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PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE TWO THOUSAND
EIGHT HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIRST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 28 April 1989, at 10.30 a.m.

President: Mr. BELONOVOV

(Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics)

Members: Algeria
Brazil
Canada
China
Colombia
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Malaysia
Nepal
Senegal
United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland
United States of America
Yugoslavia

Mr. DJOUDI
Mr. NOGUEIRA-BATISTA
Mr. FORTIER
Mr. LI Luyue
Mr. PEÑALOSA
Mr. TADESSE
Mr. TORNUDD
Mr. BLANC
Mr. HASMY
Mr. RANA
Mr. BA

Sir CRISPIN TICKELL
Mr. PICKERING
Mr. PEJIC

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The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

LETTER DATED 25 APRIL 1989 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PANAMA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/20606)

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): I should like to inform the Security Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Panama in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Ritter (Panama) took a place at the Council table.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council is meeting today in accordance with the request contained in a letter (S/20606) dated 25 April 1989 from the Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I should like to draw the attention of members of the Council to document S/20607, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 April 1989 from the Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

(The President)

The first speaker is the Minister for External Relations of Panama, Mr. Jorge Ritter. I welcome His Excellency and invite him to make his statement.

Mr. RITTER (Panama) (interpretation from Spanish): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Panama, presided over by Mr. Manuel Solis Palma, I should like to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Council for having with appropriate promptness agreed to my Government's request for a meeting of the Security Council to be convened on the basis of Articles 34 and 35 of the United Nations Charter in order to consider the grave situation brought about by the chain of actions in violation of international law committed by the Government of the United States against my country, which endanger international peace and security.

It was at the cost of a great deal of sacrifice, sweat and bloodshed that the Panamanian people and their leaders civilian and military throughout our history perfected national independence and structured a pluralist democratic system that over the course of years gave my country the honourable stature of being an oasis of peace and prosperity in the midst of a region upset by political instability and violence.

Our people has invested great diplomatic effort and confidence in international solidarity to overcome the age-old obstinacy of a number of United States Administrations and resolve through negotiation the causes of conflict in United States-Panamanian relations because of the existence of the Panama Canal.

In our desire to forget the grim history of violations and unilateral interpretations by the United States of America of bilateral Treaties relating to the Canal, we Panamanians placed our confidence in the pre-eminence of an international legal order and the rule of international commitments agreed in a sovereign manner between States.

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

On the basis of those assumptions and in keeping with the norms of international coexistence, we dedicated ourselves completely to negotiating in good faith a new treaty on the Panama Canal that would establish a relationship of modern and balanced association between the United States and Panama in respect of the Canal question.

The international community made an invaluable contribution to the achievement of a negotiated solution acceptable to the two countries. Sixteen years ago, at its historic meetings held in Panama City in March 1973, this Security Council warmly welcomed the Panamanian cause, and while the United States vetoed the resolution that gave broad support to our struggle for national liberation, the entire world in turn vetoed the stubborn attitude of the United States.

That effort at negotiation between the two countries, which was enshrined in the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977, seemed to mark the end of the era of the clashes, humiliation and foreign intervention that had characterized relations between Panama and the United States, which dated back to before my country's attainment of independence.

The justified euphoria that swept over the Panamanian people following the signing of the Canal Treaties in Washington soon began to disappear. The political changes that took place in the power structure of the United States at the beginning of the decade of the 1980s, which resulted in a preponderance of sectors traditionally opposed to the Canal Treaties, began a slow but steady process of efforts by the United States to distort the letter and spirit of what had been agreed between the two countries.

The strong opposition to the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in powerful official sectors of the United States from the very outset prompted Panama to adopt a watchful attitude concerning the legislation that country would have to enact to implement the Treaties. That is why, when in the United States Congress

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

a number of draft laws were under study for implementation of the Canal Treaty of 1977, the Government of the Republic of Panama made categorical statements on their content, mainly in connection with what would later serve as a general basis for Public Law No. 96-70, enacted on 27 September 1979.

Three months after the Treaty entered into force and after implementation of the law had begun, the President of Panama sent a forceful letter of protest to then President Jimmy Carter, carefully pointing out each of the violations of the agreement contained in that Law.

Although in large measure the objections of the Republic of Panama formed part of a legal framework, the practical consequences of violations of the Treaty in Public Law No. 96-70 distorted much of those agreements. That was the beginning of a harsh series of pressures that have characterized our bilateral relations in the course of the 10 years since the signing of the Treaty.

The obstinate desire of the United States to give unacceptable unilateral interpretations to the Canal Treaty has in recent years been accompanied by pressures to redefine the decolonizing nature of the agreements with a view to extending the United States military presence in Panama beyond the year 2000.

In this connection, the document entitled "A strategy for Latin America in the 1990s" is revealing. Better known as the Santa Fé II document, it defines the strategy of United States policy for the coming decade. Where it refers to Panama it explicitly states the following:

"The expulsion of Noriega and the holding of elections will not be enough to establish a democratic régime in Panama. The United States will have to focus its attention on a great variety of issues of the democratic régime: reform of the Panamanian defence forces, support for an independent judicial system and the restoration of the economy will be fundamental issues."

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

It goes on to say:

"In addition to this, the United States and Panama, once the democratic régime is in power, should begin seriously to plan adequate control over the Canal, which will soon need general major and costly repairs. At the same time talks should begin on the real defence of the Canal after the year 2000. These talks should include retention by the United States of limited installations in Panama, mainly Howard Air Force Base and the Rodman Naval Station, to provide adequate coverage of the Western Hemisphere."

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

These designs by the United States to maintain a military presence in Panama beyond the date specified in the Treaty have been categorically rejected and denounced world-wide by the Government of Panama as a clear expression of its unassailable resolve to continue building on the process of national liberation that began with the signing of the 1977 Treaties and as an unequivocal sign of respect for the will expressed by the overwhelming majority of our people in a national plebiscite to put an end once and for all to the disgraceful colonial enclave on our soil.

That is why, given the failure of policies of deceit, bribery and pressure, the previous United States Administration unleashed the most pitiless and inconceivable series of acts of economic, political and financial aggression and an unprecedented escalation of threats of military force against my country, with the declared purpose of overthrowing the constitutionally established Government, destroying pluralistic and participatory democratic institutions, and, in a word, setting up a puppet government which, controlled by the United States Department of State, would satisfy United States claims and agree to renegotiating a continued United States military presence in Panama.

From the adoption of United States Senate resolution 239 of 25 June 1987, which attempted to dictate to my country's Government guidelines on the conduct of its internal affairs, to the recent adoption of new coercive economic measures against the people and the Government of Panama, two United States Administrations have carried out all manner of illegal acts in violation of international law and basic principles of relations among States as set out in the Charter of the United Nations and other instruments of international law.

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

Despite the explicit prohibition contained in article V of the Panama Canal Treaty, the United States has abused the diplomatic privileges of its embassy in Panama to plan, organize, finance and carry out acts of interference in matters that fall within the exclusive competence of the Republic of Panama; its officials participate actively in political demonstrations and seditious activities in open violation of the applicable diplomatic statutes.

According to statements by United States Government officials reported in the media of that country, the United States Senate Intelligence Committee last July studied a terrifying covert plan, approved by the President of the United States, which included the possibility of assassinating the Commander-in-Chief of the Panamanian defence forces.

Those same sources indicate that in February this year the President of the United States of America approved an order adopted by the Senate Intelligence Committee to provide \$10 million to one of the Panamanian opposition candidates with the twofold purpose of bolstering his campaign and promoting destabilizing activities.

In the view of my Government as expressed by the President of the Republic, the provision of \$10 million to the Panamanian opposition just a few days before the elections set for 7 May

"demonstrates the immoral and deceitful intentions of the United States Government to resort to the shameful, illegal and anti-democratic practice of buying hearts and minds to secure the election of candidates favourable to United States interests, which run counter to the national liberation struggle that is being waged by those Panamanians who represent the dignity of the nation and the purest nationalist sentiments". (S/20607, annex, p. 2)

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

More recently, the Government of Panama captured and arrested Mr. Frederick Musse, a United States citizen and employee of the State Department, and captured sophisticated equipment intended for use in waging an electronic war in Panama to plunge the country into violence and disarray after or upon the conclusion of the elections on 7 May, according to statements made by the detainee.

The equipment's documentation lists as its destination Howard military base, a United States installation along the Panama Canal. It consisted of FM radio transmitters operating in the 88 to 108MHz band, television transmitters operating on channels 7 to 13, equipment for tapping FM transmissions and equipment to monitor and jam mobile telephone transmissions. This equipment can disrupt and jam commercial, military, police, government and private communications and was installed in various buildings in the capital city of the Republic of Panama.

This week the Government of Panama, through its intelligence services, broke another link in this chain of actions against the security of the country when it learned that the 470th brigade of the United States southern command, illegally stationed in Panama at the Clayton, Corozal and Howard military bases, had hired 80 automobiles for subversion and destabilization activities.

Furthermore, Panama has had to contend with movement of armed units of the United States army outside their defence sites; violations of our airspace; infiltration by United States intelligence units into areas under Panama's exclusive jurisdiction; attempts to provoke civilians in parts of Panama City; overflights of our defence forces' military installations; acts endangering civilian aviation in Panama, including commercial flights; and the criminal policy of allowing explosive devices to fall near Panamanian towns and of abandoning explosive devices outside designated firing ranges, which have already caused the death of several Panamanian citizens.

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

These acts are carried out daily by the United States army which, as we have already reported, in open violation of the Canal Treaties have brought to the Republic of Panama commandos specializing in surprise attacks, an elite battalion of the 82nd airborne division with groups of electronic-warfare experts and over 300 attack and troop-carrying helicopters, in addition to units specializing in controlling and occupying urban centres. Moreover, soldiers and marines have recently been sent to Panama, along with combat helicopters and an offensive military team that has never before been part of the forces used by the United States to defend the Panama Canal.

Troop and weapons movements have been continuous, as have military manoeuvres displaying a force in constant readiness to attack.

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

In spite of the unfavourable conditions imposed upon my country by economic aggression, political pressures and military threats, the Government of Panama is firmly fulfilling its constitutional obligation and political commitment to hold honest elections on 7 May as the proper way to improve democracy, promote peaceful coexistence and strengthen national independence.

On Sunday, 7 May, elections will in fact be held for the posts of President of the Republic, two Vice-Presidents, the 67 members of the National Assembly and the 510 representatives of the corregimientos. The various stages laid down in the Electoral Law have been completed on time so as to ensure the citizenry a process that respects the will of the people as expressed at the polls.

However, this election - which is recognized by both the parties that support the Government and by those that are in opposition to it as the proper way peacefully to resolve the acute confrontations Panamanian society has witnessed in recent years - soon became a new area for intervention in our internal affairs, a new subject in the constant disinformation campaign being waged against Panama and an arena for further assaults on the sovereignty and dignity of the Panamanian nation.

Thus, the United States Government and its local allies have unleashed a tendentious international campaign aimed at discrediting the Panamanian electoral process by making accusations of alleged fraud before the event and by prejudicing international public opinion in advance with regard to the results of this exercise of self-determination by the Panamanian people.

We even witnessed the unprecedented situation in which, even prior to the voting, the United States Senate has proclaimed the opposition candidate as winner of the elections in Panama, and some senators have, with impunity, asked that the Administration take new and harsher measures against Panama, not excluding military

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

actions, if the victory of "their" winner is not recognized. And, with unprecedented brazenness, they are also asking that United States public opinion be prepared to react favourably to further actions against Panama.

More recently - indeed, just yesterday - the President of the United States himself made a statement indicating that the elections in Panama were fraudulent.

With contempt for our status as a sovereign State, the United States has attempted to interfere in the powers the Electoral Law grants exclusively to the Panamanian Electoral Tribunal, for which a number of United States entities have attempted in various ways to establish a parallel electoral body and a purportedly independent electoral information centre, whose true purpose would be the early dissemination of biased information claiming a victory for the candidate who favours Washington's interests.

In the face of the enormous strength and electoral will demonstrated by patriotic and nationalist Panamanian groups, the United States plans to interfere in the Panamanian electoral process have entered upon a phase of direct participation - I repeat, a phase of direct participation - by the United States with the objective of upsetting public order, sowing chaos, promoting widespread destabilization in the country over the elections and creating a pretext for military intervention against Panama.

United States Government sources admit that there are plans for possible direct armed action in Panama.

Ever since Panama refused in December 1985 to allow its territory to be used as a base for aggression and ever since it announced its firm resolve not to allow any military presence there after the year 2000, my country has not known one single minute of truce in the economic war the United States has implacably been waging.

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the economic measures against us, measures based on the ridiculous assertion by the President of the United States - one that would even be laughable were its results not so tragic - to the effect that the Government of Panama constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the security and economy of the United States; notwithstanding the unusual deployment of sophisticated weaponry outside the defence areas; notwithstanding the harassment and humiliation to which the Panamanian population is constantly subjected; notwithstanding the politicization of Canal issues by the United States Government; notwithstanding the more than 700 violations of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties; notwithstanding the terrifying revelations of plans that include kidnappings and assassinations - notwithstanding all that, Panama has not had recourse to this forum but has, rather, waited patiently for the international community to realize the magnitude of such injustice and infamy.

However, to introduce instruments of destabilization now, in the midst of a difficult electoral campaign, and, in addition, brazenly and openly to support one of the presidential candidates, is behaviour that is not only unacceptable but that is also extremely dangerous, for it jeopardizes not only the normal evolution of the electoral process but international peace and security as well in an area that is vital to world navigation and trade.

I am therefore now fulfilling my duty to inform and alert the Security Council to the storm clouds that are threatening the peace to which the members of the Organization aspire.

Mr. PICKERING (United States of America): Mr. Ritter is here for a clear purpose. That purpose has to do with elections in his own country. Our message to him is clear: The elections cannot be won in Panama through a debate with the United States in the Security Council.

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

As we have made clear and will make clear, we have grave doubts over the fairness and freedom of the coming elections in Panama. Mr. Ritter and his friends should be debating with their election opponents in Panama. Nevertheless, the United States recognizes that the Security Council is a forum open to all countries, and the United States will always uphold the right of free speech here.

The United States favours a free election in Panama and, indeed, in all countries.

Mr. Ritter comes before you, Mr. President, asking for a debate about Panama. As I have said, the place where a free and open debate about Panama should be taking place today is in Panama itself. The people of Panama clearly want to debate the future of their own country, openly and free of fear. They want to decide what that future should be through a fair election process.

An election is scheduled in Panama on 7 May. That election offers Panamanians an opportunity to resolve their differences peacefully. Tragically, however, the military dictatorship of General Noriega, which employs Mr. Ritter, will not permit a free and fair election, nor will it permit open debate on the country's future.

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

In fact, the Noriega régime is shutting down television and radio stations and doctoring voter rolls, so let us have no illusions about why we are here discussing Panama today. We are discussing Panama before the Security Council because the régime will not permit the free and open debate to take place among its own people in its own country. The solution to Panama's lack of democracy does not lie here in the Security Council. The solution lies in Panama. The people of Panama should decide the future of their country, they should be able to vote freely and they should be able freely to debate the issues in their own elections. As the countries of the Western hemisphere, indeed, the world, move towards democracy in greater openness, Panama lags behind and is now moving clearly in the opposite direction.

The Panamanian people obviously want democracy. Indeed, for the last 20 months, in resisting the régime's rule by force, the Panamanian people have demonstrated a hunger for democracy, a hunger that can only be satisfied through a freely elected government that clearly represents their aspirations.

Panama's crisis is not, as Mr. Ritter alleges, the result of a plot by the United States Government to interfere in its internal affairs. The origin of the crisis is in the policies of General Noriega. He has abrogated to himself complete power over civic life and sponsored and countenanced widespread corruption, including drug trafficking and gun-running. The proximate cause of Panama's political and economic crisis stems from disaffection within Panama's own military. In June 1987, the then Deputy Commander of the Panamanian defence forces charged that General Noriega was involved in drug trafficking, in stealing the 1984 elections, and in the 1985 murder of a prominent opposition leader. Those charges sparked a revolt in June 1987, which was carried out by a broad spectrum of

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

Panamanian citizens concerned by the abuse of power perpetrated by General Noriega and by a small coterie of his officers. The régime responded to this internal crisis by curtailing constitutional guarantees, by closing the independent press and the opposition television and radio, and by forcing many of its citizens into exile. Efforts to seek a mediated solution to the crisis failed because the military régime was never interested in a settlement that satisfied the desires of its citizens.

Throughout the continuing crisis in Panama, the military régime has called for what it said was a Panamanian solution to that country's crisis through elections to be held on 7 May. These elections do offer an opportunity to resolve Panama's economic and political crisis, but only if they are free and fair, and thereby permit the people's will to be freely expressed. Unfortunately, on 3 March the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States stated its serious concerns about the extensive irregularities in the election process in Panama - irregularities which undermine even minimal standards and guarantees for the holding of free elections. The Inter-American Commission said that the minimum standards for free and fair elections do not exist in Panama. The military régime has continued to ignore this report. Evidence continues to mount that the régime is continuing to seek to subvert any expression of popular will through fraud, coercion and intimidation.

The international community should not now be asked to accord legitimacy to a régime which is unwilling to face the judgement of its own people. That would be a travesty. Nor should the military régime be allowed to conceal its own unpopularity and illegitimacy by alleging a plot by the United States with the sole intention of deflecting world attention away from Panama's basic problem: its lack of freedom and its apparent intention to conduct fraudulent elections.

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

Because Mr. Ritter's Government cannot face being judged by its own citizens, it has been systematically subverting the electoral process. Illustrative of the activities which the régime is taking to control the results of the 7 May elections are the following steps:

First, manipulation of voter lists, including the printing of false lists, changing data and voting registries, and last minute changes in the assignment of voters to polling locations; secondly, manipulation of cedulas - the individual identity cards required for voting - including invalidating the voter registration identity cards of opposition supporters and the issuing of duplicate voter cards to régime supporters to permit multiple voting; thirdly, developing plans to disenfranchise large numbers of voters at polling booths; and fourthly, working out deliberate arrangements to misprint ballots and to mix ballots from different polling booths in order to invalidate the vote count.

Among the other actions to influence the electoral process which the régime in Panama has taken are the following: limiting observers of the elections only to those accorded official status by the régime and denying entry into Panama during the election period of other interested international observers and organizations; by reserving on a priority basis and withholding from use all rooms at hotels, the régime seeks to deprive visitors and observers of accommodations; placing restrictions on the entry of foreign journalists; denying the use of commercial rental vehicles to anyone not authorized by the régime, in order to prevent travel within Panama for the purpose of evaluating the electoral process.

The purpose of Mr. Ritter's charges about a United States plot are both more clearly understood and at the same time especially ironic, in light of the

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

extremes to which the Noriega régime has gone to try to demonstrate alleged popular support. For instance, to make one of its recent rallies appear to be well attended, the régime dressed its prison population in T-shirts inscribed with the slogan of their candidate - "Duque for President" - and marched them under guard to the event.

The international community should not become part of an effort by the Noriega régime to deflect attention from itself through bringing what is in essence a problem with its unfair and fraudulent elections here to this body. Instead, the Noriega régime should immediately restore the minimum conditions for free elections. These include freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and personal freedoms. The régime should also permit full international and press monitoring of the elections.

Panamanians should, of course, have an opportunity to resolve Panama's political and economic crisis, but a manipulated and stolen electoral process will only compound Panama's troubles. The United States remains firmly committed to supporting the efforts of the Panamanian people to restore genuine civilian democracy. We also remain fully committed to the Panama Canal Treaties.

All friends of the people of Panama should affirm the right of that people to realize their aspirations for a democratic government and to rejoin the community of free nations.

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

Mr. Ritter charges that my Government aims ultimately to subvert the Panama Canal Treaties. He knows that is false. Just the opposite is true. We have continued to support these important Treaties since their ratification in 1978. The United States does not fear the judgement of the Panamanian people on the legitimacy of the Noriega régime; it is General Noriega who fears it. That is why the Noriega régime has tried to hide the Panamanian electoral process from public view. That is why it continues efforts to restrict and discourage international monitoring. And that is why it tries to limit any observation of the electoral process to a handful of régime-sanctioned observers. That is why it seeks to shift world attention to a debate in New York, while the problem is clearly in Panama.

Former United States Presidents Carter and Ford have both announced their intention to go to Panama under the auspices of the National Endowment for Democracy to observe the elections. On the one hand, that demonstrates our seriousness and concern about the electoral process and, on the other, because both of these Presidents participated in their negotiation, it makes clear our sincere commitment to preserving the Panama Canal Treaties. The United States fully supports this independent observer mission to Panama and will also be sending its own observers to overview the election process as well.

On 27 April President Bush made the following statement about the situation in Panama:

"The people of Panama clearly yearn for a free and fair election on 7 May so that their country can again take its rightful place in this hemisphere's community of democratic nations. Only the threat of violence and massive fraud by the Noriega régime will keep the Panamanian people from realizing that aspiration for democracy.

(Mr. Pickering, United States)

"Free and fair elections on 7 May, and respect for their results, can produce a legitimate Government in Panama which will end that nation's political and economic crisis and international isolation. That is clearly what the people of Panama deserve and desire.

"The Noriega régime promised that free and fair elections would in fact take place on 7 May, and that international observers would be permitted to observe them. In recent weeks, the Noriega régime has taken steps to commit systematic fraud. Through violence and coercion, it threatens and intimidates Panamanian citizens who believe in democracy. It is attempting to limit and obstruct the presence of observers from around the world and the ability of journalists to report freely on the election.

"Nevertheless, many observers intend to travel to Panama to shine the spotlight of world opinion on the Panamanian elections just as they did previously in nations like the Philippines and El Salvador. We admire their commitment to democracy and their courage, and will fully support their efforts.

"The days of rule by dictatorship in Latin America are over. They must end in Panama as well. There is still time for Panama to resolve its current crisis through free and fair elections. The people and Government of the United States will not recognize fraudulent election results engineered by Noriega. The aspirations of the people of Panama for democracy must not be denied."

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): The Minister for External Relations of Panama wishes to speak, and I now call on him.

Mr. RITTER (Panama) (interpretation from Spanish): I deplore the fact that the reply just made by the representative of the United States was written before I spoke. Clearly it is not a reply to what I said but, rather, a repetition

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

of what is contained in the mimeographed pages handed out daily by representatives of the United States.

I deplore the fact also that this forum has been used for the repetition of this disinformation. But, in a way, I am glad this has happened, for it completely confirms what I said about the result anticipated for the elections in Panama by the United States.

I did not come here to seek a discussion on the elections in Panama. Elections are a matter of the internal policy of States. I would have demonstrated a lack of respect for the Security Council if I had asked for a discussion of a matter falling within Panama's internal policies.

What I have brought to the United Nations for discussion - and, unfortunately, the representative of the United States has not replied to this - is the growing threat of the use of military force in our country and the possibility that the deployment of that force could lead to violent actions in our country.

The representative of the United States has not made any reference whatsoever to the threat of the use of force. He has merely repeated the scenario which the United States believes will be used for the conduct of the elections in Panama. Thus, the concern brought to the Security Council by Panama remains pending and without a reply.

I did not request the United States representative to present his picture of the way the elections would be carried out. Indeed, his description was full of contradictions. It was even an insult to President Carter, for whom we in Panama maintain deep respect. The United States representative mentioned President Carter as one of the persons who could be manipulated by the Government of Panama. President Carter has been invited by the Government of Panama to witness the elections. His representatives were in Panama two days ago, and he has agreed to

(Mr. Ritter, Panama)

come to Panama to observe our elections. The representative of the United States says that everyone who is going to be present in Panama for our elections can be manipulated. I think that that does not do justice to a former President of the United States.

I would say once again that all this repetition was unnecessary and aimed only at diverting the Council's attention by engaging in a series of improper accusations. The representative of the United States did not reply to the key point, the thrust of the issue brought to the Security Council by Panama. I repeat that we are here not to discuss the elections in Panama but, rather, the key point of conflict with the United States, which is endangering international peace and security. There has been no reply on that point.

I would invite the representative of the United States to say categorically that there will be no recourse to the use of force in our country in connection with the forthcoming elections.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): The representative of the United States wishes to speak, and I now call on him.

Mr. PICKERING (United States of America): The representative of the Noriega régime has made unfounded allegations against the United States which do not deserve a further reply. They are unfounded.

The moral bankruptcy of the dictatorship for which Mr. Ritter speaks is the only factual conclusion to be drawn from today's debate. He has sought to use this forum to wage a campaign which, in spite of violence, coercion and the plans to permit systematic fraud, the Noriega régime fears they may lose in Panama.

The régime prevents impartial international observers and journalists from monitoring the elections. Indeed we welcome the attendance of all observers and hope that this statement on his part is a broad invitation to all to come.

The régime also threatens and detains opposition candidates. Over a year ago it closed the opposition press, radio and television. It sharply curtailed freedom of Assembly. It seized the private property of business organizations sympathetic to the opposition.

The reasons for these desperate measures are also clear. Noriega knows that if the people of Panama express their views freely his supporters will not win the election. Independent and responsible polls show that the opposition Democratic Alliance now leads Noriega's COLINA ticket by a margin of 62 per cent to 25 per cent.

The charges heard here must not now deter those brave Panamanians who stand for freedom and democracy from attempting to exercise their rights. If Panama wants the free elections that have hypocritically been alluded to, let the Panamanian Government now allow opposition parties to function openly and freely, allow for equal radio and television time for opposition parties, and permit international observers and foreign journalists to monitor the election process.

I challenge Mr. Ritter to permit the people of Panama to exercise their rights to a free and fair election and to a democratic Panama.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): The Minister for External Relations of Panama wishes to speak. I call upon him.

Mr. RITTER (Panama) (interpretation from Spanish): I shall not try the patience of the members of the Security Council any further. I just want to say again for the record that the key issue brought to the Security Council by Panama this morning on the threat of the use of force has met with no response.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Russian): There are no further speakers for this meeting.

The time of the next meeting of the Security Council to continue consideration of the item on its agenda will be fixed in consultation with members of the Council.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.