

International Commemoration Service, Auditorio de Tenerife, March 27, 2007

Speech by Mr. Ricardo Melchior, President of the Cabildo de Tenerife

On this day three decades ago our island was confronted with an event that was as sad as it was unexpected. Although a long time has passed since that afternoon when Tenerife and the rest of the world had to come to terms with such misfortune, it is still alive in our memory and has left a deeply felt scar. Nobody could ever have imagined that a situation of this kind would deeply touch our hearts - least of all, the passengers who were travelling on both planes that day.

Many lost their lives, while those who survived, despite the magnitude of the catastrophe, have been forced ever since to live with the constant reminder of an event in which they never imagined they would be involved. The circumstances are the same for the families of the victims, who have invited us to this event to pay tribute to them and to pay our respects to them and show our consideration.

I am convinced that it is extremely difficult to face up to a destiny of this kind. Perhaps, people with less integrity would have chosen to forget in order to ease their pain and help them to carry on. However, the members of the association have chosen to keep alive the memory of their relatives, those who were dear to them and who one day disappeared forever due to a tragedy.

For this reason, today we are going to unveil a monument where justice will be done to their memory, so that from now on, when people come to see it, it will inspire them to dedicate a thought or even a prayer. This work, created with skill and affectionate dedication, represents much more than art and it transmits a message of hope to us with its stairway leading up to heaven.

The Tenerife Island Government, as the institution representing the island, has accepted with pleasure the official handing over of the sculpture to us by its promoters and was just as pleased to participate in its installation at a carefully chosen site. We are sure that Mesa Mota meets all the conditions both in location and geographical characteristics so that it will fulfil its mission as a symbol of everyone's sentiments.

On a day like this, when memories become the main protagonist, I would like to recall the response of all the people of Tenerife to the accident on 27 March 1977. Without doubt, it was a display of solidarity against adversity and altruistic devotion in an attempt to alleviate as far as possible the enormous damage produced by the catastrophe. The people of this island and its institutions did their utmost to help those who needed it most at the time and to attend as best they could to the requests that came from beyond our frontiers.

Unfortunately Tenerife was directly implicated in one of the saddest events ever to occur and it could not remain impassive. All the resources available on the island back then were mobilised. From the people and organisations who volunteered their help to the health services, the Armed Forces, the police forces and the island's institutions, nobody hesitated to join in the common effort to restore the situation to normal, a situation which had taken us all by surprise.

It was an example that we wished we had never been forced to set but we were driven to it by the circumstances. Today we would like to repeat that kind of behaviour by paying tribute to those who unfortunately met the end of their days on the island. They remain in our memories and to their families we offer our recognition and sincere friendship.

Thank you very much.

address: p.o. box 222 NL-2100 AE Heemstede

telephone: +31 20 658 06 28

bank: ABN AMRO N° 6227 87500

C.o.C.: registered in Amsterdam 341.68584

email: info@tenerife-memorial.org

internet: www.tenerife-memorial.org