

**STATEMENT BY ARTURO VALENZUELA TO THE SENATE FOREIGN  
RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
July 8, 2009**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor and a privilege for me to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. I am deeply grateful for the trust and confidence President Obama and Secretary Clinton have placed in me to serve our country at this critical moment in the relationship between the United States and the countries of the Americas. I also want to thank you and your distinguished colleagues for the vital role of this committee in addressing the numerous challenges the United States faces in today's world.

At her confirmation hearing, the Secretary said consultation is not a catchword for her but a firm commitment. I want to second that sentiment and assure you that – if confirmed – I will make it a top priority to maintain open and frequent lines of communication with members of this committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as the many Senators and Congressmen who have such a strong interest in this hemisphere.

Before I proceed I would like to introduce Katy Mudge, my wife. My children Mark and Jenny were unable to be with me today—but I know they are rooting for me from afar.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the work of Ambassador Thomas A. Shannon who will be vacating this post. Tom and I first met in 1999 when he came to work for me at the National Security Council during the Clinton Administration. It has been a pleasure to be associated with someone who understands the hemisphere and has worked hard to forge a better relationship between the United States and its neighboring countries. I also want to say that if the Senate confirms by nomination it will be a privilege for me to work once again with the dedicated professionals that serve our country in foreign policy and national security matters.

### **Experience**

I would like to comment briefly on my career and its relevance to this nomination; then I look forward to engaging in dialogue and answering the committee's questions.

I am a scholar who has spent almost four decades researching and teaching about Latin American politics at Duke and Georgetown universities. For the last twenty-two years I have directed Georgetown's Center for Latin American Studies, now located in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, a National Resource Center supported by a Title VI grant from the Office of Education. In addition to my academic endeavors I have worked closely over the years with democratic forces in various countries to assist in overcoming authoritarian rule and strengthening democratic governance. I have done so in my personal capacity and through institutions like the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, an organization on whose Board of Directors I have served on two separate occasions. I am also proud of my service for other non-profit organizations such as Freedom House and America's Watch who

play important roles in promoting human rights in the Hemisphere. As a member of the Board of Directors of the National Council of la Raza it has been a privilege for me to contribute in a small way to the realization of the American dream for the Latino community in this great country of ours and to help members of that community better understand their countries of origin as well as their homeland. Finally, I was honored to serve in the government previously as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in the first Clinton Administration where I was responsible for the bi-lateral relationship between the United States and Mexico as well as issues such as democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. In president Clinton's second term I served as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Inter-American Affairs at the National Security Council.

## **Shared History**

I see this as a very promising moment in the Americas, with challenges for sure, but also with many opportunities. It is easy to forget that in the recent past many of the countries of the region were governed by military dictatorships and that Central America was in the throes of open civil conflicts. Or, that changes of government often came through military coups rather than through the peaceful accession to office via elections. Indeed, from the 1930s through the 1970s, 38 percent of the transfers of power in Latin America were by coup d'état. That pattern was extremely damaging to the prospects for democratic consolidation. Every time the military, always backed by disgruntled civilian sectors, would step in to solve a political "crisis" or reverse the mandate of the electorate, it undermined the prospect for strengthening the rule of law and the institutions of democratic governance. Resorting to unconstitutional and undemocratic solutions cannot solve the problems of democracy; they must be solved within democracy in accord with constitutional precepts.

The end of the Cold War and the discrediting of military regimes that failed to bring about promised economic and political reforms, ushered in an unprecedented era of constitutional governance in the Americas. Never before in history did so many leaders make way for their elected successors in all of the countries save Cuba. The peaceful and democratic transfer of power on June 1 of this year between parties that fought each other during El Salvador's civil war is particularly noteworthy.

This new pattern would not have been possible without the determined effort of the nations of the Hemisphere acting through the Organization of American States (OAS) to make clear that the interruption of democracy would violate the fundamental norms of the inter-American system. With strong support from the United States, the watershed moment was the adoption of Resolution 1080, the Santiago Declaration, in 1991 that required OAS action in the face of an authoritarian reversal. That resolution provided the basis for the subsequent adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, subscribed to by all of the members of the Organization of American States in good standing. Beginning with the coup d'état in Haiti in September of 1991, a vigorous international response helped several countries in the region navigate through the resolution of complex political challenges with the assistance of other nations and the OAS. Mr. Chairman, the establishment of democracy is not tantamount to its consolidation, and several countries have experienced severe institutional difficulties over the last quarter century as 15

elected presidents failed to complete their prescribed terms in office. And yet, those institutional challenges were largely solved through constitutional means.

That is why the unconstitutional removal of power of the President of Honduras is such a serious matter. It is in the fundamental interest of the United States that the countries of the Hemisphere consolidate legitimate democratic governments that their people have aspired to for so long. That objective can best be achieved by working cooperatively and in concert with our partners in the Americas including under the rubric of the OAS. In accord with the Inter-American Democratic Charter it should be clear that the collective response of the hemisphere in support of democracy should not be limited to taking action simply when elected leaders are removed from office by force. It also requires ensuring the respect for fundamental civil and political rights, democratic principles, and the institutions of democracy. That is why the OAS' work to gain the return of the deposed President and the restoration of all civil liberties and a full respect for Honduras' constitution is so vitally important. At the same time the OAS and the international community must work with Honduran institutions, political parties, and sectors of civil society to establish the basis for developing a consensus to strengthen democratic institutions, overcome polarization, and protect the constitutional order.

Democratic institutions remain weak in many countries of the hemisphere not only because democratic continuity has been in place for a relatively short period of time, but also because the challenges of fledgling democracies are daunting. Democratic governments must cope with economic and social inequalities, in the face of a public that demands a state that is effective, accountable, and responsive to its needs.

It is in addressing these same challenges that we share a common struggle with the rest of the hemisphere. It is a bond built on a foundation of a shared history of colonial rule, liberation, emancipation, and more than two hundred years of striving toward a more perfect union, to make the promise of government by the people – a reality. Like the rest of the hemisphere, we have been working since our independence to narrow the gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

At its best, the United States has been a catalyst for positive change in the Americas. At other times, we have not always lived up to the basic principles of cooperation and respect. Still, democracy has always been the hemisphere's permanent aspiration. It is out of this common struggle that our governments formed the world's oldest regional multilateral organization – the Organization of American States – in 1948, upon the ideal that "...the historic mission of America is to offer to man a land of liberty and a favorable environment for the development of his personality and the realization of his just aspirations." The Inter-American Democratic Charter, which anchors this sentiment in a firm commitment under international law, was the touchstone of the approach followed by the administration in the recent controversy over Cuba's relationship with the OAS, and represents the crowning achievement of the Inter-American system.

## **A New Approach**

Informed by this common sense of history, President Obama and Secretary Clinton are building a new approach of broad hemispheric cooperation based on partnership and consultation. They have pursued a robust, principled, and sustained diplomacy in the Americas from the first days of the administration. The President's first phone call as President-elect was to Mexican President Felipe Calderon. His first visit abroad as President was to Canada, where the President and Prime Minister announced the launch of a Clean Energy Dialogue. Shortly thereafter he travelled to Mexico, attended the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago, and has hosted Brazilian President Luis Ignacio Lula de Silva, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, here in Washington. The Vice President traveled to the region in March to attend the Progressive Governance Summit in Chile and met with Central American leaders in Costa Rica. The Secretary has made four visits to the region in the five months since her confirmation by this Committee.

Both the President and the Secretary understand that the Americas matter to the United States today and that they will matter even more tomorrow. We must recognize that we do not always have the answers to every problem, and that past approaches have not always worked. However, this administration is successfully re-fashioning a relationship that seeks to build equal and pragmatic partnerships. As President Obama and Secretary Clinton have both made clear, our partnership requires a genuine willingness to listen and learn from our neighbors.

The administration's approach is vital to U.S. interests at such a critical point in history. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought with it a unique set of threats and challenges to our common welfare. Such threats are transnational in nature and have components relating to climate change, the effects of the global economic crisis, transnational crime, and energy security. These are issues that neither the United States nor any Western Hemisphere nation can successfully handle alone. But, together, mobilizing our collective experience, knowledge, and resources we can advance a common agenda that can benefit not only this region but the world.

The economic importance of the hemisphere to the United States cannot be understated. Total two-way trade with the region as a whole – including Canada – was \$1.25 trillion in 2008, which amounts to 37 percent of U.S. trade with the world. Even excluding Canada, our trade was \$633.4 billion – still almost 19 percent of U.S. total trade. Nearly 50 percent of U.S. oil imports originate in the region-with Canada as our largest foreign energy supplier. The U.S. private sector has nearly \$500 billion invested in the region, including some \$32 billion invested in 2008 alone, 11 percent of U.S. foreign investment in that year. As important as these trade and investment relationships are for us, they are the cornerstone of the economy of the Latin America and Caribbean region, which sells more than a third of its exports to the U.S. The American people are the most generous donors to Latin America and the Caribbean, with foreign assistance exceeding \$1.9 billion in FY 2009, over \$800 million in compacts with the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and 30 percent of the capital of the Inter-American Development Bank.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the hemisphere's shared prosperity is dependent on increased cooperation and economic integration, as well as on ensuring that the benefits of that

prosperity reach broader sectors of society. Free trade alone is not enough to ensure equal economic opportunity for all. Until structural reforms open economic sectors to competition, and high quality modern education is made available to every child, we will continue to see a region with the highest income inequality in the world.

That is precisely the mission of the Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas Initiative, in which we are working with our trade partners on concrete efforts to make trade work for real people, especially those who so far have been marginalized from the benefits of trade-driven growth.

In recent decades, the countries of the Americas have developed stronger economic and diplomatic ties with the rest of the world. We support that trend and should continue our dialogue with Europe and Asia regarding the Western Hemisphere. The increasing globalization of Latin America and the Caribbean will enhance prosperity and democracy throughout the region.

### **Challenges to Democracy**

As I noted, consolidating democracy is a difficult task. The ultimate objective is the strengthening of the rule of law and of the capacity and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Part of that consolidation stems from robust support for fundamental freedoms and the respect for minority rights. Despite shared democratic values and fundamental human rights as expressed in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, there are examples of freely and fairly elected governments undermining democratic institutions. Over the past decade some have used their authority to curtail the rights of others and to hollow institutional checks and balances. One of my concerns is an apparent consensus in some quarters that fair criticism and tough questioning of government action must be repressed or even criminalized. I am also concerned about a widespread notion that democracy is equivalent to simple majority rule and that passing majorities can alter institutions and constitutional practices to benefit incumbents. The essence of democracy is government by the people according to constitutional precepts that guarantee the rights of individuals and groups and thereby the rights of potential future majorities.

It is important that our foreign policy strongly support these fundamental freedoms, and, as President Obama said in Cairo, to make clear that those in power must maintain it through consent, not coercion, and that participation should take place in a spirit of tolerance and compromise.

### **U.S. Policy Toward the Hemisphere**

The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is an exciting time for this hemisphere. In 2010, many countries will celebrate 200 years of independence from colonial rule. Looking back, we have to acknowledge the progress we have made in building our democracies and preserving peace throughout the region. This is a region that resolves its problems through dialogue and engagement, and recognizes that diplomacy must address differences without damaging the essential connectivity of the hemisphere. With the strong support of governments of this

hemisphere, including Argentina, Brazil, and Canada, Haiti is finally starting to overcome decades of violence and political instability.

We need to capitalize on the creativity, capacity, and energy of our peoples to make this region a powerhouse of global competitiveness. To realize this will require determined leadership and sound policy decisions based on our shared interests.

President Obama's policy vision recommitments the United States to a practical partnership in the Western Hemisphere to advance five closely inter-connected strategic goals:

1. Expanded economic opportunity for all, especially the marginalized;
2. Safety of the hemisphere's citizens;
3. Social equity among all peoples of the Americas;
4. Energy security and mitigated effects of climate change; and,
5. Regional publics supporting our shared values.

The administration's policy is governed by what the President said on the campaign trail, simply, "what is good for the people of the Americas is also good for the United States."

Looking forward, the Americas will continue to have a profound impact economically, culturally and demographically on our nation. We have a responsibility to ensure that the impact is positive, and that our own influence and presence protects our vital security interests and advances the well being of all of the hemisphere's citizens. It will take sustained, high-quality U.S. engagement that is based on mutual respect and partnership to make this vision a reality.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you, your distinguished colleagues in CONgress, and your staffs to achieve the goals of United States policy in the