

Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
OPENING THE XXXIII SIRG
December 8, 2003 - Washington, DC**

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Secretary General Gaviria,
Undersecretary Miguel Hakim
Assistant Deputy Minister Lortie
Ambassador Marcelo Díaz
Ambassador Rodolfo Gil
Ambassador John Maisto

National Summit Coordinators
Ambassadors
Dr. Klinger
Invited guests from civil society
Friends

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I am pleased to welcome you to the OAS on behalf of Secretary General Gaviria. This Hall has been the setting for several SIRG meetings, and it makes the OAS proud to continue its tradition as the locus for discussions key to the future of the Hemisphere.

Foreign policy has traditionally been the responsibility of Foreign Ministries. But these days I suspect there is not a Foreign Ministry represented here that does not occasionally have a hard time asserting its authority over other departments of government. This is why Summits matter. Presidents and heads of government can do what others cannot. Only they can break the stove-pipe effect of specialized chains of command to ensure that entire governments, not just foreign ministries, cooperate to advance the agreed hemispheric agenda.

It is thus very appropriate that today's session begins with reports from meetings of Ministers of Labor, Agriculture, Security, and Trade. Ministerial meetings are the cornerstone for both developing and implementing the mandates decided by the Heads of State and Government in the Summits. These reports should be invaluable to your preparations for the Special Summit.

The institutions of the Inter-American System, the OAS, IDB, IICA and PAHO, plus ECLAC have served as the technical secretariats to the 27 Ministerial meetings held since 2001. The coordination we and our sister institutions provide is a fundamental component of the Summit process. It is through the Inter-American System that countries can ensure that their concrete actions fit in with those of others to yield harmonious regional results.

This is the second session of the SIRG that is open to civil society. Almost 100 civil society organizations from across the Hemisphere participated in a Regional Forum last month in Mexico City organized by civil society networks, the Summits of the Americas Secretariat and the Government of Mexico. The Summit process and the OAS Secretariat have both benefitted from this evolving space for dialogue with civil society and the fresh thinking it has generated. We look forward to this latest set of recommendations, conscious that our citizens are the barometer of our success.

The raison d'être for a Special Summit mid-way between regularly scheduled Summits in Canada and Argentina is the need to reposition where we stand in the world. Global realities are very different from those of April 2001, six months before September 11 burned into history. We of the Americas have avoided the worst of the conflicts and failures of governance that scar parts of the Middle

East, Asia and Africa. We have today 13 -- and with the change in Canada by the end of the week we will have 14 -- new presidents and heads of government in the Hemisphere since the Quebec meeting. That in itself is reason enough to meet.

But an even bigger change has been a certain loss of common thematic focus caused by terrorism, war, and economic protectionism even as the costs of uneven economic growth, increasing poverty and inequality, and continued social exclusion threaten to undermine our sense of community. Demands for a better life and increased participation in government are growing. 220 million people cannot permanently live in poverty in democracy. To complicate matters still further, we do not need to name names to know that some among us are having difficulty dealing with the simultaneous imperatives of democracy and globalization. The problems affect individual countries but are not unique to them. The challenge is also to all of us and to how we manage our relations.

This Summit is thus special not just in timing, but perhaps most of all in the urgency of the problems of governance that affect all of our lives.

The Declaration draft before you for Nuevo León is the fruit of much work already. It is long because our standards are high and we know there are no quick fixes. The specific initiatives intended to stimulate economic growth, promote social development, and strengthen democracy across the Americas are of great importance.

I would like to conclude these comments of welcome by suggesting that how we agree to close the document will be almost as important as its specific content. As with family, solidarity implies mutual commitment and sharing, in hard times as well as good, and with the all members of the family whether we are from the Andes, Mercosur, CARICOM or Central and North America. Our solidarity will bear fruit only if consider the long term as well the immediate, the international as well as the national, the world as well as the hemisphere.

You have before you the products of the ministerials, of civil society the whole coordinated by the Inter-American System. You have three agreed themes and the mechanisms for cooperation and coordination. A frank and candid dialogue between the leaders on the most important issues currently confronting the peoples of the Americas is the objective so that the leaders can inject the process with political will. Presidents and heads of government can do what others cannot. But they too need help. The task of this SIRG is to close the document and so put our leaders in position to lead us in finding solutions to promote development, create prosperity and individual opportunity and make it possible to follow through on the directions they set.

I wish you the best.

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Headquarters: 17th Street & Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, USA
Tel. (202)458-3000 / Email: multimedia@oas.org

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