



NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
June 8 to 10, 2022
Los Angeles, United States of America

OEA/Ser.E
CA-IX/INF.1/22
16 June 2022
Original: Spanish

PLENARY SESSION OF THE NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC, ALBERTO FERNÁNDEZ

Good afternoon to all of you: the President of the United States; Heads of State and Government; ladies and gentlemen: I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation of all the effort that has gone into organizing this Ninth Summit of the Americas. I regret that not all of us who should have been present are attending it, as the Summit affords an excellent opportunity for debate.

Today, I am called upon to speak in my capacity as pro tempore Chair of CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. In that community we live with diversity and respect for one another. We see things from different angles but share similar concerns in these complex times.

It worries us that Latin America and the Caribbean have emerged from the pandemic as the most indebted region in the developing world. Our external debt burden averages more than 77% of regional Gross Domestic Product. We are worried about the size of the informal labor market, which now exceeds 50%. It distresses us that the “birth lottery” means that those who are born in poorer parts of our region have seen their life expectancy fall to almost 15 years less than that of those born in more well-off districts.

Why do we suffer such hardships when the land we possess enables us to produce more food and energy than many other parts of the world? The answer lies in the global order. The advanced world has established clearly inequitable financial rules. Revenue is concentrated in the hands of a few while millions of human beings remain trapped in poverty.

From the periphery to which those rules condemn us, we in Latin America and the Caribbean observe with grief the suffering endured by fellow peoples. Cuba has faced a blockade for more than six decades, imposed during the “Cold War” and Venezuela is facing another, while a pandemic wreaks havoc with humankind and is costing millions of lives. Such measures seek to curb governments, but in the end do harm to peoples.

We would definitely have preferred a different Summit of the Americas because the silence of those who are absent today reaches out and challenges us. In order to ensure that this does not happen again, I would like it to be established that in future the fact that a country hosts the Summit does not entitle it to impose a “right of admission” on countries that are part of our Hemisphere. Dialogue among those with diverse views is the best way to promote democracy and modernization, and to combat inequality.

President Biden, I am sure now is the time to open up in a fraternal fashion for the sake of shared interests. The years prior to your presidency of the United States of America were marked by policies of the previous administration that did great harm to our region. Now it is time to change those policies and to repair the damage done.

The OAS was used as a gendarme to facilitate a coup d'état in Bolivia; and the United States took over leadership of the Inter-American Development Bank, which had historically always been in Latin American hands. Steps to achieve a rapprochement with Cuba, mediated by Pope Francis, were dismantled, reversing progress achieved under the administration of Barack Obama when you were vice president.

Intercession by Donald Trump's administration in the International Monetary Fund played a decisive role in facilitating an unsustainable level of debt for a much-deteriorated Argentine government. That was done for the sole purpose of preventing what in fact turned out to be the electoral triumph of our political party. Today, the Argentine people as a whole are suffering the consequences of that brazen interference.

At this Summit, we need to analyze the present and project the future in a bid to creatively reconstruct multilateralism. It is not possible to impose a single mindset on the world, demanding harmony in the face of all the dramas it has to contend with.

Here, let me point out the urgent need to rebuild the institutions that were designed precisely to bring us together.

If it wants to be respected and once again become the regional political platform it was intended to be, the OAS must be restructured and those running it today need to be removed immediately.

The regional development bank must, once again and without delay, be headed by Latin America and the Caribbean. The IDB needs to undergo a capitalization process to ensure more and better financing mechanisms.

Nor is it possible in America today to exclude some from welfare, from sustainable financing, from the diversification of production, from technology for social progress, and gender equity. Let us address the challenge of dealing with the underlying causes undermining our ability to live together in democracy.

As you said yesterday, Mr. President, the world is being threatened by opportunists using hate to dishearten peoples hit by the pandemic. Now is the time to confront them.

Latin America and the Caribbean know that integration is a fundamental requirement for development.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted all of us. Negotiated outcomes have to be forged to put an end to a catastrophic war without humiliation, without seeking to dominate, without imposing inhumane geopolitical arrangements or privileges based on violence.

Let us not allow the human tragedy we are witnessing blind us to the truth. I am convinced that we now have an opportunity to opt for the development of a genuine Joint Strategic Association. I wish to propose two major objectives: let us organize -- on a hemispheric scale-- the production of food and proteins and let us develop our enormous potential energy and mineral resources that are vital for the ecological transition.

I come from a humanist country, in which human rights are valued as part of our identity, to be defended at every level. That is why it strikes us as natural to think of forging the sustainable, resilient, and equitable future referred to in the title of this Summit. I have not come to Los Angeles to discuss when we should do this; that time is right now. Hunger is already attacking us. All we must discuss is how to do it.

Faced with so much inequality, we must stress the need for progressive tax policies, even when domestic elites see them as a threat to the quality of democracy. The unexpected income reaped by war to the large food and oil companies and arms manufacturers must be taxed in order to improve income distribution.

What were we elected for, if not to pass measures benefiting the population as a whole, not just a few? There is no “trickle down” theory that has actually worked. Now we need to take note of that fact and act accordingly.

Climate change is also posing new challenges. The Caribbean is feeling the brunt of that and time for finding solutions is running out. We are environmental creditors. We contribute oxygen to the planet and are not responsible for issuing greenhouse gases. The environmental injustice we are facing is destroying our continent. We need to confront ecological transition with enough financial aid to mobilize innovation with social justice.

Argentina is a peace-loving country. We continue claiming via diplomatic channels our legitimate rights over the Malvinas Islands, which are missing from this logo. We continue to have faith in dialogue. Following the tragedy of the pandemic, we see wars as a triumph for human beings’ lack of sensitivity.

Together, in unity, we need to rebuild humanism, which, as His Holiness Pope Francis teaches, begins with the lowliest and then reaches us all. United or dominated; united by a “home we share” or dominated by economic greed; united by multilateralism or dominated by polarization; united by democracy with social inclusion or dominated by individualism and collective misery.

President Biden: I am here to build bridges and knock down walls. As Chair of CELAC, I would like to invite you to participate in our next plenary session. I dream of a day in a fraternally united America in which we commit to ensuring that all human beings inhabiting our continent have a right to bread, land, a roof over their heads, and a decent job.

Thank you very much.