

**Inaugural Address by Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin, Assistant Secretary
General of the Organization of American States at the Special Meeting of the
Permanent Council**

**Tuesday 19 July 2005
Washington, D.C.**

Chairman of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Roberto Alvarez,
Secretary General, Dr. Jose Miguel Insulza,
Permanent Representatives and alternate representatives,
Permanent Observers,
Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Ambassador Roger Noriega,
Representatives of International and Regional Organizations,
OAS Staff members, Special guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by congratulating Ambassador Roberto Alvarez on his assumption to the Chair of the Permanent Council. Ambassador, in your maiden speech a couple a days ago you have indeed set the tone for a quite interesting agenda, and I look forward to working with you and your colleagues from the Caribbean who will chair the Council for the next several months.

At the outset, I would like to offer my sympathy and condolences to the governments and peoples in our sister countries in the Caribbean, Mexico and the United States, which were affected by the chain of recent hurricanes. The Organization of American States, will continue to work with you and do everything possible to assist in your return to normalcy.

Distinguished Representatives,

I am humbled by your confidence and honored by the opportunity to serve the member states by fulfilling the important tasks of the office of Assistant Secretary General. I do not take lightly the significance of the Office of Assistant Secretary General. It is indeed a huge responsibility and a honorable duty. We have come a long way, but many challenges still confront us, and despite the pervasive financial constraints within which the Organization is forced to operate, I offer member states my steadfast commitment to work towards the implementation of mandates. Therefore, in upholding the principles of the Charter, I promise to enhance the *raison d' être* of the OAS by promoting greater efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness. Through a process of constructive consultation and modernization, we intend to improve our delivery capacity, as well as the political functions of the organization.

Before continuing, allow me to express sentiments of thanks.

First of all, I want to express my warmest gratitude and special appreciation to my dear wife, Charmaine and our daughters, Kathryn, Kristyn, Amy and Anu for their love, patience and support.

Allow me to reiterate my gratitude to the Government of Suriname, especially the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for their faith in my vision for the OAS. I also extend heartfelt thanks to the Governments of Caribbean Community for their endorsement and to other member states for their firm support at this very important moment in the history of the organization and our Hemisphere.

As Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, I pledge to do the work entrusted to me to the best of my ability and to serve each member state.

I thank my distinguished predecessors present, Ambassador Luigi Einaudi and Ambassador Christopher Thomas for their stewardship and noble work on behalf of the peoples of the Hemisphere. I would also like to thank our new Secretary General, Dr. Jose Miguel Insulza for his support. I am particularly encouraged and impressed by your commitment to collegiality and teamwork. You can count on my full support and that of my team as we tackle the important hemispheric agenda. I would also like to salute the many friends who I see here today. I am delighted you could attend and I thank you for your support and encouragement. Also, a special word of thanks to Ambassador Denis Antoine, Dean of the OAS diplomatic corps for his guidance and support over the past months.

I want to reassure my colleagues in the OAS, whose unrelenting efforts and hard work contribute to many of this organization's successes, that I value your service. Your work demonstrates how seriously you take your responsibilities to this Organization. I therefore say to you that as Assistant Secretary General, I will work to see that the Organization takes equally seriously its responsibility to you. I look forward to working with you, hearing from you and benefiting from your experience and expertise.

I also wish to put on record my appreciation for those who have committed to work with me in the coming years as my advisors, a team so ably led by Ambassador Alfonso Quinonez.

Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen, As stated previously, I see the OAS as a unique and common vehicle for resolving differences and setting shared goals that promote democracy, respect for the rule of law, social justice, economic development, security and human rights. I hold a strong belief in the value of the Inter-American system, and especially in this organization

which is by far, one of our most effective hemispheric instruments for realizing our collective agenda, that ultimately has to result in peace and solidarity, stability and prosperity.

In this regard, the establishment of the Inter-American Democratic Charter marks a moral, human, and political victory in the development of our organization and our Hemisphere. It emphasizes that democracy is a sine qua non for social, economic and political development. At the same time, I hasten to remind member states that democracy, does not grow organically in a vacuum. It requires vigilance and renewal. Democracy, you will agree, must also be cultivated and nurtured.

Nurturing democracy, in my mind, suggests that member states and the OAS work together to encourage social justice, fight discrimination in all its forms, reduce poverty and promote integral development. The structures of democracy must be continuously reinforced by resolve and concrete actions that translate into economic development, opportunities for employment and education, human rights protection, responsible citizenship, good governance, human security, and political freedoms. Democracy should also promote transparency and accountability. I am convinced that once people can experience, see and share the fruits of democracy, they will be more likely to embrace and defend it.

Distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen, although democracy continues to take firmer roots in the Americas several challenges remain in our sister states such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Haiti, among others. Increasing numbers of countries in our hemisphere are facing the challenges of good governance, development and poverty, and democratic governability. In my view, the OAS needs to provide leadership in the debate on the underlying

forces that cause social injustice, protest and instability, and that threaten democracy.

Consistent with the OAS Charter and the Inter-American Democratic Charter, this organization and its leadership should stand ready to support, promote and defend democracy. In addition, it is not only critical that representative democracy develops and flourishes, but that elected officials entrusted with the noble duty of leadership always defend and promote the democratic interests and human rights of the people they serve. I therefore encourage this Organization to intensify its efforts in fighting corruption and promoting good governance

Having recently returned from a visit with the Secretary General to the Republic of Haiti, allow me to share with you my thoughts on this Caribbean nation. It is critically important that the OAS remains engaged in Haiti and continues to promote political and economic development in that country. Currently, the focus has to be on improving the security environment in preparation for the upcoming local, legislative and Presidential elections. I call on the international community to continue its financial and technical support for free and fair elections, as well as to support the process of democratic governability after the installation of a new government in Haiti in February 2006.

During my tenure as chairman of the Permanent Council and as a staff member of the Secretariat, I witnessed firsthand the real and increasing expectations of the OAS by member states and their citizens. We are expected to deliver high quality at a high pace ! The reality is that today we find ourselves in the situation where mandates and expectations exceed material and financial resources available to our organization. I feel compelled however to remind

member states that successful implementation of mandates is inextricably linked to the availability of financial resources.

Therefore, it is incumbent on member states to do what is necessary to address this urgent financial situation. Member states should also consider taking fresh approaches in examining the existing quota system, to better reflect member states capabilities and expectations, as well as increased mandates and the cost of implementing those mandates. The General Secretariat, in preparation for the Special General Assembly to address this matter, stands ready to work with you.

I am convinced that the OAS can be more effective by developing a more efficient system of assigning, prioritizing and funding mandates. For example, member states may have to consider attaching sunset clauses to certain mandates; or be encouraged to take another look at the way the Permanent Council and its Committees function.

The Secretary General and I have common ideas on the need for restructuring within the organization. We believe that there is a need to amend the existing organizational lay-out slightly, so as to reflect the priorities we have to determine, taking into account the financial means. I look forward to working with him and all member states on the very important task to help the Organization deliver more and to make sure it does so more efficiently. No doubt there is room for improvement. In my view, the OAS can do more, and should do so in a more cost-effective, pragmatic and timely manner. A reinvigorated and reformed institution will certainly result in a better use of the available funds, improve its relevancy, and hopefully attract new resources.

The Secretariat will also have to promote synergies in-house to eliminate duplication and waste. I am convinced that by strengthening the culture of

cooperation, communication and transparency, and by encouraging more efficient use of resources within the organization, the OAS will help to create ownership at all levels within member states.

I agree with Secretary General Insulza that the OAS does not stand alone in achieving its mission. It is a part of an Inter-American system and must therefore be viewed in that context. Each institution that forms part of the Inter-American system must focus on its core strengths, but this should not obviate the need for enhanced cooperation and improved coordination. In making the OAS more efficient, we must ensure that programs undertaken by and within the organization are not duplicative of work already being performed by other multilateral institutions. In short, we must promote and work towards complementarity.

In partnership with the Office of the Secretary General, we will seek to develop appropriate frameworks for interagency coordination within the OAS and with multilateral organizations. I am firmly committed to strengthening relations and expanding collaboration among the Inter-American institutions.

Also, I support the call for an intensified consultative process among regional and sub-regional integration systems and specialized agencies, the private sector and civil society. With this active engagement we can create a constructive and important platform for executing mandates of the Summit of the Americas, in a more coordinated manner.

I believe that a more effective and productive OAS requires a more inclusive approach. It means a dedicated and focused public outreach program as well as promoting greater communication and coordination of activities and approaches

between the organization and civil society, the private sector and permanent observers.

Many of us are of the view that further economic integration and trade liberalization within the context of on-going trade negotiations continues to hold great promises for our peoples. It is however imperative that the results of these negotiations and new rules do not socially or economically marginalize certain regions, countries and groups. Vulnerable and small economies require and should be given time to adjust to competition as our hemispheric trade barriers fall, and attention must be paid to the real value of special and differential treatment.

I believe that increased emphasis on disaster preparedness and mitigation is urgently required. We must strengthen the work already being undertaken by the Committee on Hemispheric Security to identify and coordinate strategies to improve preparedness, coordinate regional policies and promote better resource mobilization and support when disaster strikes.

The increased prevalence of natural disasters is a tangible reminder of the changed dynamic of security in our Hemisphere. I am sure you would agree with me, when I say that the “Declaration on Security in the Americas” is a significant step forward for our Hemisphere and provides pragmatic and useful approaches for collective action. The magnitude of these challenges and the need for greater coordination reflect the multidimensional nature of security in our Hemisphere. The OAS must continue to work with member states to deal with traditional threats to security. At the same time the OAS must be prepared to address new non-traditional threats such as natural disasters, transnational organized crime, violence, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics, terrorism, trafficking in illegal drugs and small fire arms, among others.

I also encourage member states to strengthen existing regional and hemispheric mechanisms such as the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE), and the groups of experts on cyber crime, money laundering and corruption. I also hope the OAS will become more involved in adopting measures to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers, the Organization of American States should be a relentless advocate of preventive and public diplomacy. In this regard, I hope that the organization can take better advantage of national offices in member states. As the Organization reorganizes to better serve the interests of member states, I envisage an enhanced role for national offices. I see them positioned to provide reliable information, promote technical cooperation, facilitate development and democracy, help member states in developing policies that alleviate poverty, exchange and share best practices, and importantly, to sensitize the local populations to the value and work of the organization. National offices can also be encouraged, within the structure and programmatic goals of the OAS, to leverage the resources of the organization to mobilize additional funds.

I applaud the Secretary General for his efforts in public diplomacy since assuming office. I am sure that discussions in additional capitals like those held in the United States will serve to better promote the work and currency of this hemispheric body. I welcome the representatives of the US Congress here today; your presence augurs well for the future of greater cooperation between the OAS and the legislative branches of our member states. I look forward as well to

increasing collaboration with the Permanent Observers and the international community to realize the collective dreams of our Peoples.

I hold the fundamental belief that the protection and promotion of human rights is non-negotiable. The progress we continue to make in this regard and the increased emphasis on the protection of human rights in our Hemisphere, indicates that we are on the right path. I join the Secretary General in calling for greater cooperation and dialogue with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and judicial branches of national governments of member states.

Finally, Chairman, Distinguished Permanent Representatives, Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen, as Assistant Secretary General of the important hemispheric body, I will work to strengthen this organization, improve its institutional and political functions, and promote greater efficiency and relevance. I shall work to sharpen the Organization's resolve to promote democracy and good governance throughout the Americas. I look forward to working with member states in a pragmatic and programmatic manner, to ensure the central importance of integral development.

I hold firm the belief that a holistic approach is required to forge common approaches based on shared visions and collective agendas that will allow us to develop a common hemispheric identity that is based on ownership, accountability, mutual respect and understanding, and solidarity.

Thank you.