

## Remarks at the White House Conference on the Americas

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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**SECRETARY RICE:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Tom, for that wonderful and kind introduction. And I should just say that Assistant Secretary of State Tom Shannon has been really the tip of the spear in moving our policies on Latin America. He has spent endless hours on airplanes to go to Latin America and to spend time with our colleagues and friends in the region. And so, Tom, thank you for your dedication to this region.

It is an honor to have an opportunity to join you all here and to participate with you in the White House Conference on the Americas.

I know that today's speakers and discussions have added up to quite an enriching day - but I also know it's been a long day. And I am distinctly aware, as any speaker should be, that I am the sole remaining person between you and the best part of the day -- that would be drinks and dinner -- and so I will try to keep my remarks brief.

Looking out at all of you today, I see a microcosm of the Americas. I see representatives of civil society. I see leaders of churches and faith groups. I see members of our business community. I see many distinguished members of our hemisphere's diplomatic corps.

It is men like you and women like you - some in government, but most outside of it - who are helping to deepen the personal ties that unite the citizens of the Americas: ties of travel and tourism, commerce and culture, friendship and family, and of course, the principles and practice of democracy.

We in the Americas, in all our diversity, are truly an alliance of peoples. We share in each other's successes, and we depend on each other for that success. So I want to thank all of you for being here today.

What also binds us together is the promise that we carry with us: It is the revolutionary promise that life in the Americas would represent an opportunity for all people - regardless of class or culture, race or religion, blood or birth - to break with the past and begin life anew: to replace poverty with prosperity, injustice with dignity, and oppression with freedom.

This is the original promise of the Americas, and the modern history of the region has been the quest - imperfect, to be sure - to fulfill it. The people of our hemisphere have had to overcome colonialism, and slavery, and tyranny, and together we have built a pan-American consensus that free economies and democratic governments are the right of every one of our citizens. There is only one country, tragically, whose people do not live under a government of their choosing, and that is the nation of the great people of Cuba.

Still, amidst the significant progress and opportunity of the Americas, there is, of course, tremendous suffering. Too many men and women and children are still excluded from the promise of our hemisphere - scraping by on the margins of their economies and on the margins of their societies. Too many still do not know the basic dignity that is found in a good job and in good health care, and in opportunities for education and a home of their own. Too many still feel that some elected leaders, and government officials, and police



officers are only looking out for themselves, not for their fellow citizens - that they are working to advance narrow self-interests, not broader national interests.

For democracies like ours, at a time of expanding global prosperity, this situation is completely unacceptable. And it is not surprising that it has led many in the Americas to feel let down by democracy - to question whether democracy can really deliver on their rightful high hopes for a better life.

This sense of impatience has been clear in the many elections that have taken place in the Americas. What has also been clear is the strength of our hemisphere's commitment to democratic ideals and institutions - a commitment clearly expressed, as millions and millions of citizens have gone to the polls and elected democratic modernizers - leaders of the left, the right, and the center, who want to help people better their lives, especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

The development challenges of our hemisphere are significant, but the citizens and the leaders of the Americas are making an historic commitment to address them democratically. This commitment is embodied in our Inter-American Democratic Charter - which says that democracy is the right of all people and that it is the only path to lasting political, economic, and social development. I would submit to you that a region-wide commitment to democratic development such as ours is historically unprecedented - both in our hemisphere and in the wider world.

Our main challenge then is to show that this commitment is not unfounded, that democracy really can deliver lasting development and social justice -not just to elites, but to all citizens. And that is what brings us here today. The answers we seek, ladies and gentlemen, are actually all around us.

The truly transformational power of the Americas is here in this room - in private citizens like all of you, who strengthen your communities and care for your neighbors, who create new jobs and new businesses, and who organize the rousing energy of our people into a positive force for change.

The role for government, therefore, is clear: It is to work in partnership with you - to adopt policies that expand the ties between our citizens - that deepen the ways we relate to one another and the way we work together and that liberate the full creative potential of our alliance of peoples.

Democracy, at its best, is not a status quo idea. It is a radical idea, capable of sparking individual revolutions in the human condition - of transforming people's lives through self-improvement and social mobility.

But to do so, democratic leaders must govern justly, they must fight corruption, and they must invest in their people. They must reform their state institutions to be more transparent, and inclusive, and accountable. And they must build dynamic, resilient economies that adapt to change, that harness the opportunities of regional and global trade, and that hold out hope to the poorest and weakest among us. That is how democracy leads to social justice.

Democratic citizens and the true democratic leaders of the Americas have made that commitment, and whenever they look to the United States for partnership, they are finding in us a dedicated friend. We want to play a supportive role, an effective role as all of our nations work to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century - and we all work together to build here, in the Americas, a community of sovereign nations that are successful, competitive, and free - that meet their peoples' needs, and help to unleash their tremendous creativity and their industry.

That is why advancing social justice is the focus of U.S. policy in the hemisphere today. And at this conference, we have shown that we are now mobilizing every agency of our government, every sector of our society, in a comprehensive effort to support that goal.

We are supporting social justice with our development assistance: doubling it for the hemisphere in this President's term - targeting it to help the poor gain access to health and housing, education and jobs - and relieving billions of dollars of debt.

We are supporting social justice by promoting political and social inclusion for marginalized citizens, like indigenous peoples and the descendants of Africa - by helping our democratic partners to deliver essential

services to their citizens, to invest in their people's future, to enforce the rule of law equally, and to root out corruption at all levels of government and society.

We are supporting social justice by expanding personal security throughout the cities, and villages, and neighborhoods of the Americas - working with our democratic partners to help the victims of natural disasters - and to bring drug smugglers, and gang members, and human traffickers to justice.

And of course, we are supporting social justice, economic inclusion, and the fight against poverty through free and fair trade. And here, I would just say, that it is we, the United States, who need to do a better job of living up to our agreements, and to make certain that we can deliver.

Some of our strongest partners, our democratic partners - Colombia, Panama, and Peru - have made strategic commitments to us through their trade agreements. These are commitments made by freely elected leaders, reflecting the deepest aspirations of their people - men and women who understand that trade is not a conspiracy to make the rich richer. Rather, it is the greatest force for personal transformation in our hemisphere today, and the heart of any serious strategy to help the poor.

Trade is good for our democratic partners, and it is good for the United States. And this is going to be a test for our country, and we must ask ourselves: Do we believe in our principles of free and fair trade, or not? Do we support our democratic partners, or not? Are we willing to abandon the people of the Americas to empty promises of authoritarian demagogues? The trade agreements that we negotiated are good and fair agreements. The citizens of our hemisphere are not giving up on democratic development, and it would be irresponsible in the extreme for us and for our Congress to give up on them.

Ladies and Gentlemen: We in the United States support social justice for the people of the Americas because it is right thing to do - because it is the responsible thing to do - and most of all, because we, of all nations, know how difficult democracy can be, and what a difference committed partners can make in the pursuit of justice and development.

Last Wednesday was the 231st anniversary of the nation's -- our nation's independence. Amidst all the celebration, it was also a time to reflect on our own quest for social justice and for a more perfect union - journeys that continue to this day.

After all, there was a time in our history when health and housing, work and education were privileges for the few, not opportunities for the many.

There was a time when our development challenges seemed so great that it appeared they would overwhelm our democratic institutions - and they almost did.

And of course, there was a time, not that long ago, in my lifetime, when whole segments of society were excluded from their rightful place in our democracy - indigenous peoples, immigrants, women, the poor, and of course, in my lifetime, blacks, who, at the time of our founding, were considered 3/5 of a man.

Our history as a nation has taught us humility. It has taught us about our own imperfections. It has taught us never to take our success for granted, and to remember always that our success depends on the broader success of our neighbors in the hemisphere. Most of all, our history, the history of the United States, has strengthened our resolve to be a good, faithful friend to our partners in the Americas - to all work together to build free and better nations, and thereby to inspire others far from our boundaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The eyes of the world have always turned to the Americas, and now they turn to us again. Today, as in centuries past, we embody not only the dreams of our citizens, but also the dreams of people across the globe - in places like Burma and Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Iraq, and sadly here in our own hemisphere, still in Cuba. They embody the dreams of impatient patriots who think that if democratic development can work for us, then it can work for them - who believe that the promise of liberty and opportunity is a universal desire, and a universal vision - open to every person, in every land, at every time.

We in the Americas are thus involved in an enterprise that is far larger than ourselves and larger than our region. And I am confident that, secure in our values, and knowing our future, that we will be successful. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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