



DISCURSO
DEL
EXCELENTISIMO SEÑOR
RICARDO MARTINELLI BERROCAL
PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA DE PANAMA

**Debate general del sexagésimo cuarto período ordinario de sesiones
de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas**

Nueva York, 24 de septiembre de 2009

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary General

Esteemed leaders and Heads of State, ambassadors, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Ali Treki
President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly:

Mr. President:

We Panamanians consider it a wise choice to have you preside the current session of the United Nations General Assembly.

We know you have the necessary vision and leadership to guide the nations represented here today.

I would also like to thank the Secretary General for tireless pursuit of the dialogue for peace, security and the peaceful coexistence among nations and their peoples.

The summit on climate change was celebrated this past Tuesday. I congratulate all nations for their solidarity in confronting the global warming crisis.

The beauty, resources and biodiversity of our world heritage are in peril.

Global warming is the gravest expression of a crisis triggered by excesses in the exploitation of resources.

We must apply new formulas, change our behavior and value our relationship with nature.

Our options are clear: we can talk or we can act.

If we do not act with global prudence the consequences will be irreversible.

Mr. President:

Three million years ago, the Isthmus of Panama emerged from the sea.

We are one of the youngest countries on Earth. Upon our birth we bridged North and South America as the narrowest point between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Panama parted the seas to unite continents, thereby generating a new network of ocean currents that transformed our planet's climate.

The entire world changed when Panama was born.

Today, all forms of life upon this planet are the result of an evolutionary process that adapted to our birth.

The great African savannahs and deserts came forth from these changes, and modern man evolved from those new savannahs.

Mr. President:

Panamanians have always played an important role for our neighbors and the world at large.

In these next five years, it is our duty to demonstrate how our economic model and government can be exemplary to all who aspire to prosperity and progress.

I am an entrepreneur, not a politician. I went into politics to change how things are done.

I am a simple and direct man. I believe time is short and priceless.

I will expand upon my experiences in the private sector and put them to work in government.

I was elected to the presidency with an unprecedented mandate.

Panamanians gave me a clear mandate to deliver change to our country and build a better Panama for all.

We are placing the interests of the people first and foremost, above personal or partisan interests, because a country is more important than a political party.

I have chosen the very best to work in our government, without regard to their political affiliations.

We began this government amid a crisis.

Less than a year ago, we saw the collapse of the international financial framework. The global economic model was forever changed.

Our guiding light is the improvement of our people's quality of life.

In less than 100 days, we increased the salaries of law enforcement officials and distributed 100 dollars per month to senior citizens over seventy who lack retirement funds and require economic aid.

We will build a metro. It will be the largest employment program in the history of Panama, after the expansion of the Canal.

We have started a construction project of low-cost housing, which will not only provide a roof over thousands of Panamanians, but generate jobs in a time of crisis.

Our promises meet the demands of our people. And beyond that, they are part of the plan we need to boost our economy.

America is a continent recently populated.

Panama was the bridge through which the first Native Americans crossed to South America.

There surged great cultures and civilizations like the Chibchan and the Incan.

When the Spanish arrived, they made our country into their colonies' commercial hub.

The first railroad between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was built when Panama separated from Spain. This, in turn, led to the construction of our Canal.

Today, we are the gatekeeper of the global economy.

We are a small country with less than three and a half million inhabitants. Services represent more than 75% of our gross national product.

The dollar is our currency. We have a solid banking and financial center, which is very conservative and strictly regulated.

The Colon Free Trade Zone is the largest in the hemisphere. We have the most important maritime commercial route in the world, making us the most efficient logistics hub in America.

We shall soon begin the construction of a third set of locks to expand the capacity of the Panama Canal, which will open a great doorway for international commerce.

Panama is an ideal place to invest, to establish enterprises, and to live. We will transform Panama into the Hong Kong or the Dubai of America.

Within the new Panama-Pacifico Special Economic Area, labor and immigration laws are welcoming and flexible.

Incentives for investors are fantastic across the national territory.

Our spirit of service and open-door policy make Panama a fun, exciting place of true opportunity.

Despite the crisis, Panama is growing.

Talent and creativity, social assistance, infrastructure and investment in human capital will allow us to weather the storm.

Panama was born to serve the world.

All are welcome to Panama: *We are open for business!*

We believe in free trade as a tool to improve peoples' lives. We want to do business with all nations and sign Free Trade Agreements with our strategic partners.

We've already signed one with the U.S. It just needs a small push to be ratified.

Mr. President:

In Panama we are proud of our history and our heritage; of our freedom of expression and freedom of thought, of our freedom to determine our country's direction and of our tradition of peace.

Peace is the best sentiment on Earth. Peace brings with it tranquility, stability and growth. There is no reason in the world why neighboring peoples should offend one another. No one wins. We all lose.

We, the children of Bolivar, share the same history and the same challenges. We have the same blood: indigenous, black, mixed race and white.

Here, anyone who attacks, attacks only himself. Anyone who retaliates, retaliates against himself. And anyone who seeks to bear arms, does so against himself – because we are all siblings.

For weapons of war only bring poverty. They steal the bread from our mouths and rob the future from our children. Weapons are not needed, and in the end, they solve nothing.

Let's sit down together instead, for together there is nothing we cannot solve.

There is nothing like peace!

Mr. President,

Honduras' return to the Rule of Law is necessary for its well being and that of Central America. That is why we are closely following the reconciliation in Honduras.

The San José accord constitutes the best method for formulating a consensus government that can oversee new elections and guarantee a peaceful return to democracy.

Let us allow the Honduran people to resolve their destiny and future with one another, democratically.

We Panamanians have the utmost trust in the Honduran society's capacity for reconciliation.

Nothing is stronger than words – oral or written.

We understand one another through dialogue.

Communication is a conduit for cultures, education, ethnicities, history, religions, and politics.

In Panama we are a melting pot of races, nationalities and ideologies that, through communication and mutual respect, has created a diverse society with common interests. That is part of our idiosyncrasy. It makes us who we are. It is what sets us apart and makes us unique.

Mr. President:

Tolerance is the secret to people's coexistence with one another.

Nuclear tests, however, make us all nervous. The state of alert only serves to elevate tensions between nations whose relations are already less than stable.

That is why we live in constant fear and mistrust, which significantly affects the dialogue between us.

In Panama we respect the use of science as a tool for human development, but we reject its use as a front to conceal nuclear proliferation and the production of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. President:

The war on drug traffic, money laundering, and arms traffic is a challenge to global peace and security.

Due to its nature as a crossroads, Panama is used by organized crime for drug and arms traffic.

But we are declaring our own war.

We've become an active partner with Mexico and Colombia in the battle against narco-terrorists.

Alongside President Calderón and President Uribe, we are committed to strengthening the ties of cooperation, so that Panama can be an active source of intelligence.

The many efforts and improvements that Panama has achieved in this field have been recognized in reports by the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering and the International Monetary Fund.

Panama has information exchange agreements with 39 countries to combat money laundering and the financing of illicit activities.

Drugs are not good business. Those who dedicate themselves to them are destined to jail or the cemetery. They have no future.

Mr. President:

Everyone knows Panama as a banking center, as a place to do business, and because of our Canal.

But in fact, we are nature's best kept secret in the world.

Tourism is our new passion.

Panama City has the highest concentration of migratory birds on the planet. We are the hub for America's flying species.

The Gulf of Chiriquí has the greatest biodiversity of any spot in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.

Forty percent of our national territory is protected. This includes over a million and a half hectares of uninterrupted forests between Chagres and Darién.

Our national parks have been declared biosphere reserves and world heritage sites, and so has the Island of Coiba, a natural jewel where they are still discovering new species and where whales from the Arctic and Antarctic meet to birth their calves.

Over 1,000 islands and coral reefs beautify our seas, and we are framed by over 2,500 kilometers of coastline, many of them as pristine and untouched as when Christopher Columbus first arrived on our shores more than 500 years ago.

But the very best resource we have is our people. We are a multiethnic and friendly people. Our indigenous peoples are an example of resistance to mistreatment and cultural assimilation.

All the countries represented in this great chamber have their own wonders that the entire world admires.

We must unite to protect and conserve our beauty, resources, biodiversity, world heritage and our people.

I am an eternal optimist.

I see my country, Panama, providing more jobs for its men and women.

I see a middle class that keeps growing and earning more.

I see new technologies spawning unprecedented economic growth.

I see the first country in the world with free internet access for all its citizens.

I see Panama with better health care, better education, better transportation, and with families that are happier and more unified.

We Panamanians can do anything we dream of –and if each and every one of us achieves our dreams, we will have a better world.

In these five years ahead of us, we are going to dream big.

Our best days are yet to come.

If I had to describe Panama in just a few words, I would say we are a country and a people full of surprises.

Panama will amaze you.

THANK YOU.



H. E. Mr. RICARDO MARTINELLI BERROCAL
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

President Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal was born in Sona, Panama, in 1957. On July 1, 2009, he was sworn in as President of the Republic of Panama, after being elected with over 60% of the vote. He ran on a platform of change and of effective government for the Panamanian people, as well as promoting business opportunities for the country and its citizens.

President Martinelli studied at Colegio de La Salle (Panama) and Staunton Military Academy (United States of America). He is a graduate of the University of Arkansas and obtained a Master's in Business Administration from INCAE Business School in Costa Rica, the leading business school in Latin America.

President Martinelli is a successful self-made businessman. He is owner of Super 99, a dominant supermarket chain in the Republic of Panama. Before his winning bid for the Presidency, Mr. Martinelli served his country at different times as Director of Social Security and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Panama Canal and Minister for Canal Affairs. As Director of Social Security, he implemented the Modernization plan that expanded Panamanians' access to health care. As Minister for Canal Affairs, President Martinelli led the initiative towards widening the Canal that is currently being enacted.

President Martinelli is married to Mrs. Marta Linares de Martinelli. They are the parents of Ricardo, Luis Enrique, and Carolina.
