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U.S. PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OAS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PERMANENT
COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL ON THE INTER-AMERICAN
DEMOCRATIC CHARTER**

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His Excellency, Alejandro Toledo, President of the Republic of Peru; Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my honor to open this Special Session of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, which has been convened to commemorate the First Anniversary of the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

As we look back over the great history of this Organization, September 11, 2001, will be forever remembered as a tragic day in our community's memory. That day, 32 of our member states lost citizens as a result of savage terrorist attacks. However, something very good happened on that fateful day, as the free nations of the Western Hemisphere reaffirmed the very principles of democracy that the terrorists had targeted.

It is poetic justice that within moments of those horrific attacks, the nations of the Americas vowed to preserve and defend our common values by approving the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

The Role of Peru

It is altogether fitting that President Alejandro Toledo of the Republic of Peru has been invited to present the keynote reflections on the Inter-American Democratic Charter here today. Because, in a very real sense, his people inspired the Charter. In the year 2000, while grappling with a constitutional crisis, fraudulent elections, and notorious corruption, the Peruvian people experienced firsthand that democracy provides the ideal framework for reclaiming essential rights and for resolving crises.

They also came to recognize the full potential of the Organization of American States: An independent, well-led OAS electoral mission courageously exposed and derailed a fraudulent election. And a focused and fair "national roundtable," coordinated by the OAS, provided an accountable forum for airing disputes and helped lay the foundation for a successful democratic transition.

Peruvian democrats also realized — and brought to our attention — that in order for the OAS to reach its potential, it required the mandate and the means to respond to institutional weaknesses or constitutional transgressions -- before they produce an outright democratic rupture. It was then-Foreign Minister of Peru, Diego Garcia-Sayan, who, at a meeting of the Community of Democracies held in this very room, suggested a "Democratic Charter" for the Hemisphere.

At the Summit in Quebec in April 2001, our leaders mandated that the OAS draft such an instrument, setting us on an ambitious path that led us to San José, Costa Rica, to Lima, Peru,



and here, today.

The Democratic Charter and Its Contribution

The Inter-American Democratic Charter represents an unambiguous rejection of any act or ideology that threatens the “right to democracy.” But it does even more: it represents the solidarity of our community to help one another strengthen democratic institutions and processes that might be at risk and to defend democratic order or constitutional regimes that are undermined or disrupted.

Just as important, the Charter defines, in conscientious detail, the “essential elements” of representative democracy, — that is to say, the “democratic order,” including respect for “human rights and fundamental freedoms”; the “rule of law”; “periodic, free, and fair elections”; a “pluralistic system of political parties”; the “separation of powers and independence of the branches of government”; “freedom of expression and of the press;” and, the “constitutional subordination of all state institutions to the legally constituted civilian authority.”

Thanks to the Democratic Charter, the time has passed when regimes could tinker with the definition of democracy to suit themselves. So, too, the time has passed when this community could choose to ignore an autocrat simply because his country is too poor or, for that matter, too rich.

Applying the Charter

The Democratic Charter builds upon a practical legacy in which the OAS advances principles that will make all our nations stronger by making each of our nations stronger. The resolutions and accords we approve in the OAS are not mere words: they constitute legislation that provides the framework for action. They chart the course for pursuing our ideals and objectives.

We pursue these goals as a community not because one government or another is imposing an agenda. We do so because we are compelled by our shared interests to do so.

However, some worry that the Democratic Charter is reserved for our “weakest” or “smallest” neighbors. Anyone who understands the genuine purpose of the accord would never make that mistake. Let me explain:

First, no one would include my country, the United States, on any list of “weak” or “small” countries. Yet when we were attacked on September 11, we sought help from our neighbors. And, quite sincerely, you delivered results that exceeded our most optimistic expectations. I do not exaggerate in observing that every single delegation seated around this table made concrete contributions to the anti-terrorism efforts taken by this Organization in the past year. And, those efforts continue.

I dare say that my country is safer and stronger today because of the solidarity and resolve of our partners in the OAS — large and small, strong and not-so-strong. The lesson is this: every country stands to benefit from the solidarity embodied in the Democratic Charter.



Second, invoking the Charter's self-help mechanism (Article 17) should not be viewed by any nation as a sign of weakness or failure. It should be viewed as one more tool that any government has at its disposal to help ensure the free exercise of democracy for its citizens. The ability to summon the help of sister nations is a source of strength, not a sign of weakness.

Third, the Charter's true strength is not that it carries a potential sanction. We had and still have "Resolution 1080" at our disposal to respond to anti-democratic measures. No, the Democratic Charter's central contribution is how it seeks to avoid or remedy ruptures in democracy.

Indeed, it might be said that our community will have failed if we are ever compelled to suspend a government under the Democratic Charter. It might be said that we set ourselves on the road to that failure when we shrink from using the Charter's preventive mechanisms to respond to manifest weaknesses in democratic institutions or clear threats to constitutional regimes.

The Democratic Charter allows for gradual, measured steps to prevent and respond to political crises. Indeed, we have evoked – if not, invoked – the spirit of the Democratic Charter each time during the past year that we have passed resolutions, deployed missions, or taken other steps to promote democracy.

Looking to the Future

Only through application and exercise of a document will it achieve its full or even intended potential. Through fits and starts and repeated attempts, the value of any seminal public policy document, like the Inter-American Democratic Charter, eventually becomes tangible and comes to life.

As I have said, perhaps the greatest single feature of our Democratic Charter is that it succeeds in defining the "essential elements" of representative democracy. These "rules of the game" are not imposed by any one nation or ideology. These standards, which we set for ourselves, embody the immutable, common values of our inter-American community.

It is my fervent hope that the good people of Cuba are studying the Democratic Charter, because it represents a path to their reintegration into the Inter-American System. A growing number of Cubans already are moving toward that future; many dissidents are struggling to claim their human rights and liberty; independent journalists are chronicling that valiant struggle; and more than 11,000 Cubans have petitioned for a referendum to exercise their fundamental political rights.

As the Cuban people claim the "right to democracy" — and when a government there recognizes its "obligation to promote and defend" democracy and respect all of its "essential elements" — we look forward to their representative taking Cuba's seat at this table.

Recognizing President Toledo

As I have stated, we owe the Peruvian people a debt for inspiring the instrument we



commemorate today. The Peruvian people know, too, that democracy is not an end in itself: it is simply the best guarantee that people from all walks of life will be able to claim their fair share of political rights and economic opportunity.

The Peruvian people continue to inspire us. We are pleased to note that Peruvian democrats of good will have joined President Toledo in committing to a national accord that puts the well-being of their people above their own personal and political agendas. Democracy is not always easy, nor does it provide instant results. It requires patience, commitment, and hard work by the government, civil society, and each and every citizen.

As President Toledo continues to work with democrats from across the political spectrum to construct that prosperous future for all of his people, his constitutional, democratic government can count on the full support of this Permanent Council and of this Organization.

Thank you.

