



Speech

Organization of American States



**LUIGI R. EINAUDI, ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
AT THE OPENING OF THE PREPARATORY MEETING FOR
THE IV MEETING OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION
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Welcome to all of you! A special welcome to those from the ministries of education who have come to this preparatory meeting. Your role is extremely important. We diplomats are supposed to be generalists skilled at doing and rolling with almost anything, but we turn out not to be very strong on the substance of things sometimes, so it is extremely important that you who represent the ministries make as strong and powerful an input as possible.

I would also like to give a special welcome to Dr. Marva Ribeiro, to Permanent Secretary Jack, and the rest of the Delegation of Trinidad and Tobago. I do this not because I have a special preference or liking for Trinidad and Tobago, which I do [risas], but because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has offered to host the Fourth Ministerial in August and is making excellent preparations, and we are grateful for that.

Let me come back to the central theme here. In terms of integration and the development of a regional outlook that is more than just words, these ministerial meetings are really the major benefit of the Summit of the Americas process over these last ten years. I think that there has been a process of acceleration and strengthening in the ministerial process in the field of education.

I accepted Dr. Alice Abreu's invitation to join you this morning because I think we are at a critical moment. Not only is the work that you are preparing going to feed into the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata this fall, but that Summit itself is coming at a very important moment in the history of regional organizations.

Part of it is that we are in a process of renewal of the Organization of American States itself. Our new Secretary General will take office two weeks from today, on May 26, putting an end to my exhausting seven-and-half month stewardship, so I am very glad to be replaced in the relay. I will also be replaced as Assistant Secretary General at the General Assembly in June. So we are going to have new leadership, which I think should bring an element not only of energy, but of equilibrium and balance to the Organization that is badly needed.

But the Organization does not really matter in the context of which I am speaking. It does matter, of course, as the Secretariat for the Summit process and as the coordinator for the inputs of the different ministerial efforts.

Having said that, what matters most is that we are facing very trying times in the Hemisphere and the world. I am one who took enormous pleasure in my life to see the end of military dictatorships in Latin America and the end of colonialism in the Caribbean. I thought of myself as belonging to a very privileged generation to have seen that. I think experience has shown that although these were, in fact, major, vital net gains, when judged against the background of injustice and expectations, democratization has not brought as rapid a set of successes as it should. We are finding in a number of countries, fairly profound unhappiness with the way in which governments are able to respond to citizen needs.

By way of illustration: I was in Ecuador for four days in the week before last, and the people of Quito had gone through an extraordinary emotional and trying experience—I think, basically at all levels—because not only had there been massive demonstrations, but the leadership class, which often can insulate itself

in any of our countries from popular events, was itself besieged and trapped. One of the senses that emerged in speaking to Ecuadorians of all walks of life—and our OAS delegation met with everybody who asked to meet with us; it was a very trying and difficult trip—was basically the extraordinary outpouring of democratic belief combined with skepticism about the ability of the current system to work.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Quito said something that I do want to share with you because it bears directly on the importance of your role in the field of education. He said: "What we need here in order to pull for the nation is a greater attention to citizen education and greater attention to ensuring that people develop reasonable expectations and a historical memory."

I mention this because my concern has been growing over the state of education generally, but from a totally different angle, because the Archbishop was speaking from a moral, political, perhaps historical consciousness of perspective. What I had been concerned about had a primarily economic dimension. Until now, I had been concerned about the problems that had been revealed by the impact of globalization on the workforces of our countries, the need for improved—this famous word—competitiveness, which has become such a part of our vocabulary. And, in a strange way, I am told also there has been a revealed need for increased middle management. Our hemisphere has some of the great entrepreneurs and overall economic leaders, and it has workers who are able to be productive and to compete if they are given a chance to compete, but sometimes it is that middle-management stratum that turns out to be lacking.

So, under these circumstances, an hour ago as I was thinking of what I would say to you, I pulled out the draft Declaration of Mar del Plata. I was actually quite disappointed because it almost ignores education. The most concrete thing it has to say about it is about high-quality vocational training, which is important. It fits into this economic dimension that I was talking about and it certainly fits in the theme of the Summit, which is to create jobs to confront poverty and strengthen democratic governance. But other than that, there basically is no reference to education, other than by way of incantation. I find it disturbing.

I looked at the Declaration; it seems to have four items that they have identified in this draft. As we know, when bureaucracies start marching and they have identified four items, it is probably going to be impossible to stop them. But I am just wondering. These four are all very important:

- Legal security. Terribly important. I think in Ecuador right now they don't even have a functioning judicial system and the legal insecurity is perhaps what drove people to the streets.
- A macroeconomic framework—whatever that means. The authors probably meant it to mean "responsible economic policies."
- A labor market, with respect for fundamental rights.
- And finally, a special heed to rural, small-farmer areas.

It seems to me that education should rank right up there with legal security and the macroeconomic framework. If you are not in a position to formulate things in a way that the onrushing foreign ministry bureaucracies, which of course I am part of, will find acceptable, then I suggest that you will have plenty of room in the Action Plan of the Summit, which, when I last looked at it in March, was very vague and in need of some concrete, practical inputs.

So, thank you for being here. I not only welcome you abstractly, but in a very personal and specific way. What you do will be critical, I think, and I devotedly hope that you will do it well and that we will give you all the support that you need.

Thank you very much.