Mr. Secretary General, Ambassadors, friends, guests, amigos todos.

Quiero explicitamente reconocer la presencia, desde el Perú, del rector de la Universidad San Martin de Porres, Ingeniero José Antonio Chang y del Director David Cunza, the founders of the Cátedra de las Américas program.

I am very pleased and very honored to be here. It is a true joy to share this moment with such distinguished diplomats who are also friends. Thank you, Sandra, Paco, Tom and Jean Michel.

My first General Assembly was almost fifty years ago, my maiden speech as the Permanent Representative of the United States almost thirty years ago, and I left office here thirteen years ago.

That all seems rather long ago. Multilateralism seeks agreed principles of conduct. Sovereignty is meant to protect countries from outside interference. And the OAS itself was born when many in this Hemisphere felt they were building a New World, removed from the Old.

These days, none of this seems particularly obvious or even relevant. Multilateralism often seems an idealistic illusion in a fragmented and Hobbesian world, sovereignty an obsolete aspiration from a predigital age, and regional pride a victim of disconcerting globalization.

Today I will draw on my experience to focus on the multilateral dimensions of the struggle for democracy.

I.

The Secretary General’s theme of “more rights for more people” captures the symbolism of the preamble to the OAS Charter, which proclaims that “the historic mission of America is to offer to man a land of liberty.” The word democracy does not appear in the Charter of the United Nations, but Western Hemisphere jurisprudence on human rights and democracy exceeds world practice. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, electoral observation and concern for democracy are vital to our collective hopes.
It was not always so.

In 1973 the military coup against the elected government of Chile was greeted at the OAS with silence. Neither the Permanent Council nor the Secretary General said a word.

In 1978, responding to turmoil in Nicaragua, the OAS sent a Commission to try to negotiate, but the dictator Somoza ignored it. Somoza’s fall ushered in a decade of violence in Central America aggravated by the Cold War.

In the United States, some believed these troubles had been ignited by misguided policies in support of human rights. Recalling FDR’s assertion that the original Somoza, “may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch,” they argued that dictators should be supported. Jeanne Kirkpatrick declared that dictators, unlike totalitarians, could always be changed after they had served their purpose.

This debate was painfully resolved in the forge of war. Initially uncertain, US policies in El Salvador gradually focused on encouraging the growth of a democratic center, supporting reforms and elections even in the midst of armed conflict. In the United States, conservatives advocating freedom and liberals advocating human rights began to converge. By 1984, the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America chaired by Henry Kissinger explicitly recognized that supporting dictators was no guarantee of stability.

Then, in 1989, Panama exploded. In May, faced with an unexpected opposition victory at the polls, Manuel Noriega responded with a brazenly violent election theft. His action was condemned, but the OAS, ever-wary of interfering in domestic affairs, limited itself to sending a Commission. Like Somoza before him, Noriega ignored it. That December, after unremitting regime brutality and the murder of an unarmed U.S. serviceman, United States troops invaded to remove Noriega. Even though the leaders elected in May then took office, the US intervention was widely criticized. A Caribbean ambassador privately summarized the prevailing reaction: “You may have done the right thing but you had no right.”

The President of Venezuela thought the US intervention could have been avoided. Carlos Andrés Perez was convinced that if the hemisphere’s countries had been able to put more muscle behind peaceful mediation, Noriega could have been removed without a military intervention. With that in mind, he persuaded his fellow South American presidents to urge withholding recognition from any government originating from a coup d’état.

Non-recognition doctrines had had a long but generally ineffective history. But conditions were changing. The Central American conflicts were at an exhausted end. In South America, de facto military regimes were in retreat. Internationally, the Old
World’s negative influences had weakened. The Berlin Wall had fallen and the Soviet Union was collapsing. In Spain, the madre patria, Franco’s authoritarian example had yielded to a King who had defended parliament against a military coup. In Chile, a referendum ended the Pinochet regime.

By the time the OAS General Assembly met in Santiago in 1991, its governments could all claim some form of democratic legitimacy. At its final plenary session, the Assembly adopted Resolution 1080, whose first resolutory paragraph reads “To instruct the Secretary General to [convene] . . . the Permanent Council in the event of any . . . sudden or irregular interruption . . . of the legitimate exercise of power by the democratically elected government in any of the Organization’s member states.”

The negotiations had been intense. By not specifying any action beyond a meeting, 1080 fell short of the nonrecognition standard. Many foreign ministries would have been even more cautious, but their presidents’ call for nonrecognition had made it hard for them to oppose lesser formulations. To reduce opposition from military and conservative forces, the word “coup” was replaced by “sudden or irregular interruption” – a change that later proved to strengthen the agreement by extending it to all actions against the legitimate exercise of power. In addition, by instructing the Secretary General to act, the resolution did not require a member state to convene a meeting. This eliminated a traditional procedure that could have introduced uncertainty should neighboring countries -- the países limitrofes – be loath to put a neighbor on the banquillo de los acusados. Instructing the Secretary General thus created an element of automaticity to ensure an immediate response.

Over the next few years, Haiti, Peru and Guatemala rolled back authoritarian moves to avoid isolation. The OAS Charter was formally amended to allow the suspension of a member whose democratically constituted government had been overthrown by force. And ten years after 1080, fatefuly just as the twin towers were collapsing on September 11, 2001, a new Inter-American Democratic Charter was being signed in Lima, Peru.

Article 3 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter stipulates that the “essential elements of representative democracy include, inter alia, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage …, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government.”

This provision is powerful, even unique, in its specificity. But it also exemplifies the weakness as well as the strength of multilateralism.

II.
What can we draw from this history?

*My first conclusion is so simple it is often overlooked: without the OAS, the development of common ground to advance democratic practices could never have taken place.*

The OAS is the only institution that brings together the sovereign states of the hemisphere in a setting dedicated to the harmonization of national practices into international law. Developing international law takes time and skill, not merely because legal systems and traditions differ, but because national needs and concerns for sovereignty must be satisfied.

Giving agreements a multilateral component makes them more effective than bilateral ones. The 1977 Panama Canal Treaties, for example, were negotiated bilaterally with the help of a group of neighboring countries, and then signed here, at the OAS, in the presence of the hemisphere’s heads of state and government, because all countries concerned, large and small, believed this would increase the likelihood of compliance.

*My second conclusion is also straightforward: just having the OAS is not enough. Its member governments have to use it and support it.*

Let me start with a model of effective multilateralism, the settlement of the Peru-Ecuador boundary dispute.

A 1941 war between Peru and Ecuador was settled by a peace treaty that had Brazil, Argentina, Chile and the United States as guarantors. Ecuador, however, soon claimed that the new boundary could not be completed. In 1995, after fifty years of intermittent armed skirmishes, open warfare broke out in a remote mountain valley in the tropics. After a month a ceasefire was declared. The fighting had stalemated, but both countries began general mobilization. To prevent escalation, the guarantors each contributed to a military observer mission to separate the entangled forces. At the same time, each named a senior diplomat to “assist” – the treaty language – direct peace talks between Ecuador and Peru. Brazil chaired the effort; I was chosen the U.S. representative because my superiors felt my previous OAS experience proved I had the necessary patience.

The guarantors met to exchange intelligence and develop steps to propose to the two belligerents, taking care to adhere closely to both national and international laws and to maintain intimate coordination with military commanders. It took more than three years of extraordinary patience, and constant efforts to ensure unity and resources among and within the four guarantor countries themselves. Ecuador and Peru shared the costs. The presidents of all four guarantor countries became actively involved. In the end, with positive external support, Peru and Ecuador developed a mutually beneficial solution that ended South America’s last conventional war.
Contrast this to what has happened on democracy.

The OAS has demonstrated in Peru, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Haiti, among other countries, that multilateral cooperation can support the rule of law, even under difficult conditions. When I served as Assistant Secretary General, we were unable to avoid a disputed election in Haiti, and then the overthrow by force of the government whose legitimacy had been questioned. In between, however, we obtained compensation for victims of violence, organized negotiations for an electoral commission that ensured unprecedented representation for different sectors, and helped introduce an identity card as the basis for voting – a permanent recognition of individual dignity that holds to this day.

But multilateral agreements are not self-enforcing. They take patience and resources. They do not always meet expectations. And institution-building is a long-term proposition. Resolution 1080 had called for, and I quote, “incentives to preserve and strengthen democratic systems, based on international solidarity and cooperation.” Unfortunately, follow-up was desultory. During the negotiations of the Democratic Charter, a few governments, led by Venezuela, advocated what they referred to as direct or participatory democracy. This disagreement was implicitly recorded in the reference, not to “democracy,” but to “representative democracy.”

Hoping to help identify at least some common ground, I proposed in Buenos Aires as Acting Secretary General that the Summit approve a mechanism to identify ways to strengthen democratic practices with incentives rather than sanctions. The Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism of CICAD had done precisely that for the control of illegal drugs. This call was never followed up.

In speaking out on Venezuela, which has mocked the specifics of the Democratic Charter, Secretary General Almagro has courageously upheld the flag of freedom and our founding ideals. But a fundamental truth is that the member states have regularly assigned the OAS grandiose tasks but no resources to even begin to tackle them. In preparing this lecture, I calculated that over the quarter century since 1080 was adopted, the member states have cut their contributions to the OAS regular fund by 26 per cent.

This year, eight countries have already requested electoral observation missions that would require at least 5 million dollars to do properly. The OAS regular fund allocates $75,000 for electoral observation in 2018. A handful of countries, the United States chief among them, have in the past made voluntary contributions to partly fill similar gaps. But not having even minimal resources available on a predictable basis is seriously debilitating. When we hear a complaint that the OAS is “no more than . . . an umbrella that packs up when the storm rises,” the focus should be squarely on the member states. On all member states, not just a few.
The problem, of course, is not just resources. My third conclusion is that **finding common ground in the midst of ideological and national differences requires listening, patience and, above all, fairness.**

In international relations, the shortest distance between two points is often not a straight line. *El mejor camino no es necesariamente el más directo; no es el más breve o el más rápido.* Resolution 1080 would have been impossible without the failures of previous toothless mediation commissions and the desire to avoid US military intervention. To reach agreement, everyone’s interests must be identified and dealt with at least to some extent; to last, any agreement must have something for everyone.

Another way of putting this is that **democracy is as important among countries as within them. La democracia entre las naciones es tan importante como la democracia dentro de las naciones.** If smaller countries do not receive respect, they are unlikely to be part of the solution.

I just said “smaller countries.” The politically correct formula should of course have been “all countries.” But here we have a problem. The overwhelming relative power of the United States is an unspoken obstacle to regional cooperation. Inequality is a destroyer of community. U.S. leaders often see their neighbors as Lilliputians using multilateralism as a form of trade unionism of the weak. Conversely, others in the hemisphere often see the United States as a self-interested and unreliable Gulliver focused on legitimizing its power.

One of the values of the OAS is that it can be a corrective to this asymmetry. Debates in which the strong and the weak are heard alike can identify areas of convergence among countries with different interests, reduce confusion and set the stage for future cooperation.

Listening is of course only a necessary start: national circumstances and interests differ. Some countries want to block U.S. initiatives; others welcome them. Some countries welcome ties outside the hemisphere; others fear them. In almost all cases, foreign relations take a back seat to domestic concerns shaped by national histories.

Asymmetries and differences in interests can be reduced by the rule of law and fair administration of available resources. But perhaps the key meeting point is respect. Mexico’s Benito Juarez said it best, “El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.” Peace is respect for the rights of others.

*But what happens when respect is replaced by abuse or imposition? Some say the only answer then is some form of force. I disagree. My own view is that the primary defense of sovereignty requires participation, best expressed as engagement or engranaje, a meshing of gears to make the world turn better than it would otherwise.*
Since 1890, the “Inter-American System” has become a web of regional institutions with the Columbus Memorial Library as institutional memory. This year is the ninetieth anniversary of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), headquartered in Mexico, and of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), the first international body dedicated to the advancement of women. Last year was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), based in Costa Rica. Since the 1990s, ministers of education, justice, labor, trade, science and technology, and security have met under OAS auspices.

There are of course criticisms aplenty. The OAS is an organization of governments represented by foreign ministries which invariably side with executive authorities against their own legislatures and courts. Non-governmental actors from civil society participate only to the extent each member state allows. The OAS Charter conveys no coercive authority, and military institutions have never been fully integrated to help meet today’s multidimensional security needs. As in Haiti in 2004, peace-keeping operations in the Americas go to the United Nations by default. The OAS could also do more to support regional organizations – CARICOM, SICA and UNASUR.

All this important talk about the need for OAS reform obscures the shrinking contributions of the member states. Quota shares are debated when it is the amounts contributed that are scandalously low. Even if every OAS member state, small as well as large, doubled its regular fund contribution that would still amount to no more than 3% of the budget of the United Nations.

The Inter-American System is a true engranaje, a set of gears that meshes countries and interests, from democracy and human rights to development and security. This engranaje is today becoming skeletal, fragmented by lack of common purpose and crippling reductions in resources. I am convinced that Venezuela would not be where it is today had it been part of an effective multilateral support system with incentives as well as sanctions.

It is not as though we no longer matter to each other. U.S. producers export three times more to Latin America than to China. And even if we exclude both Canada and Mexico, the rest of the hemisphere purchases 50 percent more goods from the United States than does China. And despite a growing Chinese presence, for most countries in the hemisphere their ties to the United States remain vitally important. We all have a stake in each other.

It is true that nongovernmental actors, new technologies, global finance and a host of new issues, all challenge a regional order centered on governments. But the key is not to abandon governments, sovereignty or cooperation. It is to organize more effectively and develop people who are knowledgeable about the new issues and how to reconcile
different national interests. Otherwise sovereignty risks becoming an obstacle to needed cooperation more than a protection against foreign impositions.

Sovereign nations have the right to decide who and what enters and leaves their territory. The problem is not walls. There are already and always will be many walls of many kinds. A physical wall that channels people and goods to a point at which clear entry/exit rules are enforced may be workable, but if the wall is breached or circumvented, or if there are no rules at the gate, even a beautiful wall becomes a Maginot line, possibly impressive but certainly ineffectual.

Illegal drugs, illegal arms transfers and illegal migration cannot be addressed by any one state alone. Yet they also create domestic pressures which, like the expression of previously suppressed grievances, the rise of non-governmental actors, the impact of new technologies, the decline of programmatic political parties, the risks of terrorism, all multiply the difficulties individual governments face in making both domestic and international decisions.

So here is my final point: The world needs laws and relationship-building, not walls or nation-building. Armies and barriers are less effective than relations built on respect and shared rules. Relationships need to be developed, and rules need to be negotiated. In this, people, as well as resources, are critical.

Governments often lack the people with the expertise to reconcile different national interests. A new Inter-American Academy of Public Administration, with students nominated by the member states to study a broad curriculum, would over time produce a network of professionals who know how to work together to contain issues that might otherwise degenerate into quagmires of missed opportunities or even escalate into conflict. This would be an insurance policy for progress and peace, providing a unique foundation for a safe neighborhood.

Times have changed, but some old truths still apply. Geography and neighborhood still matter. Sovereignty still matters. The new truth, however, is that, unlike the past, individual countries can no longer retreat like Voltaire to cultivate their separate gardens. To take care of ourselves, we must all also deal with the outside world, our neighbors perhaps most of all. And all must contribute their share.

I return to my opening. The OAS provides a proven framework for cooperation among this hemisphere's many and very different sovereign states. Yet these very same states are starving the OAS to death. Whether and how they will enable the OAS to work in the future for the peoples of the Americas depends squarely on them.