



## STATEMENT ON VENEZUELA BY OAS SECRETARY GENERAL

October 23, 2002

In advance of his visit to Venezuela on Sunday, October 27, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), César Gaviria, issued the following statement:

"Recent events in Venezuela have underscored the persistent and deep polarization in that country and the urgent need to move from an environment of confrontation to a framework of direct negotiation between the government and the opposition. It is imperative that Venezuelans address the current problems within the constitutional order and the rule of law, through the democratic mechanisms available under the Constitution.

"The international community continues to view the situation in Venezuela with grave concern, particularly in light of recent developments. It is more urgent than ever to resolve the issues included in my April 18 report to the OAS Permanent Council, including divisive rhetoric from both sides, curbs on free expression through threats and harassment, participation in political debate by military authorities, inadequate separation of powers and lack of meaningful institutional checks and balances.

"The peaceful nature of the recent marches held both by the opposition and by the government, and of the October 21 labor strike, is a clear sign of progress toward a solution reached by consensus. These events demonstrated that Venezuelan society is capable of channeling its differences democratically and that violence is not an inevitable result of dissent.

"Another positive sign is that both the government and opposition sectors have signed the Declaration of Principles for Peace and Democracy in Venezuela, presented in September by a joint mission of the OAS, the Carter Center and the United Nations Development Programme. During the upcoming visit we will present specific proposals to begin work on the three issues accepted for discussion among the parties: the strengthening of the electoral system, the investigation of the events of last April 11 and the need to disarm civilian populations. We will also propose a structure and agenda for undertaking a debate on the critical issues that continue to divide Venezuelan society."