

Remarks by President Vicente Fox Quesada, on accepting the 2001 Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy September 5, in Washington, D.C.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank the National Endowment for Democracy for this undeserved honor. I view this award as a tribute to the Mexican people, rather than to its recipient. The credit of Mexico's peaceful transition to a genuinely democratic regime, which this award is intended to honor, belongs only to the citizens of Mexico.

For the greater part of its history as an independent nation, Mexico has struggled to become a stable and prosperous republic based on democratic principles and the rule of law.

This goal was to prove difficult to achieve. During the 19th Century, many decades were lost as a result of civil and political discord within the country. Due to the inability of successive governments to bring order and civility to the country, the economic progress and even the security of Mexico remained fragile. And we paid very dearly for that.

Then came a long and harsh dictatorship that lasted for more than three decades, which promoted Mexico's economic progress at the expense of its people. This authoritarian regime was only brought to an end by the force of arms during the Mexican Revolution.

Out of the ashes of that movement there emerged a new political class that sought to change Mexico's fate on the basis of the revolutionary ideals and the rules of democratic government. However, as time passed by, the opposition inside and many observers abroad developed a lack of trust in the fairness of elections, which weakened the legitimacy of the regime.

For 70 years, a single political party won, by any means, fair or foul, every presidential election, the overwhelming majority of seats in both houses of Congress, and most state and local elections. And although I would not wish to decry the social and economic progress that Mexico achieved during those years, the fact remains that poverty and inequality spread out and undermined the roots of our society.

Elections held on July 2, 2000, marked the end of that era and the transition from single-party rule to a democratic form of government, that relies on fundamental checks and balances between the branches of government and on free and fair elections.

The new Mexican democracy was a collective effort, not an individual achievement. It was built over many years and by countless people; political parties undoubtedly played a leading role in this process, but so did members of non-governmental organizations as well as many other individuals committed to the democratic ideal.

The media was also crucial in defending civil liberties and promoting the democratic values. And even members of previous Administrations played a part in developing a new electoral system that guaranteed fairness to all.

But the greatest credit must go to the people of Mexico, who on July of last year, calmly and peacefully embraced a new vision for our country's political life. And yet, in spite of their significance, these elections are only the first step in the process of strengthening our democratic institutions. Mexican democracy is, at the same time, an achievement and a day-to-day goal for our society as a whole.

It is now required that we not only deepen the values that are part and parcel of democracy, but also promote a form of economic development that serves all and benefits all. Thus, political change must translate into tangible economic progress and the gradual eradication of poverty. My government is keenly aware of its social responsibilities and will

seek to fulfill them within the framework of responsible economic management.

We are working to stamp out corruption and impunity throughout Mexico. We are aware of the tremendous costs that these evils have had for our country and we will devote every effort to eradicate them.

We intend to create the right economic conditions so that every man, woman and child in Mexico has an opportunity to fully develop his or her capabilities and abilities to choose.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am grateful for this honor that I have accepted on behalf of the people of Mexico, a nation that has chosen the path of democratic government. That is an achievement worth celebrating.

But only when the values and the benefits of democratic government have reached every corner of our country, we will be satisfied that the task has been duly accomplished. It may not be possible to achieve this end within the lifetime of one Administration. But it is nonetheless a cause for personal satisfaction and national pride that we have embarked on this bold journey.

Thank you.