



CLOSING DECLARATION
Quebec City, September 21, 1997

We, parliamentarians of the Americas, assembled in Quebec City from September 18 to 22, 1997, on the occasion of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas,

Considering that the project to create a hemispheric free-trade area, planned for the year 2005, constitutes a major challenge for the future of our societies and will have an impact in the legislative, political, social and cultural spheres throughout the Americas;

Considering that our functions, as legislators and as the political representatives of populations, enable us to express the needs, concerns and wishes of our fellow citizens, especially as regards the process of hemispheric economic integration;

Considering that our action within our communities fosters a better understanding of the stakes involved in the economic integration processes in the Americas;

Considering that, through direct and continued dialogue with our fellow citizens, we are able to stimulate public debate on the issues related to the impacts of hemispheric free trade, and thereby to contribute to the definition of public policies;

Considering that the democratic nature of the economic integration processes will be reinforced through dialogue between interparliamentary organizations and intergovernmental organizations;

Considering that the knowledge and experience gained through our work with our constituents, within our parliamentary assemblies and interparliamentary organizations, and from existing processes of regional integration must be put to good account in the discussions on the creation of a hemispheric free-trade area;

Considering that the equality of men and women is a recognized principle in our societies, that women are among the most affected by processes of economic integration, that their participation is essential to achieve the goals of sustainable human development, that it would be imperative to facilitate in our structures and activities the contribution of women;

Democracy

Agree to encourage adherence to and promotion of the principles of representative and participatory democracy, in particular by supporting the various organizations that promote these principles, and through a comprehensive fight against corruption, so as to foster development, stability and peace within the Hemisphere;

Agree, in our capacity as citizens' representatives, to support and encourage active public participation in the discussions and consultations leading up to the making of decisions concerning the creation of a hemispheric free-trade area, while respecting the important contribution afforded by the experiences of the mechanisms of regional integration;

Human rights

Agree to protect and promote economic, social and cultural rights, both on the domestic level and through inter-American cooperation, according to available resources and having regard to the level of development of the different States, and the civil and political rights essential for dignity, justice and peace, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Agree to work toward the implementation of measures designed to eradicate all forms of discrimination and exploitation, to intensify efforts to report human rights violations, to counter impunity and to create a climate conducive to the full enjoyment of human rights, while respecting the integrity and sovereignty of each State;

Agree to examine and respond to our respective country reports on the measures adopted and the progress made in achieving the observance of human rights;

Agree to support the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aiming to disseminate the values of peace through the respect of human rights and through the strengthening of a culture of peace supported by the parliamentarians of the Americas;

Free trade and employment

Affirm that every individual has the right to work and that access to employment must be a priority in the process of integration of our Hemisphere, the success of which may depend largely upon the full participation of workers in economic development;

Agree to ensure, within the process of implementing a hemispheric free-trade area, that policies are brought forward to create stable jobs, and that workers benefit from proper working conditions, just and fair remuneration, freedom of association and protection against unemployment, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Education and job training

Agree to work toward the adoption of legislation providing universal access to education of high quality, at all levels, free from all forms of discrimination, in order to improve the economic, environmental, social and political conditions of the populations in the Hemisphere, particularly those of children, women and indigenous populations;

Agree to sustain investment in the educational systems and job training programmes that promote the acquisition of general knowledge and skills adapted to the new social, economic and technological realities, thereby ensuring that a greater number of people have access to the labour market;

Agree to solicit the cooperation of UNESCO in order to contribute to the process of consolidating parliamentary participation in the development of appropriate public policies that will ensure improvement in the quality of education within the Hemisphere;

Social security and health policies

Agree to work toward the achievement of greater social equity, in order to create a form of sustainable social development supported by all populations in the Americas;

Agree to place social and humanitarian issues on the agenda of parliamentary debate concerning economic and social policy, and to better inform citizens of the social stakes of integration;

Agree to design economic and social policy so as to reconcile economic growth with social equity, and to intensify our efforts to reduce poverty, social and economic inequalities and exclusion from society;

Agree to work to improve the quality of health services and to increase public access to those services, so that every person may benefit from the best possible state of physical, mental and social health, as stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development;

Cultures, languages and communications

Agree to ensure the preservation and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, to act to reinforce the institutions concerned, and to ensure that linguistic plurality is respected within inter-American organizations, agencies and institutions;

Agree to promote exchanges and closer ties between educational institutions, cultural institutions and individuals as a means of promoting cultural diversity and contributing toward mutual understanding between the societies within our Hemisphere;

Agree to facilitate access to information and to new communications technologies, so as to foster increased public participation in political, economic, social and cultural life and to promote the strengthening of democracy;

Sustainable development

Agree to see to the implementation of the commitments made at the Summit Conference on Sustainable Development in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, in 1996, and to support the organizations working to promote sustainable development, thereby recognizing that present and future generations are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature;

Agree to increase the exchange of information on environmental matters and to establish active collaboration in order to ensure sustainable development within the Americas;

Agree to express our deep concern over the increasing size of the foreign debt in a number of countries in the Americas and over the obstacle that it represents to sustainable development for the populations of the Hemisphere;

Reaffirming our commitment to our constituents;

Agree to engage in close collaboration and coordination of our efforts, in order to reflect the expectations, needs and concerns of the populations regarding integration processes, and to act in their best interests;

Indicate our willingness to take part in discussions involving the process of implementing a free-trade area of the Americas;

Agree to transmit this Declaration to our respective Heads of State and Government;

Urge the Heads of State and Government of the Hemisphere to acknowledge this Declaration during their next intergovernmental meetings at the regional and hemispheric levels;

Have decided to form a *Follow-up Committee* having as its objective to examine the framework for continuation of the dialogue leading to a structure, bringing together representatives of the parliaments and interparliamentary organizations of the Americas, to allow parliamentarians to share their views regarding the stakes involved in the process of integration within the Hemisphere and its legislative, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts;

Agree to confer the presidency of the Follow-up Committee on the President of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, who will convene that Committee's first meeting in 1998.