

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



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Distinguished Lecture

A NEW MOMENT OF CHANGE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE: *REALITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you, Mr. Francis, Professor Reddock and Professor Shaw, for your very gracious introduction. I am pleased and honoured to have been invited by the University of the West Indies to deliver this Distinguished Lecture. I am particularly grateful to the Principal of the St. Augustine Campus, Professor Clem Sankat for his kind invitation and warm hospitality, as I am to his colleagues, Professor Patrick Watson, Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) and Professor Tim Shaw, Director of the Institute of International Relations, as well as Ms. Betty McComie of the Principal's Office and Ms. Patricia Sampson of SALISES, for all that they have done to make this lecture a reality.

And I thank you all for being here this evening.

Introduction

It is perhaps an understatement to say that we are at an interesting moment in regional, hemispheric and global affairs. The world is confronted with a historically unprecedented combination of a global economic crisis, food insecurity, volatile oil prices, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, including the recent escalation of hostilities in Gaza, the war in Afghanistan, political and governance challenges in some countries in Africa and the looming environmental crisis. That is the environment in which we live.

In the Americas specifically, we are bearing witness to ideological differences and simmering socio-political tensions in Latin America, especially in the Andean sub-region, divergent views on development, inter-state relations and integration dynamics in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Central America, the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and the incredibly high expectations surrounding the election of

Barack Obama as the 44th and first African-American President of the United States of America.

When historians, in 30 or 40 years from now, look back at this period in the history of the Western Hemisphere, I am sure that they will characterize this moment as a watershed, symbolizing the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. It is up to us to determine now what that new beginning will lead to.

All of the above factors and more will influence, in varying degrees, the tone of the ongoing political dialogue among nations. And they will certainly impact on the discussions and final outcome of the 5th Summit of the Americas, which will take place here in Trinidad and Tobago, in less than three months' time, on April 17-19, 2009.

It is therefore in this context of global challenges and fundamental changes taking place in the hemisphere that I have entitled this lecture, "*A New Moment of Change in the Western Hemisphere: Realities and Opportunities*".

I shall now attempt to present an overview of the geopolitics of the Americas, including suggesting a few strategic directions for CARICOM, with the hope of generating discussion on what we should expect from the forthcoming 5th Summit of the Americas.

The Global Context

We all know that the global order is changing and that advances in technology are contributing to this process in a way that makes it difficult for some countries to catch up and to be part of the global economy in a meaningful way. Bilateral and multilateral relations are constantly being modified and in the post-Cold War world of the early 21st century, new state actors are taking prominence on the international stage.

Across politics, economics, culture and military strength, a new world order is emerging. Russia is reasserting itself and Brazil, India and China, the more advanced developing nations, are increasingly forces to be reckoned with. These so-called BRICs, as well as South Africa, are now major political and economic players in their respective regions and in international forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). This has already been clearly recognized by the most developed economies of the G7.

As traditional patterns of foreign policy orientation and trading relations are changing across the globe, the interest of China and India, for example, in Latin America and the Caribbean is also having a positive impact on the growth of Latin American and Caribbean economies. It is interesting to note that China, for instance, has just joined the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), indications of China's clear and focused attention on cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean. It is also worthy to note that China has published for the first time, in November 2008, following earlier briefs on Europe and Africa, its policy paper on Latin American and the Caribbean.

Taken with the fact that Russia too is raising its profile in the region and the interest of non-traditional players, these new developments provide for mutually advantageous opportunities in the diversification of political and economic cooperation Latin America and the Caribbean. But they potentially also pose risks to stability in the Western Hemisphere if not handled with sensitivity and diplomatic dexterity.

To add complexity to the emerging picture, it is blindingly obvious that the global financial crisis will in some form affect most, if not all, countries in the Americas. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular, the fallout from the economic meltdown will exacerbate existing structural weaknesses and distortions, which could lead to economic downturn, an unwelcome increase in poverty and political instability.

All countries of the region are expected to record declines in foreign direct investment. Those CARICOM and Central American countries heavily dependent on tourism and remittances will witness their economies shrinking, resulting in closure of businesses and higher unemployment. Commodity prices are expected to suffer and export production in certain countries will fall. All this will obviously result in reduced revenues for Governments, impacting on their capacity to deliver on social goods, especially in education and health care.

In a similar fashion, the effects of climate change, along with the already proven higher incidence and intensity of hurricanes and other natural disasters, could have catastrophic effects on all the countries of the region, but particularly on the islands of the Caribbean and those countries with low-lying coastlines.

Under these circumstances, Governments in the region will be challenged to maintain current rates of economic growth and acceptable levels of stability and security. If allowed to worsen unabated, the effects of the economic crisis and global warming together could result in a long, downward economic spiral, with increased unemployment and poverty, rural degradation, loss of food production, increased migration, worse crime and consequently, social unrest, conflict and political instability. And it is the small developing states of Latin America and the Caribbean region that are most vulnerable, given the relative weaknesses in their political, governance and economic structures.

The Western Hemisphere

Clearly the world is, as ever, in a state of flux. With regard to the Western Hemisphere, there are three fundamental changes taking place that I wish to address.

Firstly, some 30 years ago in Latin America, there were still dictatorships. Since then Latin America has gone through a democratization process that has brought to the fore different ideological, political, economic and social interests within and among countries and sub-regions. Democracy has also created political space for previously marginalized groups in society, such as women, youth and indigenous people.

Secondly, more recently, since 2006, we have witnessed a significant turnover, through democratic means, in the political leadership of the hemisphere, with more than 20 countries undergoing general elections, eight of them in CARICOM. During this period, roughly two-thirds of the peoples of the Americas have been involved in some sort of electoral process.

Thirdly, although some progress has been made, the Latin American and Caribbean region, despite reasonable economic growth, continues to have unacceptable high levels of poverty. Latin America itself has the highest levels of income inequality in the world and some 220 million people live on less than US\$2 a day. The resulting sense of hopelessness, marginalization and exclusion is a key contributing factor to insecurity in the region.

All of the above three factors indicate that democracy does not begin and end with elections alone and that the consolidation of democracy is clearly a work in progress. What is worrying is that the relative political and economic gains over the last two decades might now be in danger of being dramatically eroded by the global financial crisis and political differences, as well as by more specific challenges arising from threats to food and energy security, the environmental crisis, and the violence associated with organized crime, youth gangs, and the illegal trade in drugs and firearms.

I wish at this point to state unequivocally that the OAS leadership is not concerned with ideological differences between left and right in Latin America and the Caribbean. Every democratically elected government has the right to pursue those policies it deems in accordance with its people's wishes. The OAS is concerned with pursuing work on its four pillars – democratic governance, human rights, multidimensional security and sustainable development – in support of the social and economic aspirations of its member states and a strengthened and more united hemisphere.

I believe however that the diversity in objectives and interests in terms of how to organize societies, how to mobilize forces in societies, how to relate to neighbouring states and other countries in the Western Hemisphere and beyond, has created a new, sometimes challenging, political landscape.

Indeed, many believe that today Latin America and the Caribbean are marked by the highest level of tension and insecurity within and between nations since the end of the Cold War.

More than ever, the origins of these problems are intra-state or domestic. That is, they are related to social, environmental and economic difficulties, such as in Haiti; ethnic divisions, such as those arising from the new-found political power of the indigenous people of Bolivia and conflict with traditional elites; and the search for a new model of “participatory democracy” as opposed to more conventional “representative democracy”, to transfer power from political elites to the people, such as in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

This does not mean however that inter-state controversies and conflicts have completely vanished. The OAS has still, regrettably, not been able to broker the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Colombia. And we still have many border and maritime disputes to deal with.

Thus far, the inability to find the middle ground in some countries is cause for continuing concern that existing social and political fault lines could lead to more extreme fractures within and between countries, with obvious implications for democracy, regional stability and the hemispheric integration process.

At this point though, we should perhaps be asking ourselves if part of the current dynamics of inter-state relations in the Western Hemisphere is related to the global search for a multi-polar political architecture.

In this respect, we would do well to take note of not only the role of the OAS as the premier hemispheric forum for political dialogue, consensus building and concerted action, but also the complementary role of sub-regional integration systems, such as CARICOM, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), the Andean Community (CAN) and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), as building blocks of wider hemispheric unity.

In addition, we have the overlapping membership of various regional processes, such as the Rio Group, the South American Union (UNASUR), the Ibero-American Summit, and the Latin American and Caribbean Summit (CALC) on Integration and Development, held last month in Bahia, Brazil, all in the context of what is being called “multiple regionalisms”. In the latter configurations, one can discern the leadership of Brazil, as that country pursues a regional and international agenda, based on what is increasingly appearing to be a formulation of a new and independent foreign policy that will have important implications for hemispheric relations as a whole.

The USA and the Americas

We in the Caribbean, like most people in the hemisphere, hope and expect that the arrival of President Barack Obama will present new opportunities for enhanced cooperation and engagement in securing a more stable political and security environment in the Americas. Sub-regions and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are anticipating that a new and revitalized relationship between the United States and the rest of the hemisphere will be established.

Whether or not we consider the past eight years of US foreign policy towards the Western Hemisphere as lost years, as some have stated, there is a logical and natural expectation that, with the coming of a new administration, it will not be business as usual.

I expect that diplomatic relations between the United States and Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela will evolve positively. I also hope that, in addition, priority will be given by the Obama administration to the most threatening developments that can

jeopardize security and stability in the Western Hemisphere. This process can in turn be enhanced by the actions of the sub-regions in making a convincing case with concrete analysis and initiatives to create opportunities for structural engagement at the highest political levels.

One issue that appears set to receive more attention from President Obama and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton is Cuba's place in the hemisphere. The 50th anniversary of the Revolution has been celebrated, representing something of a triumph for Cuba in the face of the embargo of several US administrations. In November, Cuba was admitted to the Rio Group and there are calls across the hemisphere, especially by South American and CARICOM leaders, for President Obama to lift the US embargo on Cuba. President Obama said in his campaign that he would remove the restrictions on Cuban Americans travelling to Cuba and sending remittances to relatives. These would obviously be very positive first steps in the establishment of a new policy on Cuba and hopefully, dialogue with Cuba.

The message is loud and clear: Cuba is being re-integrated into the Latin America and Caribbean family. At some stage too, Cuba would be expected to be re-admitted to the hemispheric family of nations by resuming its seat in the OAS.

In my view, it is important to start the discussions on how to re-engage with Cuba. This will however depend, in the first instance, on the indications of the Cuban Government – and let me insert here that many speak for Cuba, but it is important to hear from Cubans themselves - and those of the 34 other OAS members. From my perspective, such an approach should be step-by-step and a principled one - step-by-step, because what we are talking about is not going to happen overnight; it is a process and there are many issues that need to be addressed, before Cuba can resume its rightful place in the OAS; principled, because for all the members of the OAS, issues of multiparty democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the cornerstone of the democratic framework of governance and are embedded in the Inter-American Democratic Charter to which all 34 active member states have signed on.

In this respect, I believe that it is important for the OAS to receive a mandate to engage officially with Cuba and, for that purpose, establish, at the right time, a presence in Havana. Maybe it is advisable to start these communications and consultations in areas that are not potentially conflictive, such as natural disasters, culture, music and education. Indeed, it appears that consultations on this matter are on-going among member states as recently evidenced at regional and sub-regional forums. As such is quite possible that this issue may emerge, in one way or the other, at the upcoming Summit of the Americas and at the next OAS General Assembly in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, from May 31 to June 2, 2009.

The expectations of the region with regard to US relations with Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba and with Latin America and the Caribbean in general may not be wholly met at the forthcoming 5th Summit of the Americas. But it is anticipated that the United States will seize the opportunity to make a major statement on improving relations

with the rest of the hemisphere in Port of Spain, especially on issues such as development and the fight against poverty, the pending approval of the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama, global warming and the effects of climate change, organized crime, narco-trafficking, the illegal trafficking in arms, deportees and security in general.

Beyond the emotion of President Obama's election and inauguration, there is real cause for optimism, as both the President and his Secretary of State have embraced 'smart power'. In this respect, I am sure that they will implement one of the key recommendations of the Commission on Smart Power, under the auspices of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, that is, to "invest in a new multilateralism" by reinvigorating the alliances, partnerships and institutions that allow the United States to address numerous hazards at once without having to build a consensus from scratch to respond to every new challenge. The OAS and the hemisphere as a whole can only benefit immeasurably from such an approach.

CARICOM

Now, before I make more specific mention of the 5th Summit of the Americas, I would like to say a few words about CARICOM and its place in the hemisphere.

Most of us in the Caribbean are excited about the election of President Obama and many of us believe that this historic and landmark election will have ripple effects on the political culture of our sub-region. I can only hope that President Obama's message of unity and of confidence in individual and collective responsibilities will so resonate in the Caribbean that we ourselves, citizens and politicians, seize the moment to work together for change and towards a vision that can move and modernize societies, improve transparency and accountability across divisions based on race, religion, and class.

Many believe that with Mr. Obama's election, Caribbean concerns and priorities will be easier to communicate, but here caution is a wise word. With this administration, I believe that we will only appear on the radar screen if we have convincing arguments that our interests and concerns are also theirs. We do not enter that environment simply because of perceptions of shared ethnicity or a history of exploitation. That is too simplistic and demeaning to international politics. We have to pursue a new relationship based on mutual respect and mutual interests.

What is required for Caribbean interests to be recognized is to adopt an approach that is characterized by professionalism, seriousness and strategic thinking. We have to understand the underlying political dynamics beyond our own interests. We have to be realistic in terms of geopolitics and the existing competition for time, attention, action and assistance, especially of the financial kind. CARICOM will therefore have to make a compelling case to the new US administration that strategically, politically and for reasons of security, the United States should have a stronger and more meaningful engagement with our 15-nation bloc. What needs to be demonstrated is that CARICOM's interests and needs are also of strategic importance to the United States of America.

Moreover, in light of hemispheric and global developments, at a time when historical political relations and trade preferences are fading out, and in the context of the overlapping membership of CARICOM member states in other regional and sub-regional groupings, it is of critical importance for CARICOM leaders to revisit the Community's integration objectives. It is evident that the nature and scope of the integration process have changed and that new dimensions have been added. CARICOM, consequently, needs to re-position itself strategically.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Caribbean Community needs to intensify its integration process, but this will require bold decisions from member states and one of the thorny issues seems to be how much of national sovereignty can be relinquished to the regional framework. What needs to be taken into account here is that member states have to realize that, where we create a regional entity (geographically and economically), there is no other option than a regional approach. In that context, sovereignty will be shifted from the national level to the regional, without losing the ability of each member state to influence or insert the national interest in regional foreign policy, something I call "regional sovereignty" and Norman Girvan calls "collective sovereignty".

I am aware of the many suggestions made over the past couple of months to revitalize the structures, operations and policy framework of the Caribbean Community, ranging from governance arrangements, CARICOM quasi cabinet positions, modernizing the Secretariat, to the role and mandate of the Secretary General. These are all good suggestions, but I do not believe in a bits and pieces approach. Perhaps we need a new initiative and approach altogether.

Sixteen years after the publication of "Time for Action", the Report of the West Indian Commission, and taking into consideration the patchy record of implementation of its recommendations, along with the reports of stresses and strains affecting the achievement of the Single Market, it is time for a reassessment and a new call to action. Perhaps "Time for Action" needs to be revisited. CARICOM needs to be pro-active, and not responsive, needs to make policy on the basis of sound intelligence and subsequent analysis and implement collectively. In this respect, I look forward to the results of the Special Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, to be held in Barbados at the end of this month. I trust that sage counsel, judicious thought and decisiveness will prevail.

While I am on the subject of CARICOM, permit me to say a few words about our newest member state, Haiti.

Since the 2006 elections, critical achievements have been realized. There is a relatively stable political climate, due to President Préval's insistence on an inclusive approach to governance. There is consequently a better working relationship between the legislative and executive authorities and broader civil society and private sector engagement.

There is now a plan for development, underpinned by international solidarity and a unique hemispheric commitment, as demonstrated in the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) and in the pledges for support that have been made. Now the focus has to be on social and economic development, job creation, income generation, and a structural approach to solving environmental problems. Haiti needs also to focus on education and health, and this is where CARICOM can perhaps offer most help.

I would hope that CARICOM political leaders, representatives from civil society and the media would visit Haiti on a more regular basis, so as to acquire a better understanding of the development challenges this country is facing. I believe that Haiti should not be portrayed always as a country in perpetual crisis, but also be seen as a land with opportunities.

In this respect, I am pleased to announce a new partnership the OAS has facilitated between the University of the West Indies and two major Haitian universities, the State University of Haiti and Quisqueya University, which seeks to widen cooperation among institutions of higher learning and facilitate Haiti's integration into CARICOM. In this initial phase, the tripartite collaboration is expected to establish mechanisms to further collaboration through the exchange of students and faculty as well as joint research and study programmes.

As far as CARICOM and the hemisphere are concerned, I believe that CARICOM countries can play a stronger role in the OAS as the key point of entry for CARICOM in inter-American affairs. The majority of the problems facing the hemisphere are cross-border in nature and, as such, require a multilateral framework to be effectively dealt with. For the small CARICOM member states with limited human, technical and financial resources, multilateral diplomacy has obvious advantages in terms of the pooling of resources and the search for appropriate solutions to multiple challenges through collective action.

Of course, all CARICOM countries already benefit from OAS cooperation programmes and scholarships. But I would now suggest that they need to focus more on the political functions of the OAS. CARICOM countries can bring important assets to the OAS, such as a strong, embedded democratic tradition, respect for human rights, active civil society engagement, social inclusion and non-discrimination in general. This is not to be complacent about governance in CARICOM, but simply to demonstrate that we have recognized strengths and that we need not always leave ourselves open to suggestions that we are only interested in taking and not giving. We have much to offer the inter-American system. A few countries and some individuals have already proven this. But there is so much more that we can do, which would go a far way towards enhancing our stature in the hemisphere and winning better understanding of our particular challenges and, ultimately, greater respect and leadership in the Americas.

The convening of the first Summit of the Americas in the Caribbean will therefore provide CARICOM with an ideal opportunity to take centre stage in the Summits process and to put its interests on the table. I would recommend a pragmatic approach and a focus

on a limited number of issues that go to the heart of CARICOM's political and economic well being: trade and tourism, security, natural disasters, energy security, all underpinned by a genuine desire to improve and strengthen the historical and friendly relations between the sub-region and the rest of the hemisphere, based on mutual respect, understanding and continued engagement. I expect that the forthcoming Inter-Sessional Meeting of CARICOM Heads, which will be held in Belize in March, will fine-tune the Community's strategy for engagement with the rest of the hemisphere at the April Summit.

The 5th Summit of the Americas

In this context, I wish to congratulate the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and his Government, on the bold decision to offer to host the next Summit of the Americas.

Of course, when the offer was made a few years ago, no one could have anticipated the financial crisis and other challenges before us. Such is the nature of international affairs. But then again, very few people could have foreseen the historic changes that have recently taken place in the United States and indeed, in other countries of the hemisphere. It is tempting to think that we are perhaps right now living through one of those landmark moments of change that occur in history and that the stars may very well be aligned in the political firmament for a successful 5th Summit.

I have been assured that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is leaving nothing to chance. Much work has been done and much more remains to be done, especially with regard to logistics and security. I have no doubt that the Government is accelerating its timeline to put everything in place for a successful Summit.

The OAS is doing all that it is being asked to do and I am pleased to reaffirm our commitment to supporting the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure the success of the Summit. We can, of course, always do more if called upon. Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza will be visiting Trinidad and Tobago in the first week of February to meet with authorities of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to receive an update on the status of preparations as well as to discuss some of the more pressing issues in preparation for the important gathering of hemispheric leaders.

On the substantive side, the Summit will have the theme, "***Securing Our Citizens' Future by Promoting Human Prosperity, Energy Security and Environmental Sustainability***". The multilateral negotiation of the Summit's Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain is progressing, even as these key themes are being impacted by the current climate of financial crisis and uncertainty.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is quite correctly stressing that the Summit should be people-centered and results-oriented. In this respect, the integrity and credibility of the process will depend to a large extent on what is decided with regard to issues of coordination, implementation, financing, institutionalization and regularization.

My own view is that the Summit should be institutionalized within the OAS and held every two or four years as a strengthened inter-American mechanism and substantive policy platform of the OAS General Assembly. The Summit process can also make use of the existing dialogue architecture of the inter-American system, building on OAS mechanisms for follow-up and implementation. I also see the need for joint meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Finance and therefore it may be useful to consider the back-to-back holding of the OAS General Assembly and the IDB Annual Meeting. Most critically, financing for Summit mandates should be addressed through the creation of special Summit windows at the IDB and the sub-regional development banks.

But whatever the recommendations and however finely crafted the Summit Declaration, the true success of the Summit will be measured by the tone and the quality of the dialogue among the hemisphere's leaders, many of whom were not at the last Summit in Argentina in 2005. As such, the OAS leadership is committed to supporting the diplomatic efforts of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to create in advance the right political atmosphere for a positive and constructive encounter of leaders. The Government recognizes that a lot of diplomatic legwork needs to be done and, undoubtedly, the warmth of the 'Trinbagonian' welcome and the excellence of the arrangements will underwrite the success of these efforts.

I myself hope that the different countries of the hemisphere will focus on what is common, on what binds them together and on what can foster unity, rather than on what divides the hemisphere, in a true spirit of partnership and re-engagement.

In this respect, I should underline the importance of engaging with civil society, the youth and the private sector in the process of creating an enhanced culture of dialogue for development. The OAS is also supporting efforts leading up to the Summit, whereby there will be a Youth Forum, a Civil Society Forum and a Private Sector Forum, out of which will emanate recommendations to the leaders. For civil society, as a whole, including the youth and the private sector, as well as trade unions and other functional groups, needs to play a structured role in processes such as the Summit, with opportunities established for regular dialogue to create ownership and to foster a sense of shared and collective responsibility.

Conclusion

We thus observe fundamental developments and changes in the Western Hemisphere: an enhancement of democracy in Latin America; the election of new political leaders with independent ideas and initiatives on democracy, development and security; the election of a new political leader in the USA with the promise of momentous change; and the impact of a severe financial crisis, on top of other developmental challenges, which underlines the fragility of the hemispheric scenario.

All these realities demand a new vision for the Americas, one that will provide hope and avenues for meaningful change and commitment to the causes of the peoples of

this hemisphere. Leaders have to commit through concrete initiatives to a hemispheric partnership for holistic development, focusing on the human potential, advocating education for development which will improve the economic and security environment, creating stability and prosperity in societies.

I would also like to look forward to an intensification of sub-regional integration processes as the basis of the hemispheric framework for political and economic cooperation. In this regard, I believe it is of strategic importance to intensify cooperation and communication between CARICOM and the Central American Integration System.

CARICOM will have to revisit its strategic integration objectives in light of the global, hemispheric and internal dynamics that have influenced the political, economic and social environment, and which have to be taken into account in charting a new course for further integration.

We need also to strengthen and institutionalize existing dialogue structures in the inter-American system. CARICOM nations should be much more engaged in the inter-American system, especially in the OAS, where they represent almost 45% of the membership, and together with Central America achieve a representation nearing 65%. I am convinced that CARICOM's contribution to the OAS can benefit other member states in areas such as democracy, human right, electoral processes, governance, state institutions and civil society at large.

The 5th Summit of the Americas will provide an early and unique opportunity for the elaboration of such a vision, which could encompass a new, concerted and concrete approach to strengthening democracy, hemispheric security, economic prosperity, one that is collective and multilateral in nature and one that is truly transformative in terms of uplifting the morale, confidence and commitment of the people as drivers of progress.

There have been many laudable declarations and mandates emanating from previous Summits of the Americas. This 5th Summit will provide the hemisphere's leaders with a golden opportunity to develop a new hemispheric consensus and to adopt a new strategic agenda for the Americas that relates more directly to the needs and priorities of the peoples of the Americas. Let me voice here a word of caution: if this 5th Summit is not capable of delivering concrete initiatives benefiting in concrete terms the peoples of the Americas through targeted implementation and financing mechanisms supporting governments, private sector and civil society, I am afraid that the relevance and credibility of the Summit process will be damaged.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, let me reaffirm the commitment of the Organization of American States, as the main political platform for consensus building in the hemisphere, to continue supporting democracy, development and security in the Western Hemisphere.

And let me say that while we live in interesting and challenging times, we do have opportunities for change and solutions. This requires a joint effort, a partnership, a

constructive and positive mindset, to put our collective shoulders behind these massive challenges. Peace, harmony, prosperity and stability are shared objectives and responsibilities of all in our societies. We all have to embrace the simple truth that no one, no country alone or in isolation can create and sustain the required conditions for peace, prosperity and stability alone. We all need each other to achieve that bright future with hope, compassion and commitment.

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