

**SPEECH BY PARLIAMENTARIAN CARLOS JIMÉNEZ, PRESIDENT OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY CONFEDERATION OF THE AMERICAS (COPA)**

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Our assembly will meet its ultimate objective if we keep our word to fulfill our mission as we today have sincerely and solemnly sworn.

We do so fully aware that in the some ten years of its existence, COPA has grown ever stronger as the voice of parliamentarians in the Americas and, above all, as the voice of the societies that our parliaments represent.

On behalf of the Mexican Congress and, of course, all Mexicans, I take up this important responsibility, and I do so fully confident that the oath we have taken today will require enormous dedication by each of us if we are to accomplish COPA's objectives in a manner that is above reproach.

I couldn't be more grateful to my Mexican colleagues for having believed enough in me to deem me able to lead COPA through this undoubtedly vital stage of its development.

When COPA was created—and we stressed this today—its success was driven by a desire to reflect society's feelings about the much-talked-about FTAA, a proposal decried by some today because the integration efforts conducted so far seem to have been limited to the commercial, economic, and financial spheres with no concern for the social and developmental aspects that would come into play if we worked for a more horizontal, equitable distribution of wealth.

Our organization has pledged to take part in these negotiations so that governments are not the only ones with the power to freely decide the destiny of the people by signing trade agreements, because in the past such agreements have often resulted in even greater poverty and inequality in the various regions concerned.

When I joined COPA at the urging of Pierre and then-president Laurita Pavón, I understood that the mission before us was a very difficult, indeed, colossal one. We know that our governments, on behalf of our countries, are the ones with the constitutional responsibility to negotiate trade agreements and treaties and to promote the integration process. But we also know that parliaments cannot wash their hands of the process because, very often, these negotiations are led without concern for the human and social aspect of this type of integration.

COPA is in favor of integration. Moreover, none among us can deny that globalization is here to stay, and I myself have maintained here on numerous occasions that the issue is not whether COPA should or should not support an integration agreement for our entire hemisphere, because, as I have always said, the issue is futile. We cannot escape globalization any more than we can escape the integration process, as it is the only avenue we have to become stronger and more competitive.

The important thing, as I have repeatedly stressed in this forum, is to ask ourselves what kind of agreement we want and what type of negotiations we want to fight for. I think this is what we need to be discussing. We need to understand that as parliamentarians we cannot limit our vision exclusively to the market, but rather recognize the obvious fact that, to date, the market

has been unable to resolve with any degree of justice the striking problem of social development. This shows the vital importance of the role COPA plays in future negotiations towards a healthier integration.

I began my short speech with this thought because we must not forget the reason this forum of reflection, discussion, and consensus-building came into existence and how it has enabled us to pressure parliaments in our hemisphere.

This is how COPA was born, and what a wonderful opportunity we will have, when we celebrate our tenth anniversary barely one year from now, to get back into the fray and continue this fight for more equitable integration. We cannot envision an FTAA that cares only about the interests of the superpower bordering my country. We need an FTAA that can truly remedy the imbalances and help us make our hemisphere a place of much greater justice.

This is the philosophy of this parliamentary forum that has grown ever stronger throughout its history. In accomplishing our mission, we will also focus our efforts on two or three other aspects. First on migration—this impressive contemporary phenomenon that is intimately tied to globalization and that has major consequences for many nations.

This is particularly the case for my country. Today, some 8 million Mexicans are living and working illegally in the United States. The some \$20 billion they inject into the Mexican economy every year represents, for all intents and purposes, the number one source of foreign currency in our country. Our nations' parliaments cannot stand idly by while our compatriots in Central America, South America, and Mexico are forced to leave their native lands to live in a foreign country where it is impossible for them to live and work with dignity.

Our parliaments cannot remain indifferent to the struggles these people face to find living conditions that are more respectful of their fundamental rights. I myself have been a migrant in the United States, and I have two brothers who have lived there for over 20 years. I know this is a struggle that COPA must resolutely support. Not only do we need to join in the fight for the commercial or hemispheric integration we dream of, but we must also make the phenomenon of migration a responsibility of our own governments, which have been unable to provide their citizens with hope for a better life.

I would like to ask each of my colleagues on this new management team to help ensure that we take a more active role in this struggle, that we redouble our efforts to join these people in a marvelous and extraordinary show of strength and unity, and, naturally, to help our countries' parliaments navigate these waters.

Also—and I'll conclude with this topic—Mr. President, I feel that we need to strengthen parliamentary diplomacy. Governments are not necessarily adept, or even effective, at leveling the inequalities between our peoples, bringing about better arrangements, and, above all, building consensus and signing agreements to allow us to make progress in the pursuit of our common goals. No, as we see every day, this is clearly not the case.

In theory, our parliaments are already the best tools for remedying the inequalities between our peoples and paving the way for agreements, but what would happen if these same parliaments subscribed to this hemispheric vision because COPA proved to be more dynamic than it has in the past on the parliamentary diplomacy front? I believe that we need to make a solid effort in this regard because COPA's role will be increasingly important if we become more proactive in

parliamentary diplomacy and push our parliaments to become true forums for a dialog that actually reflects society's feelings.

Governments sometimes have a vision that doesn't reflect the philosophy or ideology of the party in power, whereas parliaments are all inclusive, represent all aspects of society, and have an undeniably enormous ability to wield influence. And COPA has a mission to make sure they fully carry out this role and an obligation to contribute more itself to this hemispheric dialog.

I believe that by accepting the challenge it faces today—that of playing a bigger role, and I'd even say, becoming more of a leader not only by working more closely with other parliamentary organizations in our region and with world parliamentary organizations such as the Interparliamentary Union, but also by supporting a much more indepth dialog in regions around the world—COPA will be better equipped to defend the interests of society.

These are our objectives. Although presented, I admit, in general terms, I feel they are completely feasible ones. I urge you all to redouble your efforts to breathe new life into COPA in order to make it a parliamentary organization with a much higher profile in world discussion forums.