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**OAS SPECIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON  
INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER OPENS IN PERU**

Peru's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Diego García Sayán, and Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General César Gaviria today inaugurated the Organization's 28<sup>th</sup> Special General Assembly Session, declaring the Inter-American Democratic Charter, under consideration, to be a landmark document that is key to a new collective defense system.

In his address to the Hemisphere's Foreign Ministers, Mr. García Sayán recalled developments in Peru, from the "self coup" that led to the April 1992 dissolution of Congress to the recent developments that he said "certainly represented a triumph of democracy, not only for Peru but for all the Americas."

Noting that the OAS was a major influence in the wake of those events, albeit not without its ambivalence, he said that in 1992 the internal coup was tolerated, thereby "supplying oxygen to an illegitimate regime." But, the Foreign Minister asserted, the OAS was also "a very positive" influence last year when it assumed a more decisive role fostering democratic transition.

According to the Peruvian Minister, the inter-American system is seeing for the first time in its more than 100-year history a single document articulating a set of principles, rules and mechanisms for action a multilateral and collective guarantee to preserve and defend democracy.

"The Inter-American Democratic Charter was drawn up from the standpoint of democracy and human rights being part of the same conceptual and normative framework," declared García Sayán, stressing that democracy will be "key to the new system of collective defense that the peoples, as well as these times, are demanding of governments."

The OAS Secretary General told the Foreign Ministers that, with the approval of this Democracy Charter, "you are sending a message to all kinds of autocrats that neither coups nor efforts to undermine the constitutional order nor any disregard of the political leadership will be tolerated."

He asserted as well that the Charter, while not exhaustive, shows how the concept of democracy has evolved from it being merely elections that are free and fair but also elections that are based on universal and secret vote.

Mr. Gaviria warned, however, that the Charter "is just a point of entry to an awesome responsibility for our governments to tackle the enormous challenges of globalization, fluctuations in the global economy as well as volatile capital markets and recurrent crises."

This Special Session of the OAS General Assembly continues Tuesday with the election of officers and the first plenary session to consider the draft resolution on the "Inter-American Democratic Charter." The Foreign Ministers will make statements on the draft resolution.