



**AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO, U.S. PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OAS
REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO ON THE OCCASION OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE PERMANENT COUNCIL TO COMMEMORATE THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION
OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER**

September 12, 2006 - Washington, DC

Introduction

Mr. Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Permanent Representatives, Permanent Observers.

This day after September 11 is a powerful commemoration, not only for the 296 million citizens of the United States of America, but for the over 800 million people of this Hemisphere. Five years and one day ago, 19 terrorists tried to send a message of hate and destruction in New York and Washington, D.C. On this same momentous day, in Lima, Peru, 34 foreign ministers were working to send a message of hope and freedom.

This message, embodied in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, states that “the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy, and our governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.” On a day we were attacked as a Hemisphere — citizens of 30 hemispheric countries died that day — we committed not only to defend our territory, our security, and our people. We, on behalf of over 800 million people, committed to defend democracy.

Secretary of State Colin Powell — noting the historic significance of the moment — remained in Lima long enough to sign for the U.S., highlighting the Charter’s particular urgency in light of the attacks, stating: “They can destroy buildings, they can kill people, and we will be saddened by this tragedy; but they will never be allowed to kill the spirit of democracy.”

Shared consensus on essential elements of democracy

The democracy we are talking about is not a U.S. model of democracy. Or a Brazilian model. Or a Canadian or a Venezuelan or a Costa Rican or a Jamaican model of democracy. Every government in this room today, 34 governments representing 800 million people, voluntarily signed a document which agrees to these essential elements of representative democracy:

- respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- the rule of law;
- the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting;
- a pluralistic political system; and
- the separation of powers;

These are fundamental, universal, non-negotiable human liberties. And in the Americas, we have a positive agenda to assure that all 800 million people enjoy these freedoms.

Link between Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Summits of the Americas process

Our democratically-elected Presidents and Prime Ministers have recognized repeatedly the



importance of defending and promoting democracy. Our leaders mandated the Inter-American Democratic Charter at the Third Summit of the Americas in April 2001 in Quebec, and called for its full implementation at the Fourth Summit of the Americas last November in Mar del Plata.

The reason they linked the Summit Process and the Inter-American Democratic Charter is because they recognize that democracy, in the end, is about the democratic state “delivering the goods.”

Our leaders understood that the Democratic Charter was necessary to strengthen our individual democratic infrastructures in order to link democracy and development. The Democratic Charter clearly states, in its first article, that democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the Americas.

The particulars of social and economic development are addressed through the commitments our leaders make at the Summits, and carried out through the Summits of the Americas process. That includes commitments to concrete, measurable actions, such as those which empower our people through property rights, remittances, and small business loans. The IDB’s new initiative, “Building Opportunity for the Majority,” addresses these critical needs for the 40% of the people in the hemisphere who live on \$3 a day or less, at the base of the pyramid.

This hemisphere is strengthened by the dual pillars of democracy, championed at the OAS, and development, carried out in an important part through the work of the IDB. It is a realistic way to deal with expanding opportunities, combating poverty, and bringing about steadily improving standards of living.

If democracy is to help reduce poverty and inequality, then democratic institutions must be effective. Institutions must be reformed to fight corruption and to function transparently. And every democracy must have the strength to create opportunities for improved health and education for all of its citizens. In order to prevent a breakdown of this democratic infrastructure, the Democratic Charter must be a relevant tool for action, not just a piece of paper.

Successes of the Charter

In this regard, we welcome the Secretary General’s comments on how the Democratic Charter has already been successfully applied in the region. Acting under the Inter-American Democratic Charter, or in the spirit of the Charter, the OAS has helped and is helping those member states where democratic practices or institutions are challenged, including Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Of note, over the last 24 months the OAS has fielded high quality, successful election observer missions or other missions in Bolivia, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana the Dominican Republic, Panama, El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, St. Vincent, Suriname and in Nicaragua.

Of particular note was the OAS’ important role in Haiti, including voter registration and distribution of over 3.4 million ID cards that was so essential for that country to make the transition to a functioning democracy and the elections last February.



After Ecuador's change of government in April 2005, at the invitation of the government of Ecuador, the OAS has sent a series of high-level missions, from legal experts to assist Congress on the issue of selecting a new Supreme Court to the Secretary General himself. Ecuador has requested an EOM for its elections that begin next month, and we are confident the OAS will respond favorably.

The OAS has been heavily engaged in Nicaragua for quite some time. For example, OAS special envoy Dante Caputo led a 6-month special mission to broker a new accord resulting in the Framework Law approved last year. Since February, the OAS has had missions in Nicaragua to observe the elections, first on the Atlantic coast and with rounds scheduled for this November and December.

In Bolivia, throughout the past year of crises, the OAS and its missions have consistently urged it forward on the path of stable, constitutional democracy, respect for the rule of law, in accordance with the terms of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

In Venezuela, the OAS has made a commitment to help maintain democratic institutions. This included an electoral observation mission for the December 2005 legislative elections.

The OAS also plays a critical role in Colombia through its mission on the ground for demobilization of illegal armed groups, which is helping the Colombian government work to achieve a transparent, internationally-monitored peace process.

Engagement and observation by the OAS led by the Deputy Secretary General himself in Guyana have played a very important role in recent weeks in assisting that country.

Under the framework of the Democratic Charter, the Organization of American States has carried out critical work on behalf of democratic institutions in all of these countries. As these and other countries become more comfortable with the Charter, they'll be better able to take advantage of the tools the Charter provides. All of us, I believe, would hope that, in the future, countries beset by problems within their democratic systems will increasingly look to the OAS, and the Democratic Charter, as a valuable instrument to forestall deterioration of their political order and deal with crisis.

Shortcomings

But, there are shortcomings. That is why, as we gather today to reflect on this 5th anniversary of the Democratic Charter, we also must take a close hard look at those shortcomings, and where we need to do more. Let us be clear that the Charter has inherent value, but much work remains ahead if we are to succeed in fulfilling its full potential as the core of a principled, effective multilateralism in the Americas.

While the Charter can serve as an effective tool to ward off political crises or impending challenges to constitutional order, there is still reluctance on the part of some countries to use it in this way.

We should be clear: The Inter-American Democratic Charter does not anticipate rushing to sanction or to suspend a member state. The Charter contemplates a gradual, measured



response to political crises. It incorporates very practical measures — both remedial and preventative — to strengthen or restore democracy.

In order to avoid remedial action, we must work with the Secretary General to develop more credible long-term preventative tools. As the Secretary General noted in his June 4 speech in Santo Domingo, and as he reiterated here today, the member states of the Organization already mutually evaluate each other in the areas of counter-narcotics and corruption. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also prepares credible reports, which almost all countries take seriously, when the fundamental rights of their people are threatened. In a similar vein, we should also work together positively, in collaboration and true solidarity, to improve country performance under the Charter. And throughout this process, we should welcome the independence and credibility of academics and civil society to support these efforts.

Implementing the Charter: A Multilateral Commitment

Implementing the Charter is, and has to be, a multilateral commitment. Working together in a transparent manner, we must reduce mutual suspicions, speak with frankness, and usher in a new spirit of democratic solidarity with one another.

In such a spirit of solidarity, we must act on the Charter to secure democracy where it is threatened. We must act on the Charter to secure democracy with the rule of law. And we must act on the Charter to advance democracy where it is weak or absent. And this will require political will.

To that end, we have an important opportunity to move forward with the objectives we set out at two successive general assemblies where we committed to bolster regional cooperation for strengthening implementation of the Democratic Charter.

The Declaration of Florida and Resolutions 2154 and 2251, adopted in Ft. Lauderdale and Santo Domingo, mark an important multilateral commitment to advance the hemisphere's democratic agenda. Building on previous achievements of the inter-American community to address threats to democracy — Resolution 1080, the Washington Protocol and the Quebec Summit — the Declaration and the accompanying resolutions empower and give the Secretary General a new mandate to move the hemispheric commitment to the Charter and its principles beyond rhetoric, towards practical and politically workable outcomes.

The Declaration of Florida also set a new and important marker, establishing that adherence to the IADC is the standard for member states' full participation in the inter-American system.

Cuba

Today, as we celebrate the Inter-American Democratic Charter, nations the world-over look to it as a model for regional democratic integration. It is only appropriate that on this occasion, we — as caretakers of the Charter's promise — remember those who today still languish under tyranny, denied the most fundamental, basic freedoms and human dignity.

Unfortunately, here in the house of the Americas, in the age of the Democratic Charter, there



continues to be one empty chair at our table of democracies — a chair that will be rightfully claimed one day by the people of a free and democratic Cuba.

The Democratic Charter states that all the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy, and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it. Yet, for the people of Cuba, the Charter remains but a flickering symbol of hope.

Our hemispheric community faces a historic challenge on whether to stand by as one dictatorship replaces another, or work to make the promise of the Charter a reality for the citizens of Cuba. The Cuban people too are entitled to enjoy the rights enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter that will one day serve as roadmap for a democratic Cuba's full reintegration into the inter-American system.

It is imperative that the OAS, as the hemisphere's own multilateral political institution, also prepare itself to play a constructive role in assisting a genuine transition to democracy in Cuba and support the legitimate aspirations of the Cuban people to live in freedom.

9/11 and the Inter-American Democratic Charter

The two 9/11 events, the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the terrorist attacks on the United States are seminal in the course of our hemisphere's history, and they will forever remain tied inextricably by fate's hand.

At face value, both could not be further apart in their human dimensions: one, an act of premeditated evil, the other, a symbol of great human achievement that exalts civilization.

On 9/11, we recall the fire and horror at the twin towers, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field only sixty miles from my home. We will always remember the thousands of innocent victims who perished — citizens from 30 of our 34 member states among them — murdered by the enemies of freedom that morning.

We witnessed the heroism and eloquent sacrifice of ordinary citizens demonstrating extraordinary courage, risking and giving their lives to save others.

We saw our countries, our region, and our world come together as a community of nations to provide comfort, solidarity and hope. And we saw political will and determination by each one of our governments to make a historic and explicit commitment to the preservation and promotion of democracy, on the very day that our democratic values and way of life came under attack.

These are the images of September 11, 2001. It is here where these two stories find common ground. It is here that we find the vivid portrait of courage in pursuit of the values that we honor here today. It is this harmony of purpose we must look to as we forge ahead, determined and with strengthened resolve, to make good on the promise of the Inter-American Democratic Charter for all of our peoples.