

They are a recognition of the best way to secure a prosperous future for our hemisphere. Greater regional cohesion, however, is not directed at excluding others. It is a recognition that the nations of our hemisphere must equip themselves to meet the challenge of globalization and competition.

In this spirit, we have welcomed President Bush's proposal "Enterprise for the Americas," an initiative directed at harnessing the collective economic energies of the hemisphere.

Already Canada, Mexico and the United States have embarked on the negotiation of a free trade area. Other member countries are working toward similar arrangements amongst themselves.

Now the possibility of a free trade zone embracing the entire hemisphere is no longer a visionary's dream, but a distinct possibility. The OAS has served as a useful forum for the discussion of these initiatives.

The OAS is adapting to a changing world and we are proud to have been part of that process over the past year. We must continue to adapt if the OAS is to meet the profound challenges of the next century.

We welcome the work that has been done by the consultation group on the inter-American system. Two issues taken up by the group are fundamental to the future of the OAS. They are, first, the need to set clear priorities and to allocate resources accordingly; and second, the need to establish a system that will encourage member states to meet their financial obligations. The OAS will have little capacity to prepare for the future if we are in a constant state of catching up on obligations of the past.

Mr. President, Canada's decision to join the OAS was an act of political will to link our future more closely with the future of this hemisphere. That decision was based on a strong belief in what the future can be for us here in our hemisphere. It is a future where democracy and human rights have a firm hold.

It is a future where the problems of drug trafficking and environmental degradation will find solutions through joint efforts. It is a future where we will meet the challenges of economic interdependence and global competition through co-operation. It is a future with a vision of a more prosperous, equitable and peaceful hemisphere.

We have many issues before us at this Assembly which will determine the type of community in which we will live over the next 100 years. Let us show that we have the collective wisdom and the will to reaffirm that the Organization of American States will be at the centre of determining that future.