

PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN AT THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

I am delighted to be here in beautiful Mar del Plata at the invitation of our friend President Nestor Kirchner.

Nearly a decade ago our countries gathered in Miami to embrace a co-operative agenda for the Americas. In Quebec City, a little less than five years ago, we came together again and reached a ground-breaking consensus about democracy.

In Quebec City we agreed that only a democratic government - committed to equality, transparency, market principles and honest dealing - only a government like this, accountable to all of its people, could provide our citizens with the tools to foster long-term economic growth while distributing the benefits fairly.

Democracy is a work in progress. And we must work to ensure that all segments of our population can participate in the economic benefits that good governance can bring. We have made significant progress in achieving greater gender equality. But the goal of advancing the participation of women in every segment and every facet of civil society must be consciously and continually pursued. We recognize the unacceptable gap that persists between the very poor and the very rich. We must, all of us, developed and developing nations alike, ensure our public policy is responsive to the need to share our prosperity equitably.

In Canada, as in many countries, those hardest hit by poverty are our indigenous peoples, and we must do far more to address the reality of this deeply human challenge. This is why I applaud the results of the second Indigenous Peoples Summit here in Argentina, for they provide a rich menu of approaches to redress the poverty gap and integrate our indigenous peoples into the economic mainstream. Further, we, as leaders, have the responsibility to encourage and foster the growing relationship among indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. And as important as the separate summits are, I believe we need to foster an ongoing connection between the two.

But perfecting democracy does not complete our task. We also need to strengthen our economies from within. That means not only investing in technology and education, but also in the rule of law.

There is a lot to do. But the work is essential, because the world within and beyond our borders is changing. Nations such as China and India have grown to become industrial powerhouses in the historical equivalent of a snap of the fingers. Their rates of growth have far outstripped our performance in the Americas for some time. We, at this summit, should embrace the challenge of generating the kind of growth that our competitors in other regions are showing - to the benefit of our producers and consumers.

The steps we are taking sub-regionally through Free Trade pacts in our various neighbourhoods are improving our performance. But Free Trade on a hemispheric basis would enable us to leverage our collective size to compete globally and thereby generate jobs at home. A Free Trade Agreement of the Americas is not about making the hemisphere safe for capitalists. It is about providing opportunities for our workers, and better goods and services for our consumers, from the bottom rung of the income ladder to the top.

This is not a geopolitical agenda. It's a people's agenda. A democratic country with a stake in the global economy can grow; it can invest its wealth in essential social programs such as health and education, as well as in technology and innovation - unlocking the potential of its own people. Freer and fairer trade will lift more human beings out of poverty than all of the assistance programs in the world combined. We should make a commitment here to complete our negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas: an agreement that would complement, not compete with, our ambitions for a successful completion of the Doha Round.

Fundamentally, we have to co-operate better and more urgently in the Americas. More and more, our mutual security, health and the quality of our environment depend on our willingness to work together.

This is why the OAS is playing an important role in the supervision of free elections in Haiti, an effort distinguished by Brazil's leadership of the UN Stabilization Mission, as well as important contributions from many other countries in the hemisphere.

The need to co-operate more urgently is why representatives from many of our nations gathered last week in Ottawa, where Ministers of Health and senior officials from more than 30 countries met with technical experts and the leadership of multilateral organizations, to formulate a collective response to the threat of a global pandemic. None of us is immune to the threat of a virus derived from Avian Flu any more than we are from the threat of AIDS. We must work collectively to respond to this threat. Indeed, the Pan American Health Organisation can and must play a key role in this effort.

We have to work together. At the end of this month, the UN Conference on Climate Change will be held in Montreal, where representatives from our countries will gather to address an issue of critical importance to all of us. Working together, there, too, I hope, we can provide the kind of leadership urgently required to address global warming. Global warming is a fact. If the developed world is the primary cause of this, the fact is we all suffer together, and we've all got to be part of the solution.

Economic and social inequality, Avian Flu, global warming, the challenges to democracy itself; we didn't choose any of these, but they are real, and within our countries, and among them, the effort to deal with these challenges will require us to co-operate on a scale that is frankly unprecedented.

But we have come a long way since Miami. We are learning every day that we can accomplish more together than we can alone.

Here, in Mar del Plata, we have an historic opportunity to advance our vision for the Americas; to reaffirm our support for the OAS; and to fashion in our hemisphere an example for the world of what can be achieved when countries set aside their differences and focus on the common aspirations of all our people.

This is the long-term goal. We can get there if we work together.

Thank you.