

Letter to Venezuelans on World Peace and the Situation in Central America and the Caribbean

November 5, 1982

Dear -----:

I have read carefully the letter recently addressed to me from numerous Venezuelan intellectuals, political leaders, and other persons in public life regarding the threats to world peace and the current situation in Central America and the Caribbean.

The people and government of the United States of America share these concerns.

The major objective of my administration, as of every other American administration since World War II, is to prevent nuclear war. Twice in my lifetime, I have seen the world plunged into wars costing millions of lives. Living through those experiences has convinced me that America's highest mission is to encourage the world along the path of peace, and to ensure that our country and all those who share our aspirations of peace and freedom can live in security.

Since taking office, I have sought practical measures to reduce the risk of such a war, and to limit the destructive potential and costly competition in nuclear arsenals. Last year I wrote to President Brezhnev urging him to join me in this effort and proposing that we begin negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons and to strengthen peace.

Last November, I offered to begin discussions with the Soviet Union to find a way to eliminate land-based intermediate-range nuclear missile systems. We are now negotiating in Geneva with the USSR on this proposal, which calls on the Soviet Union to dismantle the more than 600 such systems it has in place, in exchange for which the U.S. and our allies would agree not to install similar systems in Europe.

In May, I proposed a far-reaching approach to nuclear arms control—a phased reduction in strategic weapons beginning with those that are most dangerous and destabilizing, the warheads on ballistic missiles and especially those on intercontinental ballistic missiles. In a second phase, we will seek even further reductions in the destructive potential of nuclear forces. We are now negotiating with the Soviet Union in Geneva on these very proposals.

These negotiations, and others which are in progress or which we will be proposing, provide a historic op-

portunity for us to reinforce the framework of peace and reduce the risk of war. With the support of our friends and allies, we will do everything in our power to achieve that goal.

There are two fundamental causes of the conflict in Central America: economic, social and political under-development and the violent exploitation of that under-development by Cuba, Nicaragua and the Soviet Union. To bring about peace in the region, we think both causes have to be addressed.

Together with Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Canada we are attempting to promote economic development in Central America and the Caribbean through the Caribbean Basin Initiative. No regional objective has a higher priority than passage of this legislation to provide trade and investment incentives to economic development. Our Congress has already approved provision of \$350 million in emergency supplemental funds and these are being disbursed to recipient governments.

The development of democratic institutions to complement economic growth is a parallel objective to which we are equally committed. We have supported and have been encouraged by the striking trend toward democracy in Central America and the Caribbean. Honduras and El Salvador have held free and fair elections in the last year, as did traditionally democratic Costa Rica and Colombia. Venezuelan democracy in our judgment continues to provide a worthy model compelling in its vibrancy. The trend toward democracy elsewhere in the hemisphere—we applaud the return of Bolivia to democratic rule—has our full support.

We are also seeking to support democratic political development by directing resources to the development of core skills of democracy. This week, for example, we are hosting a Conference on Free Elections to which democratic representatives from all over the world have been invited.

Our diplomacy has supported the efforts of countries in the region to lessen tensions threatening peace. We participated in the conference Costa Rica convened on October 4 to coordinate efforts for regional peace

and democracy. We hope this conference will contribute to defusing tensions in the region.

I believe many Venezuelans share our concern in this regard. The initiative of your President, together with President Lopez Portillo of Mexico, was a constructive step in the same direction. We believe the regional effort begun at the San Jose conference will advance the cause of peace we both support.

As we direct efforts toward economic and political development we cannot ignore the legitimate security needs of countries threatened by external support of internal insurgency. The United States is supplying modest amounts of military equipment and training to the governments of El Salvador and Honduras. Around 85 percent of our aid to these countries, however, is economic.

The commitment to democracy, self-sustaining economic development and non-intervention which we share does not, however, characterize the action of Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union. Subsidized by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua have persistently provided aid to insurgency in El Salvador. Both Costa Rica and Honduras have been victimized by Nicaraguan-supported terrorist attacks. Nicaragua has developed its military potential entirely out of proportion to its objective defense needs. The root cause of so much concern in the region, however, is Cuba's military buildup, which has resulted in resources which could be better allocated to economic development being directed to arms procurement.

Our two peoples, who have sacrificed blood and energy to obtain, safeguard, and nourish democracy, know well the importance of freedom and the right of free choice. Venezuelans and Americans alike share a mutual desire for peace and freedom in not only this region of the world but throughout the globe. By continuing our efforts, we can together advance the cause of peace.

Dear Mr. President.

Reflecting the sentiments of ample sectors of the people of Venezuela, we would like to express to you our deep concern over the growing threat of another world conflagration which, if it does occur, would bring with it the destruction of all mankind, eliminating all chances for anyone to be the winner.

Within the realm of this concern, the situation now in Central America and the Caribbean strikes us, as Latin Americans, as being rife with serious threats that could even eventually endanger world peace. For this reason, we are opposed to any type of interventionism that threatens the self-determination of the people of this region and impedes their progress as well as popular and democratic development.

These are the reasons that bring us to ask you, in virtue of the important position you hold, to act diligently and decidedly against the threat of another world war and thus save mankind, provide perspectives for a world free of tension, and allow everyone to walk the certain path of peace and social progress.

Note: The letter to the President, signed by more than 200 Venezuelan intellectuals, political leaders, and public figures, was dated September 20, 1982, and delivered to the American Embassy in Caracas on October 15, 1982. The letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 5, together with the President's response of that date. As printed above, this item follows the text of the letters as released by the Office of the Press Secretary.