

Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE FOURTH REGULAR
MEETING OF THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
April 15, 2004 - Washington, DC**

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Let me begin by welcoming you in my own behalf and that of Secretary General Gaviria to the Organization of American States (OAS), the world's oldest regional organization.

From its earliest beginnings, the Organization has concerned itself not only with political challenges but also with many of the other issues that are an integral part of the overall progress of the Western Hemisphere. In fact, the very first Pan American Conference in 1890 called for the harmonization of weights and standards as essential to commerce. But it was not until the Meeting of the Chiefs of State of the Americas held in Punta del Este, Uruguay in April 1967 that science and technology was explicitly identified as an essential part of modern culture and a vital tool for achieving social and economic development in the Americas.

This concept was reaffirmed and enlarged upon at the Specialized Conference on the Application of Science and Technology to the Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (CACTAL) held in Brasilia in May 1972. This Meeting considered science and technology's principal function to be the promotion of integral development and the improvement of human life in the Hemisphere. All recent Summits of the Americas -- in Miami, Florida in 1994, in Santa Cruz, Bolivia in 1996, in Santiago, Chile in 1998, in Quebec, Canada in 2001, and finally in Monterrey, Mexico this past January -- have included in their programs the need to develop specific scientific and technological applications to solve actual needs in countries around the Hemisphere.

With the Summits providing an authoritative reference point, the governments of the Hemisphere decided to convoke the "Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Science and Technology in the Hemisphere" in Cartagena, Colombia in March 1996. This meeting, the first dedicated exclusively to science and technology since CACTAL in 1972, drew on the objectives of the Summit process to focus attention on how science and technology related to the new political, economic and social conditions prevailing in the region and in the world. The meeting's deliberations resulted in the Cartagena Declaration and Plan of Action, whose conclusions highlighted the strategic development role of science and technology in the context of the growing interdependence among nation states. Recommendations touched on the generation of national knowledge, national science policies, science and technology indicators and the encouragement of innovation within a framework of regional integration and cooperation, the stimulation of research and innovation, and poverty eradication, among others.

The technology gap and the differences in economic and social development are obstacles that must be overcome if the countries of the Americas are to attain sustainable economic, commercial, political and social progress without gender and ethnic distinctions. Inequalities in knowledge and technology hamper our individual and collective ability to take advantage of globalization. They impede efforts to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Put most simply, these obstacles mean that hoped-for progress will be unattainable unless there is more and better research in various fields of science and technology and unless this research is applied to sustainable development goals and programs. Science, technology and innovation are key components of national planning. Regional development will fail if these components are not included and factored into our plans.

In almost four decades of activities the OAS Office of Science and Technology has been a focal point of experience and leadership for the countries of the Hemisphere and has been actively involved in national science and technology efforts and activities. During this time frame, the Office of Science and

Technology has served as a rallying point for national development of many important initiatives, such as the first internet networking of the Latin American and Caribbean Universities, and the establishment of Science and Technology indicators and of the Inter-American System of Metrology, know by its Spanish acronym SIM, to mention a few.

As a contribution to the work of COMCYT, the Inter-American Committee of Science and Technology, the Office is engaged in an intensive effort to facilitate COMCYT's design and elaboration of science and technology policies suitable for the current conditions in the Hemisphere. You, as the COMCYT delegates, will be deliberating over these two days to common policies and priorities that will be of maximum benefit to your respective countries over the next decades and that will promote dynamic actions to attain effective results. Your agreements will influence the First Hemispheric Meeting of Ministers and High Officials in Science and Technology in the framework of CIDI, a meeting the Government of Peru has generously agreed to host in November this year.

Many countries of the Hemisphere have expressed the distinct sensation of not going fast enough when confronted with the ever more rapid movement of scientific advances. They are right. But this problem, while very real, can be rendered more manageable through cooperation. Taken together, the OAS and its Member States possess the resources to confront these challenges. To succeed however, a new approach, both nationally and regionally, is needed. Each country must contribute its share of resources of planning expertise and make full use of its human resources without ethnic or gender distinctions. Effective cooperation can and will usher a new era of science and technological advancement and application to the problems of sustainable development in the Americas.

From your program, and from the high quality and representativity of the delegations participating in this meeting, I note with pleasure that this is to be a genuinely inter-American venture.

It is my hope that this meeting will come up with new policies and a consensual approach to the allocation, combination and use of available resources. This would in turn contribute to the attainment of our joint sustainable development objectives through the optimal use of science and technology for the enhancement of the quality of life and the physical and spiritual well-being of the peoples of the Americas.

Thank you very much.

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