



FIFTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
April 17 - 19, 2009
Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago



OEA/Ser.E
CA-V/INF.19/09
16 April 2009
Original: English

STATEMENT OF OAS SECRETARY GENERAL, JOSE MIGUEL INSULZA, AT THE
YOUTH FORUM OF THE AMERICAS

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This is the first time that we are having a Youth Forum during the Summit of the Americas, and I really want to congratulate the government of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Secretariat and the Young Americas Business Trust for helping us in this endeavor.

We will be able to discuss some of the issues involving the youths that are also dealt in the V Summit and which the Heads of State are going to be discussing, and I hope they will be agreeing on some things. I also hope that your participation in the dialogue is having an effect. Some of the issues are very important. I talked about one of them at length this morning, and I want to say that Prime Minister Manning was even more precise than I was about presenting the figures on the crisis our society is beginning to experience. According to those figures, unemployment in Latin America and the Caribbean is going to rise at least 1.5% from last year, and that's a great number if we count in millions.

I have even worse news. A disproportionate number of the people that are going to be left unemployed will be women or young people. Actually unemployment among youths in Latin American is 2.2 points higher than it is in the population at large. So I think that it is very important that we meet and that we present proposals to address this issue.

Both Prime Minister Manning and I said this morning that 22 to 23 million young people in this hemisphere either don't work or don't go to school. So we can't afford anymore of that, we can't afford losing more talent and that's what our initiatives are about. Our initiatives are about promoting association, promoting innovation, and promoting employment for young people around the Americas. I think that it is very important that we present this point of view. We don't want to be the victims, we don't want young people to be the victims of the transfer of unemployment that is produced from different countries to others, disguised as a rejection of migrants, expulsion of migrants, lack of financial flow from some countries to the others or simply by protectionist measures that leave a lot of people unemployed, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We understand perfectly well that, if remittances fall and exports diminish, these are going to cause some problems with unemployment. But we think that governments in a coordinated way, governments of the Americas, big and small, rich and poor should cooperate to prevent this falling upon the young people, the poor people, and the weaker people. I think that's one big issue.

The other big issue of course has to do with education - education of opportunities and I think that the youth has a lot to say about that. In our region, there has been a marked improvement in the number of people going to school today. The coverage is much higher for most countries, but the quality of education is very uneven. So we have to make the leaders understand that the quality of education is another projection of the unequal society we have and that it falls within the states and governments to improve the quality of public education and offer more opportunities to the young people.

At the OAS, we are linked with the Trust of the Americas, which is another business organization formed by big companies that are actually working with us to improve the condition of young people. We live in the Americas with the problem of youths at risk. We have a very important plan that began as a plan for creating job opportunities for the handicapped in advanced technologies, the so called *POETA Plan*. We are also trying to extend that plan for youths at risk, to the many millions of young people in the Americas who are actually out of jobs and not going to school and many of whom become the victims of crimes, of drugs, etc. And we want to help give them opportunities and we are excited to expand this program to improve the possibility of young people, who are unemployed, to get training in advanced technologies in order to be useful to society. I hope that you can also cooperate with us. Permit me to say that the organization of the Private Sector Forum and the Youth Business Forum enables us to present to the business people of the Americas the existence of this network of young people so that they will pay attention to that and look at the need to promote innovation and to create jobs for the young.

Of course, we know that crime is also a problem. We are going to have for the first time in the Summit Declaration a chapter dealing with crime and with drug trafficking. Everyone talks about juvenile crime. Let me tell you something. The size of juvenile crime is not larger, as many people say, than the size of crime in general in the Americas. The rates of crimes committed by youth are more or less the same as the ones committed by other sectors. It is true, however, that most people that go into a life of crime commit their first crime when they are young but that has to do also with lack of opportunities, with lack of rehabilitation measures, with lack of jobs, with lack of education, etc. Moreover, I think it is important to look at the youth from another point of view, as victims, and as victims the figures are much larger than that of the population at large. Actually, the rate of deaths in our region, which is quite high, is 27.7 violent deaths for every 1000 inhabitants. But in fact for young people between 15 to 25 years old the rate goes from 27.7 to 83.2 deaths per thousand inhabitants, which is three times the general rate of deaths. And it is even higher for young people of low and middle income, where it reaches 100 cases for every 100,000 inhabitants, which is one per one thousand, an exceedingly high figure, almost a world record. So if we don't make an effort also in terms of security to increase the opportunity for and minimize the risks of young people, then we will have a big trouble. I think our project has a lot to do with that.

So, I think that young people are in many ways protagonists of a juncture, but also an image of a problem, and the many problems we face in the region. Leaders need to look at the problems of the region, to discuss the new hemispheric agenda, to see what can be done, to help the people of the region. I think it's very important that they have the young people to tell them what their problems are and that they can see that helping the young people is probably the best way to improve the quality of life in the Americas. Thank you very much for this opportunity.