

On behalf of the Spanish Government, I want to associate myself with the warm welcome expressed to you by His Majesty the King. We have been entrusted with the honor and responsibility of hosting in our country the Middle East Peace Conference. Thus, we follow a longstanding tradition in offering you this house as your own.

Spain through her long history has known the fruits of coexistence, of tolerance, of peace among the three cultures represented here. The architecture in many corners of our soil, literature, poetry, philosophy and the sciences, still present in our libraries and which are an integral part of our identity, were once the highest expression of civilization and development in the known world. Mutual respect made that possible. Spain has also tasted the bitter results of confrontation and Al Andalus and Sefarad remained as indelible memories of happy places for many generations of men and women. That nostalgia has lived into our days. If we have known the fruits of coexistence and the bitter taste of missed opportunities, how can we not now feel the hope of an open path towards peace in that part of the world?

In the last few years our country has been immersed in a dual process of opening internally and externally. We have tried to leave behind our isolationism and learn to assume the responsibilities that we have inherited through our history, our geography and the understanding that we live in an increasingly interdependent world. Nothing in this world can be foreign to us, and least of all the destiny of a region as close now as yours, a region which has been the cradle of cultures which became interwoven in Spain, contributing to make up her identity. We have wondered frequently if the conditions that once made possible fruitful coexistence could perhaps be repeated. A positive or a negative answer to this question would lead to hope or frustration, to peace or conflict, but I hasten to add, we have that hope and we do not want to renounce peace because new conditions exist for the two of them.

Changes in the world are taking place at lightning speed so much so that it is difficult to follow the pace of the news which keep us up to date, simultaneously, of what is happening in the farthest reaching corners of the globe. Right here we can witness this new reality. The co-sponsors of this event are two men: President Bush and President Gorbachev who until yesterday headed two blocs which were faced off ideologically and militarily and who today symbolize the search for international relations with less weapons and greater peace, with less confrontation and greater cooperation, with less violence and greater respect for the rights of individuals and of nations.

It is imperative to recall the effort, of so very many human beings who for years have worked towards this dialogue which begins today. In the last few months within the framework of the co operation which has taken the place of confrontation it is only fair to point out the concerted effort of the Secretary of State of the United States of America and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. Their skill and their ability have made possible what is, in our opinion, most worthy of noting: the beginning of this process.

The entire world will hang on every word uttered and of the will shown here. There is a hope which must not be dashed to the ground. We are aware of the complexity of the process, but we Spaniards know how cooperation among cultures and the union of collective efforts

can generate peaceful coexistence. Peace is the necessary condition. The region has such natural resources and human capital that in an atmosphere where conflict is substituted by cooperation the development and welfare of all the human beings living there can be guaranteed.

On the eve of 1992, a year full of events which mark past understandings and misunderstandings, which is pregnant with hope for all, we, as Spaniards, would like to continue to work with you to achieve a peace which is stable, based on justice and which can be a lasting one. In welcoming you to our house I call upon your generosity to build peace and, for the sake of your friendship with Spain, I beg your understanding for the inevitable imperfections of our organization, which has had to work in the find of time.

I can assure you that we have all worked with great hope, moved by the spirit which you can feel on the streets, now full of traffic. If we can achieve peace, everything will be worthwhile.

We made the effort and we will continue to do everything we can to make things easier for you.

Welcome to Madrid, Welcome to Spain turned today by your presence into the capital and the homeland of peace and hope.