

Rica have undertaken to comply with the labour and environmental rules and procedures established in the legislation of each of our countries, without having to resort to fines, without the possibility of arbitrary decisions by either of the two countries and without this being an obstacle to trade flows. Without impositions, without affecting trade, without fines, but overseeing strict compliance with the labour and environmental legislation of each. All these decisions shed light on how these issues can be dealt with in the FTAA. We are also pleased to be part of the Central American Common Market, to have free trade treaties with Mexico and Panama, to have expanded the benefits of the Caribbean Basin Initiative, gaining access to the U.S. market on equal terms with the NAFTA members.

We have negotiated and approved agreements with Chile and the Dominican Republic. We are negotiating with Panama in conjunction with the other Central American countries, and we expect progress very soon in negotiations with Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. We are negotiating a new free trade agreement with Panama that updates and modernizes the treaty currently in effect.

This is the key word everywhere on the continent. Trade within the hemisphere has more than doubled in the last decade as a result of stronger subregional blocs, the negotiation of a large number of agreements and the efforts of the business community, which, with its initiative and work, is the engine of integration. To support the work of that engine — the private sector — governments must establish legal systems that facilitate, promote and deepen the process. We are all part of building the new order, which will be freer and provide more opportunities. We are part of an effort that should culminate successfully with the entry into force of the FTAA.

For our nations to reap the benefits of trade and investment opportunities, it is crucial for us to provide equitable access to education, which has been free and compulsory in our country since 1869, health care and new technologies to enrich human capital. We must close the digital gap, which is ominously widening the differences between countries and internal differences within them. All of this will make for progress and permit poor families to achieve better standards of living based on their individual skills.

We must work together responsibly to ensure that the growth we are promoting is sustainable. Costa Rica is an example in this field. Last year we generated 99.5 percent of the energy we use from clean and renewable sources, and we are developing a system of charging for environmental services as one more element in our environmental culture.

But the challenge is great and the efforts of a single country are not enough. Climate change is an alarming reality for all countries, without exception, since the atmosphere knows no borders. Our response must take a comprehensive and global view of the problem, which means we must use the most effective mechanisms possible to mitigate greenhouse gases. We need to establish market mechanisms that encourage, motivate and consolidate environmental protection. It is urgent to establish a world market for environmental services as quickly as possible. We will be successful only if we can establish world markets that force polluters to pay and reward those who protect the environment and mitigate damage to it.