

COLLECTIVE MEANS FOR DEFENDING DEMOCRACY:
OAS CHARTER AMENDMENT

Remarks of Ambassador Luigi R. Einaudi
U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS
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This Special General Assembly culminates an unprecedented series of high-level consultations on behalf of democracy.

Democratic solidarity rallied our countries to respond to the crises in Haiti and Peru.

And now that same solidarity brought us here today to consider collective means which can strengthen our ability to protect and advance democratic rule in the Americas.

Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger expressed U.S. policy to the OAS General Assembly in Nassau.

"We must strengthen our collective mechanism to defend democracy. . . . We do not seek a mechanism which would deny governments and this body the opportunity to make considered responses to future challenges to democracy. But we do seek increased risk for those who would lead a coup anywhere in the region."

In that same speech Secretary Eagleburger called us to take up the "challenge . . . of defeating democracy's remaining enemies -- poverty, injustice, racism, ignorance, and corruption in all its forms."

We believe the actions this body has taken today meet both of these standards.

In the 1930's, the inter-American system pioneered the concept of nonintervention. Now, without diminishing that earlier achievement, the OAS has taken another step to add to the jurisprudence of democracy. No other international body has ventured so boldly into the search for means to reconcile the sovereign equality of nation states with the imperatives of freedom and representative democracy.

From the outset, the United States has joined other member states to support the option of suspending a member from participation in OAS policy bodies when its democratically constituted government is overthrown by force.

Suspension is a severe measure, especially in our community which values universality, cooperation, inclusion, and consensus.

For this very reason, our decision at this Assembly to make suspension an option -- not as a first, but as a last resort -- will itself send a powerful message to would-be coup makers. Adopting a suspension option says that we are ready to forego the benefit of the full participation of member countries in the OAS when democracy is at stake; our solidarity is important, but it is a solidarity based on democracy.

Suspension has thus become one of a number of options for dealing with crises in democratic governance. Our highest hope, however, must be that the ultimate success of a suspension option would be its never having to be used.

Averting crises is essential. Dealing with the underlying conditions which weaken democracy is important.

-- That is why we support a decision to act on possible additional Charter amendments affecting development policy and OAS technical assistance at the time of the General Assembly in Managua.

-- And, I would add, that is why economic liberalization and free trade are so important. President Bush's signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement here at the OAS on Thursday is a symbol of our commitment to freeing and expanding trade -- a process which enhances the well-being of our peoples and lays a firm basis for democracy in the Americas.

By acting on suspension and poverty proposals made at the General Assembly in Nassau last June, today's Assembly brings one initiative to closure.

The democracy agenda, however, remains open. We must perfect our capacity not only to react to problems but to forestall their developing. We must pay renewed attention to "preventive measures" which help avert crises and "positive incentives" to help consolidate our democratic gains.

We recognize that the participation of all member states in the basic legal instruments of the OAS provides the optimal context within to join in strengthening this Organization. For that reason, as the representatives of one of the countries which has not yet ratified the Protocol of Cartagena, which in 1985 amended the Charter in largely economic and social matters, my delegation and I will explore the possibility of obtaining ratification of that Protocol along with the amendments adopted by this Assembly.

In the next few months, we will need to sharpen our evaluation of the Inter-American system for dealing with development in its widest sense so that by June of next year we may decide whether there is a need for additional amendments to the Charter to address more explicitly the challenge of extreme poverty. The United States is committed to enhancing our collective effectiveness in delivering needed technical assistance to countries in the region and in responding more generally to concerns for the well-being of our peoples.

In a world sobered by ethnic conflict, communal violence between religious sects, and the tragedy of famine exacerbated by clan warfare and anarchy, we in the Americas should take genuine pride in our measured steps towards strengthening the bonds of solidarity founded upon democracy. We who prize our own democracy must work democratically with others. And we believe we are making real progress in our efforts.

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