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BT

SANTO DOMINGO 000100

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TAGS: PGOV, PREL, SNAR, KIPR, DR

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH SENATE PRESIDENT

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CHARLES T. MANATT, REASON 1.5(D)

1. SBU) SUMMARY: THE AMBASSADOR MET ON JANUARY 5 WITH SENATE PRESIDENT RAMON ALBURQUERQUE AND NINE OTHER SENATORS. DURING THE MEETING, THE AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED OUR INTERESTS IN FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS, ASKED THE SENATE'S HELP IN ASSURING THAT IPR LEGISLATION IS TRIPS-COMPLIANT, AND SUGGESTED THAT A COMMITTEE OF SENATORS CONSIDER A VISIT TO THE U.S. LATER THIS YEAR TO OBSERVE PREPARATIONS FOR OUR ELECTIONS. THE SENATORS, WHO MADE IT CLEAR THEY DON'T TRUST THE RULING PLD, WELCOMED ANY SUPPORT WE COULD PROVIDE FOR THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. ALBURQUERQUE GAVE ASSURANCES, AS HE HAS PREVIOUSLY, THAT THE SENATE ALSO WANTS STRONG IPR PROTECTION. OTHER ISSUES RAISED INCLUDE THE INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS OF THE DOMINICAN CONGRESS, PENDING SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION, THE NEED FOR CONTINUING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR HAITI AND PROGRESS IN JUSTICE REFORM. AT A SUBSEQUENT PRESS OPPORTUNITY, THE AMBASSADOR REITERATED OUR INTEREST IN CLEAN ELECTIONS AND IPR PROTECTION, AND NOTED THAT U.S.-GODR COUNTER-NARCOTICS COOPERATION IS EXCELLENT. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) AMBASSADOR MANATT MET ON JANUARY 5 AT THE DOMINICAN SENATE WITH SENATE PRESIDENT RAMON ALBURQUERQUE AND NINE OTHER SENATORS, INCLUDING PRD VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MILAGROS ORTIZ BOSCH, JOSE ABINADER (SANTIAGO), FERNANDO ALVAREZ (VALVERDE), GINETTE BOURNIGAL (PUERTO PLATA), SENATE VICE PRESIDENT JESUS VASQUEZ (MARIA TRINIDAD SANCHEZ), VINCENTE SANCHEZ BARET (SANCHEZ RAMIRIZ), IVAN RONDON (HATO MAYOR), JOSE GONZALEZ (BARAHONA), AND DAGOBERTO RODRIGUEZ (INDEPENDENCIA). ALL ARE MEMBERS OF THE PRD-DOMINATED "ACCORD OF SANTO DOMINGO" GROUP.

3. THE AMBASSADOR COMPLIMENTED THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC ON RECENT ADVANCES IN DEMOCRACY AND SAID THAT THE U.S. HOPES TO SEE FREE, FAIR AND TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS ON MAY 16. THE SENATORS AGREED THAT CLEAN ELECTIONS ARE A PRIORITY AND WELCOMED ANY TECHNICAL OR FINANCIAL SUPPORT THAT THE U.S. MIGHT OFFER TO ASSURE SUCCESS. SEVERAL SENATORS EXPRESSED THEIR MISTRUST OF THE PLD AND PRESIDENT FERNANDEZ. ALVAREZ DEPLORED GODR/PLD ATTACKS ON THE CENTRAL ELECTORAL BOARD (JCE) AND SAID CONTINUED VIGILANCE IS NEEDED. VASQUEZ SAID THAT INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE. HE ALSO CASTIGATED THE GODR FOR ITS CONTINUED USE OF GOVERNMENT RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF PLD CANDIDATE DANILO MEDINA.

4. (U) SEVERAL SENATORS COMMENTED ON THE STATUS AND ROLE OF THE DOMINICAN CONGRESS. ORTIZ BOSCH SAID THAT PRIOR TO 1994, THE CONGRESS HAD NO REAL INFLUENCE, BUT NOW IS SLOWLY BECOMING A REAL LEGISLATURE. SHE AND OTHERS AGREED THAT WHILE THERE IS A ROLE FOR CONGRESS, THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH STILL HAS A HUGE ADVANTAGE, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO CONTROL OVER GOVERNMENT SPENDING. ALVAREZ ESTIMATED THAT THE GODR HAS DIRECT CONTROL OVER 92 PERCENT OF THE BUDGET, WHILE THE SENATE MUST GET BY ON

US\$10 10 MILLION ANNUALLY, OR JUST 0.03 PERCENT OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET. THEY WERE POSITIVE ABOUT AN INCREASE IN JUDICIAL AUTONOMY DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS, BUT CRITICAL OF GODR FUNDING OF THE JUSTICE SECTOR. ALVAREZ SAID THAT 32 BADLY NEEDED NEW COURTS COULD NOT BE CONSTRUCTED BECAUSE THE GODR HAD CUT REQUESTED FUNDING BY NEARLY 50 PERCENT.

5. (U) SENATOR RONDON RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE PENDING SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM LAW AND SAID THAT ANY TECHNICAL ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE THE U.S. COULD PROVIDE WOULD BE VERY MUCH APPRECIATED. HE NOTED THAT THE CURRENT SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM ONLY COVERS 6 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. SENATOR RODRIGUEZ SAID THAT THE SITUATION IN HAITI IS A TREMENDOUS PROBLEM FOR THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, PARTICULARLY IN BORDER PROVINCES SUCH AS HIS. HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR CONTINUING U.S AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR HAITI.

6. THE AMBASSADOR THEN RAISED THE ISSUE OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS, NOTING THAT WE HOPE TO SOON SEE DOMINICAN LEGISLATION THAT COMPLIES WITH INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS SUCH AS TRIPS. ALBURQUERQUE RESPONDED IN A SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVE MANNER THAT IT IS THE INTENT AND "SPIRIT" OF THE CONGRESS TO PASS LEGISLATION THAT IS FULLY TRIPS-COMPLIANT. HE NOTED THAT THE INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY (PATENT) BILL IS NOW UNDER CONSIDERATION BY THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, BUT SAID, AS HE HAS ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS THAT HE WILL MAKE SURE THAT THE FINAL RESULT PROTECTS "CREATIVITY".

7. (U) THE SENATORS RESPONDED VERY ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO THE AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO FACILITATE A VISIT TO THE U.S. BY DOMINICAN LEGISLATORS TO WITNESS PREPARATIONS FOR THE U.S. ELECTIONS AND TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS WITH THEIR U.S. COUNTERPARTS. ALBURQUERQUE REMARKED THAT ALL 30 MEMBERS OF THE SENATE WOULD WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH AN EVENT.

8. (U) FOLLOWING THE MEETING, THE AMBASSADOR AND ALBURQUERQUE HELD A BRIEF PRESS CONFERENCE. RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS FROM A HORDE OF REPORTERS, THE AMBASSADOR REITERATED THE POINTS HE HAD MADE TO THE SENATORS ON IPR AND ELECTIONS. HE ALSO CONGRATULATED THE GODR FOR ITS EXCELLENT SUPPORT OF COUNTER-NARCOTICS PROGRAMS, BUT WARNED THAT THIS IS A LONG-TERM EFFORT.
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Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir
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