

## INAUGURAL SESSION

### *Summary of the Inaugural Session*

<b>Speakers:</b>	<b>Mr. Jean-Pierre Charbonneau</b> President of the National Assembly of Québec President of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas <b>Mr. Gildas Molgat</b> Speaker of the Senate of Canada <b>Mr. Jean-Paul L’Allier</b> Mayor of Quebec City <b>Mr. Cesar Gaviria</b> Secretary General of the Organization of American States
<b>Master of Ceremonies:</b>	<b>Madam Michaëlle Jean</b> Journalist-announcer for Radio-Canada news network
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Mr. Gaston Bernier</b> National Assembly of Québec

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*Mr. Jean-Pierre Charbonneau is President of the National Assembly of Québec and President of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas. He holds a B.A. in criminology from the University of Montreal. From 1968 to 1976, he was an investigative journalist for the printed and electronic press. Elected a Member of the National Assembly for the Parti Québécois in Verchères in 1976, he was reelected in 1981 and in 1985, became Parliamentary Assistant to the Prime Minister and then President of the Committee on Education and the Labour Force, and President of the Committee on Labour and the Economy. He resigned as an MNA in 1989 to work in Africa, in the area of international aid. From 1992 to 1994, he was president of Oxfam-Québec, an international aid organization. Elected MNA for Borduas in September 1994, on March 12, 1996, he became President of the National Assembly. He is also Vice-President of the International Assembly of French-speaking Parliamentarians (AIPLF), and in 1996, was President of the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments (ERC/CSG). He has published two books, La filière canadienne (1975) and L’Option (1978 — as co-author).*

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To begin with, President Charbonneau underlined the historic nature of the meeting. For the first time, parliamentarians from Central America, South America, North America and the Caribbean gathered: over 400 members of parliament and senators from nearly one hundred unitary, federal and federated States accepted the invitation of the National Assembly of Québec.

The President explained that this Conference took shape with the setting in of a new political and economic dynamic in the Hemisphere. The reforms based on the opening of markets have given a second wind and a renewed vigour to the economic integration processes, serving as a springboard to gain access to international markets and thus to occupy a greater place in the global economy. At the same time, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law have also gained ground. The convergence of ideas on economic development and political governance are creating conditions conducive to the intensification of inter-American dialogue.

The Heads of State and Government of the Americas, at the Summit in Miami in 1994, launched an ambitious inter-American project of which President Charbonneau recalled two elements: the negotiation, by the year 2005, of a free-trade area extending from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, and the wish to see an intensification of the cooperation between the legislative bodies of the Hemisphere.

Taking due note of this plan to integrate the economies of the Hemisphere, and noting that so far, there had been no forum or assembly bringing together parliamentarians from throughout the Americas, the National Assembly of Québec has taken the initiative to bring them together to debate the issues relating to the proposed economic integration of the Americas. To President Charbonneau, in fact, the Conference must be an opportunity for parliamentarians to take up the issue, and to examine its potential consequences, so as to strategically position the role of elected officials in the integration process under way.

Parliamentarians must also agree on the steps to take in following up on this process. Mr. Charbonneau advocated that this first Conference should not remain without further action, that the dialogue between legislative bodies should be continued in a credible and effective manner, and that

it be supported by and placed within a framework of solidly established structures and mechanisms. Throughout the deliberations of this Conference, the parliamentarians will be invited to undertake a reflection and debates on issues of major importance for the future of our democracies, for employment and for our cultures, to cite only a few examples. Hence, to what degree can the strengthening of links between our countries, in the framework of the integration of the Americas, contribute to the consolidation of democracy and the reinforcement of the Rule of Law? Since an economic integration project must favour greater prosperity for all, and a reduction in economic disparities, how can we ensure ourselves that a reduction in tariff barriers will bring about an improvement in working conditions? Considering that the cultural and linguistic plurality of our Hemisphere constitutes the richness of the cultural heritage of the Americas, how can we see that the integration process will contribute to the preservation of the cultural diversity, rather than to its uniformization?

Finally, the President announced that he was making available to all participating assemblies the Internet site of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas. During the coming months, this would be transformed into a virtual Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, to bring the parliamentary assemblies of the Hemisphere on-line using the new information technologies. Among other things, this would provide elected officials with an effective tool of communication and information, and would become a useful, dynamic and interactive forum for dialogue.

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*Mr. Gildas Molgat has been Speaker of the Senate of Canada since November 1994. He studied commerce at the University of Manitoba. Elected for the first time to the Manitoba Legislature in 1953, he was reelected in 1958, 1959, 1962, 1966 and 1969. The leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba and Leader of the Opposition from 1961 to 1968, he was appointed to the Senate by the Right Hon. P.E. Trudeau in 1970. Elected first Deputy Speaker of the Senate in 1983, he was reelected in 1988. During this period, he co-chaired, among others, the Special Joint Committee on Senate Reform (Molgat-Cosgrove Report). He is a member of several parliamentary associations.*

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Mr. Molgat pointed out that extraordinary progress had been made over the past ten years in the area of liberalization of trade and integration of markets in the hemisphere. Canada, for its part, took up the wager of free trade, as reflected by the agreements with the United States, Mexico, and more recently, Chile. He also pointed out that each time the signing of a free-trade agreement has been considered, the Canadian Parliament has been the scene of vigorous and passionate debates on the anticipated consequences of these major political choices.

According to Mr. Molgat, the Government of Canada holds the conviction that the establishment of strong economic partnerships at the hemispheric level is in the interest of everyone. Moreover, there now appears to exist a broad consensus in the country regarding the economic advantages resulting from hemispheric integration. Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, must however remain vigilant, as hemispheric free-trade will be neither an Eldorado nor the panacea for the societal problems in the Americas.

Would an economic integration that did not take into account the political, social and cultural characteristics of each of the countries concerned be viable? This is the major question which, according to Mr. Molgat, parliamentarians must try to answer in the coming days. The objective of the Conference consists in bringing parliamentarians to collaborate in spite of their differences, in order that the integration processes may produce advantageous results for all the populations.

By way of conclusion, Mr. Molgat reminded the parliamentarians that they must not forget that public policies and international agreements of any type, and particularly trade agreements, essentially aim to ensure social progress, security and improvement of the quality of life of the populations, and that they must especially benefit those who are most needy.

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**Mr. Jean-Paul L'Allier** is beginning his third term as Mayor of Quebec City. He has a background in law and political science. He was a member of the National Assembly of Québec and held various ministerial portfolios from 1970 to 1976. He served as Québec's Délégué général to Belgium from 1981 to 1984, and as honorary Consul of Belgium in Québec from 1985 to 1988.

*Among other things, his current duties include those of: President of the Communauté urbaine de Québec, Board member of the Union des municipalités du Québec, Vice-president of the international Association of Mayors and, since 1991, President of the Organization of World Heritage Cities. Mr. L'Allier was made an Officer of the Legion of Honour in May 1992 by the President of the French Republic.*

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Mayor L'Allier welcomed the participants to Quebec City, the oldest city north of the Rio Grande, which will be celebrating its 400th anniversary in 2008. He underlined that Québec is a city of exchanges, of meetings, of tolerance, of openness and of sharing. He recalled that it was here, during the final weeks of the Second World War, that Churchill and Roosevelt met in order to develop the after-war strategies, and also that it was in this city that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was created some fifty years ago. Hence, Mr. L'Allier believes that the parliamentarians have gathered in a city that is welcoming to those who wish to imagine the future, to define it and to build it.

He pointed out that Quebec City is a city of convergence, a convergence that is being sought by the parliamentarians during the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, just as they seek complementarity and solidarity. According to Mr. L'Allier, throughout the world, this convergence, this solidarity and this complementarity will always be based on a better knowledge of others and on the respect of peoples, of societies and of persons.

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**Mr. Cesar Gaviria** is Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). First elected to the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic of Colombia in 1974, he became its President in 1983. Having served as Minister of Finance and then as Minister of the Interior under the administration of Virgilio Barco, he was chosen as presidential candidate by the Liberal Party and was elected President of Colombia in 1990. He played a major role in the promotion of a policy of openness toward democracy, of developing regional trade and of progressing toward economic integration. Recognized as a mediator, a fervent democrat, a partisan of regional integration and an advocate of Human Rights, he was appointed Secretary General of the OAS in 1994. Upon

*taking up his duties, Mr. Gaviria instigated reforms aiming to modernize the organization, thus enabling him to benefit from a new capacity of adaptation to the challenges and needs of the Hemisphere.*

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Mr. Gaviria underlined that as we approach the end of the millennium, the Americas have entered a new era, rich with possibilities, the most important of which is integration, but also one of challenges and of major issues, the most worrisome of which are those that threaten our democracies.

He emphasized that these two major objectives, integration and democracy, must inspire our deliberations, in a context in which marginality, poverty, drug trafficking, terrorism and insecurity constitute the main ills of our societies.

Mr. Gaviria mentioned that the reason for being and the main mission of the Organization of American States is to work toward the promotion and consolidation of the democratic institutions, underlining that the ills that affect the democracy harm both the quality of life of the citizens and economic development. He recalled that still today, many problems undermined the legitimacy and credibility of democracy, thereby decreasing its efficiency. He pointed out, on this subject, that the defence of democratic institutions requires the active participation of all governments, Parliaments and inter-American institutions, citing as an example the collaboration obtained in the framework of the Inter-American Commission against drug abuse, the Anti-Corruption Convention, the Plan of action against terrorism, the steps aiming to eliminate land mines and the Summit of the Americas on sustainable development.

To Mr. Gaviria, to work for democracy is to work for integration, since the more participatory a democracy becomes, the more it favours an integration space. This is why the reinforcement of the legislative function and of Parliaments is crucial. In order to be able to maintain the current accelerated pace of inter-American integration, it is imperative to have Parliaments that deliberate in all nations of the Hemisphere, he stated. Thus, through their initiative in the legislative field, parliamentarians held one of the most important keys to enhance integration and to consolidate democracies.

In conclusion, Mr. Gaviria recalled that the OAS would continue to contribute to the integration process, and undertook to implement a vast program of reforms and of inter-American cooperation, underlining in this regard that the collaboration of parliamentarians and of legislative institutions was fundamental to the achievement of this objective.