

We also know that the hemispheric initiative cannot be concluded by governments alone. It also requires constructive contributions from all sectors of civil society, who will be the direct beneficiaries of continental integration.

The governments of the hemisphere are firmly committed to transparency, the guiding principle of all democratic exercises.

This commitment has led us to approve publication of the first draft of the agreement, and in this same spirit we will continue to keep our societies informed of progress in the FTAA negotiations.

Agreements of this kind are valueless if they are not understood as instruments intended to strengthen domestic economies — providing them with certainty and predictability — and, above all, to raise the standard of living of the people we represent.

This is why free trade and economic integration should be viewed as indispensable elements in the broader agenda of the Summit of the Americas.

The challenge is large, but we are convinced that broad integration based on common values and interests is an opportunity that the countries of the hemisphere must seize.

Therefore, we ratify our commitment to the integration process in the making and reiterate our willingness to work toward the success of the free trade area that we envisaged when we embarked on this difficult road at the end of 1994.

We hope that the next Summit, which we will host, will allow us to announce to the world that we have accomplished our original objective of achieving a continental free trade zone that will gradually eliminate barriers to trade and investment.

Then we will know that our efforts have been worthwhile.

