

It is with sadness and frustration that we meet here again because of interruption of the democratic process in a member country. This time it is Peru that requires a strong united stand in support of democracy in our hemisphere.

Like others, I was deeply disturbed to receive the news of President Fujimori's dissolution of the Peruvian Congress and Judiciary. Many have claimed that it was justified. But let's face this issue squarely. Regardless of any rationalization, his conduct was unconstitutional, illegal and unacceptable. If that is not clearly recognized, then no effective action is possible.

At the same time, we all recognize that the obstacles facing Peru are daunting. It must deal with decades of economic mismanagement, a large and ruthless band of terrorists, drug trafficking, and corruption on an unprecedented scale. No one of us is insensitive to these problems, nor do we underestimate the difficulties in dealing with them. But no circumstances can justify the dismissal of democratic institutions. For Peru, as for our own countries, the democratic way is the only way.

This is not democratic sentimentalism; experience has proved that lasting reform is impossible without the full voice and participation of the people. We also know from experience that every leader who overthrows democracy does so on the basis of an important "temporary" need.

In determining our response, we must remember that the credibility of the Organization of American States (OAS) as an organization -- but also each of us as an individual democracy -- is again at risk. Whether we like it or not, comparisons will be drawn with Haiti and our response to that situation. The circumstances may not be the same, but the principles are inviolate.

In our deliberations today we will have to consider all the measures at our disposal, including sanctions. We cannot turn away from fundamental principles, nor should we look only to punitive actions. Peru is in crisis and its people need our help and our support. And we must keep in mind our overall objective -- the restoration of democratic institutions, civil and political liberties and respect for human rights.

Canada endorses the proposal that a group of OAS foreign ministers as well as the Secretary-General travel to Peru to convey the condemnation of the international community.

They must tell the President that the course he has embarked is unacceptable, and that urgent and specific steps must be taken to restore constitutional democracy. Canada believes that these steps must include the following: