

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



SPEECH BY

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AT THE

**OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE FIRST INTER-AMERICAN MEETING OF MINISTERS AND
HIGH LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**December 4-5, 2006
Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia**

Your Excellency David Choquehuanca, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia
Your Excellencies Ministers and Heads of Delegations
Distinguished Permanent Representatives
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Representatives of International and Regional Organizations
Distinguished Representatives from civil society organizations
Specially Invited Guests
Representatives of the Media
OAS Staff Members
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to extend to you, also on behalf of Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, a warm welcome to this First Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and High Level Authorities of Sustainable Development.

As you know, ten years ago the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra hosted the historic Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development. It is therefore fitting and almost natural that Ministers and High Level Authorities of Sustainable Development in our Hemisphere gather here today to assess our individual and collective progress, since 1996, towards the ideal of sustainable development.

This momentous event is not only one to celebrate, but also one to reflect on a strategic response, built around a coalition of development actors and partners regarding the challenges of globalisation and trade liberalization, and the imperatives of guaranteeing security in all its dimensions, modernizing, and, in some cases, restructuring our economies, enhancing national competitiveness, and reducing poverty and environmental degradation and threats.

I believe that I speak for us all in expressing delight at the opportunity to enjoy once again the hospitality of the Government and People of Bolivia and to note the achievements of the Bolivian people in the area of sustainable development.

In this respect, permit me to single out the *Agua Para Todos* partnership among local communities, water providers and micro-credit providers in Cochabamba -- Bolivia's fourth largest city. This unique partnership among communities and the public and private sectors is providing potable water at an affordable price to hundreds of households not previously connected to the main water supply system. This is an important achievement and it is noteworthy that this partnership was one of five international winners in the Supporting Entrepreneurs in Environment and Development Initiative in 2006.

We also recognise the systematic and determined efforts of the Government and people of Bolivia to restructure the national economy, with a view to achieving sustained and equitable economic growth and a more sustainable model for development. The central message from Bolivia, as in other countries and sub-regions in our Hemisphere, is that sustainable development is not an option but an imperative, one of shared responsibility between all in society ! This message is even more relevant and urgent now than it was 10 years ago.

In the 1996 Declaration of Santa Cruz, Heads of State and Government acknowledged that development strategies need to include sustainability as an essential requirement for the balanced, interdependent and integral attainment of economic, social and environmental goals.

Essentially, the principle of sustainability speaks to the absolute importance of adopting policies and strategies that encourage changes in production and consumption patterns, in order to provide a better quality of life for people, as well as to preserve the natural assets on which all life forms depend.

This principle was of course repeated in the Declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. I am sure that it will continue to be reflected in the political declarations that emerge from this and other fora on sustainable development.

There can be no doubt that, over the past 10 years, nearly all the sub-regions and countries in our Hemisphere have made encouraging strides towards sustainable development. There is a greater level of environmental awareness at all levels of society. A number of sustainable development policies and strategies have been approved and are being implemented.

Through heightened international cooperation and global partnerships, more resources are being devoted to various sustainable development initiatives. Encouragingly, Governments are allocating more of their national budgets towards environmental restoration and preservation programmes.

However, challenges still abound on the environmental front. Land degradation issues continue to have a strong presence in the region, including significant portions of Mexico, the Brazilian north-east, Chaco, the dry Andean valleys, Monte and Patagonia in Argentina. In these areas and elsewhere, intense desertification processes are evident, including deforestation, erosion of basins and land degradation. When climate variability and climate change are factored into the account, a net worsening of environmental degradation is anticipated. Even as more resources are being devoted to the problem, the report card indicates that the impact and sustainability of these efforts are a matter for concern.

In the OAS, therefore, there is a clear understanding of the critical importance of sustainability. Moreover, it is evident to us all that sustainable development requires a holistic approach, an integral and integrated approach to development that combines governance, economic, cultural, social and environmental issues.

The interdependence of integral development, democracy and multidimensional security is clearly stated in the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter. I believe that this is an important truth and I have said on many occasions that democratic governability and a sound security environment are necessary pre-conditions for sustainable development.

Democracy and democratic governance are threatened by the growing gap between rich and poor as well as structural and institutional inefficiencies in society that culminate in poverty and exclusion. The reality of 230 million (30%) of the population of the Americas still living in poverty cannot and should not be ignored. But economic growth alone is not the answer if income inequality persists. There is a need for socio-economic policies that promote equitable growth and inclusion. Development without equity is unsustainable and will ultimately undermine democracy and governance. And you will agree with me that achieving sustained political, economic and social stability and appropriate levels of security, are in the strategic interest of all in the Americas, and even beyond !

In turn, sustainable development demands a long-term and strategic perspective on creating growth and wealth in an economy. Furthermore, realizing sustainable development should be the responsibility of all. Governments alone cannot be held accountable for balanced growth and progress. Of equal importance, as part of modern governance, is the responsible engagement of civil society, including nongovernmental organizations, the business community, trade unions, religious organizations, and the media. In short, sustainable development is a collective responsibility. A strategy for sustainable development that does not create ownership at all levels in society, is doomed to fail and become counter-productive !

In the OAS, we are seeing an ongoing process of change, as Member States go through processes of political evolution and economic transformation. We are seeing

change, as civil society in many countries feels more empowered to participate actively in public discourse. We are seeing change as long-marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, youth and women, assume more prominent roles, challenge traditional notions of leadership and bring attention to a range of new human development and capacity building issues.

The political agenda of the OAS cannot and should not be divorced from the reality of these changes, in attending to the social and economic needs of the peoples of the Americas. In my view, it is only in the political debate that a sound understanding of the underlying causes of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and environmental degradation can be gained. There is an undeniable relationship between political stability and democratic governance on the one hand, and our ability on the other hand, to register economic growth to provide for concrete action to fight poverty, inequality, social exclusion, illegal drug trafficking, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the impact of natural disasters, and trans-national crime, just to mention some of the problems our Member States face in their quest for social and economic progress. And if these myriad challenges are daunting enough for the bigger countries of the region, imagine what it must be like for the smaller countries, particularly the more vulnerable countries of the Caribbean and Central America, for whom having to cope annually with devastating hurricanes, floods and other natural disasters, is an unsustainable burden.

Sustainable development does not require or assume that all countries must be at the same level of development, or have the same capabilities, or use the same development model. While the responsibilities may be common, the abilities and capacities of States are clearly differentiated.

In this context, it is essential to have policies and strategies that will ensure that the benefits of sustainable development reach all peoples in all countries in our Hemisphere, especially those small developing states whose social, economic and environmental vulnerability is more pronounced owing to their small size, restricted markets, narrow economic base and/or geographic location.

In this context, I would urge the wealthier, more developed countries to increase financial and technical assistance to the poorer countries and sub-regions. To be successful in our integration efforts, these countries and sub-regions should be supported, not only by taking account of their unique needs and constraints, but also by strengthening their democratic institutions, education systems, institutional capacity, law enforcement agencies and their social environment. In the end, achieving sustainable development built on the pillars of stability and security will be in the interest of all the Americas.

Additionally, an integral part of forging a hemispheric perspective will be dedicating attention to strengthening relations between the institutions of the inter-American system, the OAS, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), as well as promoting relations between the different sub-regions of the Americas. The OAS is actively engaged in liaising with partners in the inter-American system to create the critical mass for consensus and action on a common hemispheric policy for development.

I regard the presence here of Ministers and High Level Authorities on Sustainable Development as providing a powerful statement of reaffirmation and re-commitment to the OAS as the premier mechanism through which all Member States can work towards attaining acceptable levels of sustainable development.

The way forward – indeed the only way forward for us – is to work together with renewed purpose and vitality, with a clearer focus and a more deliberate strategy towards lasting stability, equitable growth and sustainable development.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to express once again heartfelt thanks to our gracious hosts for their warm hospitality. I also thank the Ministers and High Level Authorities for their attendance and participation, and I thank the Directors and staff of the various Divisions of the General Secretariat who have worked so hard to provide you with the platform to make this momentous event a memorable and successful one.

I share with them the view that a strong, forward-looking and comprehensive Ministerial Declaration, together with the Inter-American Program on Sustainable Development, will be adopted by the meeting.

The time is ripe for a new paradigm for sustainable development, to advance a hemispheric development agenda that is based on the interdependence of establishing viable democracies and comfortable levels of security, one that takes into account the diversity in size and levels of development in the Americas, one that is based on collective commitment and shared responsibility, one that ultimately is aimed at achieving peace, solidarity and justice.

The People of the Americas are counting on us and let us not disappoint them in their expectations and aspirations!

Thank you.