

This is the reason we believe today that any tampering with the constitution or the rupture of democratic order in any country of the hemisphere is an unsurmountable obstacle to participation by that country's government in the Summit of the Americas process.

The principle of non-intervention lies at the very heart of relations between independent states. The main purpose of this principle is to defend the sacred right of all countries to freely choose the political, social and economic system that is best suited to their expectations, with respect for minority rights and the rights of other countries. Therefore, when the people of a country are prevented from freely exercising that right, the others have the obligation of not remaining indifferent.

In short, "non-intervention but not indifference."

In recent years, a significant number of declarations have been made in the hemisphere in favour of the defence of democratic institutions, some of which I have mentioned. We must demonstrate that we have the political will to support those declarations with actions and adopt clear consensus on the principles they are intended to protect and show how far we are willing to go collectively to protect them. Last year at the OAS General Assembly in Windsor, the inter-American system set an example in this regard. Argentina is willing to continue to be an active promoter of high standards to defend these principles. We are convinced that the solidity of democracy and respect for individual rights in each country is inextricably linked to respect for all.

Therefore, acting jointly to assist countries in difficulty in these areas is not just an act of regional solidarity. It also protects our own collective interest in promoting a democratic, free and politically stable environment in our continent.

Representative democracy, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, setting the stage for the moral and material prosperity of our people, etc., are elements that form the *raison d'être* of our governments. We must jointly protect ourselves from everything that threatens the fundamental values we believe in, which are the essence of good government. Our citizens should be able to enjoy the greatest economic, social and spiritual well-being we are able to provide in a context of freedom — in short, the institutional quality of democracy that I referred to.

Human rights and their international protection are a legitimate interest and responsibility for all of us. Our continent is in the vanguard in this field, and the inter-American institutions devoted to it are evidence of this. We must make them even stronger.

This new cycle of history that is beginning in the Americas should also be a time of progress, of justice and freedom in democracy for all our nations, thereby achieving the original objective of our liberators. It depends on us to accomplish this.

