

# Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES  
AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE  
INTER-AMERICAN FORUM ON POLITICAL PARTIES  
November 9, 2004 - Brasilia, Brazil**

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Honorable João Paulo Cunha, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Federative Republic of Brazil;  
Honorable Eduardo Siqueira Campos, Vice President of the Senate;  
José Rizo Castellón, Vice President of Nicaragua.  
Leaders and representatives of political parties of the Americas,  
Members of the Congresses and Parliaments of the Americas,  
Representatives of civil society and of the diplomatic corps.  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen all.

É um verdadeiro prazer encontrar-me com os Senhores e as Senhoras nesta ilustre Câmara de Deputados da República Federativa do Brasil, por ocasião da Quarta Reunião Anual do Fórum Interamericano sobre Partidos Políticos (FIAPP). Aproveito a oportunidade para reconhecer a inestimável apoio da Sua Excelência Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Presidente da República, e a decisiva contribuição do Presidente João Paulo Cunha e de sua excelente equipe ao patrocinar esta abertura e proporcionando-nos o essencial apoio substantivo e logístico.

Nos sentimos em casa na Camara dos Diputados do Brasil. Muito obrigado.  
The Inter-American Forum on Political Parties was created in response to a mandate from our Heads of State and Government at the Third Summit of the Americas held in Quebec City, Canada in April 2001. Participating in this meeting are nearly 150 men and women representing diverse political parties in some 20 countries of North, Central, South America and the Caribbean.

The work of the Organization of American States (OAS) with political parties reflects the evolution of regional cooperation since its founding charter was signed in 1948 in Bogotá, Colombia. The OAS Charter, like that of the United Nations, is founded on the sovereign equality of states. However, unlike the UN Charter, the OAS Charter also stresses the importance of democracy. Over the past fourteen years, the governments of the Americas, themselves democratizing, have gradually built a unique regional jurisprudence to defend and promote democracy.

Three years ago, the Inter-American Democratic Charter brought together much of that jurisprudence. It contains provisions on political parties, electoral assistance and observation, conflict resolution, legislative strengthening, local government and the promotion of democratic values.

Article 3 of the Democratic Charter defined the "essential elements" of representative democracy as follows:

"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."

I would like to briefly recall five topics identified by the participants of the Third Forum on Political Parties held in Cartagena, Colombia, last year.

The first point concerns money. Article 5 of the Democratic Charter speaks to "the problems associated with the high cost of election campaigns and a balanced and transparent system for their financing."

Just to take one example, last week, the United States of America concluded the most expensive presidential campaign in its history. The election was the first to be held under the aegis of a new political party financing mechanism (often called "McCain-Feingold" after the names of the authors of the legislation) which sought to stem the unlimited contributions of labor unions and corporations to

political parties, "soft money" in the parlance of U.S. politics. Ironically, this led to the emergence of the so-called "527 organizations" which file reports with the Internal Revenue Service rather than with the Federal Elections Commission or its equivalent in the individual states. McCain-Feingold thus turned out less than perfect in achieving its objectives.

Yet the US should still be commended, for democracy is impossible without transparency and citizen participation. During the next two days, you will be discussing political financing reform throughout the region. The 34-country comparative analysis of political party and campaign finance, recently completed by the OAS and International IDEA, will provide a framework for this discussion. Key questions include public financing of political parties, transparency requirements, enforcement mechanisms and access to the media. Political financing reform is now front and center in virtually all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The second point concerns civil society. While civil society encompasses a wide array of actors including churches, unions, parent-teacher organizations and cultural and sports clubs, the term is often used interchangeably (but inaccurately) with "nongovernmental organizations."

The role of NGOs -- to pressure government and educate the population -- is vital to modern democracy. But NGOs are not a panacea for better democratic governance. Most importantly, NGOs cannot be seen as an alternative to political parties. Political parties are uniquely situated to bring together varied and disparate interests and present a integrated national approach to the public good.

The ebbing public confidence many parties have encountered in recent years is very troubling. In several countries, parties have not kept up with changes in communication or have seemed unresponsive to popular needs. In some cases, parties have produced few new leaders to offer to the electorate as candidates for high office. Occasionally it has appeared as though the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," which Robert Michels developed from his experience in the German Socialist Party at the beginning of the 20th Century, were being revalidated in the New World, a continent apart and a century later. When parties do not offer fresh choices to their electorates, the value of even the regular elections called for in the Democratic Charter is greatly reduced.

This brings me to my third point, inclusion. Women, youth and ethnic minorities tend not to belong to political parties in the same proportions as men. Article 28 of the Democratic Charter speaks to the full and equal participation of women and is a priority for the Organization of American States. In cooperation with the Inter-American Commission of Women and this Forum, the OAS Permanent Council has organized sessions to seek ways to better promote women in political party structures.

The proceedings of this meeting will, I believe, demonstrate that greater participation of women, youth and ethnic minorities can increase electoral success of parties. Being inclusive is not just good for parties, it is smart politics. The fourth point is the significance of political parties 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 the nature of the party systems, can greatly condition the potential for achieving meaningful and sustainable economic development and equity. Many of Haiti's problems, for example, can be traced to its unstable party system, in which parties of notables and a single-leader party or movement have been unable to coexist peacefully.

The fifth and final point concerns governmental systems. Since 1990, eleven Heads of State or Government in Latin America and the Caribbean have ended their administrations prematurely. While the subsequent transitions have more often than not maintained some semblance of constitutional coherence, premature departures do strain democratic institutions.

Political personalism, weak parties and corruption have all been blamed. But some have also blamed the rigid nature of presidential systems. They have argued that fixed presidential terms and separate election from the legislative branch can create confrontation without the safety valves necessary to defuse political crises.

Reforms that include elements of the parliamentary system have been considered, but aside from the Commonwealth countries -- the English-speaking Caribbean and Canada -- Brazil is the only Latin American country that actually presented a parliamentary option to the public, who rejected it in a referendum in 1993.

This Forum will provide an opportunity to discuss the merits of such reforms and

their effects on the political parties of the region.

At the same time, it would be well for political parties to keep in mind the admonition of the Inter-American Democratic Charter on the importance of "the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government." Coups have historically been considered the preserve of the armed forces and more recently of civilian executives. Unfortunately, power can also be abused by political parties and congresses.

Let me conclude by expressing the gratitude of the OAS to those who have made this event possible. The Permanent Mission of the United States and the Permanent Observer Mission of France provided significant financial support. They were joined by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Agency for International Development, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute of the United States, the Naumann and Andenauer Foundations of Germany, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the Pablo Iglesias Foundation of Spain, International IDEA of Sweden, the Inter-American Democratic Network and of course the Government, the Congress and the political party foundations of the Federative Republic of Brazil. The experience of political parties in Brazil is of interest to all and we are honored to have the opportunity to learn from the many political leaders of this great country, starting this evening with the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the Vice President of the Senate.

I feel sure that your debates will contribute strongly to charting positive courses of action in the exciting enterprise of strengthening democracy and its critical political party systems.

I thank you.

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