

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Leonel Fernandez Reyna of the Dominican Republic

July 12, 2010

President Obama. Hello, everybody. Good afternoon. President Fernandez and I just had an excellent conversation. We first met and, I think, forged a good working relationship and friendship at the Summit of the Americas last year. And we have built on that relationship, as have our respective administrations, on a whole host of issues.

We had a wide-ranging discussion. One of the first messages I wanted to deliver was my appreciation for the role that the Dominican Republic played in helping the international community respond to the crisis in Haiti after the devastating earthquake there. And I think that the Dominican Republic's role, President Fernandez's role in particular, in helping to facilitate a rapid response was extraordinarily important. It saved lives, and it continues, as we look at how we can reconstruct and rebuild in Haiti in a way that is good not only for the people of Haiti, but also good for the region as a whole.

That was just one example of the leadership that President Fernandez has shown. He and his Government have been extremely helpful in resolving the political crisis that existed in Honduras. And we discussed ways that we can manage that process so that Honduras can once again be fully integrated into the regional groupings and organizations and—in a way that is respectful of democracy, and we coordinated closely between our two countries on that issue.

We discussed the critical issue of drug trafficking and crime and how that has the potential to be destabilizing throughout the region. And we have already seen great cooperation between our countries through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, but more needs to be done. And so, President Fernandez and I discussed how we can do a better job coordinating through multinational groupings to address what is a scourge on so many countries. And that involves us dealing both with the supply side of the equation, but also the demand side. And as I've said before in conversations, for example, with President Calderon in Mexico, we here in the United States have an important obligation to make sure that we are dealing with the demand of drugs. There are also cross-border flows that involve guns and weapons and cash. So, the problem involves all of us and if we're going to solve it, we're going to have to work coordinating together.

And we also talked about how working together we can expand trade opportunities, commercial opportunities, business opportunities. One area that I expressed to the President that is of particular interest to me is clean energy. Last year, when I met with President Lula of Brazil, I noted that Brazil had made enormous progress around clean energy, sugarcane-based ethanol, the possibilities of real energy independence in the region. I think those same opportunities exist for the Dominican Republic. And President Fernandez and I discussed how we can work more closely together around energy security issues, something that my administration is very interested in partnering with Central American and Latin American countries to work on.

So, the main message I have to the people of the Dominican Republic is thank you for your friendship. I think the American people appreciate greatly the bonds between our two countries, bonds that express themselves obviously in our extraordinary Dominican population,

Dominican American population, that we have here in this country. And obviously, I've got to note that we got some pretty good baseball players here from the Dominican Republic.

President Fernandez. Yes, sir.

President Obama. But for some reason I've got a lot of Red Sox fans here, so they keep on talking about Ortiz, but I'm a White Sox guy.

But, Mr. President, welcome. Thank you for your friendship. And we look forward to a long and constructive relationship between not only our countries but our two governments.

President Fernandez. Thank you, Mr. President. Well, first of all, I would like to thank President Obama for extending an invitation to come here to the White House and speak on issues that are of mutual interest for the U.S. Government and for the Dominican Republic. As the President has indicated, we have agreed on several issues, some bilateral issues between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, and also on regional issues.

We do appreciate, Mr. President, that with all you have on your agenda, with all the international issues, with all the crises, with the economic situation that's affecting worldwide, you have put on your agenda the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Dominican Republic. I think this is evidence that you do have an interest for the region and the problems that affect not only the Dominican Republic but the region as a whole.

As you have indicated, one of our major concerns has to do with drug trafficking, with transnational crime, with violence related to all these criminal activities. I think that the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative has been the right path forward. I commend you for that, Mr. President. And I think now we should move into a more collaborative environment with the other Caribbean nations, Central America, and Mexico. It is only by coordinating our efforts that we can really defeat this epidemic that has become overwhelming to all of our countries. And whatever we can do from the supply side, as you said, or the demand side, will be of great significance for the safety and security of our people.

Other issues, like you said, related to clean energy, we're working on that in the Dominican Republic with wind energy and with the potential production of ethanol in our country. We'll move on also with trade. We have a free trade agreement between both of our countries, of which we have not benefited fully because of the global financial crisis and how it has affected trade. But we can look into the future hopefully that we will increase our trade activities and more investment coming from the U.S. into the Dominican Republic.

So once again, Mr. President, I thank you for your friendship, I thank you for your vision, for your leadership, and for your commitment to the region and the Dominican Republic.

President Obama. Thank you very much. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to David "Big Papi" Americo Ortiz, designated hitter, Boston Red Sox. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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