



Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE
INTER-AMERICAN FORUM ON POLITICAL PARTIES
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Honourable Bill Graham , Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Chief Elections Officer of Elections Canada, Mr. Christof Kuechemann, Deputy Manager, Inter-American Development Bank, ladies and gentlemen, friends:

I am honored to be with you in Vancouver to inaugurate this Second Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties.

I bring you greetings from the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria. It was his intention to join you at this important meeting; however, he is unable to do so as he is in Venezuela, acting under a mandate from the Permanent Council of the Organization.

I am pleased to see so many of you here for this event—you are more than 100 men and women from 20 countries of North, Central, South America and the Caribbean. Some 50 political parties are represented here, many at the highest levels. The Partido Nacional of Uruguay is represented by a former President of the Republic: Dr. Luis Alberto LaCalle. Please accept my personal welcome, President LaCalle.

As most of you know, the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties was created in response to a mandate issued in April, 2001, by the Presidents and Heads of Government meeting in Quebec City at Summit of the Americas. They tasked the OAS with convening, in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank, "meetings of experts to examine . . . issues such as political party registration, access of political parties to funding and to the media, campaign financing, oversight and dissemination of election results, and relations of political parties with other sectors of society."

We have been privileged to have a number of valuable partners in this endeavor: the IDB, International IDEA, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

Like the UN Charter, the OAS Charter recognizes the sovereign equality of states. Without respect for the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of states, the Inter-American System would not exist. But unlike the UN Charter, the OAS Charter also explicitly recognizes the value of democracy. Over the past decade, the governments of the Americas, themselves democratizing, have supported the gradual strengthening of a regional jurisprudence to defend and promote democracy. The OAS has played a critical role in this evolution, in both policy and practice. I would like in this regard to recognize the role of a gifted Canadian, Elizabeth Spehar, the head of the OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, who has led the General Secretariat's programs to give concrete expressions to our growing democratic solidarity.

The adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter at a special session of the General Assembly of the OAS, in Lima, Peru in September, 2001, represents a new stage in efforts to defend and promote democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1991, Resolution 1080 made the first operational breakthrough from hortatory rhetoric to actual practice. But Resolution 1080 did not specify what constituted an "interruption" that would call for collective action. Unfortunately,

most threats to democracy do not take the form of a military coup. Nor does the fact that a government is elected mean that all its actions will be democratic.

Article 3 of the Democratic Charter fills this conceptual void by defining the "essential elements" of representative democracy. I quote:

"... respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government."

The Charter also provides in Article 5 that, and again I quote:

"The strengthening of political parties and other political organizations is a priority for democracy. Special attention will be paid to the problems associated with the high cost of election campaigns and the establishment of a balanced and transparent system for their financing."

As a goal, the strengthening of political parties is not a simple one; however simply it can be stated. This is a task that will require continuous effort, broad, open and participatory consultations.

Before coming to Vancouver, I reviewed the results of the First Meeting of this Inter-American Forum on Political Parties, held in December 2001 in Miami. I would like to briefly review the four basic recommendations identified by the participants and their relationship to the program before you.

First, the participants recommended that priority be given to the "reform and modernization of normative frameworks that regulate political party systems" – the so-called "rules of the game." One of the factors they identified as crucial was that relating to "systems for financing campaigns and political parties," which they considered to be particularly relevant because of their impact on the degree of equity and competitiveness in the political system.

On this point, the OAS has teamed up with International IDEA and Elections Canada to compile an ambitious 34-member comparative analysis of political party and campaign financing in the hemisphere. Over the next two days, your input for the various focal themes of this study will be critical.

Second, the participants urged the need to promote party reform from within. The initiative must rest with you, the party leaders who seek to modernize political structures and who see reform as being in the best interest of your parties. It is our hope that by becoming increasingly participatory and transparent, parties will put themselves in a better position to win elections and form credible governments.

This Forum will hear the results of case studies from Canada, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico regarding their experiences on matters of reform.

Thirdly, the Miami conference called for the improvement of capacity and level of effectiveness of political parties in carrying out their responsibilities, particularly relating to the exercise of governing. Capacity-building is important if the programs offered to the electorate are to be implemented effectively once candidates are elected to govern.

In August of this year, the OAS met in Santiago, Chile with the leadership of international groupings of political parties, foundations and institutes to develop new strategies to meet this and other challenges.

Lastly, participants called for a significant improvement in the relationship between political parties and organized civil society and mass media.

There has been considerable debate as to whether the roles of political parties are transferable or not. The Secretary General expressed concern at the first Forum over a trend in some of the more northern countries of the hemisphere to value NGOs over political parties. I am pleased to report that we have seen emerging from our various meetings a consensus that different actors are valid

interlocutors in their own right and that the focus should be on how they interact. Certainly the institutions of civil society are important to democracy and can complement political parties. As in Miami, we have invited to this Forum representatives of key civil society organizations in the expectation that they will constructively engage with political parties.

It is true that public confidence in political parties has ebbed to worrisome lows. According to the latest Latinobarometro poll, which tracks public opinion throughout Latin America, only 23 percent of people place "much" or "some" confidence in political parties, putting parties dead last behind congress, the judiciary, the presidency, police, church and even television.

This is troubling but not surprising. For the better part of a generation, numerous parties throughout the hemisphere have failed to produce new leaders to offer the electorate as candidates for high office. It is as though the "iron law of oligarchy" developed by the sociologist Robert Michels out of his experience in the German Socialist Party at the turn of the 20th century were being revalidated in stultifying fashion a continent apart and a century later in the New World. When parties do not offer fresh choices to their electorates, the value of the "regular" elections called for in the Charter is greatly reduced.

We will have an opportunity to discuss the state of parties and Democracies, when the Inter-American Development Bank and International IDEA present their report "Democracies in Development." for consideration.

I would like to close now with four points of my own.

The first is that we should enhance the participation of women in the political process. On November 25th, the OAS Permanent Council, with the cooperation of the Inter-American Commission of Women, a specialized organization of the inter-American system, and the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, organized a series of thoughtful and thought-provoking presentations by a group of impressive politicians who happened also to be women.

The Americas are second only to the Nordic countries in the presence of women in national parliaments--17.6%, but even this figure reflects that we still have a long way to go in achieving an equitable, representative balance. Numbers, of course, cannot be our ultimate objective. What is necessary is the implementation of strategies that incorporate women as active partners in the building of democracy. I look forward to the presentation of the document "Women in Politics: Beyond the Numbers," developed by International IDEA and its conclusions.

Second, it is vital that political parties do more than survive; they must thrive. Without grass roots political parties, everyday citizens are not afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns and help decide the political future of their countries. Parties serve as an irreplaceable link between government and the public.

As a personal reflection, I would say that Venezuela, for 40 years in many ways a bastion of two-party democracy, has over the last decade or so demonstrated tragically what happens when the grass root linkages between the government and the public deteriorate.

The Secretary General is not with us this evening precisely because he is in Caracas leading an effort to develop common ground among Venezuelans of diametrically opposed views. Here is a recent report from his team:

La OEA, con la participación del Centro Carter y del PNUD, ha trabajado desde el mes de septiembre para lograr un acercamiento entre el Gobierno de Venezuela y la oposición representada en La Coordinadora Democrática. Las dos partes invitaron expresamente a las tres instituciones para propiciar este acercamiento y buscar, a través del dialogo y la negociación, una salida a la crisis que vive el país. Antes de iniciarse directamente las negociaciones, se trabajó con las partes durante tres meses para llegar a un acuerdo que enmarca el proceso de negociación que ahora se encuentra en marcha. Fue así como se suscribieron dos documentos importantes, la Declaración de Principios por la Paz y la Democracia en Venezuela y un acuerdo conocido como la Síntesis Operativa de

la Mesa de Negociación y Acuerdos, el cual contiene detalles operativos de la mesa y un preacuerdo sobre los objetivos de la misma. Las dos partes acordaron que el Facilitador sería el Secretario General de la OEA, y que el Equipo Técnico Tripartito OEA, Centro Carter y PNUD, lo apoyarían técnicamente en su tarea, conforme a sus respectivos mandatos.

El objetivo de la Mesa, según lo acordado por las partes, es buscar acuerdos para solucionar la crisis por la vía electoral, así como también sobre los siguientes temas: fortalecimiento del sistema electoral, desarme de la población civil e instalación y funcionamiento de la Comisión de la Verdad. La Mesa se instaló el 8 de noviembre de este año. El primer logro importante de esta tarea ha sido sentar a las dos partes frente a frente y establecer un contacto directo para discutir los problemas más apremiantes del país, dentro de los objetivos establecidos por cada una de ellas. Inicialmente se logró crear un clima de comunicación franca y de alguna confianza para poder entrar a discutir los temas de fondo. Sin embargo, la primera parte de la negociación se ha visto afectada por algunas acciones externas a la mesa, adoptadas tanto por el Gobierno como por la oposición. Por ejemplo, el Gobierno tomó la decisión de intervenir la Policía Metropolitana y ejercer un Patrullaje de la ciudad con unidades militares. Por su parte, y como reacción a estas medidas que no comparte, la oposición convocó a un Paro Cívico para el dos de diciembre. Todo ello le ha creado un ambiente de tensión a la mesa, pero las dos partes han expresado claramente su voluntad de mantenerse en ella.

Con la existencia de la Mesa se ha abierto un espacio para la negociación. Todos reconocen que la única salida viable es a través de ella. El apoyo de la comunidad internacional ha sido muy valioso y refleja un consenso que cualquier salida debe estar enmarcada dentro del estado de derecho y los preceptos universales de la Carta Democrática. A pesar del avance que representa tener a las dos partes involucradas en una negociación directa, existe un clima muy volátil que podría todavía generar enfrentamientos.

Third, parties and party systems are so critical to the day to day functioning of government that elements essential to the Democratic Charter can be affected by political parties quite as much as by national constitutions.

This complex but compelling point was made explicitly and very well 50 years ago with regard to the separation of powers by the French political scientist Maurice Duverger:

Le degré de séparation des pouvoirs dépend beaucoup plus du système de partis que des dispositions prévues par les Constitutions. Ainsi, le parti unique entraîne une concentration des pouvoirs très étroite, même si les textes établissent officiellement une séparation plus ou moins accentuée: le parti cimenter fortement les uns aux autres les divers organes gouvernementaux. Son rôle n'est pas différent dans un système pluraliste, mais seulement moins accentué. La rivalité des partis affaiblit les liens que chacun pourrait établir entre le Parlement et le Gouvernement: la séparation constitutionnelle des pouvoirs retrouve donc une certaine efficacité; elle peut même se doubler d'une séparation partisane, qui vient de la spécialisation de chaque parti dans une fonction déterminée. Le two party system et le multipartisme aboutissent dans ce domaine à des résultats radicalement différents. L'influence des partis sur la séparation des pouvoirs ne dépend pas seulement de leur nombre, mais de leur structure interne, et même de leur dimensions respectives: une armature faible et décentralisée renforce généralement la séparation, sauf cas exceptionnels; les changements de majorité peuvent la modifier profondément, en certaines circonstances. Chacun de ces facteurs agit d'une façon différente en régime parlementaire, en régime présidentiel ou en régime d'assemblée. La séparation réelle des pouvoirs est donc le résultat d'une combinaison entre le système des partis et le cadre constitutionnel. (Les partis politiques, Paris, Armand Colin, 1951, p. 432)

Fourth and finally, political institutions including parties are essential to sound economic management. It can no longer be assumed that economic development is simply a technical matter. Political variables, like stability, the rule of law, and, once again, the nature of the party system can greatly condition the potential for achieving meaningful economic development and equity. Perhaps no situation illustrates this reality better than that in Haiti,

where a party of popular revindication and movement, the Fanmi Lavalas, and a number of smaller parties in opposition have been unable for some years now to identify a stable democratic balance. The resulting political paralysis is tragically affecting the economic well-being and future of the people of Haiti. We in the OAS have been working very hard to help all sides find a way out based on democratic principles. But the initiative for reform must ultimately come from within.

Before I close, I would like to thank the Government of Canada, specifically the Department of Foreign Assistance and International Trade and Elections Canada for their support as co-hosts of this important event.

As you analyze and debate the issues before you, we look forward to your contributions to help chart a course of action for the OAS as a partner in the exciting enterprise of strengthening democracy and its critical political party systems.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all success during this Second Meeting of the Inter-American Forum on Political Parties.

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