

Akershus Slott

Med forbehold om endringer
SPERRET til 11. desember
Kl. 19.30

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Mr. President,
Mrs. Arias,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and a privilege to welcome you, Mr. President, Mrs. Arias and all the members of your delegation to this dinner tonight. My heartfelt welcome is supported by all Norwegians. We share your hopes for peace in Central America.

We had also hoped to be able to extend our warmest welcome to former president Figueres, to "Don Pepe", who, unfortunately could not honour us with his presence. We respectfully ask you, Mr. President, to give him our warmest regards. We view him as the Costa Rican Einar Gerhardsen.

President Arias, this year's decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee has been praised as just and timely in all parts of the World, not least in this country where the feeling of solidarity with the peoples of Central America is so strong. The Nobel Peace Prize is a worthy tribute to the chief architect behind the Esquipulas agreement - to a statesman of astute vision. It emphasizes the decisive importance of your own personal commitment and untiring efforts towards giving peace in Central America a chance.

Earlier this week we have witnessed a historic breakthrough for mankind when the first nuclear disarmament treaty was signed. This would probably not have happened had it not

been for the personal involvement and determination of the two top leaders themselves.

Similarly, Mr. President, it was indeed your work, ideals and endurance, in collaboration with the four other Central American presidents, which brought about the Esquipulas Agreement, a true triumph of summit diplomacy. Through the personal commitment and active participations of these Heads of State themselves, your efforts were crowned with success.

The mutual trust in your own established personal relationships with the other presidents and the many bilateral contacts you have had, not least with President Ortega, proved decisive, and offer hopes for the future.

The importance of success in the Central American peace process cannot be underestimated. As you rightly said about the INF Treaty on arrival in Norway, Mr. President, it also offers new hopes for the Third World which suffers when the East-West relations put restraints on international cooperation.

None the less, the peace process in Central America may indeed set benchmarks and have a positive impact also on the relations between East and West. Therefore, what you have set out to achieve in Central America is an important contribution to world peace in general. Peace is truly indivisible.

Let us hope that the Esquipulas Agreement will lead to a lasting peaceful solution to the conflicts in Central America which have prevented the people in the region from realizing their social and economic aspirations for so long.

The road towards peace may still be long and difficult, as you yourself, Mr. President, have underlined since you arrived in Oslo.

Norway has consistently maintained that a negotiated settlement on a regional basis is the only way to solve the conflicts in Central America. Foreign intervention in the region

is unacceptable. We have continuously supported the Contadora process, and we are pleased to note that these countries continue to play a significant role by their participation - together with the Secretary General of the United Nations and the Organization of American States - in The International Verification and Follow-up Commission established as a result of the Guatemala Agreement.

Mr. President, in your speech earlier today you talked about converting dreams to reality - dreams of freedom and development. I can assure you that as far as we can the Norwegian Government will try to contribute to making these dreams come true.

Now it is vital to the continuation of democratic development in Central America that the international community responds to the appeal made by the five Central American presidents for support to achieve peace and development in the region.

In response to this appeal, Norway will actively contribute to the development of democracy in Central America, through increased regional and bilateral economic assistance.

There is a natural interdependency between all Central American countries and closer cooperation between them will be necessary in the years to come.

Norway's assistance should therefore be considered not only as economic and political support to particular countries, but as support for the development of democracy and peace in the region as a whole.

President Arias, as you well know, only the Nobel Committee can award the Peace Prize. The Nobel Committee guards its independence so strictly that the Norwegian Government do not know the name of the winner before the official announcement is made.

Therefore, it was only through sheer coincidence that our Minister of Development Cooperation, Mrs. Vesla Vetlesen, happened to be in San José when this year's decision was made public.

But the visit of a Norwegian Government Minister to San Jose was in itself no coincidence. She was there also for the purpose of signing an agreement on Peace Corps cooperation between Costa Rica and Norway, an agreement which under these circumstances attained symbolic significance.

We are looking forward to increase our contacts further, and to receiving Foreign Minister Rodrigo Madrigal when he returns to Norway on an official visit next spring.

Personally, I remember with great pleasure my stay in Costa Rica in January 1984 together with other members of our Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

When we met your predecessor, President Monge, he presented three wishes to us:

- that Norway would establish an Embassy in San José,
- that Norway would give development assistance to Costa Rica, and
- that Norwegian cruise vessels would call on the ports of your country.

I note with satisfaction that less than two years later all his wishes have been fulfilled.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, foremost in our minds today is the wish for peace in Central America. It is a wish that we Norwegians share with the people of Central America. In concluding, I propose a toast to President Oscar Arias, to Mrs. Arias, to all members of the Costa Rican delegation and to the prospects for peace and democracy in Central America.