

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT
AT THE NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST**

Washington, 4 February 2010

Mr President,
Congressmen and Congresswomen,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you,

Thank you for inviting me to participate, on behalf of my country, on behalf of Spain, in one of the events of the greatest tradition and symbolism in American society.

And with your permission I am going to speak to you in Spanish, in the language that was first used to pray to the God Evangel on this land.

No one knows better than you the value of religious freedom.

Your ancestors fled from domination and so that their freedom was never grabbed away from them they founded this country.

One Nation, the United States, created under democracy.

That has not ceased to grow from its strength.

That abolished slavery, recognised equality to vote, and banned discrimination.

That has opened up pluralism, tolerance, respect for all options and beliefs...

These were admirable conquests, admirable in the eyes of a democrat who lives in one of the oldest Nations of the globe: Spain.

A Nation that is also diverse, that was forged in diversity and renewed by its diversity.

A Nation that is also American. “the most multicultural of the lands of Europe. The Celtic and Iberian, Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Jewish, Arab and Christian Spain” – *above all Christian* – as portrayed by Carlos Fuentes of Latin America.

Our two countries owe a great deal to those who have come from outside. Without them we would not understand one another, without those who throughout time have arrived in our land and living together they have become *us*, what we are.

Allow me to read you a passage from the Bible, from Chapter 24 of Deuteronomy:

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or a foreigner living in one of the towns of your country.

Pay him his wages that same day before sunset because he is poor and is counting on it.

We must not fail to ensure the successful integration of those who have come to work and to live in our countries.

Neither must we fail to protect those who we cannot welcome amongst us, and who suffer hunger and misery in so many places on Earth.

Such as the people who live in Haiti whose misfortune has moved us to make an enormous gesture of solidarity.

It is a solidarity that reconciles us with our own condition of human beings who are vulnerable and fraternal. And that should not evaporate into obscurity

I also want to assert the most heartfelt commitment to those men and women in our societies who, in these difficult times, are suffering from being out of work.

All of them must know that there is no task, as leaders of our countries, for which we feel more responsible; there is no task that gnaws away at us more than that of helping to create employment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My prayer today is to also restore the right of each person, anywhere in the world, for their moral autonomy, for their own search for the best.

My prayer today is to restore freedom for all to live their own lives, to live with a loved one and to create and care for their home environment, deserving respect for it.

Freedom is civil truth, common truth. It is that which makes us real and true as people and as citizens, because it enables each individual to look fate in the face and to seek the real truth.

But tolerance is far more than acceptance of the other: it is to discover, to know and recognise the other.

Ignorance of the other is at the root of conflicts that threaten humanity and put our future in danger.

Hatred is born of ignorance and harmony is built on knowledge.

It is the same for peace.

In the past, Spain was an example of coexistence between the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

And today dialogue, the coexistence of cultures and the *Alliance of Civilisations* defends religious tolerance in the world and respect for differences.

We do this with the same conviction with which we reject statements ruling out moral superiority, absolutism or intransigent fundamentalism.

The United States is aware, as indeed Spain is aware, that the spurious use of religious faith to justify violence can be hugely destructive.

And what better occasion than this Prayer Breakfast for us to remember together, for us to honour together, our victims of terrorism.

Because, also together, we defend freedom when and where it is seen to be threatened.

Mr President, Congressmen and Congresswomen; Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whether it has a transcendent or civic dimension, freedom is always the foundation of hope, of hope for the future.

“For freedom, as well as for honor, - as written in Don Quixote, the most important literary work in Spanish – one can and should risk one’s life while captivity is the greatest evil that can befall men.

Freedom is one of the most precious gifts heaven has bestowed upon man ...”

And [we hope] that that gift should continue to illuminate America and all the peoples of the earth.