

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 26, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Carolina, Puerto Rico)

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
GOVERNOR OF PUERTO RICO

PUERTO RICO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

12:10 P.M. AST

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Governor, distinguished members of the welcoming committee, I thank you for the very warm welcome upon my arrival at the Summit. It is an honor for the United States to be the host of this conference. I know that world leaders who are joining me will be as appreciative of the beauty and the hospitality of Puerto Rico as I am.

In recent years, the industrialized democracies have become increasingly concerned with the questions of economic growth and stability. The linkages between our nations have multiplied. Our economies have become more closely interrelated. Last November at Rambouillet we began a dialogue which recognized our mutual concerns and our interrelationships. Today, we come together to continue that dialogue. We are fully aware of how important it is for us to work together to shape policies, to achieve stable economic growth and to respond to the new challenges and opportunities which face us all.

Since we last met, we have witnessed significant economic improvements throughout the world. Certainly, in the United States our progress has been better than many predicted, but some old problems remain and new ones confront us. The very speed of the recovery itself serves as a major test of our ability to ensure long-term stability in our economy.

This is not a test, however, for the United States alone. It is the special challenge facing the people of all the industrialized democracies. I welcome the opportunity to meet again with the leaders of our major economic partners. I am confident that these discussions will help us to continue our current economic progress and move us ever closer to our goal of economic growth and stability throughout the world.

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Mr. Governor, this is my first visit as President to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It is a fitting moment to reflect on the rich and long history of cooperation and participation which this Island and its people share with the United States. That history has been built on a simple but fundamental concept -- the right of the people of Puerto Rico and the United States freely to determine the nature of their ties with one another. Over the years we have chosen to have a close relationship. We have built this relationship around a common citizenship, a common defense, a common currency and a common market.

Today, we find that the nature of our relationship is again, as in the past, a subject of free discussion and free debate. This in itself is the best testament to the strength of what we have built together, and it is the best promise that what we together choose to do in the future will be beneficial to the people of this Island.

There are those, however, who seek to distort the facts, to mislead others about our relationship with Puerto Rico. The record is clear; the record is open. We are proud of the relationship that we have developed together and we invite the world to examine it. We commend to its critics the same freedom of choice through free and open election, which is enjoyed by the people of Puerto Rico. Those who might be inclined to interfere in our freely determined relations should know that such an act will be considered an intervention in the domestic affairs of Puerto Rico and the United States and will be an unfriendly act which will be resisted by appropriate means.

In the midst of this beautiful setting, we cannot forget that problems, both political and economic, still remain. As we base our hopes on freedom of choice and expression to help resolve the political problems, so we look to cooperation and interdependence to overcome our economic problems.

Mr. Governor, I am hopeful that the work of this Summit will give a new impetus to the growth of our worldwide economy and improve international cooperation and thus we will have a positive effect on both the United States and Puerto Rico.

Again, I thank you, Mr. Governor, for your warm welcome and for your help in hosting this Summit.

Thank you.

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GOVERNOR COLON: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

GOVERNOR COLON: Mr. President, on behalf of all the people of Puerto Rico, bienvenidos -- welcome to Puerto Rico.

The Commonwealth is both proud and honored for this visit by the President of the United States and to serve as the site for the summit conference of the heads of State and Government of the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada.

The decisions to be made during the two days of the conference will have a profound and lasting effect on the economies of the world. We pray that your deliberations and those of your fellow heads of State and Government be guided by the highest sense of world community and a profound commitment to the welfare of the peoples of the world.

We know that during this conference of the industrialized democracies special attention and consideration will be given to the needs of the developing nations of the world in the interest of true human harmony and brotherhood.

We in Puerto Rico are convinced that ultimate success lies in common cooperation and mutual respect of the kind that exists between Puerto Rico and the United States and which have been the basis of our struggle to bring a better life, a better way of life for all of our people.

Mr. President, please accept a warm and fraternal abrazo in the name of the people of Puerto Rico and our sincere desire for a fruitful and successful conference.

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(AT 12:10 P.M. AST)