



**CÉSAR GAVIRIA TRUJILLO, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
TO THE “REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC
CHARTER” CONFERENCE**

September 16, 2002 - Washington, DC

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It is with great pleasure that I speak to you here in commemoration of the one-year anniversary of the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in Lima, Peru. This is an extremely important undertaking and I am truly gratified by the response we have received as well as the high-level participants who are here with us today. In particular, I would like to welcome you, President Alejandro Toledo. Your courage and resolve are an example to all leaders of the hemisphere. Your able stewardship has guided Peru out of the dark days of authoritarianism and into the future promise of democracy. The OAS pledges its continued support of your government as it works to construct an egalitarian society erected on democratic principles. We extend to you the same hospitality here in Washington that you granted us a year ago in Lima.

The Peruvian experience with authoritarianism was the inspiration behind the Inter-American Democratic Charter. From the beginning it was apparent that the OAS did not have the adequate tools to deal with new threats to democracy. In 1992, an auto-golpe carried out by President Fujimori, using as an excuse the battle on armed subversion, was the first example of a new form of authoritarianism. The government dissolved Congress and interfered with the workings of the Office of the Attorney General, the National Council of Judges and the Constitutional Court. The Hemisphere responded under the aegis of Resolution 1080. New elections for a constituent assembly were called, but the OAS did not carry out the appropriate follow up to ensure that democratic principles were fully restored in practice.

Throughout the 1990s, governmental abuses worsened: subordination of the armed forces for illegal and political ends, massive corruption, censorship of the media and limits on civil liberties. In April 2000 our Electoral Observation Mission found that, “by international standards, the Peruvian election process falls far short of what could be called free and fair.” International pressure and the weight of its own domestic scandals pushed Fujimori out of power and doomed his presidency to ignominy. Joined by you, President Toledo, and President and transition president Valentin Paniagua, Peru returned to the community of democracies. Your government’s determination and the Peruvian people’s commitment to democracy are the greatest testimony to the spirit of the Democratic Charter.

It has been a long hard road since we signed the Inter-American Democratic Charter on September 11. On that fateful day, a group of terrorists launched an indescribably horrific attack on the United States and all those who love and value freedom. Citizens from 30 of our 34 member states perished in the attacks. The news of the events reached us just as we were coming together as a hemispheric community to sign this historic and important document. The attacks did not break our resolve, but rather, strengthened our determination. As US Secretary of State Colin Powell said on that momentous day in Lima: “They can destroy buildings, they can kill people, and we will be saddened, but they will never be allowed to kill the spirit of democracy.” The nations of the Hemisphere joined together as one to express our



sadness and anger, and then proceeded to sign the Charter as a clear signal that extremism, no matter how savagely it manifests itself, cannot triumph over freedom.

Just days after September 11, the Foreign Ministers of the Hemisphere met in Washington and declared that “these terrorist attacks against the United States of America are attacks against all American states.” In an extraordinary and altogether appropriate show of solidarity, the hemispheric community heeded President Bush’s call for nations to join the United States in the war on terrorism. Although we are here today to celebrate the Charter, we cannot ignore the fact that it was born on an ill-fated day that we will never forget.

The Inter-American Democratic Charter began as a proposal made by the Peruvian government at the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec, Canada. The presidents of the hemisphere instructed their Foreign Ministers to prepare, in the framework of the next General Assembly of the OAS, an Inter-American Democratic Charter to reinforce OAS instruments for the active defense of representative democracy. This job fell to the Permanent Council of the Organization which prepared a text for the Costa Rica meeting. In Costa Rica, and following the lead of the Caribbean delegations who emphasized the need to consult civil society and improve the document, the decision was made to hold a Special Session of the General Assembly dedicated exclusively to the Charter.

The Charter that was adopted on September 11 was greatly improved from its original version and clearly reflected the hemispheric consensus on democracy. The signing of the Charter represented the reaffirmation of the democratic values that all of the member states of the OAS share. More than that, the Charter is a clear warning to those who seek to undermine the constitutional order of a member state, or subvert the essential elements of democracy, that they will be faced by a united and determined community of nations.

The Charter updates and brings to life the concept of democracy. It defines the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the separation and independence of powers, transparency and accountability in government, responsible public administration, citizen participation, a pluralist system of political parties, access to information, freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the constitutional subordination of all state institutions to the legally constituted civilian authority, and respect for the rule of law as essential elements of democracy. The Charter also draws attention to a new generation of rights related to minorities and workers and it calls for the protection of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Finally, the Charter recognizes the fundamental relationship between the Protocol of San Salvador which outlines economic, social and cultural rights, the Protocol of Managua and its battle against poverty, and democracy and its essential elements. In that spirit, the Charter makes clear that we must address the grave social and economic ills that afflict our nations if we hope to have viable and stable democracies.

The Charter, however, is not just a list of essential elements or merely a tool to react to crises or impose sanctions. It is specifically designed with prevention in mind and is intended to provide active pro-democracy support from our community of nations. The Charter goes much further than any of our previous instruments to offer aid to a member state which fears that its democratic system may be in peril.

A year after the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter we can all look back in



satisfaction on how much we have accomplished and what the Charter means to the region today. The Charter is, without a doubt, the most important instrument to have come into being in the Organization in the past ten years. It is an example and a guide for the rest of the world. While some regional organizations may include democratic clauses, this Hemisphere boasts a profound and explicit manual of democratic behavior. No multilateral organization can say the same.

The Democratic Charter was put to the test for the first time this year when it was formally applied in Venezuela following the tragic events of April 11. Article 20 was immediately invoked and the OAS Permanent Council condemned the "alteration of the constitutional order." The Council called for the restoration of democracy and dispatched an urgent fact-finding mission, which met with government officials and representatives of all sectors of society. As the head of that mission, I reported on the deep polarization we found in Venezuela and highlighted some of the problems and issues that had led to the short ousting of the president. The constitutional order was restored, but the political crisis is still affecting the political, social and economic stability of the country today.

Spurred by General Assembly and Permanent Council resolutions, the OAS has since offered its support in facilitating national dialogue and reconciliation efforts in Venezuela. For its part, the Chavez Administration has invited the OAS, the Carter Center and the United Nations Development Programme to participate in the process. This step embodies the spirit and the precepts of the Democratic Charter.

It is impossible to discuss the Charter and democracy as an ideal without making further reference to the current situation in the Hemisphere. Much of the Hemisphere is presently mired in economic and political crises that we would not have anticipated as recently as five years ago. Economic crises that affect our member states have varying causes and will undoubtedly require individual and particular solutions. The timing of the adoption of the Charter, and the crises affecting democracy in our region, was by no means coincidental. It is clear that support for democracy in Latin America is diminishing. This is understandable. For the most part, our citizens live in countries that possess weak public institutions and political systems with ineffective social and economic policies.

Furthermore, citizens now equate all of the problems that exist in their societies with the democratic system. When a public institution fails to act in a transparent and efficacious manner, its failure is perceived to be a breakdown of democracy as a system. As the Charter delineates, the people of the Hemisphere are entitled to fundamental freedoms and human rights. We must work harder to make this true in all of our nations, or face the consequences. When our governments are incapable of providing such basic services as education, security and health care, those governments not only fail, but democracy fails.

Globalization has also played a hand in the rising disenchantment that we see in our region. Globalization has created a new and healthy demand for social justice. Our citizens are now exposed on a daily basis through the media to how societies with effective public institutions function and they wonder why theirs do not measure up. This has placed enormous pressure on our political systems. Add to this the growing perception among the citizenry that corruption is rife, and one can understand why democracy is in such dire straits.



Our governments must improve their performance. We need strong governments with effective public institutions. We must carry out our work in a transparent and democratic manner while respecting the rights of every citizen and protecting the most vulnerable members of our societies. Globalization brings with it many opportunities, but it also carries risks. Our governments must learn to take advantage of the possibilities while effectively tackling the ups and downs of an increasingly volatile world economy.

Our countries cannot achieve these objectives alone. The solidarity demonstrated by the hemispheric community following the attacks of September 11 must now be extended to those countries that are currently suffering through their own crises. We, as a community of nations, cannot turn our backs to our sister states who are suffering through such difficult times. The battle against terrorism is rightfully one of our highest priorities; we must place the same emphasis on our efforts to end poverty and misery. There is a real and grave danger that if we do not address the problems that our countries face, our citizens will become so disillusioned with their governments that they will heed the siren songs of populism and authoritarianism.

The Charter is not the culmination of our journey in the preservation and defense of democracy, but rather, the most important tool to aid us in that journey. We must work diligently to ensure that democracy prospers and flourishes in our Hemisphere. The Charter is the most important symbol of our principal mission here at the OAS: the preservation and promotion of democracy. Nevertheless, the Charter only consists of words on paper that need to be brought to life through our actions. The importance of the Charter will only grow when its message is taken to heart and its spirit embraced in the daily lives of the citizens and the leaders of our Hemisphere. There is still much to be done. I thank all of you for your participation in this important event.