

Remarks to the Polish National Assembly in Warsaw

July 10, 1989

Chairman Jaruzelski, Marshalls Kozakiewicz and Stelmachowski, Prime Minister Rakowski, and senators and delegates, on behalf of the people of the United States, I am honored to greet the newly elected representatives of the Polish Parliament. To be here with you on this occasion is proof that we live in extraordinary, indeed, thrilling times.

The power and potential of this moment was first made clear to me when I saw a photo, a worldwide photo, flashed all around the world: a photo of General Jaruzelski, senator leader Lech Walesa, shoulder-to-shoulder -- Solidarity leader Lech Walesa -- shoulder-to-shoulder at the opening session of this Parliament, committed to new progress in Poland. Believe me, that sent a wonderful signal all around the world.

Poland and the United States are bound, it is often said, by ties of kinship and culture. But our peoples are linked by more than sentiment. The May 3d Constitution of 1791 set Poland ahead of her peers, ahead of her time, in the pursuit of freedom and democratic ideas, just as our Constitution, the American Constitution of 1787, set new standards for protection of the rights of the individual. For decades, beginning with the Versailles Peace Conference, the United States has stood for Polish independence, freedom, prosperity. And we are proud of our early and longstanding commitment to Polish self-determination. As America's President, I am here today to reaffirm that proud commitment.

I understand something of the work you are commencing, for I began my own public service in the American Congress. Democratically chosen legislatures are among mankind's greatest forums for debate and dialog. And while I've been to Poland before, I did not expect to return so soon nor to such altered circumstances in your country. And so, too, perhaps many of you didn't expect to be here, serving in this or any Polish Parliament, and your achievement has surpassed all expectation and has earned all our admiration.

Our meeting today bears witness to the character of our age. Some 450 years ago, when the Polish astronomer Copernicus came to understand the natural order of the planets and had the courage to question accepted wisdom, the world was changed forever. From this year forward, as Poland works to reaffirm the natural order of man and government, so, too, will Poland be changed forever. For today the scope of political and economic change in Poland is indeed Copernican -- a fundamental change in perspective that places the people at the center, a new understanding that the governed are the true source of lasting social peace and economic prosperity around which government revolves, and exists to serve.

Poland has a rich democratic heritage. The May 3d Constitution was a stroke of genius. Today, at the dawn of that document's third century, you're called upon to match its genius with contemporary action, to make a peaceful transition toward political and

economic renewal through representative government that expresses the will of the people.

I said a few weeks ago, here in Europe, that East and West have arrived at the end of one era and at the beginning of another. Chairman Jaruzelski recently said of Poland that "the life of the Nation has undergone deep changes; society has the full right to ask when a ray of sun will shine over Poland." In truth, this applies not just to Poland but to the entirety of relations between East and West.

A profound cycle of turmoil and great change is sweeping the world from Poland to the Pacific. It is sometimes inspiring, as here in Warsaw, and sometimes it's agonizing, as in China today. But the magnitude of change we sense around the world compels us to look within ourselves and to God to forge a rare alloy of courage and restraint.

The future beckons with both hope and uncertainty. Poland and Hungary find themselves at a crossroads. Each has started down its own road to reform, without guarantee of easy success. The people of these nations and the courage of their leaders command our admiration. The way is hard; but the moment is right, both internally and internationally, for Poland to walk its own path. On the day Solidarity was restored, I spoke of my support and admiration for the political experiment just getting underway in Poland. You've since proceeded further along that road, including holding the remarkable elections that produced this Parliament. And let us consider what your experiment may mean not just for Poland but for Europe and for the entire world.

The divided world of the modern age began here -- right here, in Poland -- 50 years ago this summer. Your country, and then nearly all of Europe, was first besieged and then occupied by totalitarian, despotic forces. A courageous Poland was our ally. And in that fearful time, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill devised the Atlantic Charter, which outlined principles on which we hoped to build a better world, including freedom from want and fear, and the right of peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. But as you know better than anyone, the world that we sought then was not to be. Stalinist systems were imposed over a third of a continent -- the cold war began. The countries of the West organized themselves in defense of democratic principles, and we proposed that the Marshall plan include Eastern Europe, but again, that was not to be.

The Western strategy, our strategy of containment, was a means but was never an end in itself. It was no substitute for a free and united Europe, and we did not forget the frustrated and lost hopes of 1945 nor the promise of a better world -- neither did the Polish people. You have been a crucible of conflict; you're now becoming a vessel for change. Poland is where the cold war began, and now the people of Poland can help bring the division of Europe to an end. The time has come to move beyond containment to a world too long deferred, a better world.

And now, at long last, two developments have allowed us to redeem the principles of the Atlantic Charter for which the United States and Poland fought as allies. One is the

manifest failure of the classic Stalinist system; and the other is the indomitable will of the people -- through leaders in Poland and Hungary, who are working to overcome the mistakes of the past with honesty, creativity and, yes, courage. The world watches in admiration.

And now, in part because of what you are doing here, the genuine opportunity exists for all of us to build a Europe which many thought was destroyed forever in the 1940's. That Europe, the Europe of our children, will be open, whole, and free. We can make it so in two ways.

First, a new East-West relationship must rest on greatly reduced levels of arms. I notice what General Jaruzelski said on that point, and I support him. We in the West have proposed dramatic reductions in conventional armed forces in Europe, reductions that promise to transform the military map of Europe and diminish the very threat of war. The new willingness in Moscow to accept this Western framework for reductions in troops and tanks and aircraft and other categories of weapons gives us hope that the negotiations in Vienna will succeed. A good beginning has been made. Constructive proposals are being offered on both sides. We are determined to push hard for an early and successful conclusion to these talks.

Second, reductions in military forces will go further and be more sustainable if they take place in parallel with political change. Excessive levels of arms, we believe, are the symptom, and not the source, of political tensions. In Europe those tensions spring from an unnatural and cruel division. Poland's decision to embrace political reform and Hungary's movement in the same direction thus have great importance beyond their borders. By creating political structures legitimized by popular will -- by that, your reforms can be the foundation of stability, security, and prosperity not just here but in all of Europe, now and into the next century.

Mikhail Gorbachev has written: "Universal security rests on the recognition of the right of every nation to choose its own path of social development and on the renunciation of interference in the domestic affairs of other states. A nation may choose either capitalism or socialism. This is its sovereign right." In principle, I agree, but I might well have said that the people of a nation may freely choose either a free-market economy or socialism -- that is their right. And so, the West works not to disrupt, not to interfere, not to threaten any nation's security but to help forge closer and enduring ties between Poland and the rest of Europe.

As a result of the roundtable accords, Poland's fate lies more than ever in Polish hands, and there it must ever remain. Your responsibility for your country's future is immense. Poland's friends, including the American people, want Poland to be free, prosperous, democratic, independent -- true to the best tradition of your nation's past. And this regime is moving forward with a sense of realism and courage in a time of great difficulty and challenge. Lech Walesa and Solidarity are deeply committed to institutions in Poland that will serve all its people. This Parliament, by its very existence, is advancing pluralism, and the church has served as a source of spiritual guidance and unity in turbulent times.

But above all, there are the people of Poland, people who are steadfastly working toward productive change.

And yet, even under the best circumstances, representative government has its own challenges. It requires patience, tolerance, and give-and-take between political opponents. But its virtue is that it grants legitimacy to leaders and their policies; it gives governments and societies the mandate to make hard choices. And through their involvement, it gives the people a stake in the choices that are made.

For over 200 years, Americans have wrestled over political and economic interests, over individual and civil rights, and the role of a loyal opposition. Democracy is not a conclusion; it's a process, and perfecting it never ends. But history has taught Americans one very clear lesson: Democracy works.

We understand in my country the enormous economic problems you face. Economic privation is a danger that can threaten any great democratic experiment. And I must speak honestly: Economic reform and recovery cannot occur without sacrifices. Even in an economy as productive as ours, we still debate the roles and limits of government: how to regulate the private sector without discouraging innovation; how to reduce our own enormous budget deficit; how to balance workers' needs and industrial efficiency; how to handle the painful disruptions of change for the sake of productivity, for the sake of progress, for the sake of prosperity.

The reform of the Polish economy presents an historic challenge. There can be no substitute for Poland's own efforts, but I want to stress to you today that Poland is not alone. Given the enormity of this moment, the United States stands ready to help as you help yourselves.

In Hamtramck, Michigan, 3 months ago, I outlined a policy of support for the reforms then just beginning in Poland. I proposed specific steps, carefully chosen, to recognize the reforms underway here and to encourage reforms yet to come. It is a policy built on dynamic interplay of progress in Poland and Western engagement, and not on unsound credits made without regard to necessary reforms. That was the record of the 1970's; Poland and the United States need not repeat that. Our efforts will be carefully targeted in support of an emerging new Poland. We've made progress on the steps announced at Hamtramck, and this is where we stand.

Legislation is well underway that will help Polish exporters compete more effectively in the U.S. market through Generalized Systems of Preferences and that will authorize our Overseas Private Investment Corporation to operate in Poland, providing investment insurance and setting up missions to stimulate U.S. investment and joint ventures here. The United States is proposing a private business agreement that will promote contacts between Poland's growing private business sector and its American counterparts. We hope to conclude an agreement soon to build on what promises to be an unprecedented opportunity.

There is great interest and excitement in the United States about what you're doing in Poland and a clear-cut desire to help the reform process. I hosted a White House symposium on July 6th to bring together citizens of my country interested in promoting investment, trade, and academic exchange with Poland and Hungary. And I can assure you that, more than ever before, the American people will be involved in your democratic experiment.

I've said that as Poland reforms itself, the U.S. will respond. Much has happened even in the short time since Hamtramck. So, today I'm pleased to announce that we plan to do more and go farther for the sake of a stable and prosperous Poland.

First, I will propose at the upcoming economic summit in Paris that the nations of the summit, that Summit Seven, intensify their coordination and concerted action to promote democratic reform in Poland and Hungary and to help manage compassionately the process of change. We will work with our partners at the summit, moving quickly with increased Western aid and technical assistance. This concerted action will complement existing institutions like the World Bank, the Paris Club, and IMF [International Monetary Fund], and address needed economic reforms, credits, management and training initiatives, social safety nets, housing, and other issues important to Poland.

Second, I will ask the United States Congress to provide a 0 million fund to capitalize and invigorate the Polish private sector, and we will encourage parallel contributions from other nations of the economic summit.

Third, I will encourage the World Bank to move ahead with 5 million in economically viable loans to help Polish agriculture and industry reach the production levels they are so clearly capable of.

And fourth, I will ask my counterparts in the West to support an early and generous rescheduling of Polish debt. This could provide deferral of debt payments amounting to about billion this year if our allies and friends in the Paris Club agree to join us in offering liberalized terms. I plan to discuss this issue with my colleagues at the Paris summit.

Fifth, economic progress should not come at the expense of our common heritage, our common inheritance -- the environment. In fact, sound ecology and a strong economy can and must coexist. Air and water pollution know no boundaries, and this concern is worldwide. Almost 2 years ago, I visited Krakow, your former royal capital, a city recognized by UNESCO as an international treasure. Today Krakow is under siege by pollution; its priceless monuments are being destroyed. Krakow must be reclaimed, and the United States will help. And I'll ask the Congress for million for a cooperative venture with Poland to help fight air and water pollution there.

Sixth, and finally, when I begin my remarks -- when I began them, I mentioned the shared cultured heritage of our two nations. Today, I'm proud to announce that the United States will establish a cultural and information center in Warsaw, and we'll ask Poland to

establish a similar center in the United States. This will be the first time that either of our two countries will be able to conduct educational and cultural programs outside of our Embassies and consulates.

The elections which brought us -- all of us -- together here today mean that the path the Polish people have chosen is that of political pluralism and economic rebirth. The road ahead is a long one, but it is the only road which leads to prosperity and social peace. Poland's progress along this road will show the way toward a new era throughout Europe, an era based on common values and not just geographic proximity. The Western democracies will stand with the Polish people and other peoples of this region.

Democracy has captured the spirit of our time. Like all forms of government, though it may be defended, democracy can never be imposed. We believe in democracy -- for without doubt, though democracy may be a dream deferred for many, it remains, in my view, the destiny of man.

Two hundred years ago, democratic constitutions were adopted by three nations, embodying the powerful influence of the Enlightenment, as a testament to ideas that endure. The American Constitution was first and has stood the test of history for over 200 years of our existence as a republic. Constitutional democracy in France began two centuries ago this summer, and in a few days, leaders from all over the world will be in Paris to celebrate the anniversary of its birth.

On May 3, 1991, the Polish Constitution will also be 200 years old. Your Constitution of 1791 was crushed, but never forgotten. And now this generation's calling is to redeem the promise of a free Polish Republic. Poland has not been lost so long as the Polish spirit lives.

America wishes you well as you face the tough problems today. I salute General Jaruzelski for his leadership and his extraordinary hospitality to me. I salute the leaders and members of these two great legislative bodies. God, in His infinite wisdom and love, is with us in this chamber. May God bless you and your efforts. Long live Poland! Long live Poland! Thank you very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 2:28 p.m. in the main chamber of the Parliament Building. In his opening remarks, he referred to Wojciech Jaruzelski, Chairman of the Council of State; Mikolaj Kozakiewicz, Speaker of the Lower House of the National Assembly; Andrzej Stelmachowski, Speaker of the Senate; and Prime Minister Mieczyslaw Rakowski. The Paris Club was a group of major Western industrialized nations that lent money to developing countries.