

PRESIDENT REAGAN ON FOREIGN ASSISTANCE



President Reagan strongly supported foreign assistance as a critical tool in his commitment to “peace through strength” and the fight for freedom around the world. He opposed those in Congress who sought to reduce or eliminate it, leaving a distinguished legacy in word and deed.

★ ★ ★ REAGAN IN HIS OWN WORDS ★ ★ ★

“The ultimate importance to the United States of our security and development assistance programs cannot be exaggerated.”¹

“You know the excuses: We can’t afford foreign aid anymore, or we’re wasting money pouring it into these poor countries, or we can’t buy friends—other countries just take the money and dislike us for giving it. Well, all these excuses are just that, excuses—and they’re dead wrong.”²

“Our economic development aid goes to those same countries in the developing world that provide some...of the market for our merchandise exports.”³

“Foreign aid suffers from a lack of domestic constituency, in large part because the results of the programs are often not immediately visible and self-evident. Properly conceived and efficiently administered, however, security assistance programs, an essential complement to our defense effort, directly enhance the security of the United States. Development assistance also contributes to this effort by supplementing the indigenous efforts of recipients to achieve economic growth and meet the basic needs of their peoples. Progress in both of these areas will contribute to regional stability and to a more peaceful world, both of which are central U.S. policy objectives.”⁴

“Our national interests are inextricably tied to the security and development of our friends and allies.”⁵

★ ★ ★ REAGAN’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS ★ ★ ★

- Reagan created the National Endowment for Democracy, working with Congress, “to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities.”⁶
- Every year, Reagan asked for more funding for foreign assistance than Congress was willing to spend. While he was president, the International Affairs Budget reached its highest amount as a percentage of GDP in the last 40 years.⁷
- Under President Reagan, strengthening foreign assistance was always part of our larger strategy for expanding freedom, supporting our strategic allies like Israel and Jordan, encouraging robust economic growth, and reducing corruption.
- Reagan called the U.S. humanitarian response to the famine in Africa in 1983-85 “in the best tradition of American values and ideals.” He signed a bill providing \$1 billion in emergency aid while calling for flexibility to ensure it was used effectively.⁸
- Reagan supported spending .6% of GDP on foreign assistance. Today, we spend half of that.⁹

1. [Statement](#), December 29, 1981.

2. [White House Remarks](#), October 21, 1987.

3. [White House Remarks](#), October 21, 1987.

4. [Statement](#), December 29, 1981.

5. [Statement](#), December 29, 1981.

6. [Address to Members of the British Parliament](#), June 8, 1982.

7. [OMB Historical Tables 5.6 and 10.1](#).

8. [Statement on Signing the African Famine Relief Bill](#), April 5, 1985.

9. [OMB Historical Tables 5.6 and 10.1](#).