



**HONOURABLE BARBARA MCDougall
FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER**

September 16, 2002 - Washington, DC

I felt very honoured to be invited to take part in this important celebration of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, signed one year ago. It was a remarkable achievement, signed ironically but somehow appropriately on the very day that democracy in our hemisphere suffered a searing and infamous attack

The attack was a reminder, as if those in this hemisphere need one, that democracy has many enemies, within our borders as well as without, and requires constant and vigilant guardianship. Thus the celebration of democratic achievements takes on added significance, and becomes an opportunity to deepen our knowledge, enhance our legal frameworks, advance our democratic practices, learn from each other, and refresh our commitment to our shared values.

As we all know, the Charter had a long gestation and a difficult birth. To those who never lost their dedication, patience and steadfastness in ensuring the birth was a healthy one, I offer my respect and congratulations for an exceptional achievement. No doubt, the Charter has its deficiencies – what creation of international negotiation does not? – but let us not allow the search for the perfect to be the enemy of the good.

I am reminded of the earlier document that aroused optimism and dedication from those of us who were there – the Santiago Declaration of 1991 (The Santiago Commitment to Democracy), now known as Resolution 1080, adopted as the Washington Protocol in 1992. I was an enthusiastic participant in the meeting of the Council of Ministers that adopted the Declaration. It was my first meeting of the Council, and a highlight of my life in politics.

For the first time, Canada was occupying its rightful place in the family of nations of this hemisphere, and for the first time, all of the Ministers around the table represented functioning democracies.

Many of my ministerial colleagues, as well as other members of their delegations, had suffered egregiously to bring democracy to their countries, through personal imprisonment and torture, loss of family members, confiscation of property, or social ostracism. Some of you in this room today were, similarly, victims of those same earlier regimes.

As someone from Canada, a country that was once called “the peaceable kingdom,” I offer you all my admiration.

The atmosphere at that meeting in 1991 was heady and optimistic. Not only was the Santiago Declaration signed, but the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy had been established – with relatively modest funding, but established nonetheless – to provide support for institution-building. I am delighted to remember that the Unit was a Canadian initiative, and to recognize it as one of to-day’s organizers.



Still, there were those in attendance who were well aware that their fledgling democracies had not yet been tested; that military authority remained only one or two steps from the center of power; that former dictators continued to live at the center of a clutch of diehard followers. Those early years could not have been easy, and difficult years also lay ahead for many.

Hard upon the heels of the signing of the Santiago Declaration, democracy was under attack in Haiti, and the OAS – some members with misgivings, but in the end unanimously, collectively took the appropriate action under the Declaration – sending a ministerial delegation, moving towards sanctions and the freezing of assets, engaging the United Nations.

The return to democracy in Haiti was slow, and for many member states, discouraging. In the end, it was also at that stage imperfect, and the process of returning to constitutional democracy in Haiti has been a painful transition for the country and its people.

Thus when Mr. Fujimori took over the leadership of Peru, member nations of the OAS, signatories all to the Declaration, were more reluctant to involve themselves and to take the actions called for, particularly since the Santiago rules could be interpreted to exclude interventions in the situation in which Peru found itself. For a period during the 1990's it appeared that democratic development in the hemisphere was not only at a standstill, but was in danger of falling back.

Under these circumstances, the Charter signed last year is a triumph. It not only reaffirms members' commitment to democracy, it sets out very explicitly twenty-eight fundamental elements of democracy to which all members must adhere, and it charges the Organization of American States with the obligation to assist, and in some cases to intervene where democracy is threatened from within.

Thus the potential is there to secure democracy forever in this hemisphere – to build institutions within countries, to ensure assistance from others when democracy is threatened, to open markets to each other, thus enhancing economic development and building the prosperity which is both the foundation and the reward of confident democracies. The machinery, in other words, cannot be faulted.

But the potential is just that – potential, unless the political will is there on the part of member states to ensure that the Charter is a living document. Democracy is a culture, a way of life: it is action, not rhetoric. It requires constant vigilance, and not just speeches.

While the Charter calls for collective action, to meet that collective obligation, governments must take steps internally. Steps such as opening schools in villages, opening doors of opportunity to women, opening the government's financial and economic policies to public examination and debate, these are the stuff of democracy-building.

Even in fully developed democracies threats to fundamental freedoms can and do exist, sometimes with the best of motivations, sometimes through negligence. In the War on Terror, both Canada and the United States have adopted legal precedents that, if inappropriately applied, could threaten fundamental freedoms such as the right to due process. The perfectly legitimate and necessary need to provide security for the nation – a basic responsibility of government – cannot become an excuse to violate basic human rights.



In mature democracies as well, low voter turnout, cynicism among voters – particularly young citizens who have turned away from political involvement towards special interest groups – threatens the long-term quality and stability of democracy. It is this kind of cynicism that produces a near victory for Le Pen in France. All of our countries must find ways to refresh and support our democracies, and ensure that future generations of leaders are excited and inspired by the principles we have all determined to be so dear.

The lack of progress in negotiating free trade in the Americas is a setback to our democracies. While protectionism and disagreement among trading partners are not new, nor exclusive to this hemisphere, the inability to move this file forward calls into question our commitment to regional prosperity and hence economic progress as called for in the Charter.

In Argentina, corruption and economic mismanagement were the threats that have nearly brought down the country. No democracy can survive for long in an atmosphere of economic chaos.

While all of these situations give us plenty to keep our hands full as individual countries, and as members of this important organization, our most immediate responsibility is the need to reinforce democracy in Venezuela. Once again, we veered very close to collective postponement of action there – anathema on the heels of the signing of the Charter. Thus the results of the international mission which was recently agreed to will be of enormous importance in ensuring that the Charter is not just another piece of paper, but a living document.

In the early days of the Santiago Declaration, setbacks and lack of will allowed democracy to be nearly destroyed in Peru, and we are fortunate that thanks to leadership and commitment on the part of now President Toledo, Peru's democracy is reestablished and strengthening. In addition, Peru understood better than most the danger of internal threats and led the way in the establishment of the Charter.

We have all discovered that the rhetoric of democracy is easy; its practice is not. The value of the Inter-American Democratic Charter is that it spells out as no other document has, not just the principles that we are determined to live by, but the actions we must take both collectively and as individual countries in order to do so.

There has been some discussion to-day about how to determine when democracy has been violated. But let us be clear: there can be no excuses.

We've heard them all: there is never enough money, there is never enough time, it is never the right time, there is never a broad enough consensus, the political agenda is too full, to take the necessary action. Building democracy is a day-by-day activity. All of the guidelines and reinforcing mechanisms are in place: the Charter, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, the Human Rights Declaration and Tribunal.

What is still to be proved is our collective political will to ensure a democratic future for our hemisphere. Despite setbacks, we have made enormous strides together over the last decade.



I am one of those who always think the glass is half-full, not half empty. This day of reflection gives us an opportunity to fill the glass a little further, so that when we return next year, we shall have even more to celebrate.

September 16, 2002