



Organización de los
Estados Americanos



SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
April 10 to 11, 2015
Panama City, Panama

OEA/Ser.E
CA-VII/INF.2/15
10 April 2015
Original: Spanish

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Panama City, Panama
Friday, April 10, 2015

Salutations (with special greetings for Ban Ki-moon)

I would like to thank the President of the Republic of Panama, his government, and the Panamanian people, of whom I am so fond, for their hospitality and for the excellent organization of this Summit.

I am particularly grateful to you, President Juan Carlos Varela, for taking the decisive step that has enabled us all to gather here, as the Liberator Simón Bolívar did almost two centuries ago. For that reason, this Summit in Panama City, the site of the Amphictyonic Congress, is of such special import. This is the first time in the history of the Americas that the Heads of State and Government of the 35 independent nations of our hemisphere are to sit down together at the same table. Allow me to express, on behalf of all the institutions of the inter-American system and of the Joint Summit Working Group, our delight at the historical moment we are witnessing today. We are holding this Summit at a time when events of paramount importance are taking place, with the full support of all the states of the Americas. The peace negotiations in Colombia; the talks between Cuba and the United States for the resumption of diplomatic relations and then – we hope – the full normalization of their ties; the electoral process that is beginning in Haiti, with which this year will end with a legitimized and stable democracy; the agreements signed by Belize and Guatemala last December to make progress in overcoming their territorial differendum: all these demonstrate to us, once again, that dialogue is the best way to resolve our differences, both internal and external.

We have a commitment to peace. It has been almost a century since the nations of the Americas waged war among themselves: longer than any other part of the world. Instead, we have a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Latin America and the Caribbean and a commitment for that same region to move toward becoming a Zone of Peace. Those are achievements that we must protect. Our region may have many problems and even more than a few differences, but we all agree that they must never be resolved through conflict.

Our hemisphere has, in recent years, undergone major changes that make it impossible to sustain the policies of the past. In the 21st century, the inter-American system can only function as an inclusive system made up of diverse, sovereign countries that are legitimized by democracy and act on a single hemispheric agenda in conditions of full equality.

Sometimes, in real life, our simultaneous commitments toward respecting sovereign equality, full inclusion, and respect for democracy and human rights pose dilemmas that are difficult to

resolve. But intervention, exclusion, political repression, and confrontation are no longer acceptable or useful in inter-American relations. The road toward full democracy in our sovereign countries lies in dialogue, respect for freedom, inclusion, and cooperation.

The agenda that we have been given on this occasion by the Government of Panama affords us a broad arena for that cooperation. Focused on the broad topic of prosperity with equity, it allows us to review some of the main pending issues in our hemisphere's economic, political, and social spheres.

The peoples of the Americas expect our governments to meet their commitments of peace, economic growth, creation of decent jobs, adequate public services, security, and better distribution of wealth. This hemisphere has grown significantly over the past decade and it has succeeded in riding out the global recession, even though growth rates are not yet those to which we aspire. Growth and the adoption of appropriate social policies have allowed us to lift tens of thousands of people out of poverty. Democracy is now more commonly practiced in our region than at any other time in its history.

However, we still have many problems pending in the areas of growth, equity, security, and democratic governance. The Americas is not a poor region but poverty still affects one in every four citizens, and half of the Hemisphere's people still suffer from insufficient incomes and vulnerabilities that are incompatible with democracy. We still have shortcomings in our infrastructure, in our education, in our health systems, in our competitiveness, in how we manage our energy. Our agricultural output registers a surplus, but many people across the Americas still suffer malnutrition. Corruption remains a threat to our democracies. The level violence in some of our countries is unacceptable; drug trafficking, money laundering, the proliferation of weapons, and human trafficking create growing feelings of insecurity in our societies. Fulfillment of the precepts of our Inter-American Democratic Charter and our commitments toward human rights, freedom of expression, gender equality, and nondiscrimination is still inadequate.

Of course, significant progress has been made in many of those areas, but in the climate of democracy that prevails in the region, demands are becoming increasingly specific and urgent. The citizens of the Americas see that progress, but they are also very much aware of their own wants and vulnerabilities and, while they do not expect their governments to resolve everything overnight, they do expect concrete, tangible steps forward.

The preparatory work of this Summit did not focus on new definitions but, rather, on the search for concrete solutions to known problems. The Commitments for Action prepared by our Summit Working Group, which the Government of Panama is distributing among the member countries and the agencies of the inter-American system, represent useful working tools for guiding our organizations and countries toward concrete, realistic, and verifiable commitments. The dialogue of the Heads of State and Government can be grounded on this solid work, on which their representatives have reached consensus over recent months, and on the important contributions from the summits of business leaders, civil society, youth, university rectors, women, and trade unions held in recent days under this Summit's umbrella.

Distinguished Presidents, Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers, and Ambassadors:

In a few weeks' time, I will be leaving my position as Secretary General of the Organization of American States. Dr. Luis Almagro, who was recently elected by the General Assembly, is here with us today, and I wish his administration every success. I would like to thank you all for the trust and support you have given me over the past decade. That time has not been without its

difficulties, but I would say that it has been much fuller of accomplishments and promise for the nations of the Americas.

I would have liked the opportunity to visit each one of you personally. Since I was unable to do so, there can be no better occasion than this great meeting of the Americas for me to express my appreciation and recognition, and to wish all of you and the peoples you represent a future of peace, democracy, liberty, and justice. May God bless you. Thank you very much.