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Remarks by Albert R. Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States at the Celebration of the 60 Years of the OAS Charter

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ALBERT R. RAMDIN, ASSISTANT
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Remarks by Ambassador Albert R.
Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of
the OAS at the Celebration of the 60
Years of the OAS Charter (1948-2008)

April 30, 2008 - Washington, DC

Chairman of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Michael King,
Permanent

Representative of Barbados,
Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza,
Distinguished Permanent Representatives,
Distinguished Permanent Observers,
Distinguished members of the panel,
Distinguished Alternate Representatives,
Representatives from International and Regional Organizations,
Staff of the General Secretariat,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to share some closing remarks with you on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the OAS which, as we have heard mention many times today, marks an important milestone in the integration process of the Americas.

Ten years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in the 50th anniversary of this hemispheric entity. At that time, I had the good fortune to chair the OAS Permanent Council in my capacity as Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname. It is therefore an added honor to participate in this 60th celebration, although now in another capacity.

After sixty years of consistent, focused and practical service to the citizens of the Americas, this oldest political body in the world has become an important recognizable diplomatic and political brand that continues to be an instrument for positive change. I believe that as we look towards the future, we must continue to build on and enhance this brand.

In listening to the excellent interventions of this prestigious panel, we have been inspired by the history and encouraged by the change that the Organization has achieved over the past six decades. We have heard dif-

ferent points of view and perspectives on the OAS ranging from its origins to the different purposes it serves for its diverse membership across the sub-regions.

The speakers have also reminded us of the many successes and challenges of our Organization. On behalf of the OAS I want to express my gratitude to our speakers in the forum today for their vision and their recommendations, and to thank each of them for their own contributions in advancing the goals of peace, democracy and prosperity at national, regional and international levels.

Today, we can celebrate the many achievements of the Organization of American States in areas of democracy, good governance, human rights promotion, development and security. These milestones underscore the organization's unique ability to address the important issues in the Americas. They further illustrate the shared responsibility and commitment that have transformed the spirit of Pan Americanism into a platform for constructive engagement and partnership.

The new political and social dynamics of the hemisphere have accentuated the different strategic political and economic priorities and interests of countries in the region and between sub-regions. These reinforce our collective responsibility to prevent inter-state, inter-regional or ideological fault lines from developing in this unique multilateral system.

Throughout its sixty years, the OAS has ably fulfilled its role as the main political platform for the 34 active member states to give policy momentum to the critical areas of integral development, democracy and multidimensional security. We have also learnt that open dialogue is a fundamental prerequisite for arriving at consensus and joint action.

One of the main challenges for the future will be to ensure that the OAS retains the dynamism, insight, and capacity to evolve without losing sight of its core values. It will be particularly important for the OAS to preserve its political and institutional integrity by maintaining consistency in its political resolve and action, improving operational efficiency, and facilitating the development goals of the nations of the Americas. I believe that a greater focus on development is vital for understanding and effectively addressing the underlying and structural causes of poverty, social exclusion and conflict in our hemisphere.

As I think about the future, four of the major tasks for the OAS need to be:

1. to further strengthen unity in the Americas and continue promoting a culture of inclusiveness at the national and regional level;
2. to continue embedding democracy through the strengthening of legislative and electoral institutions, and the promotion of a culture of peace and democratic governability;
3. to advocate a new paradigm on development that is holistic in approach and action oriented, that takes into account the social and economic vulnerabilities and needs of nations and seeks way to maximize potential; and

4. to facilitate deeper and wider understanding between and among the various sub-regions.

In the coming years, the OAS will also have to reach out beyond the Summits of the Americas process to integrate our actions and efforts globally with those of the United Nations, the Ibero -American Secretariat, the African Union and the European Union, as well as with the sub-regional cooperation and regional integration systems.

At the same time, I believe that additional efforts will have to be made to create more synergies between the OAS and other regional institutions such as PAHO, IDB and IICA to ensure that strategic decisions taken at the highest political levels, such as in the case of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, which will be held in April 2009 in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, can be incorporated in a consistent and concrete manner into the agenda of Inter-American institutions.

We also cannot ignore the strategic partnerships the OAS has with affiliated institutions, such as the Young Americas Business Trust, the Trust for the Americas and the Pan-American Development Foundation. By building strong partnerships with all of these entities, our collaborative efforts will serve to strengthen that which binds us together rather than what divides us. To make all this happen, we must commit to building a stronger and career based Secretariat, and to preserving the institutional memory and legacy of the Organization. Only with a strengthened, enhanced and adequately endowed professional institution, will the General Secretariat of the OAS be able to effectively deliver the services that respond to the needs of the member states. I would like to conclude by congratulating the Secretary for External Relations and her staff for organizing this commemorative event. With this forum, we have started the celebration of the 60th anniversary.

Also, it is an ideal time to congratulate and thank all past and current Permanent Representatives and alternates who have represented the Member States over these 60 years. No doubt their contribution and insights have helped to shape a shared inter-American agenda.

Additionally, I wish to recognize the current Secretary General and all former elected officials for their leadership in helping to guide the work and direction of the organization. A special word of appreciation to the staff members who make up the critical mass of this great institution for your contribution over the past 60 years and to encourage you to maintain the same level of commitment and professionalism.

Finally, I believe that the OAS remains as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. Responding to the needs of our Member States continues to represent both a challenge to which the Organization must rise as well as an opportunity for the Organization to demonstrate its capacity, its relevance and its impact on the lives and livelihoods of the peoples of the Americas.

As the Organization enters the next 60 years, it must remain vigilant without being intrusive, responsive without being prescriptive, and flexi-

ble enough to discern creative ways to promote stronger partnerships and to meet the growing demands and expectations of the peoples of the Americas.

I thank you.

Perspective

