

NOTES FOR NOVEMBER 18 U.S. EMBASSY SUPPER COMMENTS

This visit to Chile has been one of the best experiences of my life. So much human rights work involves pain, tragedy, frustration, disappointment, etc. When you are needed urgently on the phone it is almost always bad news, and frequently it is too late to do anything about it. Sometimes I am shaken when I think how many friends of mine have been murdered, by the right and the left.

But tonight it is very different. Chilean and U.S. friends of democracy are here together to celebrate the advance of human rights. We have come a long way. Sometimes I cannot believe how far we have come since Congressman Don Fraser started his human rights hearings in Washington, in 1973. And now there are opportunities for human rights work which would have been unbelievable a few years ago. The world has opened up very rapidly. Now I receive fax messages from Moscow, telephone calls from Warsaw, and human rights visitors from China. Incredible.

In that connection let me mention that I have been invited to speak on human rights in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and I hope that I will be able to go there next year. I am an old Soviet hand but my Russian has deteriorated over the years. Nevertheless I have prepared a draft speech in Russian which I hope will be of value and interest to Russian audiences. At least my Russian friends in Washington assure me it will be. And when I was working on that draft I recalled another speech I had delivered back in 1981, to a meeting of human rights advocates in New York. At that time no Assistant Secretary had been appointed to our Human Rights Bureau, and there was much gloom and pessimism about the future of the human rights cause. So I urged that we not despair, that we carry on with the struggle, and I quoted a 19th century Russian slogan which has long been a favorite of mine: To our Hopeless Cause! By that Russians meant that they would never give up no matter how tough things got. Back there, in New York in 1981 I recommended that we adopt that slogan as the battle cry for human rights activists around the world. And as I have said, we certainly have come a long way since then. Now this year, working on my speech for Moscow and St. Petersburg, where the Russian people are faced with so many painful trials and tribulations, I thought it would be appropriate to close my remarks with the same slogan.

Well, some weeks ago, I met with Vladimir Lukin, the Russian Ambassador in Washington, and I tried out that ending on him. He thought it over a minute or two and then said: "Lister, I recommend you change that to 'To the success of our hopeless cause'". I thanked the Ambassador for his suggestion and have changed my speech draft accordingly. And I believe that would be an appropriate toast for all of us here this evening, and for human rights activists around the world: To the success of our hopeless cause! Thank you for listening.