

Statement on the Lifting of Economic Sanctions Against Poland

February 19, 1987

Five years ago I asked all Americans to light a candle in support of freedom in Poland. During that Christmas season of 1981 candles were lit in millions of American homes. We had confidence that the spirit of freedom would continue to shine in the darkness that martial law had brought to that brave country. As Americans, we were showing solidarity with Solidarity.

Symbolic gestures were not enough. Economic and other sanctions were imposed on Poland in response to the repression that descended on the Polish people as a result of martial law. Our message was that America would not passively stand by while a grand experiment in freedom was brutally smashed in Poland. If the Polish Government wanted a decent relationship with the United States, we made it clear they would have to lift martial law, release the political prisoners, and enter into a real political dialog with Polish society.

Today, more than 5 years later, the light of freedom continues to shine in Poland. The commitment and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Polish men and women have kept the flame alive, even amid the gloom. In 1983 martial law was lifted and thousands of political prisoners have been freed in a series of amnesties. Since the final amnesty last September, no one has been arrested on political charges in Poland. Yet there is still far to go. The threat of arrest still hangs over those who seek their freedom. The right to genuinely independent trade unions is still stifled. Independent political activity continues to be repressed by various governmental measures. National reconciliation remains a dream, a goal for the future, rather than a reality of today.

I continue to believe, as do the Polish people, that it is a possible dream. The Church in Poland has greeted the major amnesty of political prisoners last September as a significant step by the Polish Government. In response to that amnesty, we initiated a step-by-step process of expanding our dialog with the Government of Poland. In our dealings with Polish authorities, we have made one point clear: The continuation of better relations between our countries, and their further improvement, will be possible only if we see maintained the spirit and principle of the amnesty and a reliance on dialog and respect for human rights. Only through genuine and meaningful reconciliation can the plight of the Polish people be alleviated. We will be watching to see that further steps are taken toward national reconciliation in Poland and that the progress made is not reversed.

Significantly, the leaders of Solidarity and of the Catholic Church in Poland agree that this is the right course for us to take. They have now urged us to lift our remaining economic sanctions in order to encourage further movement in the right direction. In considering this question, I have drawn on a broad cross section of views. We have been in touch at the highest levels with the Polish Government, with the Church, and with Solidarity. We have also consulted with our allies. After careful review, I have decided that the economic sanctions imposed in December 1981 and October 1982 should be rescinded, and I am accordingly restoring most-favored-nation tariff treatment for Poland and lifting the ban on Poland's eligibility for official U.S. credits and credit guarantees. We have always worked closely with our allies on issues concerning Poland, and they have sent messages of support for this step forward.

I am honored by the expression of concern from distinguished Members of Congress, leaders of the Polish-American community in this country, and Solidarity. Together we underscore the heartfelt concern of our citizens about Poland. Let no one doubt our brothers and sisters who struggle to build a freer and more humane Poland, or our resolve to stand by them. As it was in 1981, freedom is precious to us. The slogan of the Polish independence struggle of the last century was: ``For Your Freedom And Ours." That is our slogan, too. And it is more than a slogan; it is a program of action.

Today is a first step, a big step. Our relations with Poland can only develop in ways that encourage genuine progress toward national reconciliation in that country. We will be steady. We will be committed. The flame that burns in the hearts of the Polish people, a flame represented by the candles we lit in 1981, that flame of justice and liberty will never be extinguished.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/021987a.htm>