

I first want to say how inspiring and comforting it has been for me to be part of this group through the good and the bad times. My thanks particularly go to the Secretary-General and the Foreign Minister of Bolivia for their leadership, and to all of you for your friendship and support.

From the beginning, it was clear to all of us that Haiti would be a test case for the Organization of American States: after the Santiago Commitment, Haiti was the first country to fall victim to an attempt to smother a democratically elected government. It was even more tragic because all of us had responded to the Haitian call for help in organizing free and fair elections, the first real ones in Haiti since its independence.

As we have seen in the case of Guatemala, the least we could do as a collective body was to stand by the democratic forces in Haiti, and by a clear show of resolve, help them regain their lost liberties. Whatever the length and frustration of this process, we must renew our commitment and continue in the same direction with determination and patience, until our goal has been reached and President Aristide is back in his country.

I would also like to express my admiration and gratitude for the courage and the patience with which special envoy Dante Caputo has carried out his mandate. I share his vision of securing a settlement that encompasses all Haitians of good faith and sets the base for national reconciliation. I want to reaffirm Canada's support for him and his determination and dedication. I want to echo his optimism that President Aristide will be the first deposed president to be returned. But only if we all put some political muscle into this.

Unfortunately, the reasons that led us to take up the case for Haiti are still with us. This country is still suffering under the harsh and arbitrary rule of a few thousand soldiers and their supporters. Ruthless repression and appropriation of the public wealth have not diminished. It is clear that the interlocutors of the de facto regime have no intention of stepping down: they must be forced to do so.

As we prepare to enter a new and, I am convinced, decisive phase of the struggle for democracy in Haiti, we must reaffirm our confidence in Mr. Caputo -- our representative through the Secretary-General -- and support for his efforts and the process he is embarked upon.

I think it is appropriate, and in this case essential, that the Organization of American States work with the United Nations to enable the entire international community to make use of tools that are not available in a regional organization. At our meeting last December, we adopted resolution 4/92, which mandated our Secretary-General "to explore the possibility and advisability of bringing the Haitian situation to the attention of the United Nations Security Council as a means of bringing