



Speech

Organization of American States



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THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AT THE OPENING OF THE III REGULAR ASSEMBLY OF
CITEL**

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It is very gratifying for the OAS General Secretariat to host this III Regular Assembly of CITEL in this beautiful Hall of the Americas. Let me begin by reconfirming to you, Mr. Chairman, and with you all of the members of this unusual and highly effective regional body, the high regard which the Secretary General and I have for CITEL, its work and its accomplishments.

Exactly forty years ago, in July of 1962, here in this building, the Secretariat hosted a meeting of fourteen telecommunications experts to draw up proposals for enhancing telecommunications in the region following the recommendations that issued from the Charter approved by the Heads of State and Governments attending the Summit at Punta del Este, Uruguay. That Charter recognized that inadequate communications constitute an obstacle to economic growth in the hemisphere. Of those fourteen experts, ten were from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela, original Member States of this Organization. They were assisted, even then, by experts from the International Telecommunications Union, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The experts made a series of recommendations on the planning and operations of a telecommunication network that would link all OAS member countries. The recommendations included a draft Statute on the establishment of an OAS commission, which they called the "Inter-American Telecommunication Commission" more commonly now known by its acronym, CITEL.

Much has changed since then. I am pleased to note the participation, defined in terms of Member States in this III Regular Assembly has doubled and all regional groupings are now represented. This is a sign not only of the independence of the English Speaking Caribbean and with it the growth in number of OAS Member States, but also of the recognition by everyone of the importance of telecommunications to development.

CITEL is in fact an unusual and perhaps unique example of effective integration in the Hemisphere of our governments and the private sector. CITEL has over 200 Associate Members from the private sector, working with us as partners to further the development of the region's telecommunications sector. Acting as a catalyst for Member States, CITEL has facilitated the presentation in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and other international fora of common Inter-American proposals benefiting both states and the private sector.

The excellent working relationship, in fact, between CITEL and the ITU is an important phenomenon to be commended. I would like to personally express the appreciation of the OAS for the continued participation of the ITU in our activities in the Americas. This cooperation was important forty years ago when CITEL was founded and it is obviously even more so today, in the increasingly global context in which we live.

The publication in the year 2000 by CITEL with ITU and the AHCET (Asociación Hispanoamericana de Centros de Investigación y Empresas de Telecomunicaciones) entitled Services for all: Universal service in the Americas is evidence of how this cooperation can work to our common benefit.

I have taken a look at the agenda for this Assembly. As an outsider, it appears comprehensive and ambitious. I think there is probably no more important

element in it than the Agenda for Connectivity in the Americas that was set forth by the Heads of State and Government gathered in the Summit of the Americas in Quebec in 2001. We in the OAS recognize the strategic importance of Summits for setting a common framework and direction for us and of telecommunications in attempting to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

CITEL must combine the introduction of state-of-the-art technologies that ensure the efficient handling of information with the adoption of policies, strategies and programs that will foster development of the telecommunications sector in ways that raise the standard of living and reinforce the skills and know-how of all citizens in the Hemisphere.

To make the Agenda for Connectivity a reality, we are relying heavily on you to influence the development of the telecommunications infrastructure and services essential to free and fair competition in the services.

The Plan of Action of Quito is the initial step in the implementation of the Agenda for Connectivity. With it, CITEL has provided OAS member states with a set of regional strategies to enable all the people of the Americas to develop the tools to access and share knowledge that will allow them to participate more fully in the Information Age.

As a politically oriented person, I commend particularly, the strong focus of CITEL members on strategies to ensure universal coverage of telecommunication services among all population groups in the Hemisphere. From the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concern that citizenship was most meaningful within the confines of a city state where an orator's voice could reach all citizens, to modern studies of nationalism and social communication, the interaction between politics and communication has raised central issues for democracy. Your commitment to support the process of democratization in this hemisphere to effectively expand telecommunications service coverage, giving priority to the delivery of service to isolated regions and to the most vulnerable population groups under the principle of universal service is a recognition of communication as an essential human right.

Mr. Chairman, Chairs of Working Groups and of the Permanent Consultative Committees, delegates, I know you have much work ahead of you to establish CITEL's framework for the four years until your next assembly.

Based on your past achievements, I am sure that not only are you going to prove up to the task, but that you will exceed expectations. It is not by chance that I said that you are one of the most effective bodies in the Hemisphere. You have our best wishes for the success of your deliberations.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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