

*THE FUTURE IS OUR MOST MOVING RESPONSIBILITY*

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My friends:

The mythological tales about the god Odin, the principal deity of Nordic cosmogony, include the story of two ravens, Hugin and Munin. These ravens, valuable advisers to the god, used to fly over the world at dawn, gathering information for the Scandinavian monarch. Hugin was thought. Munin, memory. To govern wisely, Odin needed the daily counsel of both. I like this story because it emphasizes the importance of memory in politics, while also warning us that memory is not enough if it is not accompanied by thought, by reason – which extracts from the past, lessons for the present.

We are gathered here today to discuss the destiny of this region of light and shadow, and we cannot do so without clearing a space on our shoulders for the birds that this morning explored our lands. We cannot do so without hearing the clamor of terrible and recent deeds, which demand that we employ our powers of thought to find a solution, and our memory to ensure that they never occur again. Today the raven-advisers bring us the sorrowful news of a coup d'état in the Republic of Honduras; of the indisputable increase in the Latin American arms race; of the worst economic crisis to shock our world in the past 80 years; and of the all-out war against nature on our planet. Indeed, the afflictions they recount to us are so many, and so varied, that today we lack the space, and the time, to touch upon them all.

That is why I would like to speak to you exclusively about Honduras, and the dramatic historical setback constituted by the events that have taken place in that brother country. After our region managed to avoid, for more than two decades, the dictatorial tyrant; after we had reached the paramount achievement of educating an entire generation of young people, far from the pain of a military coup; after all that, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Latin America awoke, as did Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, to a terrifying reality. The most distinctive rule of democracy – the rule that allows the peaceful succession of power – was weakened by the violent removal of a president elected by the people.

Beyond the semantic discussions that can take place, the truth is that the international community unanimously condemned these acts as a coup d'état. It makes no sense to continue insisting on other names. It makes no sense to attempt to temper what has happened with adjectives, calling this a “modern,” “atypical” or “sui generis coup d'état.” Because, to paraphrase an expression we use in Spanish, a coup can be dressed in the finest silk, but it is still a coup.

Before I continue, I must make a fundamental clarification: my repudiation of the events in Honduras is not based on any ideological affinity with President José Manuel Zelaya, nor with his more colorful allies in the region. Democracy is a system that defends

institutions, not people; it is a system that cares about the rules of play; it is, according to the famous phrase of John Adams, “a government of law and not of men.” It is very easy to respect the rights of those who think the same way we do. Defending the rights of those who think differently – that is the real challenge of democracy.

That is why I did not hesitate to receive President Zelaya upon his arrival to Costa Rica, after the coup d’état. That is why my Government was the first in the world to repudiate his expulsion from Honduras. And that is why, when both parties to the conflict asked me to serve as a mediator, I accepted the responsibility, conscious of the challenges involved.

You were witnesses of the work we did. During long days and long nights, we worked to bring the two sides of the conflict closer together. For the first time in human history, a dialogue was established with the purpose of reverting a coup d’état. Based on the concerns expressed, not only by both Honduran delegations, but also by various national and international groups, we created a proposal that we then presented as the San José Agreement. This document today continues to be the basis for efforts at dialogue; its most important point is, and will continue to be, the restitution of José Manuel Zelaya as President of the Republic of Honduras, until the end of his constitutional term.

The surprising return of President Zelaya to his country, and his continued stay at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, has revived the need for dialogue, given the danger of an outbreak of violence in the streets. Today, I want to call on both sides of the conflict to renounce the war of words. A verbal escalation will translate, almost by necessity, into an escalation of violence. Before anything else, above any interest or agenda, is the need to preserve calm. Everything has a solution, except death. Nothing is worth spilling blood among the people, not even the defense of the noblest ideals. If we are going to defend democracy, let us defend it with its own instruments: with dialogue and understanding, with respect and prudence, with peace and tolerance.

This is even truer for the other leaders of the region whose statements fan the flames, rather than soothing them. Those who place their desire for the spotlight, before the peace of a people, will have to answer to history. Their consciences will bear the burden of having cut short human lives in exchange for five minutes of glory.

The war of words must end at once, because it prevents us from moving forward on an agreement that is essential if the international community is to recognize the legitimacy of November’s elections. Some countries have stated that they will not endorse the election results until the points of the San José Agreement are signed and, above all, carried out. The de facto government made achieving this international recognition even more difficult when it published, this past Saturday, a decree that suspends individual rights, and that imposes a curfew for forty-five days – that is, the better part of the electoral campaign. This decree also prohibits “*any public meeting that has not been authorized by the police or military authorities,*” and impedes “*publications by any spoken, written or televised medium, that offend human dignity or public officials, or violate the law and government resolutions; or in any way violate peace and public order. Conatel, through the National Police and the Armed Forces, is authorized to suspend any radio station, television channel or cable system that does not adjust its programming to the present dispositions.*”

What kind of democratic elections are these, in which public meetings cannot take place without the authorization of the army? What kind of democratic elections are these, in which the media can be closed for opposing unspecified “*government resolutions*”? Only the most forgetful of people could read this decree without experiencing memories of a

terrible Latin American past. To insist on celebrating elections in these circumstances; to scorn the points of the San José Agreement; and to impede the exercise of fundamental rights, is to turn upside down any chance of the electoral recognition necessary to return to Honduras its status in the international community. I want to be categorical about this: this crisis will not be resolved by elections alone. It will be resolved by elections that are recognized by all. This recognition has been conditioned, by some, upon the signing of the San José Agreement; and it will be conditioned, by many, upon an electoral campaign that respects democratic rights.

Resolving this crisis will restore tranquility to more than seven million Hondurans. It will also ensure the validity of democracy in Latin America as a whole. The cost of failure, the cost of allowing a coup d'état to stand in impunity, is the establishment of a terrible precedent for a region that is too much tempted by the authoritarian mirage.

If there is anything more alarming than the events that have taken place in Honduras, it is the suspicion that the same thing could happen in much of Latin America. The immediate causes of the Honduran conflict are well known. But let us be careful not to confuse them with the underlying, long-term causes. These causes are repeated, like a pattern of disaster, in many of our countries: the presence of strong armies in weak democracies; the persistent turning-over of power to military authorities, who seem unrestricted by civil authorities; the weakness of our institutions, which are incapable of giving the State of Law its full force; the propensity of our Governments to rewrite our Political Constitutions every five years, with the inevitable result of rigid texts tailored to the whims of the moment; the passivity of an international community that waits to raise its voice in an alert until it is too late; political polarization, heightened by speeches that are tired and worn-out, but that have an impact on populations that lack a true civic culture; and, more than anything, the obstinate disdain for procedure that many leaders in this region demonstrate.

Why are we surprised by a coup d'état in a region that, this year, will spend nearly \$60 billion on its armies, despite the fact that 200 million Latin Americans live in poverty, and the average years of schooling in our countries barely reaches seven? Why are we surprised by a coup d'état in a region where conventional arms flow from one end to the other, feeding disrespect for the most elemental norms of human coexistence, as passive government look on? Why are we surprised by a coup d'état in a region where it seems to be more important to feed the belly of a cannon, than the belly of a child; more important to give training to a soldier, than education to our young; more important to reinforce military barracks, than democratic institutions? The land that inspired the *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* should know by now that in Latin America, magical realism is more reality than magic.

Unfortunately, we are not alone in this madness. The world spends \$3.5 billion each day on weapons and soldiers, ten times more than all international aid. Last year, the most powerful nations on the planet sold more than \$42 billion worth of weapons to the developing world. What is this, but the most demented possible race towards the edge of a precipice? I put it this way last week, before a session of the Security Council, led by President Barack Obama: *"I am not unaware that the biggest arms exporters in the world are represented here. But today I speak not to the makers of arms, but to the leaders of humanity, who have the responsibility to put principles before profits, and make good on the promise of a future where – finally – we can sleep in peace."*

My Government has lobbied nonstop for the approval of the Costa Rica Consensus. This international initiative would create mechanisms to forgive external debt, and to support, with international financial resources, developing countries – poor or middle-income – that invest more in environmental protections, education, health, housing and sustainable development for their peoples, and less in arms and soldiers. I am convinced that, at least in our region, the quantity of weapons is inversely proportional to the progress and well-being of our nations, and that Latin America will not leave the cesspool in which it has found itself for decades, until it puts the needs of its people before the needs of its armies.

My friends:

I want to thank the Miami Herald, the World Bank and Florida International University for their generous invitation for me to accompany you at this Americas Conference. In particular, I thank Andrés Oppenheimer, one of the most audible voices of reason in the region. The whole purpose of this speech is no more than that: an effort to ensure that reason prevails. An effort to allow light to gain ground, finally, against the shadows in Latin America.

On our shoulders sits the bird of memory, whose irreducible cawing warns us of the risk of returning to the past. And on our shoulder also sits the bird of thought, the possibility to transform our errors of “before,” into virtues of “after.” That is the destiny of the progress of our species. Our future is our most moving responsibility, because it is the sum of all our fears and of all our hopes. It is the dream of building a day in which human beings can say “never again.” Never again, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Never again, Dresden and Hanoi. Never again, Auschwitz and Treblinka. Never again, Santiago and Buenos Aires. Never again, Tegucigalpa. Never again.

Thank you very much.