

Transcript of a Speech by Mrs. Maria Soledad Alvear Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs

ENGLISH

Good afternoon and thank you for giving me the opportunity of attending this meeting. I would like to begin by saying that Chile attaches particular importance to civil society. President Lagos' government has taken on the option of including civil society in different institutions, as a key element for comprehensive, efficient and equitable community development. Why has this option been taken on as a state policy at the ministerial level? We have one ministry specially charged with enumerating civil society organizations and linking them to the different actions and policies undertaken in our country. This is because domestic and foreign policy in each of our countries is centred on people more than on governments or states — which is probably a key factor in defining the difference between the 20th and the 21st centuries. Placing people at the centre of policy definitions means that their views must be considered when defining those policies. What is civil society for us? We see it as a series of associations, groups, entities of all kinds born in the civil world, with the purpose of discussing problems that affect the different segments of society and promoting certain common values, which in modern political science is called "social capital." We all know that to progress, a society needs physical capital, represented by money, savings, machinery, investments, tangible goods. We also need human capital, represented by education, training, instruction; and last, we need this "social capital," defined as the set of networks and frameworks that exist in our society.

In the context of the summits, civil society has been playing a larger and larger role. I am proud to say that we have had contacts for preparing different documents, that we have had very active participation by groups that have coordinated to make proposals. Last year, on the occasion of the OAS General Assembly in Windsor, Canada, we were able to present a document produced by civil society. We are maintaining a dialogue and are working hard to perfect this approach, although there may be cause for concern about the communications processes at summits and the reasons for the kinds of reactions we are seeing.

To be able to listen to you and for you to listen to us, I would only remind you that the fruit of these Summits of the Americas has been significant progress for our countries. The process of moving toward a Free Trade Area of the Americas was born as an idea that seemed very difficult to achieve at the outset. Our Heads of State and Government will soon ratify an agreement reached 10 days ago in Buenos Aires on establishing an FTAA by 2005. But other objectives and other priorities were also established and turned into action plans in each of our countries. I am referring to education, which resulted in a series of public policies in each of our countries; or to the topic of justice proposed at the Santiago Summit, which led to very significant changes in justice