

Speech

Organization of American States



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My best greetings to all of you, members of the "Grupo de Arte", friends, and all those interested in Inter-American ideals.

These are not easy times either globally or regionally. Never before has the force available both to private citizens and governments been so great. Never before has the monopoly on force Max Weber proclaimed to be the characteristic of the modern state been more challenged by terrorist groups and non-state actors. Uncertainty over the international rules governing the use of force is almost as high as it was when the League of Nations dissolved.

We in the OAS have no coercive Charter authority like that in Chapter Seven of the UN Charter. In fact, the OAS has not even endorsed the use of force by others since 1965. Yet we are far from helpless. If anything the new international uncertainties give new weight to the primary political tasks of the OAS - acting as the "caja de resonancia" of the Americas, developing cooperation to strengthen democracy and ensure the peace.

As my staff and I have worked to serve the political bodies and struggled to develop effective answers to the conflict resolution needs of member states, particularly in Central America and Haiti, but also supporting the Secretary General in Venezuela, Bolivia and a myriad other questions, I had have two great reassurances. The first is the gradual advance of cooperative regional jurisprudence. This is evident in the conventions negotiated and ratifications deposited defining the rules for regional cooperation on everything from the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, the illegal trade in small arms, and corruption to the rights of the disabled and of indigenous peoples.

The second inspiration is art. I have a beautiful large office, but the Oregon fir paneling was at some point stained dark. The overall effect would be hard to bear were it not for the light and energy emanating from the eight works of art and a sculpture of Bolivar by the outer door. Paintings by Cañas, Carreño, Pelaez, Tamayo. Varela and Velasquez on loan from the Museum vie with two paintings from my home, a vivid market scene in Haiti by Faustin (framed beautifully by our colleague Najera), and a representation by my daughter Maria (painted on a door hung horizontally over my conference table, where many a deposit of ratification ceremony has taken place) of a scene she entitled "When the world finally ends there will still be heroes."

Men and women are uplifted by their culture. And no part of culture is more immediate and instinctive than the visual. When art is beautiful, it makes all else worthwhile.

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