

**SPEECH BY OAS ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL,
AMBASSADOR NESTOR MENDEZ**

**TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY (TTU) ETHICS CENTER
GLOBAL ETHICS DAY PANEL
TTU School of Law, Lanier Auditorium-October 17th, 2018-11:30 AM**

Good morning to each and every one. I bring you warm greetings from the Organization of American States, the oldest multilateral organization in the world, and one which since its establishment seventy years ago has endeavored to maintain the highest ethical standards in areas covered by its four pillars of Democracy, Development, Human Rights, and Security:

- President of Texas Tech University, Dr. Lawrence Schovanec
- Provost of Texas Tech University, Michael Galyean
- Managing Director of the Texas Tech University Ethics Center, Fulbright Global Specialist, Executive Editor and Publisher of the Journal of the Texas Tech University Ethics Center and Adjunct Professor of Public Health and Management, Dr. Ralph Ferguson.
- Distinguished guests
- Fellow Panelists
- Faculty and students of Texas Tech University

I am honored to be a part of the 5th Annual Global Ethics Day panel here at Texas Tech University. This is my first time visiting Texas Tech and I look forward to an enriching exchange with you. I extend sincere thanks to the Texas Tech University Ethics Centre, and specifically to Dr. Ralph Ferguson, Managing Director, for inviting me to be a panelist.

As the Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States, I am grateful for the opportunity to illustrate how the work of our institution can confidently be mapped out on deliberate ethical foundations both in terms of the specific initiatives and projects we implement as well as in the core objectives of our work which ultimately seeks to improve the lives of the people we serve. Ethics speak to the spirit of a society as a society devoid of morals and values would lead to the destruction and disintegration of its social fabric.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 1948 twenty-one countries of the Hemisphere established the Organization of American States through the signing of the Treaty of Bogotá, in Bogotá, Colombia. Seventy years later, the OAS has succeeded in constructing more prosperous and just societies with participatory democracies and agreements to protect the human rights of the people of the Americas. The core mandate of the OAS is to improve the lives of all people of the Hemisphere through strengthening peace and security, responding to political, judicial and economical challenges, and ultimately by promoting economic, social, educational, scientific, and cultural development in the region.

We recognize the importance of continuing to promote these values through organizations like the OAS as well as fora of this nature that provide a space for discussion on the myriad challenges we confront and possible solutions and mechanisms to overcome them. We can also share many concrete examples of how we have addressed these problems. For instance, the OAS has taken action against discrimination in all its forms. The Inter-American Convention Against Racism and all forms of Discrimination and Intolerance, adopted in 2013 is confirmation of our goal to afford equal rights to the people of the hemisphere. Likewise, at its 2016 General Assembly, the OAS approved the Plan of Action for the Decade of Afro-Descendants in the Americas. This initiative, as well as those undertaken to acknowledge the contribution of indigenous peoples to the Americas, namely the Plan of Action on the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, shape the message of equality and rights for all persons which the OAS embraces as integral components of the mandates issued by its Member States.

You may be asking yourselves, “How do these themes relate to ethics?” The primary goal of the Ethics Centre here at Texas Tech University is to enhance your understanding of social justice, healthcare, and governance, among others. The core ethos of the OAS is to act as a catalyst for the cultural, economic, social and political development of our Hemisphere. For that reason, the OAS invests in programs and initiatives that promote ethical governance. For example, since 1962, the OAS has deployed more than 240 Electoral Observation Missions in 28 of the 34 Member States including the United States. This month we were proud to observe the electoral process in Brazil for the first time. These electoral observation missions aim to ensure that elections in Member States are free, fair and transparent, and the OAS’ imprimatur confirming a well-managed electoral process serves as a source of credibility for the government and the people.

The Eighth Summit of the Americas held in Lima, Peru last April, under the central theme “Democratic Governance against Corruption,” focused on one of the most pressing issues of the region and yielded concrete and important anti-corruption measures that will help to combat impunity through regional cooperation.

The Heads of State and Government adopted the Lima Commitment, vowing to “Continue to strengthen national anti-corruption measures or systems and enhancing conditions for the effective participation of civil society, social organizations, academia, the private sector, citizens, and other social actors in monitoring government performance...¹” Such agreements demonstrate the commitment of the OAS and its Member States to join forces in the fight against corruption and unethical practices at all levels.

This year our Organization also commemorated the 90th anniversary of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). The CIM was the first inter-governmental organization in the world created to ensure recognition of women’s rights and to promote the development of policies and practices which elevate the role of women. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Latin America and the Caribbean is the region that has made the most progress in formally recognizing the rights of women. Our Organization is proud to have been a part of this journey.

¹ Organization of American States, VIII Summit of the Americas. *Lima Commitment: Democratic Governance Against Corruption, 2018*, <http://www.viiiicumbreperu.org/us/lima-commitment-democratic-governance-against-corruption/>

Furthermore, the OAS has always been committed to investing in the youth. You are the ones that must live with the decisions and mistakes of past generations. As part of the largest demographic in the Americas, the youth are an indefatigable fount of innovative ideas and proactive engagement who must be supported in their quest to move beyond traditional responses and to seek new and innovative solutions to societies' problems. The OAS, through the Model OAS, aims to develop the minds of young people and hopes to give voice to the many young individuals that yearn for an inclusive and democratic Hemisphere. The MOAS program responds to the three primary goals of the OAS Youth Agenda, which are: (1) to emphasize the importance of establishing an ongoing dialogue with the youth of the Americas; (2) to prioritize capacity building and skills development for students; and (3) to strengthen the institutional development of youth affairs within Member States and the OAS.

In that vein, we applaud your institution's decision to launch its new interdisciplinary minor, Mexican-American and Latina/o Studies which we see as a testament to your school's efforts to provide a well-rounded, holistic academic experience. We are hopeful that this program, like the MOAS, will help students to develop a more cohesive understanding of how social issues, politics and other environmental realities shape the circumstances of Mexican-Americans and Latina/os living in the US. We further hope that this area of study will allow students to become more cognizant of the realities of millions of persons around the region.

The OAS strives to bring awareness to the many challenges and successes of our Member States, and we recognize that we cannot do it alone. In this context, the OAS continues to seek strategic partners like your university to work together in promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion, all of which form part of our key priorities. The opening of a Texas Tech University campus in Costa Rica demonstrates a conscious effort to collaborate with Latin America, a region rich in culture and replete with the human resources and technical capacity to formulate solutions to overcome present day challenges. We are currently organizing the 34th Model OAS for universities of the region, which should take place from March 11th -13th, 2019 at Universidad Latina in Costa Rica. This once again underscores our commitment to provide a forum specifically for dialogue among the youth of the Americas. We trust that we can count on the participation of Texas Tech in this Model OAS, and we extend a warm invitation to Texas Tech to consider hosting a University Model OAS, perhaps in 2020.

During the 47th OAS General Assembly, Member States voted to “Encourage existing OAS forums to allow children and adolescents the opportunity to participate and have their opinions and proposals heard, fostering intergenerational dialogue on important issues that focus the attention of the region”². The Model OAS is one of these forums. The annual Washington Model General Assembly of the Organization of American States is also an initiative that the OAS hopes will develop critical thinking skills for the youth of the Hemisphere. I want to encourage you to engage in programs such as this, which will no doubt enhance your problem solving and negotiation skills. The Model OAS is a powerful, hands-on tool that has been created for you, the future leaders of our Hemisphere,

² Organization of American States, *ADVANCING HEMISPHERIC SECURITY: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH*, 2017. AG/RES. 2925 (XLVIII-O/18), <http://www.oas.org/en/47ga/>

to make a more ethical world in which people's rights are recognized and respected. At the OAS we believe that our young people constitute an essential part of our efforts to confront our challenges and to seek solutions. I therefore urge you to use your voice and your various platforms on social media to take a stand against the blatant ills that plague our society. In addressing the leaders and dignitaries at the High-Level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment in 2015, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, underscored the pivotal role of the youth in the future development of our world. He stated that, "When we give young people decent jobs, political weight, negotiating muscle, and real influence in our world, they will create a better future."³ You hold the keys to the sustainable development of our Hemisphere and world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Global Ethics Day is a reminder that the vision of a more just, equal and cooperative society is a shared responsibility. The OAS is committed to these ideals, and we need the support of other institutions that share our vision. The values of Texas Tech University align with those of the OAS, and I hope that we can collaborate in the near future to bridge the gaps that exists within our societies. Let us therefore partake in the race that is set before us, employing a combination of ethics and a holistic vision for a strong and productive Americas for all.

Thank you.

³ United Nations Population Fund, *Youth empowerment, education, employment key to future development* 2015. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/news/youth-empowerment-education-employment-key-future-development>.