

REMARKS TO BE PRESENTED BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, ARTURO VALENZUELA, AT THE  
MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ORGANIZATIONS OF  
AMERICAN STATES, NOVEMBER 23, 2009

I am truly honored to come before the Permanent Council today as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs in the United States Department of State. I am grateful to President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for their trust in me. My life-long vocation has been the academy. When I entered, almost by accident, the State Department in the first Clinton Administration I did so because the Cold War had ended--we faced a new and more promising world where we hoped that the great divides of the past could be put aside in favor of a more collaborative project, crossing national boundaries to create a better and more just world.

I returned to service in this administration because of my faith that that should continue to be our cardinal objective, despite the vexing challenges of the Twenty First Century. As President Obama made clear in Trinidad and Tobago the United States seeks to develop a new and genuine partnership with all of the countries of the Americas drawing on our common values and histories, one based on mutual respect and trust and genuine consultation, in the search for ways to build a better future and improve the conditions for the people of the Americas.

There has been much progress in the Americas over the last two decades since the end of the bitter chapter of authoritarian rule and open civil conflict in several countries. And yet the challenges remain

great. Our dialogue and commitment to work together must be premised on the fact that we face common challenges—to overcome poverty and inequality, to strengthen institutions of governance, to provide for the safety and security of our people, to increase the competitiveness of our societies in an ever-changing world, and to strengthen our multilateral institutions including the mechanisms for collective defense of democracy contemplated in the democratic Charter of this organization.

Quisiera subrayar que entiendo muy bien que este diálogo y esta tupida agenda que tenemos por delante no pueden estar exentos de un reconocimiento de las a veces difíciles relaciones históricas entre los Estados Unidos y muchos países del continente americano. Entendemos que en otras épocas a menudo la política exterior del país se guiaba en función de grandes intereses económico. O que durante la guerra fría el imperativo de seguridad nacional conllevó a que la política exterior estadounidense privilegiara el orden y la seguridad por encima de la consolidación de democracias más justas y representativas. No se puede tener un diálogo genuino si no asumimos nuestras historias.

Mais comme le President Obama l'a dit au Trinidad et Tobago, ceci ne veut pas dire que nous devons nous enchaîner au passé, en restant prisonniers des malfaits de nos histoires. Nous nous devons surtout au future. La biographie personnelle du Président et de sa famille lui donne sans doute une grande autorité morale à ce sujet. Et en lui confiant la plus haute investiture de la nation, le peuple américain a montré à son tour que les injustices du passé peuvent être surmontées

quand les institutions démocratiques permettent l'expression pleine de la volonté populaire.

It is an honor Mr. President for me to be in this historic hall. As we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Pan American Union we should be proud of this achievement. The republics of the Americas created the world's first regional organization, providing a precedent for future inter-national associations and contributing to the evolution of international law. This enterprise was the fruit of a collective endeavor. When the United Nations was created, the Latin American member nations insisted that the OAS be recognized by it as a properly constituted regional organization under the UN Charter.

The history of the OAS has had its low points, but also its high ones. Some of its institutions like the Human Rights Commission have proven effective instruments promoting and safeguarding core values. More recently, the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter as an expression of the commitment of the nations of the hemisphere to affirm and defend democracy has been one of the OAS's most significant achievements. With its origins in resolution 1080 adopted in Santiago Chile in 1991, the Inter-American Democratic Charter stemmed from a strong consensus that the frequent interruptions of the region's democratic constitutional procedures had to be confined to the past.

What is at stake with Honduras is nothing less than the credibility of the OAS and its members in living up to the call for the collective defense of democracy enshrined in the Charter. The United States, together with the rest of the Member States, rendered a unanimous

verdict in judging that the duly elected president of Honduras, who was approaching the end of his term, had been removed from office by a coup d'état. There is no other word to describe the abrupt and forced exile of a head of state. Moreover, if any citizen, including a head of state, is alleged to have transgressed the law, forceful exile without due process of law is a violation of one of the most basic principles of democratic governance whose origins come to us through the ages from the Magna Carta of 1215. When the de facto government refused to return President Zelaya to office the United States formed part of also joined in the unanimous determination that Honduras should be suspended under the Inter American Democratic Charter as a member of the Organization of American States.

This action reflects the conviction of all member states that a coup d'état or serious disruption of the democratic order in a member state could set a damaging precedent that risks the return of a praetorian pattern of politics that proved so damaging to the consolidation of democratic institutions in the Americas..

The Organization of American States as well as individual governments have worked strenuously to assist Honduras to find a path towards national reconciliation and the reestablishment of democratic and constitutional order, including the restitution of President Zelaya. This has been a continuous process involving different initiatives, notably the extra-ordinary contributions of President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica who, working with officials of the Organization of American States, proposed the San Jose Accord that was accepted initially by both sides. We regret that the de facto authorities in Honduras were

unwilling to sign the agreement, giving the appearance to be stalling for time.

The accord finally signed in Tegucigalpa on October 30, and redubbed the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accords pursuant to the work of the Arias-OAS effort, is a significant achievement of which we can be proud. It provides a framework for resolution of the crisis with four key components--the formation under the auspices of the OAS of an international Verification Commission, the creation of an interim government of national unity, the creation of a Truth Commission and a vote by the Honduran Congress on whether President Zelaya's should return to office before the end of his constitutional term. It is critical to stress that both sides, the de facto authorities and President Zelaya, agreed to these terms as the best way to resolve the crisis. While we are disappointed that the Accords have not yet been fully implemented, I want to commend the OAS and the Verification Commission for their tireless work in continuing to seek implementation of the Accords.

We are pleased that Mr. Roberto Micheletti has opened up a promising space for compromise by declaring that he intends to step down as leader of the de facto government by taking a leave of absence to facilitate in his words "a period of national reflection." We welcome that step and urge that it facilitate the expeditious formation of a governing authority of "national unity" as called for in the October 30 accord, one that can inspire confidence in all sectors of Honduran society.

Let me comment on the electoral process underway in Honduras. It is important to place this election in its proper context. This is an

electoral process that follows the normal electoral calendar under the Honduran constitution, and it had been underway for several months prior to the coup. Primaries were held with high levels of voter participation, candidates resigned from other offices in accordance with Honduran law to run for the presidency, and the country's electoral authorities undertook extensive preparations including the commissioning of international observation. Despite challenging circumstances, candidates from across Honduras' broad ideological and political spectrum— Felicito Avila, Cesar Ham, Pepe Lobo, Bernard Martinez, and Elvin Santos—have engaged in a vigorous campaign to be Honduras' next President. Their campaigns are scheduled to close next Tuesday.

Despite the deep crisis that interrupted the legal foundations of the democratic order in Honduras, that order can best be restore in Honduras when all major political actors agree on a fundamental principle. That principle is that no governmental authority can be considered legitimate if it has not been given its right to rule by the sovereign people. However, the sovereign people can only express their will if elections are free, fair, peaceful, and credible.

I want to underscore that, this was not an election invented by a de facto government in search of an exit strategy or as a means to whitewash a coup d'état. To the contrary, it is an election consonant with the constitutionally mandated renewal of congressional and presidential mandates permitting the Honduran people to exercise their sovereign will.

Nevertheless, we do view with concern reports of human rights violations and deliberate efforts to incite violence and confrontation on both sides of the political divide in Honduras that might taint the electoral process. For the popular will to be expressed clearly, the elections must be held in a climate that permits candidates—all candidates—to campaign in a climate of peace and security. They must be able to present their points of view freely. And on the day of the election, voters must be able to cast their ballots in a climate of order and free of intimidation, with the full assurance that their votes will all be fairly counted. We will turn to international observers from civil society, and our own observations to determine whether or not these elections meet international standards.

Let me very clear, however, that while an election that is held consistent with international standards is a necessary condition for Honduras to return as a member in good standing of the Organization of American States--it is not a sufficient condition. Let me repeat: A necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. For that to occur, the parties in Honduras must fully implement the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accords. This means that a government of national unity must be constituted, one that represents all sectors of society and the Congress. At the same time the Honduras Congress must vote expeditiously on the return of President Zelaya to office.

The accord also contemplates other critical elements. The OAS should strengthen the Verification Commission to give it the tools to fully report back to this body on the degree to which all parties in Honduras have fulfilled their commitments. At the same time the

accord calls for the establishment of a Truth Commission to investigate the circumstances that led to the breakdown of the institutional order in Honduras and provide assistance on what the country's leaders must do in order to strengthen democratic institutions, rules, procedures and constitutional practices.

This has been a difficult time for the people of Honduras. We trust that the nation's political leaders will rise to meet the challenges that this critical moment in history has placed on their shoulders. It is a time for them to set aside bitter disputes and unite around the need to recreate the country's democratic order and establish the grounds for civility, while getting down to the task of addressing the severe social and economic challenges that Honduras' people face.

I look forward to working with all of you and the nation's of the Americas to help Honduras resolve this crisis in such a way that the Honduran people have a clear, peaceful and timely path forward, while making clear in no uncertain terms that a disruption of the democratic and constitutional order in a member state is unacceptable in light of our common values as expressed in the democratic charter. Finally, I look forward to working with each and every one of you in this room to advance our common agenda in what I hope will be a new era of cooperation with mutual respect.

Muitíssimo Obrigado