

**Yale UN Oral History**

Interview with Dr. Diego Arria

Interviewer: Jean Krasno

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**Jean Krasno (JK):** This is an interview with Dr. Diego Arria of Venezuela. This is September 5, 1997. We are interviewing in New York City in his residence and I am the interviewer, Jean Krasno.

Dr. Arria, for the record, could you explain when you first became associated with the United Nations and when you became ambassador to the UN?

**Dr. Diego Arria:** I became Permanent Representative in January 1991 and I was there until the end of 1993. I served on the Security Council as Permanent Representative of Venezuela for two years, from 1992 to 1993.

JK: Venezuela was on the Security Council during this period.

DA: Exactly, we took, along with the United States, the issue to the Security Council.

JK: When you say the issue, you took the issue of El Salvador to the Security Council. Did

Venezuela serve as president during that period?

DA: I served as president during the month of March in 1992.

JK: Venezuela has played a very key role in the resolution of a number of conflicts in this hemisphere and has been a member of the Groups of Friends on several different issues: El Salvador, Haiti, and then most recently in Guatemala. I would like to talk to you about Venezuela's role in these three groups. Perhaps we should take them one at a time and try to keep them distinct. How did the Friends Group form on El Salvador and what was its relation to the Contadora Process?

DA: Well, its origin really comes from the Contadora process. Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama actually were involved and tried to be a supportive element to the resolution of the conflicts in the Central American area, fundamentally, in the case of El Salvador. Then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Pérez de Cuéllar, had the idea -- it was an innovation at the time -- to pick Mexico, Colombia, Spain, and Venezuela to be the Friends of the Secretary-General on El Salvador, to help the Secretary-General in the process of negotiating the peace agreement. At the end, at the last months of the process, the United States became what we called the "four friends plus one," which was the inclusion of the United States which proved to be of extraordinary importance in the resolution of the conflict.

JK: In the selection of these original four countries, three were a part of the Contadora Process. But

Panama had also been in the Contadora Group. Why were they not included as a member of the Group of Friends?

DA: The political landscape of Panama had changed. President Manuel Solis Palma was not there anymore. He had been killed in an accident, remember. So, there were players and new leaders in the region. So, that is why Panama was not included. But Colombia was a part of the process. The inclusion of the United States in the process actually made more real the whole negotiating process. The U.S. was very much involved throughout the whole process during the conflict and the war and then in the solution of the conflict. But they were doing this through bilateral negotiations. When the Secretary-General involved the U.S. in the Friends, it became a very constructive process because the player that had the weight was the U.S. This was a euphemism to call it the "four friends plus one" but the "plus one" became a fundamental contribution. At the time it was Ambassador Pickering who was an extraordinary representative of the United States.

JK: Why was Spain included in the group?

DA: Spain, because of the role that Felipe González fundamentally played. It was a way to include a European country instead of France. If you remember in the Contadora Group, France had a very conflicting relationship with the United States regarding the Contadora process, originally. Mitterrand, at one time, even made a proposal from Europe. So, I think the Secretary-General was wise to bring a European country, in this case Spain, with a committed head of state like Felipe González, committed to the Latin American cultures. He enjoyed great trust from the guerrilla

groups and from the government.

JK: Was there some importance to have a link to the European Union through Spain?

DA: Yes, I think it gave formally a balance. There was Mexico, a big country in the area, Colombia and Venezuela, not as big but also very active players in the same region, and Spain, which had a socialist government, who could be trusted by the guerrilla movement and at the same time respectable enough to be trusted by the government in El Salvador. It had this balance. I think that was the reason.

JK: What were Venezuela's interests in Central America or in El Salvador?

DA: You know, even today, in Venezuela, and through the process, public opinion never understood why Venezuela would get involved in the Salvadorian process or in the Guatemalan or Haitian process when we had so many internal problems. We had at the time, a president who was very active in hemispheric issues, Carlos Andrés Pérez. I think, thanks to his vision, that Venezuela became a very important player in the process, fundamentally because of his initiatives. In the case of El Salvador, he thought it was a part of the region, that the process should be solved by ourselves, that we should not let the "big brother" of the hemisphere resolve the problems of the region, the we, the Latin Americans themselves, should be a part of the process. That is why he became so committed. We are in the area, and in the Caribbean; there is a certain proximity, not like the proximity of Colombia. There would be very few people in the country that would share

with him that concern. That is a reality. He was swimming against the current because most people couldn't care whether we were active or not active in the case. We are a strong economy, an active country, and a democratic country who had experience with internal problems in the 1960s of guerrillas that we had solved and this gave us moral authority and political authority to be part of the Group.

JK: Did Venezuela have the same kind of relationship with both parties that you had talked about in relation to Spain, the confidence of both sides?

DA: The guerrilla leaders, the FMLN leaders, like Shafik Handal or Samayoa had met with the president of Venezuela on many opportunities and they learned to trust him enormously. You would see Pérez in the process, personally influential because of the trust that he had developed and the effort that Venezuela had made. Venezuela hosted many of the meetings, as you know. When the process would lose speed, the president would get involved and move the players on both sides. He would speak to Cristiani. He would speak to the guerrilla leaders in order to maintain the momentum. As I will tell you later, that was very important during the last few weeks of the process in 1991.

JK: I definitely want to talk to you about that. In what way were you personally involved in the Group of Friends?

DA: Well, as the Representative of Venezuela, I was automatically involved. But, also as the

president's advisor and having been a member of the cabinet before, I had very open access to the process. I was very well informed. The president had a chief of staff at the time; her name is Beatrice Rangel whom I suggest you interview, who was extremely active also through this process and who enjoyed great confidence on the part of the players, both the government and the guerrillas. She kept me very much informed all through the initiative that my government was taking unilaterally in the process.

JK: How and when was Venezuela first contacted by the Secretary-General to become a member of the Group?

DA: In 1991.

JK: In 1991, okay. You talked about the role of the president in contacting both the parties. Can you just tell us, for the record, what were some of the other things that Venezuela did to assist the process. You mentioned that they hosted various meetings. Could you describe some of that?

DA: Venezuela served as a meeting ground for many of the official meetings held. Even though they were not meeting face-to-face, what we call pendular meetings, on several occasions, Venezuela and Mexico acted as hosts for the process. New York at the end became the last meeting ground where the peace agreement was signed. Pérez himself, the president of Venezuela, played also a very important role which is not very well known, speaking to Castro, for example. President Castro, as you know, was an informal but very important substantive political link

between Cuba and the rebels like the United States was for the government of El Salvador. You have to put this into context. You have to see El Salvador as a part of the East/West confrontation, even though Cuba is in the West. The Soviets at the time also had a stake in the issue. And I will tell you later how the Soviets wanted to be part of the process. At the end when we were negotiating in New York. I remember the Soviet Ambassador, Noronsov who is now the Ambassador in Washington, and his deputy wanted very much to be kept informed. Actually they wanted to be part of the Friends. At the end, this is not very well known, they wanted to be part of it. At the end, they were actively informed, throughout. Actually, the Friends met with the Soviets to keep them informed. At the time of Perestroika, there was a clearer air between the parties. You have to remember that the U.S. Ambassador, Thomas Pickering, had been the U.S. Ambassador in El Salvador during the conflict when the United States was supporting and financing substantially the war. This was an extraordinary experience. I remember the first time that we met, it was at the Mexican Mission. We met with the guerrilla leaders and the United States came for the first time to be part of our group, the so-called "plus one" and Ambassador Pickering came in and said in perfect Spanish, "Buenos Dias, comandantes." Good morning, commanders. I could not believe it. He had been in charge of the confrontation before. And now he was in charge of the peace process. I think Pickering made an extraordinary contribution because of his wisdom, his knowledge of the situation, and the degree of respect that the guerrillas had for him. Isn't that an amazing story?

JK: It really is. This is all very, very interesting. When the parties met in Caracas, I believe that was in the spring of 1990. They had met in Geneva prior to that as a first attempt to negotiate something, working on even a agenda, what they would negotiate and in what order. Then the

meeting in Caracas took place somewhat after that. What were some of the issues at that time?

DA: In 1990, I was not involved. I suggest that you speak with Beatrice Rangel. She was very knowledgeable. She took notes of all the meetings that Pérez had with all these people on the whole process, even in Haiti. She has extraordinary, good information because she was taking notes herself or one of her assistants. She took very good notes of the whole process that she saw and she saw a lot. For example, one of the fundamental issues at the time was how to put into perspective the demands of the guerrillas on the armed forces; what did they want out of the process. The essence was that no one could win the war. That was when they came to realize that they had to come to an agreement. It was a standstill. The government could not defeat the guerrillas and the guerrillas could not defeat the government. It was the end of the Cold War.

I am jumping a bit ahead but I remember telling Shafik Handal and the guerrillas at the meeting that the Friends had with them at the United Nations building on the 36th floor, one morning around two o'clock in the morning -- sometimes we were there all night -- one morning I said, "Listen, in two days, Pérez de Cuéllar is going to leave the United Nations and there is going to be a new Secretary-General. There are going to be new priorities. You are going to be the least of the priorities, number 27 or 46, you don't know. Today, you are number one. There is a Latin American as Secretary-General who wants to clinch this deal. No one is going to care very much for you." I got Pérez to speak to Handal and to tell him, "You have to seize the chance now, seriously, do it now." Because at one time we felt that the UN Secretariat was wavering and wanted them to get an even better agreement and maybe go beyond it.

Later, the Friends decided that we would play even a more active role, intervening into the



process, supporting the Secretary-General, but intervening in the process.

JK: Let's go into that right now, as long as you are talking about that. This was in the last couple of weeks?

DA: Let's say in the last two months because Cristiani came several times.

JK: Yes, Cristiani came at that period of time. So, now we are talking about the last months of 1991 when Pérez de Cuéllar was going to leave.

DA: Yes, we felt that sometimes the Secretariat -- they were very good people; de Soto is a very good negotiator, and Blanca -- but we felt that sometimes we had to take issue with some of the way they were negotiating. The information that we were getting from the government or the information that we were getting from the guerrillas. I remember one day, we were informed that there was not going to be an agreement. So, we immediately presented ourselves to the Secretary-General's office, without notice.

JK: By we, you mean yourself and ...

DA: The four Friends: the Ambassador of Mexico, of Colombia, Spain, and myself. We wanted to see the Secretary-General urgently. And we said to him (this was in the last week), "Listen, this is the opportunity. It has to be done right now." I remember we had a discussion there. De Soto had

some different points of view than we did. But we had a very collective, unified position. Then we decided to go out of the system. Instead of only talking to him, to the Secretary-General, we became a party to the negotiating process. We went to see Cristiani, tried to convince Cristiani of certain positions and then we would go to the guerrillas and tried to convince them. We became extremely active in this. And then we would meet with the Secretary-General.

JK: When you say you met with them, I have this need to know where people actually meet.

DA: Cristiani was staying at a 42nd Street hotel, the Helmsley on 42nd Street, not the Helmsley Palace, the other one. He was there in his room with Santa Maria, General Vargas, and his wife [Mrs. Cristiani]. His wife was the one who was taking all the notes in her computer.

JK: Mrs. Cristiani.

DA: Yes, she was actually like the secretary of record of the process. Cristiani is a very balanced man. Thanks to his balance, the deal was made. We came in and tried to push him when we thought he needed to be pushed, practically, very objectively, very candidly. I had a very personal relationship with Cristiani. And he had very good relationship with my presence. There was a sort of intimacy and trust. He knew that we would not do anything that would go counter to El Salvador.

JK: It is important to have his trust.

DA: Then we would go to the apartments that the FMLN had near the United Nations.

JK: So, then the whole Group of Friends would go to visit Cristiani in his hotel.

DA: We would all go together.

JK: At this point, you were not really meeting in the UN or at any of the missions.

DA: No, no. You see, Cristiani only went to the UN to meet with the Secretary-General until the end, only the Secretary-General. In the last few days, he would wait on the 36th floor and we were meeting with the guerrillas, let's say, on the 37th floor, and with the government on another floor, trying for them not to see each other. Some of the meetings lasted all night until 5 o'clock in the morning, 6 o'clock in the morning. And then, we would hold meetings also in our missions and invite the guerrillas or the government to meet. The meetings always took place in the Venezuelan mission or the Mexican mission; those were the places. I don't remember that we ever had a meeting at the Colombian mission or the Spanish mission, and at the end at the U.S. mission. The Friends would meet with Pickering, not with the guerrillas. With the guerrillas or the government, we always would meet at the Venezuelan or the Mexican mission. That is where the meetings were held.

But we were very disturbed by the realization that de Soto and the others said that an agreement could not be reached, before the 31st.

JK: I did not realize they had said that.

DA: This was the day before. I remember very clearly, and I must look for some of my notes for you. I have all my notes because I kept them for my government. I had to inform them what was going on. More than the government, it was really the president who was the only one who was really concerned about this issue. I remember Pérez de Cuéllar said, "I am going to impose on them," he said in Spanish. "Voy a imponer mis cabellos blancos." "I am going to impose on them my white hairs." Pérez de Cuéllar had a suave way of negotiating which proved to be very useful at the end. He was like a big father talking to his children. He would say, "Listen." He treated them in a very familiar way, in opposition to a very formal United Nations fashion, in a way, tougher. Pérez de Cuéllar would make them meditate. He has this good image, like a father figure, which proved to be very important. Hours before, we feared that it was not going to be signed. That is when we met with both sides. I think that at the end, the contribution that we had because of the support and trust that we had with these parties, that we were able to move them. So, actually they did sign, not at twelve o'clock, at twelve- fifteen.

JK: Stop the clock!

DA: We decided to stop the clock. My wife was waiting for me with my daughter thinking that I was going to arrive, and I never arrived before midnight. Actually, they signed at twelve-fifteen, twelve-twenty, fifteen minutes into the first of January 1992. Of course, the agreement lacked a lot

of things. We did it at the end, afterwards. What started as a supportive role to advise the Secretary-General, with the Friends, became a negotiating role. We thought that it was going to unravel. We were very concerned with the arrival of the new Secretary-General, the Salvadorian issue might not hold. Croatia was beginning to be inflamed. We thought that others issues would enter the Security Council and we said this is the moment to deliver. It must stop this year, now. All the parties contributed at the end. There were many issues still hanging in the process, like the distribution of land, the economic support, to make sure that all the displaced parties in El Salvador would get an opportunity to get agricultural credit, to get education. A lot of the things were left hanging and not very clear. But the fundamental issues, the cleaning up of the armed forces, the Truth Commission, were taken care of. The government went through a very painful process. I would see Cristiani's face. It was a very painful process to accept that his armed forces had committed criminal acts. They had been under his command. He had to go out and fire and prosecute many of the officers in the army. It was very difficult.

JK: Yes, later on when the report of the Truth Commission came out.

DA: I remember, in the last few weeks, he had with him the Minister of Defense, and General Vargas, and he had with him the mayor of San Salvador, who is today the president of El Salvador, Calderon Sol. He had been wise to involve the person he thought could be a presidential contender. And he brought the Minister of Defense who was very receptive. It was an amazing process. Some of the issues that we had to speak to the president about were really very painful. He had a lot of demands on the guerrillas, the delivery of arms. We had a lot of quarrels with the guerrillas at

the end regarding the real truth about the amount of armaments. As you remember, they lied many times.

JK: Because they found that there had been weapons stored. I just want to go back to that period of time before the agreement was signed at the end of December in '91. You said the Group of Friends had played a much more active role at that point. My understanding is that the Group of Friends actually did propose some initiatives which were able to overcome the impasse. I believe it had something to do with the reforming of the military and the police. Do you have some recollection of that?

DA: Yes, thank you for refreshing my memory because that is a fact. The UN, for example, wanted to impose changes in the police which would have rendered El Salvador [for a period of time] a country without a police. Some ideas were extreme and we came with some ideas on the extent of the reforms of the armed forces and on the dates that these events should take place. For example, battalion X should be demilitarized, the dates; it was a lot of fine-tuning. Of course, the fundamental negotiations were done by the United Nations. There is no doubt about that. Who clinched the deal? The United States. Who supported the deal politically and made it possible to clinch the deal? The Friends. And who created the groundwork to be able to conduct for two years -- remember they started in 1990 -- a long process of negotiations, the patience, the perseverance? De Soto and his team. That is a major truth. Each one played its role. What happened at the end was that each one had to play very actively his own role. Otherwise, it would not have come to an end. It was fortunate that it was the last year of Pérez de Cuéllar. If Pérez de Cuéllar had had

another year, we would probably have been negotiating through 1992.

JK: There would have been another year of negotiations.

DA: Yes.

JK: So, having a deadline was important. The situation was ripe enough but a deadline was needed.

DA: Pérez de Cuéllar said, "I am going to impose on them my white hair." I don't know what he told them at the end. But he must have told them the same thing I am telling you. "This is it; I'm leaving at midnight. You are on your own after midnight. I have been caring for you for two years. You can trust me; I have supported you." But I think that Pérez de Cuéllar did not know very well the details of the process. Of course, he had too many other issues at the United Nations. He relied fundamentally on de Soto. So, that is why we felt, in the process, we had to give him direct input on what was the real situation, not seen through de Soto's eyes, but seen through Cristiani's and the guerrillas' eyes. We felt at the time that there was an imbalance; that they were trying to get too much out of the government. We felt that pushing the government too much could derail the process. We had to cool them down on the pressure they were putting on the government. At one time we thought there was an exaggerated leaning on the government and not too much leaning on the guerrilla side. That is when we decided to intervene.

JK: Very interesting. You mentioned the role of the Soviet Union and of Cuba. I understand that

Pérez de Cuéllar, early on in the process, had written letters to Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the United States, asking for their support. It came [the support] indirectly. But, from what you were saying, later on there was more direct involvement. The president of Venezuela, Pérez, had been in touch with Castro?

DA: The president of Mexico, the president of Colombia, and of Spain. They were meeting with Castro on other issues outside El Salvador. Actually, we were meeting with Castro to see if we could get him back into the main stream in a democratic fashion. Of course, it proved to be a futile effort. I was at one of the meetings in Brasilia in 1990 for the inaugural of the then President Collor de Mello. We had a meeting with Castro at the time. There was the President of Spain, the Prime Minister of Spain, and Garcia Marques, and Castro, and the president of the Parliament of Cuba, who then became ambassador here. Later I became ambassador here. Castro proved to be a contributing factor to stabilize the process.

JK: In what way? What were you asking of Castro?

DA: First, no more support, and that happened, then to reinforce the conception that El Salvador was exhausted and that this was the right time for the guerrillas to get a good settlement and that a peaceful resolution would be accomplished. I think it played a moderating role in that. The extent of that, I cannot tell you, but this what I perceived in my conversations with the Cuban delegates here, all the time. They were very constructive and knew what was going on all the time. I am sure they were meeting discretely with the guerrillas. I cannot prove it, but, well, I am sure they did.



Sometimes one of my colleagues (one of the Friends) would get lost and we would find out that he was meeting with the guerrillas without telling us. We reprimanded him for that but he must have been receiving instructions from his government relevant to the issue, unilaterally.

On the issue of Castro, I think Castro played a minimal role but in the same direction as the United States. The U.S. had been very actively involved in the war. Cuba had been active but not as active as the United States, first, because of a matter of size and importance and significance and resources. They supported the guerrillas in the country for many years. I happen to be very familiar with El Salvador. Actually, Napoleon Duarte, who you remember was President in El Salvador before, was my advisor when I was governor of Caracas. He was in exile and he was my sanitation expert. It was very funny. He was my advisor and sanitation expert. He helped me to change the landfills in Caracas for soccer and baseball fields. That is what he was doing in Venezuela. He and I go back a long time.

JK: That is amazing.

DA: Now, the Soviet Union at the end was always there asking to be informed. They knew that the solution would come, and they wanted to be a part of the solution. We were not actively engaging them more than before, but they played an important role. There was a complete cut in their relationship with the guerrillas at the time. They were very supportive and expressed publicly their support of the peace process. But we never included them. They wanted to be the "Friends plus Two." They attended one meeting at the U.S. Mission with us. We had invited them. I don't remember the content of the conversation, but it was in the context of the Friends. But, we did

meet with them.

JK: Why were they not accepted as "Four plus Two?"

DA: By that time, when they wanted to be included, it was at the end of the process. I don't think we ever discussed it formally whether we should or should not, but as head of the mission here, we never felt that there was a state interest in the problem. We did not approach the Secretary-General on their account and I never heard Pérez de Cuéllar express to us anything of that sort.

JK: You mentioned something that I wanted to go back into; you mentioned in terms of maintaining the consensus among the Group of Friends, I wanted to ask you more about that. It seems as though maintaining a common front would be particularly important. But, you mentioned, that at times it seemed as though there might be one or another that might begin to do some bilateral negotiations. I had heard, actually, that President Pérez may have participated in something like that, inviting the parties to Caracas to possibly negotiate something. Could you explain something more about that?

DA: Yes, Pérez personality could not resist being part of the process himself, always in good faith, but sometimes he did meet with them. But these were not secret meetings. People knew they were in Venezuela while I went to see him. He would take a lot of time, personally, to cajole them, both parties. When I speak about the consensus, once we had agreed, for example, that we should tell the Secretary-General to ask x, y, and z from the government was too much, we would go and do

this together. When we were negotiating with the parties, each one would have his own concerns and would battle for those. The Spaniards, for example were very institutional. They were interested in the preservation of the institutions. The Mexicans were involved in the whole political issue. The head of the Mission of Mexico was very political. This, for Mexico, is a very political issue. The country more affected was Mexico. They had been following this for a long time. He [Ambassador Montana] had a very good relationship, rapport, with the FMLN people, more than they had with the government. It is funny, the Mexicans did. We had a more balanced relationship; we had a very good rapport with the government, and our president had a very good rapport with the FMLN. We were perceived as very balanced by both sides. We never lost the confidence either of the government or of the guerrillas.

JK: That is very important and I think it is interesting that each country had something to contribute to the Group of Friends to keep the whole group balanced.

DA: On the whole, these digressions of one member going directly to the guerrillas were rare. In general, the group behaved very well. To the extent of sticking to a position at least on those issues of fundamental value where we would approach the Secretary-General. Remember, at that time we were not advising, we were telling him, "Listen, if you don't do this, these are the consequences. We spoke to Cristiani and he told us this. People are telling you something differently." You see, Cristiani took more beating at the end because he was the one who had to yield. While the guerrillas had to yield, actually they did not yield to the extent that they should have, i.e., arms, hiding of arms, demobilization of people. They said they had, but we couldn't prove it. We didn't

know how many there were. In the army, you know how many divisions, how many regiments, the famous Atlatal Battalion, where it was located. We didn't know where the guerrillas were. We knew they were in certain parts of the country, but we could not pinpoint the size. So, the UN was leaning at the end on the government. The government was yielding and yielding and yielding. Of course, they had more to give. To answer your question, we had a unified front in pushing the Secretary-General away from some of the advice that he was getting.

JK: [We just had a little break.] You were talking about some of the anguish of some of the people involved.

DA: I remember, for example, very vividly the face of the president of El Salvador every time I would go and see him at his hotel. What we would do is, we would negotiate with his team, would listen to them, and then we would go and listen to the FMLN group, and then we would go to see Cristiani. Sometimes to appeal to some of the positions, to change some of the positions that his people had been holding that we thought should not be held. You could see his anguish that he felt that the UN was being very unfair with him. He felt that very clearly. His people made it much more obvious. Cristiani proved to be a man of outstanding qualities during this process. Had he been a smaller man than he was, the peace would not have been possible. To begin with, he was the opposite of arrogant, a very modest man. Because he had a very clear record personally, he knew that he was not being attacked himself. Every time, I knew he must have been thinking, "Tomorrow I have to go to El Salvador and meet my armed forces." The UN had lost perspective sometimes on the monumentality of the challenge for Cristiani. To create a Truth Commission, it

had never been done, not even in South Africa, at the time. It was the first.

JK: You were speaking about the fact that there was tremendous pressure on the government and on Cristiani.

DA: Sometimes I felt that the UN negotiating team had lost perspective of the political landscape of El Salvador and the role of the armed forces and how fragile the government was, how fragile it was going to become. But at the same time, I realized that if they were not pushed enough, they would not bend the minimum that they had to bend. So, in hind site, I think it was wise to push. Otherwise, they would not have reached the agreement that they reached.

JK: We have been talking primarily about the role that the Friends had played in the negotiation process. After the agreements were signed in January, in Chapultepec, Mexico, and the implementation had to begin, what kind of role then did the Friends play and was there a change?

DA: At that time we became members of the Security Council. After the agreement, we had the United Nations Mission in El Salvador. The fact that Spain and Venezuela were on the Security Council, together with the United States, made us increase our authority on both parties to continue exercising certain pressures to comply. The Friends accompanied the process until its end. We did not have the same intensity as before. As a matter of fact, a few months ago de Soto had the idea, before Boutros-Ghali left, to ask the former four Friends of El Salvador to go on a mission to present an evaluation of the peace process. We had accepted but at the end there were some

internal conflicts and they decided to postpone it. They wanted the same people who had negotiated the agreement to come and give a sort of post mortem evaluation. I think it would have been very interesting. I never knew exactly what happened, but there were some opposing forces inside and at the same time, the president of El Salvador, now was a little bit fed up with the UN intervening and giving the impression that they were still under the tutelage of the United Nations. They wanted to get rid of the United Nations as quickly as possible, which they have. So, that's why we never went back. I have been back and with Cristiani several times, but on other issues.

JK: In terms of the implementation, there were times when the parties met with the Group of Friends to complain that things were not moving along. Were you a part of those meetings? What kinds of complaints did they have?

DA: The land distribution became an important issue and the police reform. And in the beginning, the Truth Commission. That was a very touchy one. The land problems continued to be the haunting problem. At the end, it was an issue of poverty. The fundamental issue, the clashes of El Salvador were of an economic nature. And they could not be solved by a peace agreement. There were a lot of complaints about slow results. Many times the rebels felt the government was not complying especially on the economic side. They did not have enough resources. The international community never gave the financial support they should have. You can change the police and downsize the armed forces, but you have to have the financial support for this to happen. The Salvadorian people are a laborious people, but they never got the strong financial support that the peace process would have required. This is taking place in Haiti. We are replicating the same

experience in Haiti.

JK: Did Venezuela have resources that they would use as incentives throughout the implementation process?

DA: Yes, we had with Mexico what we call the San Jose Agreement. We would give them oil at preferential prices. That comes from Pérez' first government since 1974. When oil prices became very expensive, we started a program for the Caribbean and Central American countries "Acuerdo do San Jose," the San Jose Agreement. We would give them preferential trade on oil. El Salvador was receiving that support. Plus, we were part of the United Nations Mission in El Salvador, too.

JK: You had personnel there.

DA: We had a number of officers. Some the people who attempted the coup in Venezuela had been in El Salvador as part of ONUSAL. Some of these commanders and captains had been in the ONUSAL Mission in El Salvador. They were training for a coup there.

Yes, we would meet with the Salvadorians. The minister, Santa Maria, would come here. You should speak to the Ambassador from El Salvador because he has been here throughout the whole process. He's been here since 1990 up to now. And he has served under both governments and he never lost the confidence of FMLN. It was a very difficult position. I greatly admire that he always represented his country in the midst of this situation. If there is anyone who could give you some useful information, it is he, Ricardo Castalera. He was Deputy Foreign Minister before

coming here. He is in his seventh or eighth year at the United Nations.

JK: I'll definitely get in touch with him.

DA: We would meet with him and with Boutros-Ghali and give our advice many times. We met with de Soto. Then it became an exercise of implementation.

JK: You mentioned that at one point that you had heard complaints on the rebel side, that the police were not being reformed properly, and so forth. There was also the complaint on the government side that weapons were being found in secret hiding places. How did that information come to you? Was that presented to the Group of Friends?

DA: It would go through the United Nations. The president of El Salvador would call the president of Venezuela and say, "Listen, look what is happening here." Then the president would call me and I would call the Secretary-General. So, both parties moved in that direction. Or the FMLN would get to see Pérez or the president of Mexico. I don't think that the president of Mexico was involved personally. The Mexicans are more formal. So, any contact would have been through the foreign minister. While Pérez was the direct link, he did not have any intermediaries. Also, they could call Beatrice Rangel, who I have mentioned. He was very involved personally. So these people would complain to him. For example, what is happening with the police, some of the officers, people being persecuted. They would promise to hand over all the arms, and then we would find out it wasn't the truth. We would reprimand them, get very angry with them. At times we had very tense



conversations with them. Remember that the guerrillas were very much divided amongst themselves. I'm sure they were lying among themselves. That collectively, they agreed to lie to us, I don't believe that. Because that was very serious.

JK: I wanted to ask you some questions about Haiti. We have been talking primarily about El Salvador. Venezuela then became a member of the Group of Friends on Haiti. Aristide had been overthrown on September 30, 1991. So, this was interwoven with the whole issue on El Salvador. How did Venezuela become a member of the Group of Friends on Haiti and what was Venezuela's involvement in the issue of Haiti?

DA: It would be interesting to take a look at the book I gave you because in that I relate some of the things. One of the few presidents that attending the inaugural of Aristide was the president of Venezuela.

JK: This is Pérez?

DA: This is Pérez, the same. And Pérez was very impressed by Aristide. I remember he told me, "This small man, when he starts speaking, he starts growing." When Pérez, who is a man with some arrogance about his own abilities, told me that, I was greatly impressed. "Diego," he said, "You know, this guy grows up when he speaks." "Magnificent, he moves people in a way I have seldom seen," he told me. But, then he was overthrown and I called the president. The president sent a plane, a private plane of a Venezuelan banker, a friend of ours, Jose Alvarez Estele. He sent

a Gulf stream to get Aristide. I will relate something that happened that night. He arrived in Venezuela early the next morning.

JK: So, they sent the plane from Caracas to Port-au-Prince. Who had contacted Aristide to tell him that he could be picked up?

DA: Our ambassador, it was a lady, in Haiti, was told. Pérez had urged Mitterrand before this saying that we should help this new democracy. That is why he was involved. The next day, I called Pérez and said to him that I knew that Aristide was flying to Washington to the OAS meeting, this time in a Venezuelan government plane. I said to him that he must come to the United Nations. I said to him that he is going to waste his time at the OAS. "I understand that is a stop he must make, but you should tell him that he should come here. And when he comes here, he should come straight to me because I would like to speak to him in order that he doesn't repeat the performance he had at the General Assembly the first time here." As you remember, he spoke in 17 languages and it was quite a mess.

JK: Let me just get the sequence of events: he was overthrown on the 30th, and then your ambassador to Haiti, the Venezuelan woman. Did she organize Aristide's safe delivery out of Haiti?

DA: She couldn't. This lady was also very close to Aristide. Aristide trusted her. At the time Aristide was a prisoner. When we sent the plane, we didn't know if he would be at the airport.

Finally they took him to the airport. There was a lot of speculation on that.

JK: Were the military holding him?

DA: The military were holding him. Actually, they had him a prisoner at the airport. Our plane landed and we sent a doctor, a physician, who got him onto the plane. Aristide thought he was going to be killed. He told me. He thought he was going to be killed before he got into the plane. By that time, the French were on notice, the U.S. was on notice, we were on notice. So, he landed in Venezuela and they took him to the presidential guesthouse and a couple of days afterwards he was in Washington. Then sent him here in our plane. Then I met with him and I tried to negotiate personally. The Colombian Ambassador, Fernando Sepera, the Mexican Ambassador, Gorge Montana, and myself went to see the president of the Security Council, who was the Indian ambassador, Chinmaya Gharekhan, who late became a part of the Secretariat. That month, he was the president of the Security Council. We went to see Gharekhan and said, "Listen, Chinmaya, there has been this coup. Aristide is the first elected president of Haiti, thanks to the United Nations contribution, you remember. This is a United Nations issue. You must receive Aristide." He did not offer anything. This was around 6:00 in the afternoon. There was an informal consultation about that. And we spoke also to the Ecuadorian ambassador who was on the Council from Latin America along with Cuba, at the moment. Later, we found out that the Ecuadorians, the ambassador is very formal -- he is now the foreign minister of Ecuador and a very distinguished man -- Jose Ayala Lasso. Pepe Ayala, very formal, was saying this is a regional issue; why should it come to the Security Council. The discussion was going on and Pickering came out and Alex

Watson and said to me, "I don't understand why Pepe (Jose Ayala) took this position when we had already approved together to get Aristide into the meeting. Venezuela was also in favor of this. But the position taken by Cuba, by China, and by Ecuador, that I know of, prevented him from coming to a formal meeting of the meeting of the Security Council. So, we got the second best. We kept pressing and we said we were going to bring the whole Latin American group and there is going to be a major confrontation. They accepted that the Council would meet in the official room, he would speak, and then he would leave. They would give him his fifteen minutes before court. Then Aristide came to the United Nations around 7:00pm and I met with him in a small room next to the Security Council. I explained to him, "Mr. President, the Security Council is not the General Assembly. The Security Council is a very serious procedure; you can't speak in 17 languages." Then, at that time I was not a member of the Security Council, so I sat in the gallery overlooking the formal room. I remember, Aristide came in, the first time I had seen Aristide in the United Nations, the people stood up. This small-framed man came and the Security Council members stood up. Then he sat at the table and began speaking very softly on the importance of democracy, peace, not like a man fighting for his life, no, mild with very strong concepts, very well delivered, with no notes. He didn't mince one word that he spoke. He speaks immaculate French. He speaks many other languages immaculately also, as we know.

JK: He spoke in French this time?

DA: In French. I remember the silence. The whole room was packed and there was major silence. The man carried great moral weight. Everyone expected him to come like a bomb. It was the

opposite. There started a long process of great conflicts in our own region. Then a few months later, we entered the Security Council. That is when we started pushing to bring the issue of Haiti to the Security Council.

JK: When did the Group of Friends form? At that time, you were already a member of the Group of Friends on El Salvador and had seen that process move very successfully. So, how did it form on Haiti?

DA: There was a new Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali. Boutros-Ghali had great sympathy for Haiti. He played a very important role. Boutros, I will tell you some confidential matter, that Boutros decided that he should put together France, the United States, Canada, and Venezuela as the Friends. Why? At that time, Mitterrand, Bush, Mulruney, and Pérez had a very good rapport and with Boutros Ghali. I say in this book that it was Pérez who proposed to Mitterrand that they should support this process. Then Mitterrand visited Venezuela. It is Pérez' records that he said to Mitterrand we must support Haiti. And Mitterrand said yes but he did not respond quickly. So, Pérez called Mulruney and asked Mulruney to speak to Mitterrand.

JK: Mulruney of Canada.

DA: Right, and asked him to speak to Bush, too. And Mulruney became very involved, engaged immediately. Mulruney was the one who called Mitterrand and called Bush and that is how the whole thing got started. In the Security Council, there was France, the United States, and

Venezuela. Three of the four Friends were in the Security Council. Canada was not. We started looking for ways to bring this to the Security Council immediately. There was a major resistance in the Latin American group, major resistance.

JK: Why was that?

DA: The Mexicans, the Brazilians, the Ecuadorians, the Uruguayans were very much opposed. They felt that the Security Council was the place to bring issues of international peace and security. Haiti did not threaten international peace and security. Their foreign ministers were being very formal about how to handle the decision.

JK: And there was the issue of OAS.

DA: The Secretary-General of the OAS was a Brazilian.

JK: Baena Soares.

DA: Now we are in 1993. Brazil enters the Security Council substituting Ecuador. In 1993, we get the Haitian issue before the Security Council. There was a major resistance in the Latin American Community, as usual a very formal and conventional handling of international issues, sovereignty, you know, certain icons, not intervening in internal situation, more or less the policy that China takes on many of these issues. This is intervening into the sovereignty of the nation. So, two sides

were taken up. We took one side and we became very active in the Caricom conference, which were thirteen members. Then the Caricom countries and ourselves began lobbying all over the United Nations. Even in my own government, I had to keep away from our ambassador to the OAS what we were doing at the United Nations. Because he would call me everyday to find out and to tell me that we should not accept Haiti, that this was a regional issue. It was not an international issue. At the same time, the Brazilian Secretary General was pushing his own ambassador. Boutros would speak to me and say, "You must find an excuse to bring Haiti to the Security Council." I remember once he said to me, "We must link this to a threat to the Dominican Republic, which is potentially a fact." This would entail a threat to the peace and security. He really wanted us to do something.

He had a very original solution to the issue. He appointed as his representative, Dante Caputo. He said why don't we appoint together one representative, instead of two. Baena accepted.

JK: Dante being from Argentina.

DA: Dante was Argentine. So, then we had the same position as the Brazilians. They thought that would calm us until we were able to bring under the sponsorship of the United States, France, and Venezuela, the resolution to the Security Council. We became involved in the Governors' Island Agreement and the final return of our friend Aristide. The day I took the resolution to the Security Council, my ambassador to the OAS called me and said, "Diego, what is going on there?" I said, "Nothing, nothing special. Nothing very much is going to happen." An hour later, I took it to the Security Council, made a speech, pushed it, and we got it approved. He called me in the afternoon

and I had to tell him that I couldn't tell him because he would have tried to stop it. But the president of Venezuela was in total support of what I was doing. In the OAS, they kept it a bay, and they would not do anything. But in the international forum, we would move ahead very fast. We did not offend the OAS, and we did not offend the international community.

JK: The resolution that you are referring to, is this the resolution to impose sanctions on Haiti?

DA: Yes.

JK: That was a key issue.

DA: That was a significant step. That is what created Governors' Island and Baena Soares one day would speak of it.

JK: In this case, to orchestrate that took quite a while because the Security Council had not wanted to take up that issue. At that point, did you meet with the other members of the Friends Group? You had the French, the Canadians, and the U.S. Was there a consensus among them?

DA: Yes.

JK: At this point the issue of sanctions was ready?



DA: Very ready. That group worked like a clock. The Group of Friends in the case of Haiti worked like a clock. They were always very much attuned to each other. What we had to do was always done collectively. There was very unified action. Of course, we had to lobby all the members of the Security Council. There was a role played by the Caricom countries. We incorporated Africa into the whole thing, 54 members. We had a lot of people involved and we started playing the racial card. I wrote an article in the New York Times about that called "Haiti, the Black Bosnia." Latin Americans do not care for Haiti because they are Blacks and they don't think they are Latins. Like the Europeans think that the Bosnians are Muslims. Nobody cared very much what was happening in Haiti. This was a fact. The first victims of the Latin American lack of interest were the Haitians. Latin America never gave much importance to Haiti.

JK: In that case, Venezuela's role in the process was very important because you were the only representative of Latin America in the Friends.

DA: More than Venezuela, it was the president of Venezuela. Let me tell you something tragically ironic. When we brought Aristide to Venezuela, and many Haitians arrived in Venezuela, there was a major scandal in public opinion. "We are going to be inundated by these Haitians." What they meant was members of the Black community. And that is when I ran my article. "You criticize, the United States and they have thousands of Haitians. You get 40 Haitians and you forget our whole history when Pétion was the president of Haiti and financed the two incursions of Simon Bolivar to establish Venezuela's independence. Being one of the two Latin Americans in the Security Council, I convened for a formal meeting the Caricom countries and the Caribbean and the

Latin American group. I convened them in a formal group to openly discuss this. This is beyond national considerations. Haiti is the poorest country on this continent. It is a bad country, impoverished, marginal. I made a very strong political argument rather than to continue on the international law interpretation, whether it was a threat or not a threat. They knew that we had the support of the Africans and the United States. The Europeans were connected and involved. There was more resistance, formally, from the Latin American countries. There was China and Cuba that didn't want the United Nations to get involved because they are scared that one day we would bring a Cuban issue to the Security Council. The China policy is not to intervene. In this case, they abstained.

JK: They abstained, I see.

DA: In the rest, we had 14 votes, but not Cuba.

JK: Let me ask you another question because I think it is very interesting and complicated as to why the Latin American countries were resisting some of the issues.

DA: Traditional attitudes, that the United Nations not intervene in internal problems, and second that the Security Council should not handle an issue in which international security was not involved.

JK: Because they wanted the OAS to handle it, instead?

DA: Well, I tell you that nobody cared for Haiti. The United States cared for Haiti for one reason; Miami was being inundated by Haitians. That was very reasonable; that was more than enough. It was not that the United States loved Haiti more than we did, it was that the United States was more threatened. Actually, the greatest threat was in the United States because they were going to get one half a million Haitians overnight. And that's what prompted it. I am not saying that was the only reason, but that accelerated the concern of the United States position. It was a natural one.

JK: The other question that I have had in my mind, was there resistance by some of the Latin American countries or was there a fear that the United Nations, or the United States behind the United Nations, might get involved, as it did in Haiti, and that that might set a precedence for getting involved in other Latin American countries if there were a military coup?

DA: Absolutely. Of course, that was not so openly said, but it was openly implied. In reality, actually the foundation of the concern was that. Today it's Haiti, tomorrow it's us. They took the luxury of being very formal in the consideration of a country like Haiti. I wonder if there would have been the same consideration taken if it had been Colombia, a more significant country. They have been the victims of discrimination by their own colleagues in the region, Haiti, absolutely.

JK: Just in terms of bringing Venezuela into this issue, when was that attempted coup in Venezuela?

DA: The first one was in February 1992 when we already had a coup. The coup took place when I had only been in the Security Council for one month. I acted like nothing had happened, but it had happened. So a year before.

JK: I wonder if that at all played a role in some of the active quality of President Pérez. Because if there had been a military coup in Venezuela, would the United Nations taken a stand against the military coup?

DA: The OAS would have. The OAS would have stopped in a minute this exercise. If poor Haiti had to wait for the OAS, Aristide would still be meeting in a church in Washington waiting for something to happen. Every time you take something there it is the end of the road. That's why we all realized that we had to bring it to the UN. And I convinced Pérez. The venue is not the OAS, at least not the formal one. The real issue is in the United Nations. So, I went to Pérez and that's is why we had him here at the UN and it actually was resolved. It laid the groundwork for something to happen. It happened later.

JK: In terms of bringing the issue to the UN and working with the Friends and getting the resolutions passed in the Security Council, you played a very important role. What about bringing along the members of the OAS? Were you able to play a kind of role in terms of convincing the OAS that their cooperation in this was important?

DA: That was an impossible exercise. I went to see my colleague at the OAS, who was a very good

friend of mine, and tried to convince him. They had a culture, and that culture was regional and against a more universal view. We, the UN, had the sanctions; they did not have sanctions. We have the force of the Security Council, a force that they didn't have. I never received an instruction from my president to talk to our people at the OAS, never. I did it on my own volition. I never got one note to coordinate or talk to them, no. We left them to do their own exercise, very political, very rhetorical. These negotiations we had, the resolutions, were very difficult. Baena was a very complicated man on this issue. We had the advantage that Boutros was very militant and wanted to bring Haiti to the Security Council. That was one reason. He was really genuinely convinced that the only way for Haiti was to go to the Security Council.

JK: I understand that the Group of Friends on El Salvador really wrote most of the drafts of the resolutions before they were presented to the Security Council. Was that the case with the Friends on Haiti?

DA: Yes, we were all very active. The four Friends were all very active. But the issue of Haiti was only going to be resolved by the United States. There is no regional conflict where the president of the United States is not needed. In the end it proved a fundamental one. What could we do? Help Mulroney, send some policemen and whatever. The Canadians were extremely useful. If I had to say who was more important it would be the United States and Canada, on the support of Haiti, later on. Inside, we were more useful because we were on the Security Council and Canada was not. They had just left the Security Council a couple years before. It was a pity that if it had been the four of us together [on the Security Council] it would have gone much faster. But Canada is a

respectable country, enjoys great respect. So, we were able to use the Canadians very effectively in the region. But we all cooperated, cooperated like a clock. We were working with the Secretariat which was also on the same wavelength as we were. We were all working in the same direction. The four Friends and the UN Secretariat were very closely united. We did not have the differences that we had on the Salvadoran process with the UN Secretariat or with the Secretary-General. Here the Secretary-General and the Secretariat and the four Friends were totally united.

JK: You mentioned on El Salvador that you had had a special arrangement for Central American countries on the purchase of oil. Did you have a similar arrangement with Haiti?

DA: I think so, but I will have to check. Haiti was the poorest nation in the hemisphere. The problem is that when Haiti had the dictatorship we were not giving them oil. At one time, they had this lady, Trouillot as president. During Pérez time, Venezuela was very supportive of Haiti.

JK: When you were proposing sanctions, which included an oil embargo, that really did involve Venezuela because you would be involved in the oil embargo.

DA: At one point, we threatened the Dominicans, because the Dominicans were sabotaging the embargo. They have a very uneasy relationship, as you know, with Haiti. The independence of the Dominican Republic was the independence of the Haitians. There is a lot of bad blood between the two countries. And they were sabotaging, selling gas and oil.

JK: Across their border.

DA: I remember I had several meetings with the Dominican ambassador warning him that we were going to do something about it. If we had to, we would propose sanctions against the Dominican Republic. They were really sabotaging it.

JK: Toward the end, wasn't there a Security Council resolution to close that border and put observers on that border?

DA: To put observers, but even though we had observers, they were warned that we were taking a close look. There were a lot of military officers on the Dominican side that were making a lot of money selling oil, like happens whenever there are sanctions. This is not the only place.

JK: We have a few more minutes and I wanted to go onto the third Group of Friends which is Guatemala. It is amazing that Venezuela has been involved in all these different groups. How was the Group of Friends of Guatemala set up and what was Venezuela's role in that case.

DA: This is different; one day the president of Mexico, the president of Venezuela, the president of Colombia met for a conference and they agreed to form a Group of Friends of the President of Guatemala. The one who tried to do a coup d'etat himself ala Fujimori. Then I get a call that I should go to Guatemala from my president. I am ambassador here. I get a call from my president that I should go to Guatemala and meet with the president together with the Mexican ambassador

who at that time was Tello, the Colombian ambassador also. He wanted to get the same Friends as on El Salvador to Guatemala.

JK: So, there was a direct link between the Friends on El Salvador and Guatemala.

DA: Yes, so we arrived in Guatemala. I had been a friend of this man long before he was president of Guatemala. And we immediately realized that there was a major mistake made by our presidents. Because instead of calling ourselves Friends of the Process, . . .

JK: You had been called Friends of the Secretary-General.

DA: That was the same as Friends of the Process, Friends of the Secretary-General. But we were becoming Friends of the President of Guatemala.

JK: Which was one of the parties to the issue.

DA: I remember the reactions among ourselves. The first reaction was Tello. We had a very candid conversation with the president and the armed forces. We had a meeting at the palace the whole day. And I remember Tello saying, "We are Friends of the Process." The president of Guatemala said, "Well, you are my friends." We did try to become on our own Friends of the Process rather than Friends of the president. We knew that we would lose the importance of it immediately.



JK: There is a distinction between the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General which was the title of the Salvadoran Group and the Guatemalan group which is Friends of the Peace Process. But originally, he had set it up as Friends of the president.

DA: Yes, it became later on Friends of the Process. We knew this on our own. I said to the president, "We must go to Mexico to meet with the guerrillas. Because if we leave from here and go back to Washington or New York, we are going to be one-sided." He lent us a small plane and we got to Mexico around 9:00 that evening and went directly to the foreign ministry and they brought the rebel leaders and we managed to meet until 2:00 in the morning. We explained to them that there had been a certain misunderstanding and that we were Friends of the Peace Process, not Friends of the president. That had been a mistake made by the presidents themselves.

JK: Who initiated the meeting in Guatemala with the president of Guatemala? Was it the president of Guatemala's initiative? Or was it from the group of presidents?

DA: They offered it to him. They said, "We are going to send our ambassadors to meet with you as soon as possible." I got a call and that day I left for Guatemala.

JK: The idea came from the presidents of the countries rather than from Boutros-Ghali. [break in the conversation] We were talking about the ambassadors going to meet in Guatemala and then realizing that you had to meet with the guerrillas, as well.

DA: We realized that it was a major mistake done at the meetings in Caracas by our presidents in good faith agreed to the request of the president of Guatemala, which is one side to support him because he wanted to sign a peace agreement. We knew, but we didn't call back our presidents and say it was a mistake. What we did was to act like it were the Friends as in the case of El Salvador. Let's become Friends of the Process, not Friends of the president. At one point, in the meeting, the president of Guatemala said to the Mexican ambassador, "Well, you are my friends." And Tello said, "Yes, well, we are Friends of the Process." It was a very difficult relationship because he thought that we were going to serve him politically and we realized if we did that, it would be bad. That is why we went to speak to the guerrillas, actually the same day. We flew to Mexico in the same day. Let's say we met from 10:00am to 4:00 in the afternoon, and at 4:00 we took off for Mexico. And we ended the meeting at 4:00 in the morning in Mexico with the guerrillas. Then we came back to New York.

JK: What was the role of Boutros-Ghali in all of this?

DA: None, at this stage, none. The Mexicans, there was Rosario Green, who was the Deputy Foreign Minister. She presided and was like our hostess for that night. We met with the guerrillas there and later on, the UN felt they wanted to become part of the process and we became more institutional. In a de facto way, I don't think there was any formal invitation. They started calling us, including the Secretary-General, the Group on Guatemala, a de facto continuation of El Salvador. El Salvador is finished, now let's go talk about Guatemala.

JK: In terms of the Secretariat, then were you working again with Alvaro de Soto?

DA: No, it was more with a young French guy and not so much with de Soto. I can't remember his name now.

JK: Was it Francesc Vendrell?

DA: No, Vendrell was in El Salvador. Vendrell was very important in El Salvador; he was very active. And Vendrell was active in Haiti.

JK: Yes, very much so.

DA: Vendrell is a very good guy.

JK: In Guatemala, it was somebody else then.

DA: It was this French guy; I will have to remember his name, a very bright guy.

JK: Then you started to meet but it was not at the initiation of the Secretary-General, so it was not really Friends of the Secretary-General.

DA: De facto, it became. Nobody said now you are the Friends, no. It was taken for granted that we were already.

JK: Then did you begin to play the same kind of role, in terms writing resolutions for the Security Council?

DA: Yes, but at that point I left the United Nations. That was 1993.

JK: And then Venezuela went off the Security Council.

DA: Remember the role was different. The guerrillas in Guatemala didn't have the same weight that they had in El Salvador. It was a different issue. Then came the self-coup d'etat by the president of Guatemala. Many things have changed. From there on, I cannot help you anymore because I became an outside observer of the process because I was not in the United Nations. It began to take place more in 1994 and 1995.

JK: Then, let's just go back to those initial meetings where you met with the president of Guatemala and then with the Guerrillas in Mexico. My understanding is that the guerrillas were living in Mexico City.

DA: They were living in Mexico City. That's why we went there.

JK: That's why it was possible to meet with them immediately. What were some of the issues on both sides? What did you discuss?

DA: First, we had to decide. They suspected us. In the meeting I had to speak very frankly, very candidly, and very strongly because they thought why do we have to meet with these countries who have already taken a side and to support as Friends of President of Guatemala. It took 90% of the time to clear the air that we wanted to be Friends of the Process. We were not Friends of the president of Guatemala. We were friends of both of them. We wanted to be an instrument to promote peace within the United Nations system. That meeting was only significant in the way that we cleared the air, in a large extent. But these people almost didn't want to meet with us.

JK: Were they aware of the Friends Group on El Salvador?

DA: Yes, very much, being aware of that, they suspected in this case, that instead of being the Friends of the Secretary-General, we were the Friends of the president of Guatemala.

JK: So, you really had to change that concept.

DA: We changed it by our own performance, not by the original instructions that we had. I had never gone back to Pérez to find out. I think they were motivated and convinced by the president of Guatemala's will to come to peace. And he convinced them [the presidents] but they made a mistake.

JK: Do you think that in taking the action that you did, that you overcame that lack of impartiality on the beginning?

DA: Yes, because otherwise it would have been impossible to keep that same group as Friends of the Secretary-General that it later became. We had this moral authority from El Salvador. That was our real importance that we had inherited from El Salvador a good image of being objective and balanced, etc. We had almost lost it by the introduction as Friends of the president of Guatemala.

JK: Did you get involved in talking about the specific issues at that point?

DA: No, I have to speak to Tello to refresh my memory, but that night we were addressing fundamentally the role that we would like to play and how we were going to do this, and the need to come to an agreement, rather than on specific points.

JK: Norway also became a Friend. How did that happen.

DA: The ambassador of Norway attended the meeting that we had in Guatemala. The ambassador of Norway to Guatemala.

JK: Why was Norway involved? It seems very strange.

DA: They did the same thing in the Middle East; don't forget that. That had been very hospitable to the guerrilla side. So they enjoyed great trust from the guerrillas. They were very vigilant. They were in a way very vigilant of the process that we would not deviate from an objective process. That is the role they played. They were very active. Later on, we met with the church, the bishop. That day we met with the bishop. I went to see the head of the Opus Dei, who was an old friend, a Spanish priest, to get the thinking of the Catholic Church of Spain. The bishop is a very complex man. He was the negotiator for both sides. The church took a role to be the mediator. We were trying to see how we could push them. He was very jealous. He did not want to lose the Catholic role or his own personal role in the process, which was a very touchy and delicate matter. He was a man of great arrogance, this bishop. He comes from one of the most distinctive families of Guatemala, an aristocratic family in Guatemala. He was very concerned that he was going to lose his primary role because of the United Nations intervention.

JK: Let me ask you a question about that because if the church had been able to play the final role in mediating the agreement, then it wouldn't have been necessary to bring in the Friends group. So, what was it that the Friends group had to offer that the church couldn't do? It was similar in El Salvador, for example, because the church there had played the role of the intermediary and had been working with the parties to a certain extent. But then they could no longer really function.

DA: They played a useful role within their capabilities. The UN had the capacity to push the governments and always the threat of sanctions looming in the background, which the church didn't have besides not giving absolution to the seniors. It made it a more formidable process. They

wanted the church and himself to be the savior of this and he could not be. He did not want to acknowledge that. Our meeting was a difficult one. He was a very arrogant man and very much full of himself and the role he was going to play.

JK: When you moved the meeting to Mexico City, who represented Norway there?

DA: The ambassador of Norway to Mexico, because he didn't travel with us. I took the Venezuelan ambassador to Guatemala with me in order to preserve the continuity of our conversations. The Mexican also came from Guatemala with the Mexican ambassador to the UN, who shortly afterward became the foreign minister of Mexico.

JK: I think I am going to end it here. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview.

DA: My pleasure.