

Address by His Excellency  
Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría  
President of the Republic of Costa Rica

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With the precedents of the Miami and Santiago summits, optimistic because the Americas will be the “region of the future,” the countries of the hemisphere have enthusiastically gathered at this Third Summit of the Americas to set the stage for a new order of opportunities for the American family.

A new order in which democracy, peace, freedom, respect for human rights and the environment, coupled with personal responsibility and social solidarity, complement the scenario of opportunities for progress that is being built thanks to specialized production and competition, trade and investment flows, technological development and new scientific knowledge.

To build this new order is a fascinating and daunting challenge, but it is not a utopian or unattainable goal. Its materialization will not tolerate excuses or delays.

The time has come to turn the Americas into the “region of the future.” To turn this dream into a reality, we must cooperate to ensure that the countries of the continent have a strong rule of law, solid, participative and representative democracies, in which civil society in the broadest sense of the term can contribute increasingly to the decision-making process, with a system of accountability and checks and balances on the exercise of power.

The task is hard and painstaking. As a system for intelligent debate, democracy allows us to build consensus and ensure freedom, personal dignity, peace, governance and stability, which are indispensable conditions for the ideal climate needed for peace between countries, the primacy of individual rights, flourishing economies and success in integration processes.

Democracy is the political foundation for the hemispheric integration process we have embarked on, and we must strengthen it. Having eliminated our army in 1949, Costa Ricans are extremely pleased with the inclusion of the “democracy clause” in this summit — a Costa Rican initiative presented last October, to the effect that any alteration or rupture in the democratic order in any state on this continent is an insurmountable impediment to its participation in the Summit process.

Strengthening democracy means that ethics must be effectively applied in the public service. The *Plan of Action* promotes the signature and ratification of the *Inter-American Convention Against Corruption*. I respectfully ask the heads of state and government to amend the text to establish that the signature and ratification take place by the end of 2002 at the latest, or by the date we decide on here.