



Organization of
American States



SIXTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
April 14 to 15, 2012
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

OEA/Ser.E
CA-VI/INF.9/12
30 April 2012
Original: Spanish

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF COSTA RICA,
H.E. LAURA CHINCHILLA
SIXTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
Cartagena, Colombia, April 2012**

Here, in this beautiful and historic city, I am pleased to begin my address with an affectionate greeting for President Juan Manuel Santos, for the beloved Colombian people, and for all of you, dear colleagues and friends.

Here, Mr. President, I feel at home. And I am pleased that here we can exchange points of view on cooperation, integration, and connectivity as vehicles for overcoming challenges, addressing demands, and realizing legitimate hemispheric aspirations. All of these are urgent tasks that must be undertaken with the utmost respect for democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and individual dignity. We must remember that the targets of our work as heads of state and government are our peoples. For each boy and girl, for each man and woman, we must strive to create and distribute wealth, to generate opportunities, and to set up respectful and safe environments for their full individual and collective development.

In discharging that agenda, information and communications technologies can be powerful allies. Their proper implementation allows citizen participation to be fostered, transparency to be encouraged, access to knowledge to be facilitated, and the creation of wealth based on innovation to be catalyzed. For an economy such as my country's, whose main competitive advantage is the quality of its human resources, digital technologies offer a vital tool for developing knowledge and innovation.

We must undertake the tasks for which we have come together at this Summit in very different national contexts, and in a hemisphere that reflects that diversity. But our heterogeneity, rather than being an obstacle, must become a lever for integration and cooperation.

Let us defend our principles but, at the same time, let us be realistic. Let us treasure our traditions but also remain open to the future. And let us ensure that the resurgence of stale ideologies, or the search for guilty parties in our past, does not keep us from understanding the current situation and embracing empirical evidence as a guide for public policies.

In accordance with that often harsh realism, I would like to reflect on two risks that represent a crude reality, for both my country and the other nations of Central America.

The first of these are natural disasters which, as a result of climate change, manifest themselves with particular violence in the tropics. Year after year, we experience the loss of human lives and the destruction of physical and social infrastructure. For a country like Costa Rica, which has been called the greenest nation in our hemisphere and that has such a strong commitment toward environmental sustainability, it is incomprehensible that, year after year, we have to pick up the tab for the failings of other highly polluting nations. The Rio 20 Summit offers a new opportunity to reassert our commitment to the protection of biodiversity, to environmental sustainability, and to the adoption of specific measures for strengthening those commitments.

The second risk to which we are exposed in the Central American region is the ferocious onslaught of organized crossborder crime.

For Costa Rica, the most important component of the national strategy for security and combating organized crime has been the prevention of crime through investments in human capital and the construction of a solid institutional framework based on respect for the rule of law and democracy. Those components, together with effective police action, have enabled my government to improve the everyday security of our people. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, we have the lowest murder rate in Meso-America, but it is still much higher than a decade ago. For that reason, the insecurity phenomenon is a source of endless anguish for us.

I am convinced that the best protection against organized crime is a society that can create opportunities and maintain institutions with high standards of transparency, efficiency, and integrity. But current events and situations are also determining factors in the success that we seek. In the case of Central America, they imply enormous disadvantages. Our region is a victim of a perverse geopolitical reality. Located between the world's main production centers and its largest market for drug consumption, we have been hooked up to a convoy of death and destruction.

To deal with that challenge, all the countries involved in the equation have responsibilities that are shared but different. Central America has accepted the burdens it must shoulder. Our efforts are still imperfect, however, and they have not yet received appropriate support from the international community.

Given that reality we are not asking for handouts, but for genuine coordination, appropriate cooperation, and, above all, a frank and rigorous discussion to ensure greater balance in the strategies implemented to date.

Today, we know that the approaches to tackling the drugs trade followed over recent decades have not resolved the problem: they have simply transferred it from one nation to another, at an appalling cost. Clearly, we have to revise the view that has prevailed to date, which has treated the problem as "the war on drugs." With its tradition of peace, without armed forces, and for the legacy we wish to leave to future generations, Costa Rica refuses to be dragged into strategies that have placed the emphasis on extremely costly military actions that also lead to high losses of human lives.

We must address the drug trafficking phenomenon from at least four different angles: as a public health problem that must not criminalize drug use; as a priority in our educational systems,

in order to prevent it; as a challenge for greater transparency and integrity in our institutions; and as a matter closely governed by the rule of law. In addition, we must understand it as a global problem that extends its tentacles across the world and not just into a few countries, and so we must seek out answers that are also interconnected at the global level. The time has come to strengthen the regional and global institutional framework so that the United Nations, including the Security Council, place the problem of drug trafficking in Central America on its agenda as a priority topic.

The region's presidents have agreed on a common minimum strategy, the Central America Security Strategy, which offers a comprehensive approach to the problem. We have also succeeded in turning the international community's eyes toward us and in securing certain undertakings from them. It remains to be seen whether the strategies will lead to effective actions and whether we will have enough external support to carry them out. However, fear or criticism must not deny us the right to thoroughly discuss alternate scenarios to those we have always followed.

Dear colleagues:

The time has come for those of us who struggle for the wellbeing of our peoples to put even greater coordination into practice: a true integration of our efforts to halt the onslaught of violence and, above all, to define and set ourselves out along better roads toward peace, freedom, and development.

The greatest responsibilities are national. They weigh on all our governments. But the results will be stronger if we connect with each other as partners for prosperity. Let us do so with an open and democratic spirit; with candor and self-criticism; with respect toward our fellow citizens and our neighbors; with realism and transparency; with awareness of our duties and in accordance with our dreams.

Let us do so as heads of state and government with a responsibility toward our countries and to the hemisphere.