

known as the Pieta. It is a monument to those who gave their lives during this recent struggle for independence in Lithuania. I was struck by the fact, as I walked along the gravestones of those martyrs to freedom in Lithuania, how many of them were teenagers, or in their early 20's, who lost their lives in the hope that Lithuania would be free. Many of them in their lifetimes had never known anything but Soviet domination, Communist domination, a domination where the Soviets tried to Russify the Lithuanian language, take away Lithuanian culture and traditions, close down Catholic churches and literally close down the press. They saw that.

I saw as well, when I visited, in Kaunas, the archbishop, His Excellency Sigitas Tamkevicius, who is considered a saint, having spent many years in a Soviet prison for the audacity of publishing an underground journal, how much this country has been through, how much it has suffered. It is not unreasonable for us as leaders of democracy and freedom in the world to understand why Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia want to be part of our peace-loving and democratic alliance.

I sincerely hope that the United States, starting first with the meeting between the President and President Yeltsin in Helsinki this coming week, and then again in Madrid this coming summer, will really try to show the initiative, to broach this discussion about Lithuania and the Baltic countries becoming part of the NATO alliance. I think it is important for us to say unequivocally that this will happen and we are committed to it, and to say as well, now let us discuss with these countries and with Russia when this will occur and how this will occur.

It should be a transparent process. By that I mean we should say to the Russians this is clearly defensive in nature. These tiny countries are only looking for the assurance that they will have freedom and great opportunity in the future.

I will close, Madam President, by saying that one of the more memorable moments in my trip to Lithuania was on Independence Day, on February 16, when on Sunday I stood in the square in front of the parliament in Vilnius and saw the people gathered singing the Lithuanian national anthem and then went to the cathedral for a Mass celebrated by the Cardinal of Lithuania. At the end of this Mass they once again sang the Lithuanian national anthem, and then closed with a Catholic hymn entitled "Maria, Maria." My brother and I were standing there and looked around and saw men and women with tears rolling down their cheeks. This was the hymn that the Lithuanians turned to in their churches many times in clandestine masses to give them hope that they could survive the occupation by the Russians, the occupation by the Nazis, the occupation by the Soviets. These men and women have suffered so much in the name of

freedom and independence, and now they are asking us today as leaders in the free world to invite them into this family of freedom-loving and peace-loving nations.

I hope I can prevail on my colleagues in the Senate to join with me in encouraging the United States to include the Baltic countries, as well as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and all the other countries that are genuinely interested in becoming peace-loving partners in NATO. I think that will continue the great legacy that really defines America.

We are not out to conquer territory. We have defied history by being the conquerors in World War II and literally working as hard as we could to rebuild the vanquished, and now we have again the chance to say as we embark on this 21st century that this NATO alliance will guarantee that a new Europe, East and West together, will be a peaceful Europe for decades to come.

I thank the Chair.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIXED SIGNALS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I was disappointed to note that the United States, alone among its allies on the United Nations Security Council, vetoed a proposed resolution urging Israel to abandon its plans to build housing for Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem. This housing initiative, which was reported last week to have been pushed by the right wing of Prime Minister Netanyahu's party, threw a cold towel on the peace process that had been so painfully promoted through U.S. intermediation.

Indeed, the President and the Secretary of State, Ms. Albright, both correctly criticized Israel's position on this issue. It is unfortunate that the President felt compelled to mix that clear signal of American displeasure with an American veto of essentially the same policy position, expressed in a United Nations Security Council resolution. American policy on this very important matter needs more consistency if the United States intends to maximize its influence and leadership on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It is unfortunate that the message of displeasure has been diluted, because that softening risks emboldening the hard-liners in Israel who act as if they do not want that process to succeed.

I believe that the policy of the administration rightly remains opposed to the recently announced settlement

initiative by the Israeli government, and I spoke out on the floor a few days ago in support of that position. It does not seem logically consistent that a Security Council resolution essentially expressing the same disapproval could in any way itself "jeopardize efforts to keep the peace process moving", as was reported by the Washington Post on March 8, 1997. Strong leadership on this matter requires sustained consistency in all foras, both national and international regarding American policy, and I hope that there will be further opportunities to make our very correct position in opposition to this new housing initiative abundantly clear.

The Israeli leader stands at a pivotal point in the Middle East. The peace process is clearly very fragile, and great efforts are needed on a sustained basis by all the parties, not some of the parties, for it to succeed. The alarming exchange of letters between King Hussein and Prime Minister Netanyahu, released publicly yesterday reveals the damage that the Israeli housing initiative is causing. Neither the U.S., nor the Palestinians, nor the Israeli people should passively allow the Israeli right wing to sabotage this process anytime it decides it has gone far enough for their taste. I congratulate the President for sending an American envoy to meet in Gaza with Mr. Arafat on the overall situation.

I make an urgent plea to Prime Minister Netanyahu to look history in the face and to take a bold step and reverse his decision on the housing matter, regardless of the merits of the initiative in his mind from a narrow geographical perspective. This decision has become the central indicator of his government's commitment to peace in the Middle East. It is clear that, regardless of any merits which may attach to the housing decision, it is causing grave damage to the peace process which our governments have worked so painfully to engender. Therefore, I urge the Israeli Prime Minister to reverse that decision. This would certainly require considerable personal courage and political difficulty on his part, but it would mark him as a true leader at a time when such leadership is desperately needed. He alone is in the position to make a crucial change in the present explosive atmosphere. The process of peace in the Middle East has reached a vital juncture, and its future is highly dependent on the action he takes now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Jersey.

THE DECISION TO CERTIFY MEXICO

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, the decision by the administration to certify Mexico as an ally in the fight against narcotics raises a broader issue. In my judgment, it is time to