

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



Remarks by

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Assistant Secretary General

First Seminar of the Inter-American Peace Forum

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Distinguished Permanent Representatives of the member states of the OAS,
Distinguished Permanent Observers,
Distinguished members of the panels,

Sir Marrack Goulding, former Under Secretary of the United Nations,
Ambassador Alvaro Tirado Mejia, Former President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,
Ms. Rosario Green, Chairwoman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee of Mexico,
Mr. Ivelaw Griffith, Provost, Senior Vice President, York College,
Ms. Ana Maria Campero, Executive Director, Unir Foundation, Bolivia,
Ms. Carrie Menkel Meadow, Jr. Professor of Dispute Resolution and Civil Procedure, Georgetown Law University,
Ambassador Gustavo Albin, Chairman of the Committee on Hemispheric Security and Permanent Representative of Mexico,
Ambassador Aristides Royo, Permanent Representative of Panama,

Members of the diplomatic corps,
Representatives of international and regional organizations,
Representatives of civil society organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for coming today to the OAS to participate in the First Seminar of the Inter-American Peace Forum of the Organization of American States. And I am pleased to share with you some of my own thoughts on this important topic.

The launching of this Peace Forum is timely given current developments on inter-state and intra-state relations in the Americas, especially in the Andean region. As you know, the OAS has been actively supporting its member states in the peaceful resolution of conflicts and border disputes for many years. One of the greatest contributions the OAS has made to preserving peace among its member states has been its commitment to facilitating greater understanding and cooperation among countries and between the diverse subregions which constitute this Organization.

I congratulate Secretary General Don Jose Miguel Insulza and the Secretariat for Political Affairs headed by Ambassador Dante Caputo for this

initiative which provides us with an opportunity to discuss ways to strengthen peace in the Western Hemisphere. Many of you have heard me speak about these issues before and would know that in matters of peace and security, I prefer using the term peacebuilding as opposed to “conflict prevention.” The concept of peacebuilding reflects a more constructive approach, and at its core needs to incorporate a continuous process of dialogue and commitment.

I believe there is need for rethinking the concept of peace in terms of what it stands for, it’s meaning to different actors in society, and how to create the best environment for peace beyond the political-judicial framework.

“Peace” does not happen automatically, it does not happen on its own; it is facilitated and established by a complex system of education, attitudes, intentions and interests from with individuals and from society as a whole. Indeed, the maintenance of “peace in the world” requires continuous investment in building trust and confidence among groups and nations with often competing interests for the resources and power bases.

Peace building seeks to transform conflicts constructively and integrally. In the OAS experience, transforming conflict goes beyond problem solving or crisis management. It addresses the root causes of conflict and aims to change how actors or parties perceive, relate and interact with each other. It requires that stakeholders take ownership of the values embedded in the objectives of civic education, solidarity, and tolerance, democracy and human rights. Structural peace building allows for working on immediate and long term goals in order to create sustainable peaceful environments.

There is no doubt that the OAS has contributed tangibly to crisis prevention, crisis management and resolution, which is essential for strengthening peaceful relations and creating prosperity in our hemisphere. However, in a 21st century context with the multiplicity of actors that impact policy and matters of peace and conflict, it is critical that the Organization create long term initiatives to identify and monitor potential sources of conflict, and develop a quick response mitigation mechanism to help preserve peace and stability within and among our Member States.

As was referenced this morning by President Arias, the concept of peace and the need for a culture of peace and social cohesion must form part of the overall development and democracy frameworks.

Our peace and conflict resolution efforts must be holistic and seek an integral approach that also includes security and socio-economic development. This will require combining the peace agenda with a strong social and economic development focus including the fight against poverty. It is important to note that while democratic stability is ideal, it cannot be an end in itself. Our initiatives and actions in the area of strengthening democracy and promoting peace, if they are to be responsive and effective, should be people centered and geared towards creating a positive climate for social and economic growth and development.

Challenges to achieving peace

Latin America and the Caribbean still remains one of the regions of the world with the most unequal income distribution: a factor which complicates the

quest for sustainable peace. Without equity and social balance we cannot build genuine peace and without peace we cannot have sustained development.

The strategic long-term goal of any peace building intervention should be to assist countries strengthen democratic governance by developing national capacities to engage in constructive dialogue and help countries find ways to institutionalize conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms within their existing structures.

Peace building must be a continuous and ongoing process, which must include a systematic approach to the education of our citizens. Educating for democracy should be an intrinsic part of curricula if our Hemisphere is to promote better understanding and communication between communities, as well as respect for and acceptance of norms and values of other cultures.

Likewise, poverty reduction must form part of comprehensive strategies to both mitigate conflicts and promote peace. This is still a major challenge for our Hemisphere where some 213 million people continue to live on less than two dollars a day. While poverty has declined worldwide over the last two decades, not enough progress has been made in our region. Good governance must be directed at empowering all of our citizens by building human capacity through education, innovation, and policies of inclusion that contribute to the economic and social well-being of our countries.

OAS Contributions

In the past 15 years, the OAS has enhanced its ability to address situations of conflict and potential violence and has proven to be an effective, trustworthy and honest broker in political negotiations. OAS missions and programs have exerted a significant positive political impact in situations ranging from chronic low-intensity violence to volatile political tension. Specifically, OAS work in democratic governance, human rights, and development has focused on promoting actions, norms, and institutions which strengthen local capacities to solve disputes at multiple levels of society and at all stages of democratic development.

Secretary General Insulza shared with you this morning already that the OAS has been particularly instrumental in facilitating the resolution of several interstate disputes in Central America for example between Guatemala and Belize and Honduras and Nicaragua. It has been instrumental in finding solutions to the challenges in Haiti, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia, through a range of political and technical assistance mechanisms.

The recent role played by the OAS and the Rio Group in the situation between Ecuador and Colombia demonstrated that regional organizations can make meaningful contributions to achieving desired political solutions.

Moving forward

There are no short term solutions to entrenched historical conflicts. Active and continuous engagement with member states is of critical importance in solidifying the common trust and laying a foundation for true multilateral cooperation and action. This engagement should not only be geared toward

immediate resolution, but also should provide the required technical assistance, political accompaniment and capacity building for the longer term.

Increased dialogue and participation with civil society in informing policy issues and public discourse has enhanced governance in the 21st century even as it has made it more complex. Therefore, we must continue to find innovative ways to include citizens at large in our democratic decision making process.

In this regard, I believe that “Citizen diplomacy” is also important. I do hope that through activities such as this Forum a meaningful contribution can be made to this process.

Today, in the Americas we observe that in many countries the underlying basic values of a democratic political culture have been eroded by the inability of state institutions to deliver basic services and fulfill social needs of significant portions of the population. Civic discontent resulting in unrest and instability within a democratic framework has generated a climate of instability in some member states. As a consequence, democratic governability in a number of states in the region is being challenged.

Building peaceful societies and creating sustainable economies require a climate and approach of unchallenged solidarity and collective action. And this cannot be achieved without dialogue and communication among all branches of government, the private sector, political parties and civil society.

As conflicts become more complex and interrelated, international cooperation has to become more focused in order to be effective; thereby enabling all to respond more swiftly to evolving global and regional threats.

No doubt, member states, international institutions, as well as the civil society organizations, such as those represented here today, have an important role to play and must be willing to take the lead in strengthening democratic governance and promoting the peaceful resolution of complex problems that face the different countries and sub-regions of our hemisphere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that an open and inclusive participatory decision-making process that is genuinely democratic is fundamental for development, peace and stability. Human development, which seeks to expand choices and opportunities for individual citizens, and promotes the sustainability of democracy, is essential for improving the everyday lives of people and for maintaining social cohesion.

At the global level, efforts to foster and develop new relationships with extra-regional organizations will prove beneficial as the international community continues to manage the arduous task of combating new transnational and regional threats to security. Sub-regional and hemispheric wide information sharing among the various agencies and organizations involved in conflict prevention and resolution should become a standardized process. This will help in the

development of a set of best practices to contest the threats to peace, democracy and development in the Americas.

To this end, one specific recommendation I made last year on a similar topic – and wish to share again-- is that the time is right to establish an annual conference to analyze and learn from successful engagements of regional and sub-regional institutions in countries experiencing conflict. This would allow for more systematic and effective follow-up on peace building actions. It would also improve cooperation among multilateral organizations. Just as importantly, such a meeting would help with achieving better coordination for resource mobilization and the development of more targeted assistance to avoid a return to crisis situations.

Finally, while we all have a collective responsibility to create change, to build peace, and restore confidence in the democratic system; ultimately this can only be done through the civic and political leadership of each and every country. Our role as third party institutions must focus on helping to build capacity and maintain environments that support domestic and regional objectives of peace and security, justice, social equity, development, and democratic governability and to provide hope, opportunity and safe living environment for all the citizens of the Americas.

I thank you for your time and attention.