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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
ALFONSO LOPEZ MICHELSON
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA

THE EAST ROOM

10:43 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. President, it is a great pleasure and privilege for me to welcome you to the United States for this State visit.

The President of Colombia, His Excellency Dr. Alfonso Lopez Michelson and his wife, the distinguished First Lady of Colombia, Cecilia:

President Lopez is no stranger to the United States. As a young man he studied here briefly. Also I am told he and Mrs. Lopez spent part of their honeymoon in Williamsburg, Virginia.

During his long and distinguished service in his country, he has frequently visited the United States in various important official capacities. His election as President was one of the largest votes in Colombia's history.

It is indeed a great personal pleasure for me to welcome him to the United States once again. This time the United States honors him as a Chief of State of Colombia, the first Latin American Chief Executive I have had the privilege of welcoming to Washington for a State Dinner.

President Lopez represents a nation with a long tradition of democratic government. Colombia's friendship with the United States is characterized by the mutual respect each of our two nations has for the independent ideas and sovereign integrity of the other.

As a respected intellectual, author and statesman, Dr. Lopez has been a champion of the idea that relationships between nations must be based on the rule of law, non-intervention and respect for national sovereignty.

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He voiced that conviction in an address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in January of 1974 when he said, and I quote, "For a country like ours, there is only one guarantee for survival, the effective application of international law, a deep sense of human solidarity and the principle of self-determination of nations."

Your visit, Mr. President, is timely indeed. The nations of the world face pressing issues in international trade, in monetary policy and the challenges of explosive scientific and technological progress. The problems of peace, justice, hunger, inflation and pollution can no longer be solved by each nation alone.

Each of us now is caught in the same tide of world events -- consumer and producer, rich and poor, powerful and weak. We must, therefore, work together for the solution of our problems. We must step up our efforts to modernize and strengthen our hemispheric relations.

The nations of Latin America share the same intricate web of social, political and economic elements which comprise the civilization of the western world. At the same time, they share the problems of developing societies elsewhere in the world.

All of these circumstances provide an important bond linking our two nations which have a long, long tradition of friendly relations based on respect for each other's sovereignty and independence.

That is why I have invited President Lopez to visit Washington. We have much to talk about. I look forward to our frank and candid discussions. We expect to examine carefully our bilateral relations and their probable future course. We will review together the issues of current concern in the inter-American system and the alternatives that open into the future. We will discuss world issues of particular concern to our two countries.

I know that the intellect and statesmanship of President Lopez will further our common quest for constructive solutions and mutual understandings.

And so, as you say, Mr. President, bien venido.

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PRESIDENT LOPEZ: Mr. President, Mrs. Ford, the warmth and friendliness of this welcome does not take us by surprise. It is a reflection of the nature of the relations between Colombia and the United States which, during the last quarter of this century, have remained untarnished.

Of course, our points of view have occasionally been different on certain matters of continental interest. But this has only contributed to strengthening our friendship on the basis of mutual respect. We have become accustomed to the practice of agreeing to disagree, abiding by the rules in order to resolve our conflicts.

Our presence here on the same site so often visited by prominent statesmen has a special significance on this occasion. The White House is not a palace. Its name derives from its occupants, men who seek to interpret the will of the people they rule.

We evoke the memory of patricians, soldiers, statesmen, thinkers and popular leaders who embody the collective aspirations of their times. Despite their difference in character and background, they have honored the North American tradition of democratic government without yielding to authoritarian temptations.

The system they have contributed to create has proven strong enough to withstand the most serious crisis. In these troubled times, there is something both comforting and old-fashioned in your manner that is reminiscent of your early predecessors. Even though you preside over one of the most powerful nations in the world, making daily decisions which bear on the destiny of mankind, you continue to be the same straightforward, unassuming citizen who, as a Congressman, won the respect of his colleagues and who has earned the affection of the people of the United States, symbolizing today the essence of what the Founding Fathers of this country wanted their Nation to be.

They wanted their leaders to be model citizens of a democracy, unencumbered by the falsity of royalty.

I am witnessing today in this place and surroundings that the wishes of the American people have been fulfilled.

President Ford's human touch greatly contributes to ensure that this meeting will be patterned as a sincere exchange between friends. This is the proper way to deal with common problems. The nature of the challenge confronting us today and the above-mentioned circumstances make me look forward to the conversations we are about to begin and the confidence that the outcome will be of mutual benefit for our two countries.

Thank you.

END (AT 10:53 A.M. EDT)