,500. She stated that a lot of surviving residents were in Costa Rica seeking work at the time because the crops in Rolando were finished. President Aleman asked her for Rolando's death toll, and she estimated there were 3,000 between Rolando and El Porvenir. Ms. Pantoja thanked the U.S., the Red Cross, and Save the Children for relief efforts and added her concern for people's need for shelter and opportunity to work in the wake of losing their livelihoods. Survivor *Esperanza Mirales Acosta* thanked the President and described being buried in the mud for 3 days. She said in spite of everything, she held out hope that she'd be able to find her family, but she never did. She said she lost 25 family members.]

President Aleman. No one from your home was saved, my dear? No one?

Ms. Acosta. My sisters were saved because they had gone to work in Costa Rica. But the people who were living there, who were still there from my family, I'm the only one who survived.

President Aleman. And where were you?

Ms. Acosta. In El Porvenir.

President Aleman. And that's exactly where the mudslide went through?

Ms. Acosta. When it came through, it was a terrible noise of helicopters. My husband went out, and he shouted at me, "Sweetheart, run." And I grabbed my little girl, and I ran out. But when I ran out, the house had been destroyed, and I was dragged by

the water. I lost my little girl, and I never found her again.

President Aleman. And your husband died, too?

Ms. Acosta. Yes. And my little girl was shouting at me, asking me to save her, but the water was dragging me away, and I couldn't do anything. I was struggling to try and stand up again, but I couldn't do anything. I couldn't see anything.

President Aleman. And who rescued you?

Ms. Acosta. I was rescued by people from the Red Cross who were there and some people from the area. Two people from the area were there, as well. They found me. I was terrified, and they were able to get me out. They were able to dig me out of the mud. I was there stuck for 3 days.

President Clinton. So what are you going to do now with your life?

Ms. Acosta. I still have problems with one knee. I want to get well, and I want to fend for myself, because now I have nothing and no one left. All I want to do now is work to survive and just get by.

President Aleman. She said, "I just want to work until my day comes to go."

Ms. Acosta. That's all I'm waiting for.

President Aleman. And what's wrong with your leg?

Ms. Acosta. I had a cast on this leg, and it wasn't set properly. And so now they have to x ray it again and see what they can do.

President Aleman. And where are you staying now?

Ms. Acosta. I'm over there in the shelter.

President Clinton. You know, the President was explaining to me when we were coming out that the people need not only homes again but homes that are close enough to land which can be farmed again, because a lot of this land which is covered by the mud, even though it's dried out, it may or may not be suitable for crops now. And a lot of trees will have to be replanted to guard against further flooding.

So I think we in the United States have to try to get some financial help to the President to do that. And then you will have to work together to identify the land where the people can farm again; and then the houses can be built.

You were explaining that to me, on the way out, what you have done—find the land.

[President Aleman agreed and said his country needs to dig deeper channels to avoid future flooding. He inquired about a nearby “co-op,” a cooperative farm, and suggested help be given to individuals like Ms. Acosta and Juan Pablo and work be found for them. He then asked Ms. Acosta if none of her children survived.]

Ms. Acosta. I had four.

President Aleman. All of them little?

Ms. Acosta. The oldest was 13. My little girl was 7—13, 12, 10, and 7.

President Clinton. And how old are you?

Ms. Acosta. I'm 29.

President Clinton. You're still young.

President Aleman. So you became a mother when you were 16?

President Clinton. What about you, Juan Pablo? Do you want to say anything to us? Do you want to say anything to your President about this terrible thing?

Juan Pablo. I lost my whole family, and I miss them—my mama and my papa.

President Aleman. Where are you living, Juan Pablo? With his brother?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

Mr. Santeliz. Yes, he lives at the co-op there with his brother.

President Aleman. How many people are in that co-op? Fifty people, they said? And all these new people are coming in? You said that there are 2,500 people in a block. Will they accept them there?

[Mr. Santeliz stated his opinion that everyone involved—governmental and international organizations and survivors—needs to sit down together and visualize solutions, discover alternatives. President Aleman said all the co-ops in the El Porvenir sector were destroyed, but a co-op in Posoltega, with 50 people farming about 2,000 acres, survived. He noted the trouble was convincing the 50 to accept 300 survivors from El Porvenir and offer them 3 or 4 hectares per family to cultivate. Mr. Santeliz interjected that he understood the land has been rented to people with money.]

President Aleman. The co-ops, themselves, are doing that?

Mr. Santeliz. Yes.

President Aleman. We have to sit down and talk with them so we can convince them.

Mr. Santeliz. I think what we need to do there is sit down, as I was saying, to see what points they propose, see what they want to do.

President Aleman. And what about Juan Pablo's brothers? Have they already been admitted?

Mr. Santeliz. No, they're in the same situation.

President Aleman. So you're like squatters?

Mr. Santeliz. No, I'm not there. I was given a parcel, it's 12x20, by an organization from the U.S., as well—in Washington. An Evangelical church gave us a little plot of land, about 6 blocks of—

President Clinton. World Vision, was it World Vision?

Mr. Santeliz. It's managed by the Evangelical Conference of the Assembly of God in Washington.

So since we didn't have anything, we said, “Okay, give me a little plot of land where I can go.” And that's where I am. The only thing is that we're all so very much reduced right now and we're under so little plots of land.

President Clinton. How much land did the average family farm before the hurricane and the mudslide?

Mr. Santeliz. About 5 or 6 blocks—what they call blocks, which are actually more like hectares.

President Clinton. Ten acres? So the average family had 10 acres?

President Aleman. Per family, that's what each family had.

President Clinton. And then this block, you say, with the 50 families, they have an average of 25 hectares?

President Aleman. It's like, 100 acres per family—this particular group.

President Clinton. So they could actually sell it out?

President Aleman. And what they're doing is, they're renting out the land that they're not farming themselves.

President Clinton. So it's your proposal for the Government to buy this land on behalf of the other people, if they will accept them?

President Aleman. That would be the ideal situation. The problem is that the co-op with those 50 people—and it's very, very good land; they know that land, very fertile land. This co-op got it back in the Sandinista days. So I don't think they're going to want to give it up. They're not going to give it to anyone or sell it.

They prefer it, as he was saying, to rent it, to lease it, because it's better business for them. We'll see what measures can be taken. And the discussions we're trying to hold—we'll see how we can change this. Because the other problem we have, Mr. President, is there's land, but not in this area, not on the Pacific side.

President Clinton. Too far away?

President Aleman. This has been traditionally farm land. But we'll see what solution we find. Faith in God.

Juan Pablo, you have to go and study now. Do you promise you're going to study?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

President Aleman. Are you going to study? You promise?

Juan Pablo. Yes.

President Clinton. You can learn a lot and pray to God to take care of your mother and father. And they will know and be very proud of you.

NOTE: The roundtable began at 3:45 p.m. in the auditorium at the Cotton Research Center. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of Joe DiMaggio

March 8, 1999

Today America lost one of the century's most beloved heroes, Joe DiMaggio. This son of Italian immigrants gave every American something to believe in. He became the very symbol of American grace, power, and skill. A brilliant individual performer, he led his magnificent Yankees to the World Series 10 out of his 13 years. His electrifying 56-game hitting streak, unequaled to this day, is one

of the most remarkable achievements by any athlete in any sport.

He stood tall off the field as well. In 1943 he volunteered for the Army and swapped his Yankee paycheck for \$50-a-month private's salary. He and the foundation he started gave mightily to help poor children benefit from the world's best medical care. And he was an incredibly devoted father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

I have no doubt that when future generations look back at the best of America in the 20th century, they will think of the "Yankee Clipper" and all that he achieved. Hillary and I extend our thoughts and prayers to his family.

Statement on the Kennedy-Murray Amendment to Proposed Education Flexibility Partnership Legislation

March 8, 1999

The Republican leadership continues to block a vote on an amendment to finish the job of hiring 100,000 teachers to reduce class size. Communities across the country need to know that Congress will live up to the bipartisan commitment we made last fall to fund this effort. The American people expect us to work together to improve the education of our students. I call on the Republican leadership to allow an up-or-down vote on more teachers and smaller classes.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Report on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty Compliance

March 8, 1999

Dear _____:

In accordance with Condition (5)(C) of the resolution of advice and consent to ratification of the Document Agreed Among the States Parties to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) of November 19, 1990, adopted by the Senate of the United States on May 14, 1997, enclosed is the Report on CFE Compliance.