

Closing Remarks

**The United Nations in the 21st Century:
A New Generation Rising to the Cause**

By

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4th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS (CILA)

**Hosted by
The United Nations Association of the Dominican Republic (ANU-RD)**

Barceló Bávaro Convention Centre
Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
18 October 2008

Your Excellency, President Fernandez, Executive Director Sandoval, and all of the leaders of tomorrow who are here today—I am both pleased and honoured to have received an invitation to address you upon the closing of this fourth annual International Conference of the Americas.

It is no exaggeration for me to say that the future of this great organization—the United Nations—remains in the hands of young people throughout the world. I do not mean just those who will come to work at one of the many institutions that comprise the UN family. Nor do I mean just those who will serve as diplomatic representatives of their countries at the United Nations. I instead mean all of you—including those who will join their fellow citizens as informed voters and taxpayers, for you too will have your own opportunities to contribute in making this a better world.

In one way or another, each of you has a personal stake or interest in the future of the United Nations. And each of you will have some contribution to make in advancing some of the great goals of the UN Charter.

After all your deliberations, I am sure that you all understand what I mean. Regardless of which of the many issues you have considered at this conference—which include the role in the United Nations in the fields of economic development, peace and security, human rights, the rule of law, and many others—you have learned how progress in these areas does not happen automatically. It requires persistent, hard work by individual human beings, working together for the achievement of a great common cause.

Many of you, more than you might now think, will be those human beings of the future who will be doing this work, whether directly in service of the UN organization, or indirectly in promoting greater public understanding and support of our work. You will find it interesting and fruitful to pursue this work not because it will bring you great personal wealth, fame, or power—but because of its importance in serving the ideals and interests of entire communities beyond yourselves, perhaps even in serving all humanity.

This type of work is not easy. Great successes never come as frequently as we all believe they should. Difficult obstacles—political, bureaucratic, financial, and just plain ignorance—must be overcome. Yet there is great satisfaction to be gained in knowing that you have in some way contributed, even in a small way, to such inspiring goals as strengthening international peace and security, protecting human rights, advancing economic development, promoting justice and the rule of law, or in helping to give future generations a cleaner global environment.

I have worked on behalf of many of these types of goals in the course of my own diplomatic career and in my work at the United Nations. I chose to work in the field of disarmament not because it was easy – which it is not – but because I know how important it is in serving entire communities, from local to global. I see this in the progress we are slowly making in working to halt the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, which is a subject of great interest to many countries in this region, because of the humanitarian and economic damage this trade has caused. I

am immensely encouraged by the solidarity of all Latin American and Caribbean nations in supporting the goal of achieving the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, and in limiting the production, sale, and use of conventional armaments. I am deeply impressed by persistent efforts by citizens and governments to try to reduce military expenditures—despite the upward trends we have been seeing in several states in recent years—while expanding investments in more productive pursuits that benefit larger communities.

I have learned in my own career that there is a very interesting two-way street between the development of global norms and the activities undertaken at the local, national, and regional levels. On the one hand, it is vitally important for global norms to be reflected as legitimate goals of domestic laws, regulations, and policies. Yet on the other hand, I have been immensely impressed with how national and regional initiatives have had their own impacts in shaping those global norms.

Consider, for example, the growth of regional nuclear-weapon-free zones over the last few decades. Over four decades ago, the countries of this region gathered together and concluded the Tlatelolco Treaty, which created the world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone in a highly populated region. Today, we see that similar zones have been established in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, and most recently, Central Asia—which is the first such zone to be created entirely north of the Equator. Well over 100 states are now parties to such zones.

This shows how some enlightened leadership by government leaders and officials—in this case including Alfonso García Robles, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts—with the support among the people, can truly help to improve the world around us. Recent efforts in this region to curb the illicit trade in firearms, to cooperate in cybersecurity, and to prevent terrorism are additional examples of how regional cooperation can serve to advance a wider global public good.

In closing, I wish to extend to all of you my deep personal respect for the interest you have all shown in the United Nations and its important work around the world. Please accept my very best wishes for long, happy, and productive careers. More than you can possibly know, your own futures and the future of the world, are in your hands.