

The amendment to the OAS Charter known as the *Washington Protocol*, based on an Argentine initiative, was adopted in 1992 and establishes that any member whose democratically elected government is overthrown by force will be suspended from the organization.

In the Rio Group, democratic legitimacy and its defence have become vital issues. Through the Contadora Group and the Support Group, this mechanism has been built from the outset on the restoration and consolidation of democracy. I need only mention the *Veracruz Act*, signed on March 19, 1999, which summarizes what has been called the “historical heritage” of the Rio Group.

The *Cartagena Commitment* was signed during the 14th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Rio Group in Cartagena de Indias in June 2000, reaffirming the intent to strengthen representative democracy as a system of government, to promote its values as a way of life and to defend democratic institutions and the rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Summits of the Americas should also be a tool for strengthening the basic values shared by our countries that I mentioned earlier — human rights and fundamental freedoms, representative democracy, the rule of law and economic and social progress in a context of freedom. In addition to economic freedom with social justice, these values are the foundation on which the continental integration we are attempting to build must be based.

These are the values that Argentina shares and is determined to achieve and protect on our continent.

The full effectiveness of these values, or what we call the institutional quality of democracy, is an objective that we must all work toward in common, since it can be achieved only if the countries of our hemisphere act in close cooperation.

The social, economic, judicial and security institutions of the Americas must also support these values and the concept of a world that prizes them, where their respect is directly linked to the legitimacy of governments.

Representative democracy is simply government by the people, through their elected representatives, for the purpose of satisfying their aspirations and rights.

Today, we are witnessing the triumph of openness and protection of individuals and their rights that has created a unique situation in our history, where it is possible to promote and defend these values on a continental and even a global scale. The characteristic national traits that are so enriching and that we must respect should not, however, be allowed to undermine the general principle of the indivisibility of fundamental rights and freedoms.

In this context, protection of democracy and human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential for guaranteeing a prosperous and free future for our people. This is the mandate that all the leaders present here have been given by popular vote, and no country on the continent can remain indifferent to serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any other.