



17. mai-tale i den norske ambassade i Washington.

Honored guests, dear hosts!

I would like to thank you all for joining us here this evening, and for honoring our country with your presence.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to meet you all.

In Norway we have a number of customs which are peculiar for Norway. You are possibly familiar with some of them such as the host wishing all the guests welcome to the table. In Norway we may not have many inhabitants per square mile, but we certainly have plenty of speeches per square meal.

Other customs, like our affinity for spending entire winter days outside in freezing temperatures, waving flags and applauding athletes from all over the world, was well demonstrated during the recent Olympics.

Another very Norwegian custom is the way we celebrate of our national day, which is today May 17. Back home, the main attraction is invariably the children's parade. In fact, it has been said that wherever there are more than two Norwegians on May 17, there will be a parade, not of soldiers and tanks, but of children of all ages. In Oslo the parade of course goes past the Royal Palace where it is greeted by their majesties the King and Queen.

Our national day is also constitution day. As many of you know, there is a strong historical and philosophical link between the Norwegian constitution of 1814, the American Declaration of Independence and the United States' own constitution of 1787. Like its American forerunner, our constitution was a bold and historic move towards national self-determination.

But there are other good reasons for celebrating the 17th of May in the United States. One thousand years ago, the Norsemen were the first Europeans to set foot in America.

More importantly: in the course of the 19th century, one quarter of Norway's population immigrated to the USA. We all take great pride in the important contribution the immigrants made to the building of this great nation.

During the Second World War we also became close allies, and in 1949 both countries were founding members of the Atlantic Alliance which has safeguarded our freedom, peace and security so well for all these years.

We celebrate freedom also to remind us that our freedom and justice tomorrow require that we never accept that others are deprived of freedom and longing for justice. We must be on guard and alert. Today we must

be alert against new kinds of threats - threats that are more obscure than before, but nevertheless very real. Ethnic conflicts when ignited by voices of extreme nationalism, lead to hatred of frightening dimensions. We risk that weapons of mass destruction come into the hands of villains who shun no atrocity. Environmental degradation threaten not only present, but all future generations. And drug-dealers play seductive tunes to our youth.

A great majority of people in the Third World suffer from suppression, increasing poverty, debt and ecological disaster. Only major concerted international effort can change this trend.

Norway has always attached great importance to the principles of international solidarity. Today, we who are free have an obligation to share and to care, for others who are less fortunate. The Norwegian and American constitutions rest on the idea that all men and women are born equal. In an interdependent world, we must help bring the fruits of these ideals home to the people of other countries as well as our own.

What is the Atlantic alliance if not a community of free peoples and nations, who can enjoy their freedom fully only if they are willing to share it? Today, our thoughts should go to the people of Bosnia on whom so much pain and suffering has been inflicted. Our pain is that despite all our efforts, the conflict is still raging. Our thoughts go to South Africa as well, and the joyous daybreak of democracy in that country, hoping that the whole region of Southern Africa will enjoy more prosperity, opportunity and freedom from want and despair.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When I met President Clinton earlier today I warmly welcomed his continued commitment to stay engaged in Europe. In a truly global perspective, American leadership is vital to all of us. It is my hope that Europe will be able to unleash its full potential, because progress for freedom, justice and opportunity depend so much on what Europe and America can do together. Europe and America have obligations that go far beyond our borders to even the most remote corners of the globe.

The President and I reaffirmed the importance of enduring close ties of friendship between Norway and the United States of America, and our commitment to working together as rock solid friends and allies. 17th of May is so important to us that we generally celebrate it together with close friends and family. I feel that I am among close friends of Norway here today, on this side of the Atlantic.

A sure recipe for success is good food, old friendship and short speeches - by Norwegian standards. Ambassador and Mrs. Vibe have contributed to the first, you to the second. I will now do my part. Thank you for your attention.