

SAN JOSÉ COMMUNIQUÉ

This is a summary of the deliberations held in San José, Costa Rica, in the meeting of former heads of State and Government and experts on 25 and 26 February 2016 under the auspices of the Forum 2000 Foundation and of the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress.

The participants included H.E. Oscar Arias Sanchez, former President of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, H.E. Felipe González, former Prime Minister of Spain, H.E. Jorge Quiroga, former President of Bolivia, the eminent Mexican politician and diplomat Jorge G. Castañeda, H.E. Sila M. Calderón, former Governor of Puerto Rico, and the former Secretary-General of the Presidency of Chile, H.E. John Biehl del Río, as well as Human Rights and governance experts.

Discussions centered on the deficiencies of democratic systems in Latin America in general, with particular focus on the political systems of Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, and a number of problems, threats and challenges were identified, as well as ideas and suggestions on strengthening the region's democracies,, as well as on the launching of much too long postponed transitions to democracy.

SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES

- The lack of democratic values prevailing in the rulers of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, as well as their disrespect of civil liberties and Human Rights in general, stunt the development of their societies, and stifle the full vital potential of their nationals.
- The non-democratic nature and totalitarian drift of some governments in the region, among which those of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua stand out, is now evident to everybody and can no longer be ignored by the democratic governments of Latin America and the world.
- Democratic transitions are facing grave political and institutional obstacles, as is happening in Venezuela, where the Presidency of the Republic, and the Supreme Tribunal of Justice it controls, blatantly disregard the unquestionable legitimacy of the new National Assembly elected on 6 December.
- National and regional institutions established to protect Human Rights and Democracy are fragile and have, on occasion, been kidnapped by non-democratic forces, such as the governments of the three countries mentioned, as well as those of Bolivia and Ecuador.
- In general, the weakness and often fractured nature of the political opposition and of civil society render them unable of performing their roles in a democratic system. It must be mentioned that Venezuela constitutes an exception in this regard.
- International institutions often do not discharge their mandates of promoting and protecting human rights and strengthening democratic governance in an adequate and timely manner.
- The almost complete unwillingness to denounce, let alone condemn the unrelenting undermining of democratic values and institutions in the five ALBA countries is a cause of great concern, and we draw the attention of the democratic governments of the region to their duty of protecting their democracies by respecting and persuading and bringing pressure on others to respect and fully comply with the international treaties they have signed and ratified in the framework of the Organization of American States and of the United Nations.

- Foreign investment and credit, when granted with political motives, always constitute a risk to the sovereignty and democratic governance of the countries of the region.

IDEAS ANG SUGGESTIONS

- Regional solidarity in defense of democratic values and institutions, both by governments and by civil societies, is of the utmost importance in the task of protecting and strengthening democratic governance.
- Venezuela is on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe, and its grave food and medicines crisis urgently requires a determined and effective response by the entire Venezuelan State, together with that of the international community. This joint effort, however, has been impeded by the blockage of democratic governance caused by the government's non- recognition of the new National Assembly's legitimacy. It has now become urgent that the hemispheric community of nations unequivocally condemn this irresponsible policy by the government of President Maduro, in order to persuade him to allow that the assistance to the people of Venezuela provided by international solidarity effectively reaches the people, and that the looming humanitarian disaster is avoided.
- It is necessary to revert the authoritarianism imposed on the three countries mentioned by reestablishing the Independence of the branches of government, relegitimizing democratic institutions, and strengthening them where they still exist. Only thus can the requisite checks and balances essential to democratic governance be reestablished.
- There can be no democracy with political prisoners. It is indispensable that they are all set free, and that, to this end, all democratic governments in the region express their solidarity with their just cause and act on it in an active and effective manner.
- Nevertheless, a degree of optimism is fully justified, as, in spite of the opacity and the well established fraudulent practices in the three countries the democratic oppositions of Argentina, Venezuela and Bolivia were able to register brilliant electoral victories. This very welcome development does not, however, in any way diminish the importance of always insisting on the full participation of credible international electoral observation, such as the one provided by the OAS, the UN, and the EU.
- The governments of the region should think twice before accepting external economic obligations, especially if they could imply severe limitations to their sovereign and democratic development.