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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Beatrice Rangel
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
16 September 1997
New York City

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Beatrice Rangel

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

September 16, 1997

New York City, United States

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Ms. Beatrice Rangel in her office in New York City on September 16, 1997, and I'm Jean Krasno. For the record, Ms. Rangel, could you explain the role that you had in Venezuela and when you became associated with the UN?

Beatrice BR: I myself was never involved with the United Nations. The person who was directly involved with the United Nations promoting the peace process in Central America plus nurturing the democratic process in Haiti was the President of Venezuela at that time which was Mr. Carlos Andrés Pérez. I happened to be his Deputy Chief of Staff from 1989 to 1991, and from 1991 to 1993 his Chief of Staff. President Pérez was elected for the mandate 1989 to 1994 and he was asked by the Central American heads of state to broker the peace process which at the time he took the oath of office was under a very dangerous stalemate. The Arias peace plan did not seem to be moving forward. And, of course, we had basically the political instability and fragmentation in Haiti that made it very difficult for that country to trigger its democratic process.

JK: Venezuela has played a very key role in resolution of a number of conflicts in this hemisphere and has been a member of the Group of Friends on El Salvador, on Haiti, and most

recently on Guatemala. I'd like to talk to you about Venezuela's role in these three groups and perhaps we should take them one at a time beginning at the beginning of the three groups. When did you become involved in the Salvadoran Peace Process?

BR: First of all, it has been a tradition of honest brokerage, recorded in the Venezuelan Constitution. Promotion of peace and democracy are our main foreign policy guidelines. They are part of Simón Bolívar's legacy. As you may know, Simón Bolívar started the process of promoting independence from Spain in the former Spanish colonies. He first accomplished the independence of Venezuela. Then he was the leader for the independence of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. This was done not out of self-interest because these were not countries that the Venezuelans wanted to conquer. These were countries that the Venezuelans needed to fight for in order to secure independence and autonomy in world affairs. And then we withdrew and went back to our daily business which was to build our own republic. From there on Venezuela developed this tradition of honest brokerage in international affairs. We have a country that because of that tradition and because of our multicultural composition which is a mixture of African elements, indigenous elements, and European elements, we are like a melting pot. Venezuela is a country that has been multi-cultural from the beginning and has the capacity to understand very many cultures and very many conflicts. We have been a very peaceful country which developed its own model of a federation and its own pattern of independence. We have had no major conflicts throughout our republican history. Therefore, with all these elements, Venezuela was the perfect country to help bring through a process of stability, peace, and democracy in the region. Our constitution clearly states that Venezuela should seek in foreign

affairs, to support the peaceful resolution of conflict and also Latin American integration and democracy.

JK: I see. Venezuela was one of the countries involved in the Contadora Process in Central America.

BR: Venezuela was involved in the beginning. Simón Bolívar, in 1825, was the first one to have the idea to create a federation of independent states with the newly born republics that he had helped liberate from Spanish rule. He had the idea of convening a congress in Panama. In Panama, he thought that all these nations could get together and work together to face other challenges, growth, prosperity, and well-being. From then on, panamericanism, or Latin American integration, was the seed that nurtured the thoughts on integration and Panamerican cooperation. From then on, Venezuela had always supported the development of international bodies in order to tackle the problems of conflict resolution and the peaceful establishment of democratic processes. Concerning the Central American republics, Venezuela was first involved in the Contadora Group which aimed to try to take away the elements of the East/West divide from the national grievances that were causing the political instability on Central America. What was happening at that point in time, in the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s was that you had a group of nations that were being affected by these outdated political structures. They were political structures that were exclusive and not inclusive. Most of the people wanted to partake in the political process. But at the same time, we were in the middle of the Cold War and the East/West dilemma, so the Central American conflict was also a part of this competition between the two superpowers. There were two elements: one was internal political change and

the international rivalry among world powers which got all mixed up into the Central American reality. What the Contadora Group aimed at was to try to isolate the Central American region from the East/West rivalry in order to tackle the problems of constitutional reform, the reform of the military, and so on, since they were of domestic nature. The Contadora Process had a limited success because it was very difficult for these poor countries, whatever the power in Latin America, to really get the two superpowers to cooperate. The United States and the Soviet Union were competing in world affairs to have larger spheres of influence, and it was not in their national interests to cooperate fully.

The great success of Contadora was that, because it kept the dialogue going, it planted the seeds for a future peaceful solution of the conflict. And the most important achievement was that the Contadora Group made sure that this war did not regionalize. You had a war in El Salvador, you had political instability in Guatemala, you had the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. And you were beginning to have problems in Costa Rica because of immigration and because their territory was being used by irregular forces or by the neighboring armies as a haven when in hot pursuit. You had the issue of hot pursuit all the time. So, even stable Costa Rica was being affected. What the Contadora Group very effectively prevented was that all this fighting did not turn into a regional war. I think it was a great success in that sense. Resolution of the conflict, I don't think it was possible. You really needed a more conducive international environment that you didn't have at that time. Then the Contadora Group turned into the Group of Eight. Four more countries came as a support group. The entry of Brazil, for example, and Uruguay and Argentina [Peru was the fourth] was fundamental because it gave support to the original countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Mexico. It gave a great impetus. The entry of the other countries which

were Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil gave even more strength because they better represented Latin America. First of all, these were the largest democracies in the hemisphere, so they had the political authority. Second, these were the largest markets, so they had economic power. Third, they were very active countries in world affairs, carrying a lot of weight in international affairs. Therefore, I think that the support group could advance much further. That created the conditions for Guatemala to make the proposal of Esquipulas. The Esquipulas Agreement which was pushed forward by President Vinicio Cerezo who had been the first democratically elected civilian in Guatemala. And President Cerezo pushed forward the Esquipulas, thanks to this kind of protective bubble of Contadora and the support group. At this point in time you had eight countries, the United Nations was invited to provide all the Secretariat support in the sense that they needed information, technical assistance from its peacekeeping department. I think it was fundamental. The United Nations, at that time, was not a leading actor but played a very supportive role.

After the Esquipulas peace process, President Arias in Costa Rica, elaborating on Esquipulas, introduced his peace plan for the region that went very well from 1987 to the end of 1988 when it was also facing a stalemate. That was when Carlos Andrés Pérez was elected president of Venezuela, in December of 1988.

JK: When did he take office?

BR: On February the 4th, 1989. President Pérez, while he was not president, had become very active in the region because he was Vice President of Socialist International, which is an

international association that gathers together all the Social Democratic parties in the world. There had been a lot of support from the Social Democratic parties, particularly the European parties, for the peace process in Central America. And Socialist International always drew the advice from local leaders, not only President Pérez. So, President Pérez kept his contacts and his daily dialogues with most of the main players in the Central American region; he had also chaired the Socialist International committee on Haiti after the departure of Jean Claude Duvalier. He went there in a fact-finding mission. He talked to all the political parties. And after he got the sense of what was going on, Socialist International decided to start supporting all the democratic movements in Haiti, the unions, all political parties, regardless of whether they were Social Democratic, or Christian Democratic, or Communist. Because what everybody wanted was all these parties to get together into a front in order to liberate Haiti from this incredible, repressive apparatus that had been built over more than three decades of rule of the Duvalier Family. Concerning Central America, before he was inaugurated, President Pérez was worrying about if the hemisphere continued to have these political disruptions, it could turn into a regional war, that would affect the stability of all the countries in the region. Also, from the human point of view, there were tens of thousands of people being killed every year in El Salvador, which was horrendous for such a little country. Because of political as well as military considerations, he thought that something had to be done to break the stalemate.

So, in that point in time, in December 1988, two months before he took office, he thought of consulting the Contadora heads of state and the support group that were going to come to his inauguration to see what could be done in Central America. I remember that very distinctly because in January 1989, he asked me to go out as his special envoy to Uruguay to talk to

President Sanguinetti, who at that time was the secretary protempore of the Contadora and Support Group. So, I brought the news to President Sanguinetti that the situation in Central America seemed to be getting worse and that something needed to be done. President Sanguinetti agreed and said let's have an informal meeting. At that time they had already changed the name. They no longer called themselves the Contadora and Support Group; they called themselves the Group of Eight. The Group of Eight would only have one summit a year. Given that the heads of state of the Group of Eight were to attend the inauguration of President Pérez, they could hold an informal caucus.

They discussed this matter and they told President Pérez that being in Venezuela, why wouldn't Venezuela try an initiative and see how it went. If it went well, everybody would support that initiative. I remember that we didn't sleep in three days. We had all these people coming. We had to talk to all the heads of the Group of Eight and then to every single Central American head of state, individually. Then he also talked to President Castro of Cuba because of the Cuban involvement with the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

JK: Did Castro come to Venezuela at that time?

BR: Yes, President Castro was there. Prime Minister Felipe González from Spain was there. Everybody was there. The Who's Who that had something to do with the crisis was there. And not only were the heads of state, but the representatives of all these political parties in every single country of the region were there. I took notes; President Pérez talked to everybody. He told them that we need to break this down somehow. "What would it take to break the stalemate," he

kept asking all players. At that point in time, the government of Nicaragua was already aware that the international pressures on them were far too much for them to resist. And international pressures were in favor of them having elections. But, of course, having elections was not enough. There were very important actors in the international community that wanted to have elections that were clear, transparent, supervised, and with, let's say, an international "good behavior" certificate.

At that point, President Daniel Ortega was already pondering on the idea of advancing the elections. According to the constitution, he would have to wait a year and a half more. But he was thinking about scheduling the elections in advance, which is what he ended up doing. He needed to not only agree to make the elections earlier, but also there was a need for him to accept international surveillance, which was fundamental. This was a thing that he had to discuss with his people and with the Central American

countries. Concerning El Salvador, I am not at all sure that President Napoleón Duarte was so sure about what the diffusing device would be for El Salvador and did not, at that time, have a concrete proposal. When Nicaragua was thinking about having the elections earlier, I don't think that El Salvador had a proposal. They had a dialogue, the government kept talking to the rebels. But I don't recall that they had a concrete proposal.

JK: Then there was an election process going on in El Salvador, anyway, because Cristiani was elected President in the spring of 1989. A few months after Pérez took office, Cristiani took office.

BR: What I don't recall is if El Salvador had a concrete proposal. They were just waiting for the elections to see what would happen. They were hosting the meeting of the Central American presidents, I think, on February 11 of that year in El Salvador. And it was fundamental for them to have full backing because you needed the consensus of all the Central American presidents to support the idea of holding early elections in Nicaragua to international cooperation to support this effort. They agreed that this dialogue was going to take place and they were going to discuss this issue at that meeting of the Central American presidents. A resolution was going to come out and the resolution would seek international support. When the inauguration finished, the day after the inauguration, I left for Costa Rica to talk to President Arias. President Arias sent a very secret mission to the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua to discuss with the representatives of President Ortega the terms of peaceful disengagement in Nicaragua. That document was the one that Arias took to the Central American presidents' meeting. That document was the one that we immediately supported. That document called for the first time for the involvement of the OAS and the United Nations.

JK: In that document, okay.

BR: The meeting that the government of Venezuela brokered between the Nicaraguans and the Costa Ricans was in a town called San Juan, which is a town in Costa Rica that is very close to the border with Nicaragua. The meeting of the Central American presidents was in El Salvador, in a resort that is called Tesoro Beach. They met in Tesoro Beach and this document that had been discussed between Costa Rica and Nicaragua was the subject of consultations with the other presidents and was adopted by all the presidents. That document supported the proposal of

Nicaragua to convene early elections and these elections to be supervised by international bodies and to request the support of the OAS and the United Nations, which was the first time they got involved.

JK: Thank you for that history. That is very good.

BR: The United Nations said that when an issue is in the scope of a regional organization, they need to come to us and ask for our support according to our Charter. That was the first time I had seen all the Latin Americans getting together and saying, "Let's go after this project and wrap these issues up." The foreign ministries and everybody cooperated. The representatives in Washington at the OAS did the procedures that were necessary to get the OAS involved in the elections in Nicaragua. Quickly, the people in the OAS adopted the resolution that requested the participation of the United Nations. Our representative in the United Nations immediately took that resolution and it was brought to the Security Council, the General Assembly, etc.

It went very well and I think it was very successful, indeed, because right after the elections in Nicaragua, we know that Mrs. Violeta Chamorro was elected. Two things happened there which are fundamental. Since they were planted both by the United Nations and the OAS, they are very important to the future of both of those countries. One is because they were supervising the whole process, not only the actual counting of the ballots, but the preparation that came months before to hold the elections, they were very involved. They created a team of Nicaraguan civil servants that are very good at convening and preparing elections, which is absolutely necessary in order to start a democratic process. You need to have an independent, respectable election

authority and you can only get that if somebody comes and trains your people and creates this vehicle in the people who are going to constitute that electoral authority. An electoral authority in a vacuum does not exist. They are made out of women and men who work there. If there are not professional and they do not do their job well, nobody respects them; they are not credible.

The United Nations and the OAS did a sensational job at training these people and creating this civil body. I think it was very good. Then the other thing that they did which was excellent was the whole disengagement of the armies and getting back the weapons. The whole country was a time bomb. You had weapons here and there and landmines. You name it, they had it. Without the United Nations, particularly the United Nations, you could have never achieved this and the other fundamental elements to getting this country stabilized. You had to get back the weapons. If you have a political conflict and you have everyone in the population wearing a weapon, no matter what the issue it, there is a tendency to resort to weapons, even when you are losing an argument. I think it was a tremendously well-done job. Then the United Nations paved the way for the United Nations Development Programme to come along, for the World Bank, for the International Monetary Fund. That was the next step. Once you achieve political stability, you need economic progress.

JK: When did Venezuela become involved specifically with the Group of Friends?

BR: What happened was, in parallel to what was going on in Nicaragua, also El Salvador was being followed. One of the things that President Arias was emphatic about was that we should also concentrate on keeping the dialogue going between the government and the Farabundo Martí

liberation army. To his mind, the moment that dialogue would stop, they would go back to tremendous acts of violence. And that's what we did. We held I don't know how many secret meetings in Caracas. We hosted the representatives of the Farabundo Martí and the El Salvadoran government. I think that it was very fortunate for that country and for the region as a whole that Alfredo Cristiani was elected. This is a man who has an extraordinary human quality. He is the most objective, cool, sensitive human being. He is also a person with a lot of sensitivity towards tragedy, like social scourges like violence and poverty. He independently, no matter what political party he represented, he wanted to bring this conflict to a stop. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to bring his country's tragedy to an end.

JK: [second side of the tape] You were talking about President Cristiani and the important role that he played and how key it was actually President Cristiani who was involved in the peace process. I wanted to just ask you about his wife because I understand that Mrs. Cristiani played a certain role.

BR: I think she was terrific. She was with him all the time. I don't think she was directly involved. She was there with him, supporting him in every single aspect. She dedicated herself --remember that first ladies are not elected -- to just play a supportive role to the peace process. She knew that he needed time to consider the alternatives. She would make that time available. If she needed to preside over charities, she would pick those charities that would be instrumental for the peace process. I think that she was the first lady that would talk to everybody and try to gather the maximum amount possible of opinions within her country in order to tell him what was going on. She was not a lady who would close herself in an ivory tower. She reached for the

people. I think it was fundamental because she kept him informed of what the people were thinking and then she would make time available for his to think over his strategy. Whenever he had to take trips that posed some threats to his security, she would insist on being with him. For example, when there was a great offensive of the FMLN launched on November 11, 1989, she decided not to leave the house and stay with him. Although the military house for the president, like the secret service here in the United States, wanted to take the presidential family out she said no. "I'll stay here." There were all these rockets coming less than a block away. This gave him courage to persist in his efforts.

JK: It was very dangerous.



BR: And she stayed there. She was just a great lady.

JK: My colleague, Jim Sutterlin, interviewed President Cristiani a few weeks ago in El Salvador. And we sent a separate special letter to his wife, asking if we could interview her, but she declined.

BR: She explained it to me in a beautiful way. She said once, "Everybody has a little shining light in himself or herself, but sometimes we have to turn off our light in order for other lights to shine and I decided to turn out mine so that Alfredo's could shine and bring the peace."

Everything she did was in the quietest manner. If you were close to her, you would realize that.

But if you were not close to her, you would not figure it out.

JK: That takes a very special person. He also chose someone else to be a part of the negotiating team that seemed like a very good choice and that was David Escobar Galindo.

BR: David Escobar Galindo was fundamental. I think the most important people were Fernando Martínez, David Escobar Galindo, and, of course, the team leader which was the chief of staff, Dr. Oscar Santa María, who subsequently worked with the OAS. He was the team leader and I think he did a terrific job. He was a very quiet man, a man without passions, without emotions, who could be under the most difficult and stressful conditions, he would not lose his calm, his senses. He was absolutely sensational. David Escobar Galindo was the great missionary. Then you have Colonel Martínez who played a decisive role because he was the one who had to pull the military into this process.



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JK: And General Maricio Vargas.

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BR: Maricio Vargas, well, he was important, but Martínez was also the Minister of Domestic Affairs. He was more intertwined with the military power structure than Maricio Vargas. Maricio Vargas however ?? so played a crucial role in bringing the military together.

JK: This is all really excellent. I had spoken to Alvaro de Soto and he said that the initial idea for the Group of Friends really was developed in the latter part of 1989 but they didn't actually meet for a while. There was contact with the Group of Friends.

BR: What happened was that the Group of Friends was fully official, let's say in 1989, but it had been working informally before because there were several things that happened. While we were brokering all this dialogue between the FMLN and the government of El Salvador, the Venezuelan government invited the chief of staff of the military of El Salvador to come to Venezuela into a seminar that was a very secret operation with our chiefs of staff on the Venezuelan military. They spent two days sitting with them. And joint chiefs of staff explained to them how the Venezuelan military had evolved from an army that gave political support to a dictator into an army that was a professional army that did a professional job in a democratic society.

JK: What was the relationship with the police because one of the concerns or demands of the FMLN was that the military be separate from the police?

BR: Those were the issues that were key. The FMLN had six different documents addressing different issues. One of them was security and the structure of the police and the armed forces. But I think that came later, because at the beginning, what they wanted was, for example, to convene new elections, to change the parliament, to change this and that. One of the first conditions that I remember that was a great issue was constitutional reform, the reform of the judiciary. And then they addressed the security issues. The important thing is that during 1988, they kept on talking. In 1989, they split for a while and didn't talk for a while. Then the Farabundo launched an offensive. While you are under negotiations, you are not supposed to undertake a major offensive. But the army responded equally brutally, or violently. What they did is they went and killed all these Jesuit priests. It was a massacre, like all massacres, senseless and

very sad. What happened was in order for them to come back and negotiate; you needed to start a special effort. The Secretary General of the OAS was right in the middle of the offensive to try to disengage them. Then the Farabundo took him and held him for 24 hours inside the Sheraton Hotel.

JK: They took the Sheraton Hotel where he was staying. They didn't actually know in the beginning that he was there.

BR: I do not know whether they knew or did not know. But the army reply to the offensive triggered the participation of Spain in the disengagement. That was when Spain got involved. I will tell you why, because most of the Jesuit priests that the army death squadrons killed were Spanish citizens.



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JK: I didn't know that.

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BR: Yes, of course. A priest was a Basque. And there were several Spanish citizens. So, Spain came and said, " Spanish citizens have been killed. We need to establish responsibilities for these crimes. " What they did is they put a lot of pressure and I think it was fundamental, not on Cristiani himself because he was interested in having this issue clarified. But the military was resistant. When there was a foreign country coming to the president and saying we need to know what happened. Of course, conducting an investigation of this massacre was going to lead immediately to the military. So, the military, because of the pressure from Spain decided to be more conducive to negotiations and give up on a lot of issues that they didn't want to give up.

Spain started brokering some aspects of the dialogue. Mexico had been fundamental given that Mexico has always had a very open policy toward political expatriates. So, very many of the Farabundo leaders were in exile in Mexico. The government of Mexico also began talking to their contacts. I don't know exactly how they did that, but they were telling the leaders who were there, "You have to be more conducive." Mexico was playing a role well before. Basically, Spain, Venezuela, and Mexico. Then, of course, Colombia got involved because we always felt that we also needed another Latin American country. Colombia felt that if they could cooperate in bringing peace in El Salvador, then they could get the support of other countries to gain peace in their own country because they also have a very strong guerrilla movement. All these countries contributed enormously to the peace process.



There was a point in time when a decision was taken that the United Nations was absolutely necessary because a) you needed to conduct elections in El Salvador in territories that had been occupied by the Farabundo Martí, b) you needed to disengage the armies, c) you needed to get the weapons from the armies, and then you also needed to build a national police that was a professional police in order to finish this kind of incestuous relationship between the army and the police, where you never knew who was doing what or why, or under whose orders. You needed all the resources of the United Nations. There was a point in time when it was decided the issue should be brought to the United Nations to create the institutional framework for the peace agreement to be executed.

One could say that there was the political will in favor of peace expressed in a pre-agreement among the parties. But the institution building process in order to bring this agreement into

reality needed to be brokered by an international organization. President Cristiani always thought that given that El Salvador was a very small country and he needed our backing and support not only of Venezuela, but from the international community. Venezuela had already been involved in brokering all these agreements. President Cristiani asked the heads of these four countries whether they would go along with the idea of acting as friends. Of course, everybody said yes. Pérez de Cuéllar thought it was a very good idea so, when he presented the resolution to the United Nations, he presented it already with the support of the four friends-to-be.

JK: You were in Caracas with President Pérez. Did he hold meetings periodically in Caracas with the ambassadors to Venezuela of these "Friends?"



BR: What happened was that all these heads of state talked with each other on a weekly basis. So, he didn't need to talk to the ambassadors. I remember that President Pérez would talk three times a week with Cristiani of El Salvador or President Arias of Costa Rica.

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JK: Would he speak directly with the president of Mexico or Felipe González?

BR: Yes, they would talk among themselves all the time. Whenever there were meetings or whether they were deciding to hold a meeting, the first closed sessions of negotiations on El Salvador were held in Caracas. They all came down. We had homework everyday to prepare a briefing for the other three heads of state on how the conversation had gone that day.

JK: Would you fax that information to them?

BR: We would fax that information. If it were not the presidents, I would talk to all the chiefs of staff on a weekly basis.

JK: So, the chiefs of staff of each of the presidents back in their capitals?

BR: Yes, or the presidents themselves. Another person we have not mentioned but without whom it would have been impossible, was President Bush. Because President Bush was fully briefed on what the plans were for this peace process when he attended the 100th anniversary of democracy in Costa Rica. He came down in October 1989. President Arias held a meeting and there was President Bush. There were presidents from all over Latin America. President Bush was there and he was fully briefed. He decided to give his wholehearted support to this. I remember I used to talk a lot to General Scowcroft who was the National Security Advisor to President Bush. President Bush was on the phone all the time, asking questions to see how the thing was going, saying, "If that is the agreement, then I will have to talk to my people here, so that the Secretary of State knows, and so our ambassador to the UN is fully briefed and supports this process," he would say. He was quite active and supportive.

JK: Was there a dramatic change between the Reagan administration and the Bush administration?

BR: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. I did not meet President Reagan and I was not in contact with the people who were his decision makers. What I knew about President Reagan's foreign policy is

what I read in the newspapers, in the specialized magazines, and so forth. But I believe, based on the information that I had, that President Bush had a clear international vision, and I think the most important priority in this vision was the Americas. I think that he always thought that this hemisphere, integrated, not only economically, but through commonality of interests in the Americas would become a major power in the world, in terms of prosperity and freedom. That was his dream. He worked hard to get it going. He realized that he was never going to see that, if there were no political stability. I think that he understood that there was a limited role for the United States to play in this particular conflict because the United States had been part of the problem. What he decided to do was very intelligent. He consulted his colleagues. He called briefings and advice from his colleagues and he supported what his colleagues from the region thought was necessary to do.



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JK: The U.S. was not a member of the Group of Friends initially, during the negotiation process. They joined as "four plus one" after the agreement had been signed in Chapultepec in 1992.

BR: But the United States from the White House down the bureaucratic chain always supported the process. They were so close that it was said about Pérez de Cuéllar was very fortunate to have an honorary Secretary General of the United Nations sleeping at the White House. Because President Bush had that vision, he also understood that there was a very useful role for the United Nations to play that could not be played by the U.S. alone.

JK: And President Bush had been the U.S. ambassador to the UN.

BR: In areas where he knew there were severe constraints on the U.S. to act, he would support the United Nations in that role. The final thing about President Bush is that although the United States is a world power and takes foreign policy decisions based on its national interest; he always made his colleagues [the other presidents] feel that they were a part of the decision-making process. He would call them, tell them, "We are going to do this." and seek their opinions. The United States would then take the decision, but everybody had been informed and consulted. So, he really created a caucus. Everybody felt for the first time they were a part of the U.S. foreign policy making, which is what I am sure in the future is going to make President Bush distinct from the rest of all his colleagues.



JK: And that was in distinct contrast to the Reagan administration?

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BR: Yes, perhaps they consulted a lot with Margaret Thatcher but I don't think there were a lot of consultations going on with Latin America.

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JK: And the outside world had changed also. The Berlin wall had come down in 1989.

BR: Also, you cannot compare the kind of foreign policy constraints that were faced by Reagan as were faced by Bush. President Reagan saw a threat in Soviet expansionism. Of course, the Soviet Union was making inroads in Africa. They were using the Cubans to make inroads in Africa. I don't know how close the connection was, but there was the connection between Nicaragua and Cuba. President Reagan said that he was going all the way to contain them. By the time President Bush came to the

presidency, the Soviet Empire was dissolving and it disappeared altogether while he was president.

JK: You had mentioned earlier that President Pérez had some conversations with President Castro. What were the nature of those conversations?

BR: During his inauguration?

JK: Yes.



BR: Basically, President Castro was asked to modify his relationship with Nicaragua. "Look, there is a need for a disengagement in Central America and we know that Cuba has been providing Nicaragua with intelligence and tactical support, and we want you stop that. We would rather have you supporting the idea of military disengagement and democracy in Nicaragua."

JK: And what did he say?

BR: Well, he never admitted that they were doing that. He said, "Well you know, we cannot say no when we are requested to play a role." But at the end of the day, I think that President Castro, in spite of not saying it, did support the peace process in El Salvador, and Guatemala and everywhere else.

JK: But the pressure of President Pérez and the other countries who supported the peace process may have made a difference?

BR: I think so because two things may have happened that made him change his foreign policy course. One was the realization that war was never going to be won by the guerrillas and second, the Latin American mood was not for that kind of role for Cuba, did not contemplate this kind of role for Cuba. So, I think that he understood both. He changed his foreign policy course. I do think he changed it.

JK: Then, in his situation, he lost the support of the Soviet Union when the Soviet Union dissolved. There was a lot of complex interaction.



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BR: Yes. In 1988, or the beginning of 1989, it is absolutely incredible, nobody in the world could have forecast the fall of the Berlin Wall. Lech Walesa, the Polish leader, came to Venezuela. He came to Venezuela because he was invited by the Federation of Venezuelan Labor Congress and he was the keynote speaker. And, of course, he made a courtesy call on the president of Venezuela, and he was invited for lunch. I was not present at the lunch, but afterwards, President Pérez commented. He said, "It was a very interesting lunch." Because in those days, there were a lot of people leaving Eastern Germany. There was this mass of people going from Eastern Germany into West Germany. And they were commenting on the flow of immigrants, that it was impossible to stop. It was like a dam with an opened hole. That was exactly the metaphor that President Pérez said. He felt the situation was untenable. It was like if you open a hole in a dam, the dam might explode. And Mr. Walesa said, "I have come from Germany and I just talked to

Chancellor Kohl and I told him the same thing." But he had said, 'No.' We are preparing ourselves for a closer relationship with Eastern Germany, a rapprochement, a kind of economic inter-relationship between the two Germanies and the other Eastern European countries. This will stabilize the situation." Then Mr. Walesa said, "But Chancellor, what about reunification?" And Chancellor Kohl said, "no, that is a task for the next generation."

JK: So, he didn't anticipate it either, but a few months later everything changed.

BR: The Berlin Wall fell and there was reunification. So, I don't believe that President Castro, in February 1989, thought that this could happen. Nobody thought that this could happen. What made him change his foreign policy course was he felt that the Latin American mood had changed in favor of bringing the Central American conflict to a close. He also realized a long time before that this war was not going to be won by the guerrillas.

JK: What we have been talking about is primarily President Pérez and Venezuela's role politically and diplomatically which is extremely important. What I would also like to know is did Venezuela provide resources in any kind of way to El Salvador during the negotiation process as incentives or in any way use threats like the carrot and the stick sort of situation to push the government.

BR: No, we never did. We created in the 1970s when the energy crisis struck the region, a program called the San Jose Program through which we would sell oil to all the Central American and Caribbean nations at the current market price. Then the Venezuelan investment

fund which is a public facility would open a credit account with these countries equivalent to 30% of their oil bills. Let say a country pays \$100 million a year in oil purchases, the Venezuelan investment fund then would create a credit for \$30 million that they can use to finance development projects. That goes on for 14 years. They have 7 years grace period and 14 years to pay at very low interest rates.

JK: When did that begin?

BR: That began a long time ago; it had nothing to do with the conflict but rather with the rise in oil prices. It was created in 1974 when the oil crisis went into a hike and it severely affected the economies of these small countries. So, Venezuela created this fund. Mexico created another program which is exactly the same called the San Jose Program that is undertaken by Mexico and Venezuela for the Caribbean and Central American nations.

JK: [a break to change tapes] We were just talking about the San Jose Program.

BR: We had the San Jose Program going but it was not changed in any aspect during the peace process. These were long-term commitments that were taken by the Venezuelan and Mexican governments. None of these countries used the San Jose Program as a negotiating tool during the brokerage of the peace process in Central America. President Pérez believed in the benefits of creating a free trade zone in the Caribbean basin that would incorporate from Surinam to Mexico, all these countries, let's say Colombia, and so forth, the English speaking Caribbean and the Central American nations. And we worked forcefully to get all these free trade agreements going

during his government, particularly during the first years. We signed one with El Salvador, with Nicaragua, with Costa Rica (which took more time), with Panama. With Panama, it was a year after the invasion that we started negotiating. With the Caribbean nations, we signed an agreement that was a pioneer in the hemisphere because it was a one-way free trade agreement, whereby we would open all the Venezuelan markets to the all the Caribbean nations without requesting them to open their markets to our products. But I think it was precisely because we gave up all these levers and carrots and stick approaches to the negotiations and we just concentrated on doing an honest brokerage that we had what is fundamental in international negotiations of these horrendous conflicts, which is moral authority. Because if you are not pursuing your own egotistical agenda or selling your products (the private sector coming in), then you get the moral authority to get the people and tell them, "Sit down, listen, your people are dying on the streets."

JK: After the peace agreements were signed, and the negotiation stage was finished, what role did Venezuela play then in the implementation of the agreement? Did they provide personnel for the reforming of the military and the police?

BR: We provided funds to the United Nations, also in the case of Haiti that we haven't talked about. We made an initial contribution to OAS which I remember very well, a hundred thousand dollars, so that they could begin to do the groundwork preparations for the elections. We were the first contributing country. Because we made that initial contribution, the same day that the Secretary-General convened the meeting, then the other countries had to match us, including the United States. With respect to Central America, we contributed directly to the UN to support the

peacekeeping activities. Our contributions were made in cash and in kind. We increased our cash contributions and we also sent troops to participate in the UN peacekeeping forces.

JK: So, they made a contribution to a fund for the UN for the implementation of the agreement.

BR: Yes, for the peace agreements. The only country in which we were involved directly was Nicaragua where President Pérez sent people from our security in order to train the security guards like the secret service for Mrs. Chamorro.

JK: But Venezuela did not send police to El Salvador?

BR: No, we sent the army. We did send the army within the United Nations.

JK: As a part of peacekeeping?

BR: Yes, as peacekeepers. We sent a battalion, I believe. We sent one for Nicaragua and one for El Salvador, a top brass military person of Venezuela. The peacekeeping force in El Salvador was headed by a Spanish general. And the second one was a Venezuelan colonel, who later was promoted and became chief of the joint chiefs of staff of Venezuela, General Barbosa. But when he was in the peacekeeping force, he was colonel

JK: Then there was Pedro Nikken who was in the UN Secretariat but was Venezuelan.

BR: And there was another Venezuelan in the Commission of Truth, Reinaldo Figueredo, our former foreign minister.

JK: He was one of the three heads of the Truth Commission.

BR: There was Mr. Thomas Buergenthal [of the U.S.], former president of Colombia Belisario Betancur, and Reinaldo Figueredo.

JK: I know we have to get on to Haiti but I wanted to ask you one more question as long as we are talking about the Truth Commission. How was the Truth Commission actually established? It was said in the agreement that a Truth Commission would be established. But then the Truth Commission itself was independent of the agreement. It was not a part of the UN.

BR: That is exactly what the parties agreed to. I do remember because it was a proposal made by the FMLN. It had a lot of resistance, but finally everybody agreed. The initial design was like a kind of Nuremberg, more the model of the Nuremberg tribunal than a commission.

JK: Or something based on what had happened in Argentina?

BR: They thought of it, but I think the original design was quite tough. It resembled more the Nuremberg Court than anything else. They negotiated that among themselves and they came to this agreement. It was nothing like the Nuremberg tribunals but it was a little bit stronger than the Argentinean commission. First, it was an independent commission set up by an international

body with international support and with the resources of the whole UN system. It was something in between.

JK: How were the three commissioners selected?

BR: The Secretary-General selected them, after consulting the parties.

JK: Because the members are primarily from the Friends group, were they involved in the selection?

BR: They were concerning the personalities chosen from the Friends group. The member from the United States was one of the most distinguished personalities in the issue of human rights that is Mr. Buergenthal.

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JK: At that point the U.S. had become a member of the "four plus one." There is still so much to talk about here, but I wanted to go on to Haiti. Venezuela played such an important role on the issue of Haiti. To start from the beginning, Venezuela's relationship with Haiti, Venezuela seemed to have a rather special relationship with Haiti.

BR: First of all, our image of Haiti is completely distorted by its current predicament. We shouldn't forget that Haiti was the jewel in the French crown in the past century. It was a very prosperous society. It was fundamental for the French crown. It was the colony that generated the most income to France and it was a very important possession. After they separated from France,

I would say they had a lot of political instability. I don't know why and I haven't done enough research to come to a conclusion, but it seems to be the pattern of all former French colonies to inherit a lot of political instability afterwards. It is probably that the process of institution building in the case of France is slower. They get to be independent before the institutions are consolidated. What comes afterwards is a period of chaos. That happened to Haiti, however; Haiti was the first independent nation in this hemisphere. It was the first to gain its independence from a foreign power in the Western Hemisphere.

When Bolívar started his independence process in Venezuela, he did not succeed on the first try. He failed and he had to leave Venezuela in exile. And he was taken in by the president of Haiti who had been the liberator, Alexander Petion. Petion had been involved in Venezuela's early independence attempt because before Bolívar we had Francisco Miranda who was the precursor of independence in Venezuela. Miranda, after having fought in the Napoléonic wars with France, came to Venezuela to try to convince the local leaders to get independence from Spain. His conspiracy didn't work and he was put in prison and he died in Spain, in prison. But before going to Venezuela, he stopped over in Haiti and he was hosted by President Petion. It was there that the Venezuelan flag was created because Miranda had an idea for the Venezuelan flag that was going to be yellow and red like the Spanish flag. Petion told him that he had to use blue which was the Caribbean. Our flag became yellow, blue, and red. Then Bolívar followed Miranda's footsteps, but he failed again and was in exile. Petion received him and because Haiti was such a prosperous society, Petion was able to buy ships, weapons, and train the Venezuelan patriots and send an expedition back to Venezuela, which was far more successful. So, we have these historical links with Haiti.

I remember President Pérez saying, "We are always worried about paying back debts to the bank, but we have this debt that we have never paid which is an historical debt that we have with Haiti. Haiti was fundamental in our getting our independence. Now, we have to do something for them to get democracy going." He had been following the Haitian situation because he had been commissioned by the Socialist International. He was the chairman of the committee on Haiti. He held regular talks with all political leaders in Haiti, Mark Bazin, Benoît, Gille and others. Nobody knew Aristide, to tell you quite frankly.

We knew everybody else, but Aristide was never in the picture because he was a priest. He had a church where he took care of religion and did charity for the poor. If you wanted to know what was going on in Haiti, you would go to his parish and listen to his homily. He was a priest and he was not in the political game at that point in time. The leaders of the political turf were Mr. Benoît, Mr. Basin, Mr. Gille, and also a professor who had been in exile in Venezuela. Then Sylvio Claude, who was a union leader of the Christian Democrats and afterwards died. He was killed by the Tonton Macouts. These were the people who were working in the political field, trying to set up the parties, have elections, participate, and win. When President Pérez came to power, the elections in Haiti were forthcoming. There had been elections in 1987, which were interrupted by these goons from the military that killed voters. Then they conducted another elections that was marked by a lot of absenteeism, only about 10% of the people voted. They elected Manigat and then the military overthrew Manigat. There was one military junta after another. Finally Prospere Avril (?) took power and left under U.S. pressure. The U.S. played a fundamental and important role in Haiti. They were all set for democracy and decided that Avril,

the current military leader had to go in order to hold elections and trigger the democratic process. Abril left and there was no one in charge of the presidency. No one wanted to do anything that was not constitutional in order to have a little bit of political institutionality in the country. Constitutionally, the person who should have become the provisional head of state was the chairman of the Supreme Court. But that particular chairman of the Supreme Court had been appointed by Duvalier to whom he was very close. He was horrendous. He very intelligently resigned. The provisional president then became a lady, Madame Trouillot, who was the second most senior justice.

Madame Trouillot, immediately after she had been sworn in, she sent her chief of staff to Venezuela to ask for our support. And she said, I only have one task in this life that is to organize elections and to oversee that these elections are clean, credible, and internationally acclaimed. So, please help me to do this." So, I remember that Madame Trouillot came to power sometime in March 1990, it must have been, and there was an inauguration ceremony in Colombia in August 1989. And President Pérez brought Madame Trouillot on an official visit to Venezuela and took her to Colombia for President Gaviria's inauguration. There they sat with the newly-inaugurated president and they said let's do something in the OAS framework in order to organize elections in Haiti. Everybody worked, including the United States, quite actively in supporting this lady so that she would get the resources to organize and conduct elections. Vice-President Quail attended the inauguration of President Gaviria and was briefed on the subject. He responded very positively to the call for US support. Then she was able to do that.

Nobody was expecting this outcome of the elections because everybody thought that it was going to be either Mr. Bazin or Mr. Gil as president of Haiti. At the last minute, Aristide registered himself and he won by a landslide. After Aristide was elected, everybody had to support him because he was the person that the Haitians had chosen. Everybody tried to do that but I think that President Aristide lacked what we call in Spanish "a left hand." He was not subtle, at all. So, he started alienating the support of very many key players in Haitian politics. So, he was overthrown. After being overthrown, it was even more difficult to get him back.

JK: Let me just stop you there for a moment because I understand that Venezuela played a very important role right in those moments of the coup to save Aristide.



BR: I recall this perfectly because our ambassador kept sending reports.

JK: Your ambassador in Haiti, what was her name? It was a woman.

BR: Yes, Elsa Bocceciampi. Elsa kept these reports. (First we had a man who was ambassador — Peinado — but then for the inauguration in Haiti, Elsa was appointed. She came to the inauguration with President Pérez. She started her mandate there at that time.) Elsa kept sending all these reports on Haiti, saying that the Chamber of Commerce was at odds with Aristide because he had threatened them on price controls. The Church was mad at him because he had challenged the most senior bishop. She said that the situation was getting very unstable because there were many people who had grievances against Aristide. So, we were very worried. We came that September [1990] right before the coup to the United Nations, and Aristide was here

[in New York]. President Pérez wanted very much to talk to Aristide but their schedules never coincided. We could not arrange their schedules for them to meet.

JK: Had you come here with President Pérez?

BR: Yes, I was here. I even went the listen to his speech at the United Nations in which he spoke in several languages.

JK: When Aristide spoke to the General Assembly.

BR: Yes, he spoke in several languages. He spoke in French, Spanish, English, all the languages he knew. When he finished his speech, I came and I said, "Mr. President, my boss wants to see you." He said, "But I am leaving because the Haitian community is holding a rally in Central Park." I said, "How about tonight?" He said, "I have a dinner." I said, "What time are you finishing that dinner?" He said, "I don't know, call me around 11:00." Around 11:00 I called but President Pérez was too tired and Aristide was not back. And we left for Venezuela at 6:00 in the morning. President Pérez wanted to tell him, "Look, I am very worried. You have to do something quickly to get all these people behind you, not against you." So, we reached Venezuela and we got an even more worrisome report from Port-au-Prince. I told President Pérez, "Look at the report we are getting." So, he said, "Why don't you go to Port-au-Prince because they have not signed to cooperation agreement that we proposed to them. We have been waiting here and this is a very good excuse."

JK: You had proposed a cooperation agreement between Venezuela and Haiti?

BR: Yes, in order to develop their energy resources because they were having shortages of energy, a lot of problems. So, I said, "Okay, let me try to coordinate this with the foreign ministry and see how far they have gotten. Let's have the ambassador join the mission just as backup." He said, "perfect." So, I called the ambassador and I said, "Elsa, tell President Aristide that we are sending this mission. We would like him to organize his schedule with all the ministers. But I would also like to talk to him, in private." We couldn't arrange a date; he would change the date. Finally, in the middle of the evening, Elsa called and said, "Beatrice, there is a coup d'etat going on." That same afternoon, I got a call from Bernie (Bernard) Aronson, from the State Department. The U.S. had all the information. I got a phone call from the Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Mulroney from Canada. And the three countries started talking. All these people were on radios; they didn't have cellular phones in Haiti. They were with these radios, trying to communicate with headquarters, so that we knew what was going on. There was a point in time when we started this conference calling. My ambassador said, "I am going to the residence of the Canadian ambassador. He is convening a meeting to coordinate our positions with respect to this crisis."

JK: Was this in Caracas?

BR: No, they were in Port-au-Prince. And they decided to meet, the American ambassador, the Canadian ambassador, and our ambassador. They were at the residence or at the offices at the embassy. They were all going to meet at the Canadian embassy. And she left the phone number

but, when we called there, they said, "No, the ambassador left with Mrs. Bocceciampi and they were going to the American embassy." We called the American embassy and they said that the three of them had left for somewhere else and there was no way they could connect with them. Two hours afterwards, Bernie Aronson called me and said, "You know, there is a coup d'etat going on and they have Aristide. He has been taken and I think they are going to kill him. We are trying to get our ambassador to save him, but they have held Aristide and there is a coup d'etat." So, that was when they went to the headquarters of the military and while they were upstairs, these guys were downstairs, torturing Aristide. And they said, "We don't know. There were these soldiers that staged a mutiny and we cannot control them. They are furious; they're ferocious. They took over this military headquarters in the outskirts of the city and we cannot go in because they would kill us. They would shoot at us. They don't obey orders. They don't want to talk. Those are the ones that have Aristide."

JK: But, later you found out that he had been in the same building?

BR: In the same building, in the cellar. The ambassadors never believed what they were being told. They were suspicious that these guys were lying to them, the military, including Cedras, and everybody who was talking to them. I don't know how they found out, but they found out and they started negotiations to get Aristide released. Finally, the military agreed that they would release him. But that a plane had to come and pick up Aristide. So, Venezuela sent a plane.

JK: How did you get him out of the cellar and to the airport?

BR: Because I think that the three ambassadors kept negotiating. I don't exactly know the context of what they were negotiating. But they did negotiate and the military finally agreed as a part of the negotiations that they were not going to kill Aristide. They were going to let Aristide go into exile.

Then Bernie Aronson called me and told me, "Beatrice, we need a plane." And it was something like 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening. I remember that quite distinctly because I went to the president and he told me to call the minister of defense and tell him to make one of his planes available. I called the minister of defense and the minister of defense said, "Beatrice, we can't do that." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because all the Presidential planes are in the Presidential hangar in the Caracas airport and in the Caracas airport, there are no airport lights. So, they cannot take off because this is only an airport that is used during the day. Since the president wasn't traveling, we decided to keep them in the hangar that is safest. So, what is it that we are going to do now?" So, what they did was that they brought 30 trucks from the army and to put 15 and 15 on both sides of the landing strip and they turned their lights on and they were the airport lights. That's how that plane took off.

JK: The plane did take off from the Caracas airport, then.

BR: Yes, what they did is they brought these 30 trucks and put them in line on both sides of the landing strip with the lights on. That created the airport lights. That is what they did so the plane could depart. Then they had to go down to the Simón Bolívar airport to get refueled and then from there they went to Haiti. The American air force had to support them with flight

information because the Haitian control tower did not want to give them information on the winds and everything that a pilot needs to land. They would not turn on the lights at the airport and so they were going around and they didn't see the airport because all the lights were shut off. The American air force told the American ambassador in Port-au-Prince, "The plane is up there but it cannot land because there are no airport lights." Then they managed to get the airport lights on in Haiti. So, they landed and they had Aristide in the airport. With Aristide in the airport, there was the American ambassador, the Canadian ambassador, the French ambassador, and our ambassador.

JK: Those constituted eventually the four friends. They were right there at the crucial moment.

BR: They were right there. The French ambassador, I forgot, was always involved in the negotiations including pressing to get Aristide out. His involvement was essential, because in Haiti, France carries more weight than anybody else. Even though they are so distant and they can hardly do anything, but France has a strong cultural attachment to Haiti.

JK: So, then Aristide arrived in Caracas.

BR: France is like the mother. No matter if when you were a little baby you were taken away by your grandmother and she raised you, the moment that you see your mother, that's your mother.

JK: That's right; it's the mother country.

BR: That is what France is to Haiti.

JK: Then Aristide arrived in Caracas.

BR: At 3:30 in the morning. At the airport, were the French ambassador, the US ambassador, the Canadian ambassador, and myself to greet him. And then the president decided that since the Venezuelan government only recognized a truly elected head of state, we declared his presence in Venezuela as an official visit. So, he was there on official business for three months until he moved to Washington.

JK: So, he actually stayed in Venezuela. I know he came to Washington for meetings. You were saying that Aristide's stay became an official visit of a president because he was still recognized by Venezuela as the official president of Haiti. He was then hosted by the Venezuelan government for several months.

BR: He was in the presidential guesthouse all the time.

JK: When he traveled to the United States, to Washington.

BR: He would use our Air Force One plane. And he had a military aid as if he were a head of state.

JK: So, Venezuela played a very key role.

BR: And we recalled Elsa and left our charge d'affair. Elsa helped him and she was like his chief of staff, acting chief of staff. And this I cannot disclose because they touch upon national security issues, but we managed to get many of the political leaders out of Haiti, members of Congress, members of the Supreme Court, even some members of the military who were not in agreement with what the top echelon of the military was doing. We managed to get them out of Haiti and to bring them to Venezuela to talk to Aristide and start building the process of political consensus again. Then Venezuela requested an urgent meeting of the OAS in order to tackle the issue of Haiti. Then the OAS started taking measures and finally there were sanctions against Haiti. In order to implement those sanctions, we needed the United Nations, which is the only body that has a charter that allows for this punitive action.



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Ambassador Arria's role was fundamental because all of this needed the United Nations support and he was our representative. He dealt with all these issues of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti.

JK: After the coup in 1990, in January 1991.

BR: In 1992, there was an attempted coup d'etat in Venezuela.

JK: Just to back up a little bit, I believe in 1991, Ambassador Arria became Venezuela's representative on the Security Council. Then Venezuela began to play an even more important role because you were on the Security Council.

BR: Yes.

JK: What I wanted to ask you is that you brought up the issue of sanctions because the OAS had called for sanctions. But they couldn't really implement them. With ambassador Arria on the Security Council, what was the relationship between the OAS and the UN in trying to achieve sanctions?

BR: From the procedural point of view, a regional organization has to tackle a regional conflict because the United Nations only tackles those conflicts that can threaten world peace. Regional conflicts are dealt with in the context of regional organizations. That is what they are there for. But when a regional organization feels that they cannot deliver completely because they have charter problems, as in the case of the OAS, or because you need the support of other countries that are not located in the region but whose role is pivotal. Then you have to go to the United Nations. You always end up going to the United Nations because the United Nations is the only truly world forum that we have. Let's say Bosnia. Bosnia is in Europe but, of course, there are countries in Asia that have a role to play in the Bosnian crisis. These countries are not members of any European regional organization. They are members of the Asian organizations.

So, the OAS produced a resolution requesting the cooperation of the UN. It was brought to the Security Council. Now, the UN can decide, yes, we have a role to play that is fundamental or they can say no, let the regional organization tackle this. So, it was fundamental the role that

Ambassador Arria played, having that resolution supporting the sanctions vis-a-vis Haiti adopted by the Security Council.

JK: With the permanent members of France and the United States and then Venezuela, there were three of the Friends that were also members of the Security Council at that time. So, only Canada was not on the Security Council. Was it tough to try to bring pressure to pass sanctions?

BR: It was very difficult. I remember that while Guatemala and El Salvador went smoothly, I don't know for what reason and I don't - remember which of the countries had doubts about Haiti, but I think that there were some misgivings within the Latin American group which had to be overcome. After overcoming the misgivings of some members of the Latin American group, you had to overcome misgivings of other countries. I am not sure, but I think that one of the permanent members was not all together sure.

JK: I think China, because of interfering in domestic issues, the issue of sovereignty.

BR: Exactly, it was China. It took an arm and a leg to convince the Chinese government.

JK: There is so much more to ask you about Haiti, but I wanted to have a few moments to ask you about a third conflict that Venezuela has played a very important role in, and that is Guatemala. Venezuela became a member of the Group of Friends on Guatemala. If I remember correctly, it is the only country that really was a part of all three groups.

BR: Because of the beginnings. President Pérez, remember, in his inauguration, was asked to act as good officer for all the Central American conflicts. That included Nicaragua which was the first to be solved, then El Salvador, then Guatemala. But if you go to the Tesoro Beach Declaration of the Presidents of Central America, you will see that the seeds of the solution of the three conflicts were planted there. On Guatemala, it was discussed with President Cerezo. Then President Cerezo ended his mandate. There was a president elected who didn't last long but he also concentrated on the peace process. He was the one who took a resolution here to the United Nations. He himself asked this Group of Friends to be created. Venezuela was in the three groups because Venezuela started the brokerage for the whole region.

JK: How was Venezuela approached at becoming a member of the Group of Friends on Guatemala? How did that begin? Were you involved in that at all?

BR: We were asked by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. But the Secretary-General also consulted with the two parties which were the UNRG which is the Federation of Guerrilla Groups and the government of Guatemala, both.

JK: As I recall, there was a meeting in Guatemala. The president of Guatemala had called a meeting inviting Venezuela and Mexico.

BR: I was the person that represented President Pérez for the Group of Friends of Guatemala. I attended two meetings.

JK: Did you go the meeting in Guatemala? That first one when the president asked if you would become a Group of Friends, and didn't he ask if you would become a Group of Friends of the President, of himself?

BR: Yes.

JK: Okay, so, why did it start out with that kind of request rather than a Group of Friends of the Secretary-General of the UN?

BR: I think what happened with the president of Guatemala was that he wanted to feel a stronger support around himself. Remember that in Guatemala, the army had far more control of the political process than anywhere else in Central America. It had been an army that had run the country for at least 30 or 35 years. Of course, the president felt that he needed to be protected. And so, he wanted, from the domestic point of view, he wanted to portray an image that it is not just "It is I with four more countries, here." Of course, that was not possible because the resolution and the treaties and the agreements and everything called for the Friends of the Secretary-General. Because the person who had been asked to mediate was the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

JK: Eventually, it was resolved that the Group of Friends would be the Friends of the Peace Process. Why was there this difference?

BR: Well, to say that you were Friends of the Peace Process or of the Secretary-General was the same thing. They didn't want to offend a head of state, particularly the one who was pivotally resolving the crisis.

JK: So, you suggested that as a kind of compromise. You were in Guatemala, and then did you go to Mexico from there?

BR: You see, contrary to the modus operandi of the peace process in El Salvador, whereby you have the FMLN on one side of the table and the government on the other side of the table, Oscar Santa María was the team leader of the Salvadorian government, you had Oscar Santa María and all the government representatives of the peace commission and then you had on the other side of the table Shafik Handal and all the other representatives of the FMLN, and they were together in the same room. But in Guatemala, they never sat together. Only very late in the process, the last year, you would see them together. First of all, there was a peace commission that was headed by the bishop. The bishop would sit with the guerrillas, get their arguments, or complaints, and positions, and then go to the president and then come back. You see. Since these people were in exile in Mexico from the fear that if they came to Guatemala, there was no way to guarantee their personal security. So, we would talk to the government and then go to Mexico and sit with the guerrillas and then come back and talk to the government. It was really, it was very stressful. I remember we would spend the whole day sitting with the government. We would talk to the bishop, too. And then we would take a plane, the last plane in the evening -- I think it is at 9:00 in the evening - - and we would go to Mexico, wake up in the morning and have breakfast with

the guerrillas, work all day and then take a 10:00 plane back to Guatemala. We shuttled back and forth for the two meetings that I went to.

JK: So, you actually became the representative of President Pérez to those meetings initially.

BR: Yes.

JK: Did the parties start coming to New York at some point to negotiate?

BR: The president of Guatemala was overthrown in the midst of a political crisis. He tried to dissolve the parliament. He tried to do something very similar to what President Fujimori did. And it didn't work. In Central America, everybody is trying to build institutions that are competent in resolving conflicts and aggregating interests. You cannot allow for a solution like that which is extra-constitutional. That destroys all threads of constitutionality. That didn't work. So, he was ousted. Then President Ramiro de León Carpio finalized his mandate. What happened is that Ramiro Carpio had been the chairman of the peace committee.

JK: He had been the chairman of the peace committee?

BR: No, I'm sorry, he was the chairman of the Commission of Human Rights because there was a Commission of Human Rights in Guatemala.

JK: Run by the Guatemalans?

BR: Run by the Guatemalans. He was elected as the Human Rights Ombudsman. His position was like an ombudsman. He was its chairman. So, he had to tackle all the problems of violations of human rights within the peace process. He was elected provisional president by congress to finalize the mandate of the president who had been removed. President León concentrated more on the peace process and he said that the first thing need to move forward was to sit at the same table. He pushed very much forward.

JK: So, they did come to New York?



BR: Which was, of course, the easiest because the two parties could come to New York. In Guatemala, one of the parties could not come. Then it went very smoothly, I believe.

JK: Were you in New York then during that period of time? Did you participate in the meetings here?

BR: No, my participation stopped in 1993 because at that point in time, I had stepped out of government and I was general manager of the opera theater in Venezuela. I was doing something else. I resigned from my ministerial post in the aftermath of the coup attempt. And, of course, there was political turmoil. You remember, President Pérez was deposed. After he was deposed, I didn't expect things to continue on the same track. Venezuela is going to concentrate on its own domestic problems. So, I resigned and what happened was that the process continued. But I think

that the Venezuelan participation was not as active afterwards, first, and utmost, because of the role of President Pérez. In order for decisions to work, you need a visionary, and a convinced visionary, and he was both. Second, Venezuela was having internal political problems and they had to be addressed. I don't think it was a time when the Venezuelans wanted to look abroad. They wanted to look inside their own house. Venezuela stopped being a leading actor and took a supportive role. Then I don't know what happened afterward, who was the person who represented us. I believe it was our ambassador in Guatemala who was the person. But I am not sure.

JK: In that you have been very aware of these three conflicts and the resolution of these three conflicts, and the Friends groups on the three, how did the three groups differ? Were there any significant differences in how they operated?

BR: Well, I think that Nicaragua was a process where everybody collaborated and they really didn't need a peace commission or a negotiating team because the decision to open up and enact political changes was taken by the government of Nicaragua. Without the government of Nicaragua, you could have done nothing. Then, El Salvador was a country where you had the fiercest of all wars we have seen in this century in Latin America. So, you needed to try to convince people to try to forget their grievances and talk to each other. I think that was very difficult because most of the people that were sitting on either side of the table had behind them corpses, from in their family or relatives that had been killed in that war by either of the factions. Then you had a country that was absolutely destroyed, half of the country, by war. It was very difficult, I would say.

In Guatemala, it is a completely different process in the sense --I am not saying that it was more or less difficult than El Salvador -- certainly it was the most complicated thing to convince the elites that they had to support the peace process. In El Salvador, the elites were convinced and the grievances didn't let them talk to each other. But in Guatemala, the elites were not convinced.

JK: So, that was the major stumbling block over the years.

BR: The difference with Nicaragua is that it was in the middle of that hurricane you called the East/West rivalry, or the Cold War syndrome and the rivalry among the two super powers. Then you also had the same thing in El Salvador, to a certain degree. That East/West discussion veiled the fundamental problems of political exclusion, economic injustice, and all the domestic grievances that were in those societies. In Guatemala, we didn't have that problem at all.

Guatemala was not part of the Cold War syndrome. So, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union seemed to be interested in what anyone was doing there. What was a very difficult problem to tackle was leverage. The role of the United States in Guatemala was almost negligible if you compare it to El Salvador or anywhere else. For example, the Guatemalan army is independent and has its own resources. It does not rely on international cooperation. The United States has not been involved in training or in providing weapons or anything. In El Salvador, the United States would say, "You behave or I don't continue to support you." But in Guatemala, you didn't have that.

JK: On the Group of Friends on Haiti, how did that operate differently?

BR: To tell you frankly, the problem that was the most difficult to tackle was Haiti. To begin with, Haiti had to begin nation building. And that is what the United Nations is sensational at. It has all this expertise from the Trusteeship Council. They are very good at this but it is a very tough process. The first thing that you needed was to convince the Haitians that if they didn't get together and start building those institutions, nobody was going to do it for them. Second you had to convince them that once you elect a president, good or bad, you have to stick with him until he finishes his mandate. Third, you had all this incredible repressive apparatus that Duvalier set up for three decades that was intact. Then, you have so much poverty and misery. That Haiti did not carry any strategic value. You had to do nation building, you had to resolve conflicts not between Haiti and any foreign player, but among the Haitians, which is far more difficult. On top of that you needed to get the economy going.



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JK: Are there any lessons that can be learned from the process of using the Group of Friends?

BR: I think that using the Group of Friends is a very good idea because it commits, first of all, countries in the region to cooperate in the solution of the problems that, although, do not affect them directly, will at the end of the day, in this world in which we are living which is globalized, will end up affecting them and taking a toll on them. That is one of the things. The second thing is that once you get a Group of Friends, then these countries put up their resources together with those of UN and so, you strengthen the UN. And the countries are strengthened. Finally, I think it is a good idea also in terms of creating more political stability in the long run. Once the conflict is solved with the cooperation of four important countries, people who seek conflict -- something

that you will always have in the world -- because of their involvement, they are going to think that they cannot go too far in creating conflict again because they will have all these people against them. So, it stabilizes the situation far more.

JK: Somebody is watching them.

BR: Yes, the people who like to misbehave feel like they are being watched.

JK: Do you think that there are some lessons for the future role of the UN? Can this kind of process be applied to other situations?



BR: Oh yes, but I will tell you what is more useful for the future of the United Nations. I think the United Nations really needs to undertake a serious restructuring process. There are component elements in the United Nations that today's realities have made irrelevant, absolutely. For example, I don't see the use of UNIDO, or even UNESCO. Seriously, there is no role for them in this globalized world. What you have to do is understand that they are not useful anymore and get rid of them and try to use those resources for those component parts that have a lot of relevance for the future. You need to tackle the relationship between the UNDP and the World Bank, which is fundamental. If you are going to really deliver to the overwhelming majority of the people of developing countries the promises of free trade, you need these two to work together. One has the technical expertise and the other has the money. So, get them to work together. Then concentrate on peacekeeping. I would strengthen a lot not only peacekeeping but conflict resolution. You should have a group of people who are analysts who can tell the

Secretary-General, "Look, in Banania (I don't want to name any real country) there are factions which are going into conflict. You need to go there and prevent this and help the authorities there." There are so many things that this coordinated, informatics society can bring in terms of well-being and prosperity to everybody. You need an early detection system for conflicts to identify them and help local authorities handling them before they explode. These conflicts make things irreversible because they kill people, they destroy proactive capacity, and they bring you back to the Middle Ages. The country just suffers Zen. The UN can see it coming and work with interested countries in the region and the local authorities so that they are prevented. You also have to strengthen a lot the WTO. So, peacekeeping, peaceful conflict resolution, and interest aggregation among countries are things that the United Nations must master in the next century.



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JK: Well, we are running out of time and I have taken so much of your time. So, thank you so much.

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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Beatrice Rangel

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

September 16, 1997

New York City

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