



**10<sup>th</sup> OAS Policy Roundtable:  
“Opportunities and Challenges in the Western Hemisphere: Perspectives from the  
United States Congress”**

Transcript

*Wednesday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008*

*Irene Klinger:* Muy buenos días. Welcome. My name is Irene Klinger, Director of the International Affairs, it is my pleasure to, (no, can we check the sound please?, can you hear now? ok, we will wait for a few minutes, let me know when we have sound, now?) Ok, thank you very much.

Welcome to the 10<sup>th</sup> OAS Policy Roundtable: “Opportunities and Challenges in the Western Hemisphere: Perspectives from the United States Congress”.

The OAS Policy Roundtable series as you know, many of you I see here have been with us in early Roundtables, seeks to link the best in policy thinking to the actions of the Organization of American States, through promoting an informed dialogue among policy analyst, practitioners and diplomats.

Using a variety of formats, including lectures, panels, debates and open discussions, the OAS Policy Roundtables, actively engage the community of policy analyst with the Organization of American States. This morning we are pleased to have as our special speakers two prominent members of the US Senate: Mel Martinez and Robert Menendez, and US Ambassador to the OAS, Hector Morales, as well, as of course our own Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza.

Thru the support of the US Permanent Mission to the OAS this 10<sup>th</sup> Policy Roundtable will be also webcast and broadcast throughout the hemisphere and for our international audience in general.

The program today will consist of initial remarks by Secretary General Insulza, introductions by Ambassador Morales, presentations by Senators Martinez and Menendez, and a questions and answers period, to hear your comments and concerns about issues in our hemisphere.

I would like to now to give the floor to our Secretary General José Miguel Insulza.

*J. Miguel Insulza:* Thank you very much, distinguished Ambassadors and Ambassadors representatives to the OAS. I also see some Ambassadors representing their governments in Washington, I also welcome them. As Irene has said this is an opportunity for discussion, actually there is a big discussion going on in this country on the next presidential elections, and many people in the Americas and in the Western Hemisphere

feel or say that the Americas are not that present in that discussion, that the issues are not being discussed, etc., I don't think that is true, maybe there is not much information to the countries, but certainly a lot of mention to the issues that we have in common between the United States, the Caribbean and Latin America; we have issues of, we were just talking about, problems of drug traffic, we have issues of trade policy, we have issues of energy, we have issues of immigration, and of course an interest in also knowing how the largest country in the hemisphere look at their neighbors down south. So, I think it is very important to have this roundtable, I am very happy to have you here, this is difficult, not difficult but is a moment of interest in the Americas, I've come, as I was telling you, from a meeting of the Union of the Nations of the South, the UNASUR, I am leaving for Bolivia tomorrow, so the things are moving, and we very much want to know your opinions, but first I will give the floor to Ambassador Morales, who is the Permanent Representative of the U.S. to the OAS, to introduce two distinguished partners.

*Amb. Morales:* Thank you Mr. Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General Ramdin, Ambassador Laporte, distinguished OAS Ambassadors, members of the diplomatic core, special guests, and guests all here en la Casa de las Americas, welcome, buenos días a todos y a todas.

On behalf of the United States Permanent Mission to the Organization of the American States, it's indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this special forum. It's truly an honor for me to be able to present two renowned and respected leaders from the United States Senate, Senator Mel Martinez, Republican from the State of Florida, and Senator Robert Menendez, Democrat from the State of New Jersey.

Senators you come before as at this very important time and all you here today, because this year marks a number of significant milestones, we are celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAS Charter, it's also the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and this year we are celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone at this terrific and fine building the House of the Americas, or "La Casa de las Americas".

Today is also important in the Americas because of the common hemisphere purpose that centers on the core commitment to democracy which is enthroned to Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was adapted seven years ago this month on September 11 2001, and it's important to recall a couple of points on this charter which is that the peoples of the Americas have the right to democracy, and that their governments have an obligation to promote and to defend it, but it also goes on to assert that democracy is essential for the social, political and economic development of the peoples of the Americas.

Throughout their distinguished carriers in the Senate, Senators Martinez and Menendez, have exercise vision and leadership demonstrating a firm commitment to strengthen US relations throughout the hemisphere, both bilaterally and multilaterally, working with our neighbors in the region to advance the share common purpose: to promote democracy, development, human rights, security and economic prosperity, and they have also taken

in the lead as champions for the cause of freedom for the good people of Cuba. Among the many key legislatively initiatives they have promoted on a range of issues, Senator Menendez and Senator Martinez are also the sponsor and cosponsor respectively, of the Social Investment in Economic Development for the Americas Act of 2007.

This year also marks another important milestone as our country, as Secretary General Insulza stated, prepares for the transition in our own government with the upcoming presidential elections. The views of the United States Congress are critical in the formulation and in the advance of the U.S. foreign policy in this region and the world over and specially, as we look forward to the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas, in Trinidad and Tobago, which is scheduled to take place in April of next year.

Your joined presence here today Senators sends an important message in reaffirmation of the bipartisan nature of the United States commitment to our neighbor countries throughout the western hemisphere. So again thank you for coming, and on a personal note I want to thank you, because for your support I would not be here today to have the honor to represent the United States at the Organization of the American States, so thank you. So with that, we are going to begin with Senator Martinez and then Senator Menendez will follow and I believe we are going to have a questions and answers session so.

*Senator Martinez:* Thank you very much and good morning to all of you, you say “Buenos días”. It is a great pleasure to be among with you today and I want to thank Secretary Insulza and Ambassador Morales for your invitation to participate in this forum, I also want to acknowledge all of the OAS Ambassadors that are here today, as well all as all the other distinguished members of our Washington diplomatic core.

I am pleased to be here today with my good friend and colleague Senator Bob Menendez. It is a great opportunity for us to discuss, all the problems and challenges that we face in the region, which undoubtedly, not only for my role as United States Senator, but also we bring to this discussion the background and the experience of our personal lives, which I think are immensely helpful and regards to our understanding of the region. I, like many of you, have been watching the news of recent events in the region and I remain concern of some of the challenges that we face. But I am also optimistic that together we can work toward solutions that will move the hemisphere in the right direction. Given the events of last week particularly in Bolivia, I am encouraged by the meeting called past Monday by all the South American presidents and I am hopeful that they will work to address the growing stability in Bolivia. More encouraging is the agreement announced last night, that Bolivia’s President and opposition Governors will meet tomorrow to discuss their policy differences.

Now is the time to address counter currents in the region and it is unfortunate, that the loudest voices are distracting the world from the important efforts to bring reason to this situation, specially commend the efforts of countries like Chile, Brazil, Colombia, and Paraguay in this effort. In the United States, we know that we maintain an important supporting role in many of these efforts but at their core, these are regional issues

influenced primarily by regional leadership. As history has shown the United States is prepared to assist where we are welcome. However it is important that the leaders of the region continue to take under responsibility to meet us as they did in Chile, and to follow up to ensure steps are taken that will benefit the people of the region and ultimately our entire hemisphere.

As leaders here in the OAS, the principal multilateral institution on the western hemisphere you also have leadership responsibilities and opportunity. I take seriously the mandate of the OAS Charter to promote and defend democracy, which I think continues and should remain the primary goal of the region. As regional neighbors we share many similarities and we also have common challenges. Security in the hemisphere remains one of our highest priorities. Let's not forget that it was on September 11 of 2001, the members of the OAS in Peru adopted after a meeting the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the very same principal the Charter pledges to protect, came under attack that day here in this country. The United States, like many OAS members nations, has made many sacrifices in fulfilling the principals set forth in that Charter. I will continue to support our efforts to keep the region secure, working towards the success of initiatives like Merida and Plan Colombia. It is efforts such as these that allow the United States to demonstrate its commitment to the region. The peace and security the people of the region must exist before other efforts to improve lives can really take root.

We know that we all share a common desire to help provide our citizens with a high standard of living, safe neighborhoods and an opportunity to just simply live a better life and sadly we also know and have seen that there are some within the hemisphere, that do not share this goal. The horrors of totalitarianism have plagued the people of my country, my native country for decades despite the Cuban peoples' strong desire for change. We know this is a critical time for Cuba and I know that after a recent impact of two hurricanes the United States and the American people stand ready to provide aid and support from food, medicines and shelters on an effort to help the Cuban people begging to rebuild.

We cannot control the challenges of Mother Nature that impact many countries in the Western Hemisphere. Like the constitutes of my own home State of Florida, those living in the tropics face a constant threat of deadly storms and hurricanes. Families across Haiti, The Bahamas, Cuba, Jamaica and other nations have been left homeless and in need of food and shelter. In these times the need, it's a time of need and in these times we all must come together as we have, and already begun to help our friends in Haiti, Jamaica and in the Bahamas. As neighbors we have great compassion for these individuals and what they are going through and that is why I immediately called on the United States to offer humanitarian aid and support to all those countries in need.

Fortunately we have seen aid arriving in all the countries impacted by these recent storms. The United States has not been allowed to offer or to carry out its offer of assistance to Cuba and I hope that you will join with me in asking the Cuban Government to put politics aside and simply look after the humanitarian need of their people in this time of need. I firmly believe that with every other challenge we face in the region, we

also have opportunities to promote and consolidate democracies, to promote prosperity and to invest in people.

In all of these areas we can and will demonstrate our continued commitment to the Western Hemisphere. I am proud, as was mentioned earlier, to have partnered with my colleague Senator Menendez in introducing the Social Investment and Economic Development of the Americas Act. This is something that Senator Menendez has worked on from the time that he was serving in the House of Representatives and I am happy to join with him in these efforts to see if we can bring it in to fruition. This effort sets out a clear plan and demonstrates our commitment to the Western Hemisphere by providing two and a half billion dollars in aid to the region over the next ten years.

I believe that this is an innovative approach to addressing our commitment to the region into the next decade. In the last eight years we have opened the doors to economic growth and development with the signing and implementation of some of the various successful trade agreements. Others still remain and I'm hopeful that we would be able to see the Colombian free trade agreement, as well as the one with Panama come to fruition, perhaps in the not too distant future. But trade agreements are only one aspect of engagement; the Social Development Act emphasizes basic development issues, such as education, housing and health care, and it also concentrates on economic development issues such as creating a strong investment climate, educating the workforce, micro-financing and the leveraging of assets for development.

Another benefit of this plan is that it assists to complement the work of another successful venture: The Millennium Challenge Corporation. The Millennium Challenge Corporation is implementing compacts in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. We are also working through the MCC with Paraguay and Peru. The compacts are targeted to improve rural infrastructure in agriculture and growth projects, strengthen the rule of law and fight corruption. Through the MCC the United States has pledged more than one billion dollars to these countries. As regional partners and members states of this body we must all work together to confront and address the challenges in our world today.

There is not time like the present for the OAS to lead in this region. The mandate of the Inter-American Democratic Charter adopted by this body, article one clearly states and I quote: "People of the Americas have the right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it. Democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the people of the Americas." I am confident that this body is up to the challenge and that it will meet today's political, social and economic challenges with the same dedication and resolve used to solve the problems of more than a half a century ago.

So again, I like to thank Secretary Insulza and Ambassador Morales for this opportunity and I look forward after Senator Menendez' remarks to try to handle some of your questions, Thank you very much.

*Senator Menendez:* Good morning Mr. Secretary General, thank you so much for your invitation to be here at the OAS. Ambassador Morales, thank you for your advocacy for us to be engaged here with all of the distinguished Ambassadors who are maybe present today from the OAS and other members of the diplomatic core who are here today, as well as interested citizens from organizations and think tanks, we appreciate very much you're coming. Para mi es un gran placer estar con nuestros hermanos en el hemisferio en la cumbre de donde actualmente tantas conversaciones tan importantes se toman con referencia a nuestro futuro común." And I am certainly very pleased to be here with my distinguished colleague from Florida Senator Martinez, who very early on got together with me when he was the Secretary of HUD, before he went to the Senate, we worked together on a whole host of opportunities to bring housing opportunities for people in our communities and then later on we have worked together now in a legislation he spoke about, so I hope you notice something Mr. Secretary if you want to get ahead here it's Morales, Martinez, Menendez so you know its says something about where we are going.

There is an old joke about diplomats is that they let you do all the talking as long they getting their way. So, Senator Martinez and I look forward to answering your questions we won't do all of the talking.

My parents came to the United States fleeing repression in Cuba. I was born in Union City, New Jersey, which has more Cubans per square mile than La Habana. I take every opportunity I can to remind my fellow Americans of the importance of the Latino presence in and the contributions to the United States. We have been here well before the nation was ever is founded, and by 2050, nearly a third of the population will be of Latin American descent. This year, a Dominican-American named Juno Diaz won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Our first gold medal in wrestling in the Beijing Olympics went to Henry Cejudo, the son of immigrants from Mexico. And the first soldier to fall in Iraq in the service of the United States was Lance Corporal José Antonio Gutierrez, born in Guatemala. Someone who not yet was a US citizen when he gave his life on behalf of this country. So when we talk immigration in this country, I am often like to remind our fellow Americans about the incredible contributions that we have made and we are making every day.

We in this hemisphere share a great deal and not just achievements but challenges. When the Maras kill innocent people at random, this is not just simply a Central American problem, this is the Hemisphere's problem and it is a human problem. When criminals buy guns in Texas and smuggled them into Mexico, making a mockery of the rule of law, this is not just a North American problem, this is the Hemisphere's problem and it is a human problem.

Whether it's the destruction of the world's most diverse forests or the spread of HIV that destroys human life, unfortunately on the up rise within the hemisphere, the most serious problems we face affects us all.

As public servants, our countries all demand of us that we be problem solvers. So I appreciate tremendously the opportunity for dialogue we have here today and I would

like to discuss strategies for increased cooperation in three specific areas, there are so many issues of course and I know some of the questions will get to others but I want to focus in three specific areas: immigration, citizen security and economic development.

First, one topic that has great personal significance for me and great strategic significance for the region; is immigration. As some of you may know, we fought hard in the Senate last year to pass comprehensive immigration reform. I personally fought hard to make sure that package was as comprehensive as possible, and included a commonsense, practical approach towards border security. We need smart borders, not closed borders. I realized the symbolism that fences and walls have in the region. It harms our interests to alienate people with symbols of exclusion, and it makes it less feasible to collaborate on other migration control and counter-terrorism priorities. Rather than building fences, we need to refocus on building friendships and alliances, so that we can build trust and work together on immigration.

Honoring our shared values means creating a joined strategy to address the opportunity deficit that fuels mass migration in the first place, and I say a joined strategy because there are significant responsibilities on both ends. In the Senate, and especially from the vantage point of my seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I'm going to continue to work towards an immigration policy that's not just tough, but it is also smart. Job creation remains the primary responsibility of countries themselves. But only if we both do our part will we begin to close the deficit of opportunity and end mass migration.

Cross-border migration is tied to another major concern and that is security. Why do people leave their countries? Either because of economic necessity and which they see come somewhere else where they are able to meet their goals and be able to sustain their families or sitting on rest, otherwise as someone travel in the hemisphere their stay in their native countries which are beautiful and have much to offer. But security is a concern, Mexico and Central America, in particular, have been plagued by increasing violence perpetrated by drug cartels, organized crime, youth gangs, and other criminal groups which threaten citizen security and political stability throughout the region.

Lofty pronouncements that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere becomes very vivid and real when Maras expand their membership into countries that hadn't even seen them before, or a group of thugs in Ciudad Juarez is more heavily armed than the police thanks to weapons they brought across the border, allowing them to kidnap and kill seemingly at will. To paraphrase the old saying, we all have a very strong interest in making sure that "la justicia no cojea, sino llega" that justice doesn't limp but it arrives. This problem of citizen' security is not confined within single borders or single root causes and neither are the solutions. While I have supported institution building as a major part of any solution, including better training for police and judicial personnel, some political actors have focused on military intervention.

Last year, the Bush Administration proposed the "Merida Initiative," which would provide- and has provided- new aid thus far, largely military aid to Mexico and Central America. The initiative is an opportunity and that is why I supported it, to collaborate

across borders on a variety of critical areas: intelligence-sharing, counter narcotics, arms smuggling, and public security. But of course I believe a more systematic engagement with Mexico and Central America in a wide range of areas is long overdue. And I believe some aspects of the Merida Initiative, mainly its long term institution building components, are a very good start.

While the heavy weaponry and sheer brutality of the criminals we're facing seem at first to justify the use of a nation's military, it's a deeply imperfect solution. First, a military is not a police force, in training, effect or intent, and using a military command structure and ethos in domestic law enforcement represents a serious challenge to human rights. In general, I've long been frustrated with approaches to citizens' security that focuses on short term armed intervention and ignore the deficit of development and economic opportunity that is most often at the root of the problem and that is the last thing I would like to talk about.

Currently, in the Senate, I have chaired the committee that oversees -or subcommittee-that oversees our foreign assistance programs. I have long argued with my colleagues that these foreign assistance efforts are not handouts but they are investments in our mutual prosperity. When it comes to promoting development in the hemisphere, the big question for Congress is, how can we get the greatest impact from these investments? First of all, no government can go it alone. We need to continue to expand the people with whom we cooperate; both in civil society and in the private and philanthropic sectors. We should also think more about regional solutions to regional problems.

The hemisphere is brimming with talented people who understand how to build institutions. We need to take better advantage of this talent and broaden our partnerships. One example of something worth studying is the Balkan Trust for Democracy, which seeks to build civic participation among the grassroots, the nexus between citizens and their government to strengthen democratic institutions. The Trust is a 10-year, thirty million initiative, that seeks to bring together the strengths of the public, private and non-profit sectors for the benefit of people in developing countries. It has received contributions from a wide range of donors including foundations, governments from the region, and the United States. It is managed in the region by highly capable people from the region. And it has had some tremendous success and moved beyond his original amount. So I want to take the opportunity today to present the idea of engaging in a Latin American Trust for Social and Economic Development, as something that which we consider; and on those lines Senator Martinez mentioned our collectively engagement in Social Investment and Economic Development of the Americas Act. It is a bill has thirteen cosponsors, both Republicans and Democrats, it was reported favorably out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June of this year; it is a bill that looking for tractions of the early next year on the next administration and we can actually make this a law.

The bill provides two and a half billion dollars over 10 years for social and economic development in Latin America using both the USAID as well as the Inter-American Development Bank. The goals include nurturing public private partnerships and

microenterprise development, reducing the time and cost of starting a business, increasing access to credit, improving the investment climate, strengthening the rule of law, and reducing poverty. The approach is to multiply the impact of U.S. investment through the creation of a matching fund for the private sector and member countries of the Bank. The bill requires a 10 percent contribution from the recipient country so that they are part of taking responsibility for those projects. And it implements a rigorous evaluation and oversight system to make sure that we are achieving our goals.

Again, I don't believe that two and a half billion over ten years is going to be our solution, but it is the beginning in addition to the overall -this is not to replace existing development assistance- this is to enhanced it, and in my view it creates a tremendous opportunity for us to be engage in the hemisphere.

Finally I have mentioned some strategies for cooperation on immigration, security and economic development. They're strategies to improve the quality of life of all of our citizens. But maybe above all, they represent an opportunity to reverse the frustration so many have felt in our relationships around the region. The events of the last week have once again brought that frustration into view. In regarding those events, let me say that, while I am disappointed, I am not as worried as many others are. It's a disappointment because our ad hoc diplomatic engagement continues to look like "sand-box" diplomacy, rather than a mature, strategic acknowledgement of our shared interests and regional priorities, we continue to bicker over debates that should have ended years ago.

Countries are choosing to remove our Ambassadors rather than continuing to engage diplomatically to resolve any differences. And the events of the last week are about a series of complex and deeply held beliefs that need to be given the space and time for debate and non-violent discussion that such beliefs merit. Some of the tensions we are seeing are more a result of lack of opportunity and a frustration with a sense of exclusion; a frustration that is completely justified given the ongoing inequality and inequity within the region. What we are seeing is that this frustration can spread faster than confidence in democratic systems and free market economic systems. Regardless of whether it is a government or an opposition group if anyone engages in undemocratic practices, the community of nations in the region needs to be equally forceful, equally engaged, equally supportive of forward progress.

We need to make clear through proactive and sustained diplomacy that rhetorical confrontation with Washington is not going to advance our mutual interests and values throughout the hemisphere. I am pleased that the nine presidents met on Monday in Santiago and I am encouraged that continued engagement is the best way to move forward. I am less worried than some because I am confident, in the long run, we can get beyond this. When the events on the Colombia and Ecuador border were unfolding, some said they were the beginning of a diplomatic meltdown in the region. After the Rio Summit, and engagement of both bilateral and multilateral diplomatic instruments, including the OAS' leadership, the countries in the region, not the United States, were able to sort things out. Don't get me wrong, these are serious issues and they need to be

taken in a serious way and the United States should and can play a constructive role, the OAS can and should continue to play a constructive role.

Democracy needs many caretakers, and responsibility for its survival in this hemisphere lies with all of us. For it needs more than just elections to be legitimate; it needs free press, free speech, a reasonable distribution of powers, and so many other elements. As José Martí said, “Con las libertades, como con los privilegios, sucede que juntos triunfan o peligran, y que no puede pretenderse o lastimarse una sin que sientan todas el daño o el beneficio.” “Freedoms, like privileges, prevail or are imperiled together. You cannot harm or strive to achieve one without harming or furthering all.” Democracy is undermined as much by rioters bombing cities to get their way as by demagogues perverting constitutions to force their will. It’s not enough to cry foul on one and stay silent on another. When regimes denigrate the fundamental charters of government, they are not strengthening democracy; they are just concentrating power. And they should not be able to escape without a response from this body.

Let me take one last word on Cuba, you know we disagree and many others in our hemisphere disagree with our policies, but I hope we all share common goal human rights, democracy, the basic freedoms that some many of us enjoy as members of the OAS here, certainly we are enjoy in the United States, but if governments abuse of its citizens is something none of us, none of us, should tolerate.

In the wake of horrible hurricane season, the government of Cuba has repeatedly rejected offers of direct aid; direct aid to the regime sends in a civilian aircraft send it directly to help people in immediate way of very significant assistance and they say no, which just ultimately adds additional punishment to the heavy burden its people already have to bear. So I would challenge this body, very candidly, to be more forceful in pursuing a core mission that we both share: defending not just the semblance, but the process of democracy. If we do that I think collectively we can make this hemisphere a much better place for all of our citizens and for a much better future as beginning of the century unfolds and it can be a century of great promise for all of our people. Thank you very much.

*Irene Klinger:* Thank you Senator Martinez and Senator Menendez for those insightful and thought-provoking presentations. I would like now to open the floor for questions and I like you to please raise your hand and the microphone will come to you, also please identify your self and keep your comments brief please so we can have a very interactive session of questions and answers, the floor is open.