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Quinta Reunión de Consulta de Ministros de Relaciones Exteriores
Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs
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ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PRESIDENT
JORGE ALESSANDRI RODRIGUEZ OF CHILE
AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION
AUGUST 12, 1959

Your Excellencies, Ministers of Foreign Affairs:

I am deeply honored at the opportunity, for which I thank you on behalf of Chile, to inaugurate at this formal ceremony, the Fifth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the American Republics.

I recognize the profound and gratifying significance of the resolution in which this capital was selected as the seat of this Assembly, whose debates and decisions will surely help strengthen and perfect our international community. Our country, with such a long-standing and deeply rooted American tradition, welcomes with justifiable pride the high officials of our sister nations, who, imbued with an exemplary spirit of brotherhood, have decided to meet here to find a solution to a state of unrest whose aggravation could alter the fervent desires for peace that inspire us, a peace in which we have resolved to live together, as we have repeatedly stated in instruments that pledge the good faith of our peoples.

I am certain that there is no better way to acknowledge the honor paid us than to offer, within the limits of our modest material resources, the sincere and heartfelt hospitality of a fervently democratic nation, where we are struggling with all our might to defend integrity in our social relationships and law and order in our republican institutions. These are the best guarantee that in our land you will find

the proper respect that you deserve, gentlemen, as well as a full understanding of ideas that you have come here to expound. You can rely on the definite cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile to bring to a successful conclusion the extremely important task entrusted to you by the governments you have the honor to represent.

We Chileans, trained in a school of deep American feeling, recognize no boundaries that could prompt us to use one language in our internal affairs and another in meetings of American brotherhood such as this. That is why I can stress just as strongly now as I did to the Chilean parliament in my recent message, my government's purpose to continue unswervingly to develop the policy of adherence to democratic principles.

Seeing you here together strengthens my conviction that, as I pointed out in my message to the Chilean parliament, up to now no better system of social harmony has been achieved than that which is based on reverence for the great spiritual values and on strict respect for human rights. This enables us to achieve progress and collective well-being and broadens men's horizon so that they can freely express their thoughts, develop their potentialities, and fulfill the mission entrusted to them.

I believe that I see in the honor bestowed on Chile, recognition of the deep and heartfelt desire of our people that their cooperation will never be refused any proposal designed to strengthen international solidarity, particularly among the American nations, and to insure throughout the world and especially in this hemisphere, the rule of peace, freedom and law.

Strengthening the peace is a common aspiration, which at this moment is unifying all mankind. We all want to live under the tranquillity that peace promises, receive its benefits, and enjoy the true prosperity that it alone can offer, a prosperity that makes it possible to furnish to all human beings the greatest well-being possible without threatening their individual freedom. We feel in our souls the disturbing effect of these decisive hours for mankind, in which it would seem that the dangers of a holocaust are coming closer to mankind, enveloping that supreme blessing which is peace. Nations and continents with problems more complex than ours are not sparing any effort to achieve peace; it is possible to appreciate the clear interest in cutting new furrows in the world and planting therein the seed of international understanding, which will grow so luxuriantly that it will destroy forever any danger of war.

It would be impossible for me, on this solemn occasion, to conceal the sympathy with which Chile views the contacts that are being strengthened between the two great powers apparently so far apart, contacts designed to overcome their differences and inaugurate an era of true peace for the world.

We, a group of nations that, thanks to Providence, are a unique expression of peaceful international relations, should, not only not remain indifferent to this aspiration, but, in keeping with our tradition and the sentiments common to our peoples, should make every effort to achieve this precious goal for the world and for this hemisphere.

The reiteration of these ideas certainly brings to mind the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, held in Buenos Aires in 1936, in which certain men of vision understood the tremendous importance that Meetings of Consultation would have for the future of America. It was the tragic fact of an extracontinental war threatening our shores that made it necessary to hold the first of those Meetings in Panama in 1939. That was followed by the Havana Meeting in 1940 and later, at the request of the Government of Chile, that of Rio de Janeiro following the attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor. Not only were norms derived from those Meetings that were fundamental in organizing the hemisphere and protecting it from all threats from abroad, but the ideal of Inter-American unity acquired a consistency that years later proved to be the ground work of that organization which, with justifiable pride, we regard as an example to the world of what can be accomplished by the good will of nations devoted to the lofty purposes of peace.

With the end of World War II, it was essential that America be safeguarded against the calculated spread of ideas that was endangering our democratic system and the defense of the Free World. The Meeting of Consultation held in Washington in 1951, convoked for that purpose, adopted political and economic norms designed to avert this peril mainly by effectively strengthening democracy, and internal security, and raising the social and cultural standards of our peoples.

That is why we can be justly proud of these Assemblies, which have made clear the unity of the hemisphere in the face of any material or ideological threat from abroad.

But now we find ourselves confronted by a problem of another kind, which threatens our unity and runs counter to principles that must be kept inviolable if that unity is to be maintained.

Now it is not a question of America's being united in the face of a threat from abroad; it is a matter of finding an immediate remedy for certain symptoms that have appeared within America itself, and what they indicate it is not yet possible to diagnose precisely.

It should not be forgotten that the questions to be resolved are not limited to a particular situation that has arisen in the Caribbean, which, if this were so, it would be proper to solve with purely local formulas; but instead we are dealing with events that might occur in any part of the Americas and that therefore must be faced in accordance with general standards that will apply to any given circumstances.

What, as a matter of fact, is hanging in the balance at this moment is the very foundations of our American institutions, which no existing state of affairs can weaken. I am sure that in the course of these discussions it will never be forgotten that our nations won their independence and paid dearly, with the blood of their sons and with untold suffering for their entrance into the international community.

It should also be remembered that it has not always been easy for many of our republics to create a government of law rather than of influence. It is fitting, therefore, to revere, together with the heroes of the fight for independence, those who carried out the nobler task of giving form to this primitive concept of a nation and of independence, by giving to our peoples a political, juridical, administrative and economic organization.

This happened in a not distant past.

I am sure that we have not forgotten those standards and ideals, which had a spiritual content before they became a reality in all our republics.

It is essential to remember that experiences similar to those that our countries have undergone in their domestic affairs, we are now witnessing in the development of our inter-American organization. We cannot turn back the clock. In addition to the sacred principle of democracy there are others no less sacred, such as the principle of non intervention, which cost us so dearly before it became a rule of positive international law.

For us, who have developed side by side with this concept, Democracy has only one meaning: it is the government of the people by its representatives freely chosen in periodic elections that guarantee the expression of the people's will and that are based on a sacred respect for the individual and his rights, the true source of which is to be found in the Gospels of the Christian civilization.

As defined above, democracy has been incorporated in the agreements and the resolutions that are the foundation of the American community. We Chileans do not conceive for ourselves any system that departs from these standards, but this does not mean that we do not have profound respect for any system of government that each state chooses for itself. We condemn self-perpetuating dictatorships, as I am sure that each of you condemns them, and we hope that wherever they exist for any reason they will be short-lived.

- On a par with the fundamental idea of democracy we must, as I have already stated, place the sacred principle of nonintervention. This was not clearly accepted in our America until the Conference for the Maintenance of Peace was held in Buenos Aires in 1936. Reiterated at Panama and at Chapultepec, this principle was definitely included in our system in the Charter of the Organization of American States.

It has been said that independence is for nations what liberty is for the individual. Independence is the liberty of a state. Intervention is an attack upon this liberty. This is a fact and we can accept nothing that offends this principle. In this matter we must proceed with the greatest caution because exceptions could lead to new arguments, which would certainly lead to the end of sovereignty, which is the more serious for smaller nations.

The study of formulas to protect human rights without violating the principle of nonintervention, which must be kept inviolate -- in other words by bringing these two principles into harmony -- should be one of the major tasks to be undertaken by this Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

The broad scope of the Agenda that the Organization of American States has drawn up is such that no country should feel committed. Nevertheless, for its very vastness I trust that in your deliberations a spirit of mutual respect will prevail, for without it meetings of this kind, instead of being beneficial, merely point up the divergencies.

When there is so much to be said, sound judgment counsels not to say more than is needed to reach practical and immediate solutions to basic differences. Countries, like individuals, are jealous of their sovereign rights. Each one looks at his own case in the light of given circumstances at the situation of his neighbor in a different light. Thus, if we wish the concept of liberty to prevail in our America, it might not be a bad idea to let each country work out its own destiny, by exalting the positive value of the legal standards that serve as credentials between civilized countries.

We are firmly convinced that there is a close relationship between prosperity and political stability; but although the former helps to maintain the latter, prosperity cannot create such stability unless it is founded on firmly established principles capable of existing and prevailing even in periods of severe economic crisis.

It was the unanimous concern and desire of the less-developed countries of America to strengthen their economic ties and to find formulas that would make it possible to combat their underdevelopment quickly. To do that it seems to us essential that means be found to eliminate immediately any frontier barriers that might exist between these peoples. An atmosphere of trust can thus be created that will make a true and sound integration possible, one that, furthermore, will prevent the huge expenditures that an arms race between sister nations usually entails, and will help maintain efficient armed forces that, in addition to performing the lofty and noble mission of keeping internal order, will be able to defend continental security and the sovereignty of the several countries.

The preservation of the democratic system in underdeveloped countries makes it essential that the fastest possible growth of their economies be achieved, because the extraordinary speed with which means of information are multiplying and being perfected makes it possible for all progress that makes life more attractive and better worth living to be known to an increasingly greater number of persons, who logically are fired by the natural ambition to be able to enjoy the fruits of such progress.

We are witnessing a period in which the aspirations of the people for a greater degree of well-being are growing much faster than the possibilities for economic development in our countries.

On repeated occasions I have said that the chief responsibility for accelerating economic development falls upon the nation concerned, but it would be a fatal error not to understand that such development also requires the generous encouragement of countries whose economies are stronger. It is obvious that under a system of complete freedom, like that which happily the less developed American republics enjoy or aspire to enjoy, there are limits to the sacrifice that can be demanded of their citizens; this is quite the reverse of what happens in other parts of the world, where there are governments ruling by force and where the liberty that we have enjoyed for so many years has never been known.

On this occasion, at which all the American nations are represented, I could not fail to point out, either, the imperative need to have the international monetary and credit agencies adopt standards that will increasingly be in harmony with the practices and the economic development of our countries, since there is no doubt that whatever is appropriate for countries of a greater degree of development in matters of economic and financial techniques is not always the most advisable for others in which different conditions prevail.

I am certain that all of those meeting here are inspired by the firm hope that from this Meeting of Consultation there will emerge, even stronger and more nearly perfect, our international community of America, which in the field of politics should be a model of true international democracy. Our countries hope that by your wisdom and prudence you will succeed in strengthening this democracy, by finding a formula that will allow us to reconcile our dearest wishes that human rights shall never be violated, with strict respect for the principle of nonintervention, or at least paving the way thereto. Since, as I have said, nonintervention is the basis for the independence of states, it gives meaning to the international liberty essential to harmonious and healthy relations between the American countries.

We trust, too, that this international political democracy will be strengthened and supplemented in the economic field in such a manner that the common use of the products and potentials of these republics will redound to the benefit of the whole community and promote the progress and prosperity of each, so as to raise the standard of living of their sons.

Gentlemen: As I declare this Meeting of Consultation open, I do so full of confidence in the future of America, which today depends on the success of your deliberations. In the name of the people of Chile, I extend to you a most affectionate and cordial welcome, personally and on their behalf; I can assure you of the deep sincerity of their feelings and of their unbreakable faith in freedom and in democracy.