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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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The remarkable changes experienced by Latin America and the Caribbean in the final decades of the twentieth century were a fitting prelude to the arrival of the new century. These transformations included the collapse of dictatorships, debt crisis and depression, redemocratization, a shift to more export-led and neoliberal economies, and the resumption of economic growth. Yet not all changes affecting the hemisphere have been so visible. Some transformations take place so gradually that they go unnoticed or are dismissed as inconsequential until their cumulative effects finally require a recognition of their importance.

An example of such a process of incremental change is what is sometimes called the inter-American system. The three basic institutions of that system have been in place for decades: the Organization of American States (OAS), the inter-American security system (the Rio Treaty), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This seeming institutional continuity is misleading, however, because the inter-American system has been undergoing changes that may be as profound as those experienced by the countries of the region.

The significance of recent changes in the inter-American system may have been obscured by the shadows cast by the long history of asymmetrical relations between the United States on the one hand and Latin American and the Caribbean on the other. This haphazard and sometimes bizarre history is a source of embarrassment to citizens of both the United States and the neighbor republics to the south. The former would prefer to forget the ignorance and racism that so often shaped U.S. policy, while the latter would rather not recall the roles of victims or accomplices that they were forced to play. Both tend to dismiss the present inter-American system as an institutional relic of that shared past.

When the first Summit of the Americas was announced as an early initiative of the Clinton administration, some observers in both north and south viewed this development as a threatening, perhaps even fatal blow to the institutions of the inter-American system. Others disparaged the first summit as merely another means of forcing the U.S. agenda on Latin America and the Caribbean. What actually transpired at the first presidential summit in Miami and over the course of the succeeding summits belied both these expectations.

Whatever the intentions of the Clinton administration, the first surprise of the Miami Summit in December 1994 was that the Latin American and Caribbean countries pushed the agenda well beyond what the United States had envisioned in terms of scope and timetables for action. While the summit was intended to be a showcase for President Clinton, the summit process also proved to be an irresistible and effective forum for the leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean.

With the subsequent summits of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in December 1996 and Santiago de Chile in April 1998, it has become clear that the summit process is being driven by Latin American concerns. The loss of leadership by the United States reflects domestic problems in part, especially the failure of "fast-track" trade legislation in the U.S. Congress. But a more fundamental factor has been the Latin American presidents' use of the summit process to highlight and reach agreement on measures dealing with a broad range of issues important to Latin America. These issues extend well beyond trade integration to address an array of problems that confront the emerging democracies of the region.

The list of non-trade positions that the Latin American republics have successfully presented for adoption at the summit meetings continues to lengthen. At the Miami Summit, these included strengthening democracy and human rights; cooperating in telecommunications, science, and technology; eradicating poverty and discrimination; and providing access to health services. At the summit in Santa Cruz, measures were adopted to sustain forests, agriculture, water resources, coastal areas, communities, and cities. The Santiago Summit focused on educational access and improvement but also addressed additional matters including the rights of migrants, indigenous peoples, women, and workers; the right to freedom of expression; corruption and the strengthening of justice systems; terrorism; telecommunications; and a series of other issues of concern to Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

1. A comprehensive compilation of the declarations, plans of action, and conventions adopted by the first three summits has been published by the OAS: *Official Documents of the Summit Process from Miami to Santiago* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Summit Follow-up, General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1998). An independent assessment is pro-

The second surprise of the summit process is that it has led not to the demise of traditional institutions like the OAS and the IDB but to their renaissance. The leadership at these two agencies responded with alacrity to the summit process. Faced with either creating a new bureaucracy or utilizing existing institutions, the countries participating in the summit process were receptive to the overtures from the OAS and the IDB. These institutions have since become the principal agencies charged with implementing the agenda items adopted at the summits. The inter-American security system also appears to have entered a new phase with the initiation of defense ministerial meetings in the wake of the Miami Summit.

The OAS and the IDB now have an agenda that results from a consensus among the presidents of the Western Hemisphere, an advantage that gives their activities a status and recognition far higher than previously enjoyed. That agenda represents a successful effort to internationalize problems that in past decades would have been viewed as purely national issues.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the conversion of a national agenda into an international one is the elevation of constitutional and electoral democracy to a hemispheric mandate. The defense and deepening of democratic institutions are no longer national questions but a common hemispheric responsibility. The clear implication is that the doctrine of national sovereignty will no longer serve to prevent the OAS from taking measures against illegal seizures of power or other violations of democratic processes.

Another issue confronting the Latin American and Caribbean countries is protecting the rights of their citizens. This concern has been translated through the summit processes into mandates on protecting human rights, eliminating discrimination against minorities and women, and assuring social rights, such as the rights to education, employment, health, and welfare. These statements have led in turn to declarations on sustainable development and the environment. Given the exacerbation of inequality and other problems associated with neoliberal economic policies, the salience of these issues continues to increase.

A related phenomenon confronting most of the republics of the hemisphere is the rise of crime and violence in various forms. This trend has led the summits to adopt additional mandates on reestablishing and maintaining the rule of law, promoting transparency, eliminating corruption, combating terrorism and narcotrafficking, reforming judicial and

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vided in *Mastering Summitry: An Evaluation of the Santiago Summit of the Americas and Its Aftermath* (Miami, Fla.: Leadership Council for Inter-American Summitry, North-South Center, University of Miami, 1999).

penal systems, and enhancing the security of citizens. The next summit, to be held in Canada, will make personal security its central theme.

In short, the new multilateral agenda has been inspired by the problems actually faced by the Latin American democracies. The summit process thus has provided a new mechanism for translating national concerns into a hemispheric agenda and in so doing has revitalized the inter-American system. The challenges may be formidable, but the nations of the Western Hemisphere have begun the twenty-first century with a greater sense of common purpose than ever before.

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