

Global Peace Convention 2014

November 18, 2014
Keynote Address



Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is my great honor to welcome you to the Sixth Annual Global Peace Convention here in Asunción, Paraguay. This Convention is bringing together leaders from more than 40 different nations, and all sectors of society, including politicians and government officials, religious and business leaders, educators and civil society leaders, united by a common vision for peace and prosperity, and ready to work together to make that a reality.

I want to give special thanks to our host His Excellency, President Horacio Cartes for his warm welcome to this beautiful nation of Paraguay. Could we give him a round of applause?

And I would also like to recognize, it's a surprise, but I would also like to recognize the illustrious Vice-president of this nation of Paraguay, Juan Afara who is with us here today as well. Could we give him a round of applause?

Another surprise, the Speaker of the Congress of Paraguay, could we also give him a round of applause, as well? Now I'm not certain about the protocol but I think in most nations it's unusual that the top three heads of state will be in one convention. So, this is an example of Paraguay taking ownership over what's happening over here, could we give the leadership of Paraguay a round of applause?

I want to especially thank our Presidents Juan Carlos Wasmosy, and especially, President Vencio Cerezo, and President Lacalle of Uruguay, the members of the Latin American Presidential Mission. They are the ones who got the call for the need to bring the top leaders of this continent together to really discuss and formulate strategies of how to improve the state of all people in this region, so could we give them a round of applause? Could we also have all the presidents from Latin America that are part of the mission here today, could they stand up and get a warm round of applause from our audience today?

I was told that never in the history of Latin America that so many ex-presidents come and convene in one gathering, so we're making history here today. Give them once again a round of applause.

We owe much of the success of this convention and GPF's work in Paraguay to our Senator Lilian Samaniego, who's really been championing the work of GPF in this nation, could we also recognize her contributions?

And of course we also have to thank the illustrious mayor, who has been so gracious to be the main convener of this event, although it lies outside the precinct of Asunción, could we give him a round of applause, Mayor Arnaldo Samaniego.

We would also like to appreciate the many significant faith leaders with us today, as well as political leaders from neighboring countries. My good friends Bishop Manoel Ferreira, could he stand and be recognized? As well as Congressman, Nelson Marquezelli of Brazil, could he stand and be recognized? I also want to give special note to Dr. Marsudi Syuhud, Secretary General of Nahdlatul Ulama of Indonesia, one of the largest civic Islam organizations in the world and really a champion for fighting radicalism for that state. I would also like to recognize Dr. Robert and Donna Schuller from the United States.

And a special thanks to all of the distinguished GPF Global Leadership Council members in attendance from around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are drawn together here inspired by the vision of One Family under God, and the hope, that as we find more ways to act upon it, we can heal the divisions that separate humanity and make peace a global reality.

The theme of this year's convention is "Roadmap for National Transformation: Liberty, Prosperity and Integrity through Moral and Innovative Leadership." This theme focuses on the type of change within nations that is needed to improve not only the state of that nation, the region, but the world. It is

particularly fitting for a convention held in Paraguay, which is part of the “Global South,” the world of emerging nations seeking to grow and find their place in the global economy and the community of nations.

When the Cold War ended, so too did the old world order based on ideological division. A new world order has yet to be established, and emerging nations will play an increasingly important role in shaping how it looks like, whether for the good or for the bad. With the Cold War geopolitical order gone, the world has experienced increasing fragmentation along tribal, ethnic, sectarian, and religious lines.

This has produced violent identity-based conflicts throughout the developing world, -- in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia. Here in Latin America the legacy of Iberian feudalism still fuels social conflicts based upon disparities of wealth and opportunity. The old struggle of communism and capitalism still endures at a social level in this region, producing opposing visions for the path of prosperity.

Many emerging nations today are experiencing significant economic growth and greater democratization. Yet they still also face many challenges. In addition to the instability arising from identity-based conflict, there is inequitable development that fails to benefit the people as a whole, and government tainted by corruption. How these challenges are met will have great significance for global peace and prosperity.

In addition, most of the emerging world has large youth populations. This is in marked contrast to the developed world with its aging populations, low birthrates, and dissolving families. The energy of the young represents a great opportunity for the growing economies of the developing world.

Yet those energies need to be properly harnessed and that is the challenge. It calls for education, in productive skills and in moral and civic virtues. That, in turn, requires tackling poverty and the cultural impact of poverty. The negative behaviors that poverty produces undermine social stability and thus impede progress toward equitable and sustainable prosperity.

To achieve prosperity without sacrificing traditional values is another major challenge for countries in the southern hemisphere. Observing the breakdown of the families and its social impact in the so-called advanced nations, and in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, many countries are looking for alternative models, rather than Western development models. They are looking for new models of national transformation that can stimulate economic development and material prosperity without having to compromise spiritual and moral traditions or their roots in strong family values.

If these countries successfully meet their challenges they will create the foundation for a peaceful new world order. This region has a tremendous opportunity to bring about a rebirth of Latin America. It is particularly encouraging to see so many former heads of state gathered here for the 2nd Summit of the Latin American Presidential Mission. They are dedicated to applying their experience to lift up this region.

To achieve this, Latin American society has to become more inclusive. Positive transformation leads to political and legal change that then leads to sustainable economic development. In the feudal system that Latin America adapted from Spanish and Portuguese colonizers, a serf had no ownership, few rights, and, as a result, little opportunity for incentive.

This was in contrast to the cultural traditions of North America that grew out of the English common law and encouraged independence, enterprise, and self-reliance among an ever-growing segment of an inclusive citizenry.

These differences grew out of fundamental principles and values that upheld human rights and freedoms and sought to extend them to all people. Basic liberties created social opportunity. Hard work was rewarded, enterprise encouraged, and an engaged citizenry expanded. Prosperity was the fruit of the resulting culture.

For much of its history Latin America has had oligarchic societies that excluded the majority of the population from prosperity, and political influence and engagement. Lacking these opportunities, opposition often took radical forms. Today, social disparity remains a challenge that the region has to meet.

To prosper, Latin America needs a broad, well-established middle class, engaged in the economic, political, and social life of their nations. That requires good education and opportunity for all citizens. As these social issues are addressed, the political and legal framework will change, creating greater stability through the rule of law and the protection of property rights. At the root of these changes are the principles and values that uphold the rights and freedoms of all citizens and all people and lead to the creation of a society where they can and be will protected to exercise those freedoms and rights.

This opens the door to economic development and prosperity, particularly as it makes a country attractive for foreign investment. A country that leads the way in this process can become a hub nation for its region and the model for this region and world.

Peace and prosperity cannot be secured in this world without nations that exemplify integrity, good governance, and responsibility. Our host nation of Paraguay offers an instructive example of how national transformation can come about.

Since my first visit here in 2008, Paraguay has made great strides forward. Back then the U.S. State Department was advising Americans not to travel to this country because of security concerns. Also, the Paraguayan government was planning to expropriate foreign owned private property. However, I made it very clear that Paraguay could never prosper as part of the global economy if it did not respect the rule of law, and property rights of foreign investors. No foreign government or organization would invest in a country where their enterprise was not protected by the law. The president and other leaders at that time whom I spoke with, understood the force of this argument. They made a historic choice that set Paraguay on a path to becoming a well-functioning democratic free market state.

Where might this path lead? My experience here convinces me of Paraguay's great potential. With the right foundation of principles and values, Paraguay can become a prosperous and peaceful modern democracy that respects the rights and freedoms of all people, and promotes a successful free market economy that unleashes and promotes their citizens creativity.

Such a transformed Paraguay, at the center of South America, can be like a womb for the rebirth of this region and to bring a genuine prosperity, based on those principles and values that then can spread throughout the region and other developing worlds in the Southern Hemisphere I have shared this vision consistently with the leaders of Paraguay in government, business and civil society.

In the past six years much has changed in this country as efforts have grown to move from this vision to national transformation. I am proud to say that the Global Peace Foundation has been among those at the forefront of this endeavor. In 2010 we established IDPPS, a research institute, to develop a roadmap for the future of this nation. Its members are prominent and respected figures known for their integrity. They come from the ranks of government, business, the Central Bank, Supreme Court, as well as the military.

That same year GPF and the Institute held a conference in Asunción for Paraguayan leaders from both the public and private sectors and has attracted several former heads of state from the greater Latin American region. Their presence became the seed of the Latin American Presidential Mission, established at the Global Peace Convention in Atlanta in 2012.

The conference in 2010, produced the "Asunción Declaration," a comprehensive statement of principles that affirmed the desire of Latin American leaders "to work together beyond religious, political, social, and ethnic differences for the unity of Latin America." That affirmation was reiterated by several of the former presidents the following year in the "Brasilia Declaration."

That Declaration outlined the need, and I quote, to "revive the civic values and virtues that reflect the better spiritual, democratic, and plural traditions of humanity on this continent," and, I quote, to "promote education in ethical principles and universal values that can empower children and young adults to become better human beings and good citizens."

These principles are being implemented through the work of the Institute and GPF's national chapter here in Paraguay and by the Latin American Presidential Mission across the wider region.

The Institute has contributed to the creation of sound and consistent public policy based on mobilizing public and private partnerships, particularly through its work on the development model for the vast, poverty-stricken Chaco region. Meanwhile, GPF has been promoting greater social stability in the country through forums on the core principles essential for good governance and a wide range of social initiatives.

These include character education in the nation's schools, launched in cooperation with the Ministry of Education; youth volunteerism; and the energetic and enterprising women's division that does pioneering work to advance the role and dignity of women and affirm the fundamental importance of the family in transmitting values.

The Latin American Presidential Mission is working throughout the region to strengthen relations between North, Central and South America and the Caribbean as well. Promoting a hemispheric spiritual awakening centered on the universal principles and values that uphold vibrant, well-functioning democracies. Could we give them a round of applause? It is also promoting broad educational initiatives focused on moral and civic development and contributing ideas on issues such as trade and investment, income disparity, and how to combat organized crime.

In Alto Paraguay, GPF has been active since 2009 in the main town of Puerto Casado, providing basic assistance in health, education, and housing. Later GPF established sustainable projects including a fish farm, communal vegetable farm, and a bakery to help the community support itself. Last year, Marlene Ocampos, who had guided these projects as the GPF social director in the state, ran for governor of Alto Paraguay and she won.

Against all expectations, and on the strength of her work, serving the people of that state, she won the election. As governor, she has continued to lead with the same spirit of service. The Institute has supported her work with its expertise, establishing efficient and transparent systems of government that help to root out corruption.

The example of Alto Paraguay is causing a stir in Paraguay today. There are entrenched special interests that are threatened by the changes underway there. However, those with a greater vision see it as a model of change that is necessary for this nation, this region, and the world. During my last visit here one governor asked me for GPF's help to implement in his state what had been done in Alto Paraguay.

As fundamental principles are put into practice through political and social initiatives, the stability of the country grows, making it more attractive to international investors. Investment will follow Paraguay's national transformation, to build not only infrastructures but also to allow Paraguay as a nation to live up to its dream to be the hub nation for Latin America.

I foresee a future in which Paraguay can become, if it maintains its course, can become what Singapore is for Southeast Asia or Dubai is for the Middle East.

As the Latin American region experiences a rebirth it will naturally look west to build trade relations with Asian countries, as part of the emerging Asia-Pacific rim. Even though Paraguay is a landlocked nation, it needs to be part of this process to become fully engaged in the global economy.

In this respect, I believe that Korea and Paraguay make natural partners, complementing one another perfectly. Korea is technologically advanced but resource poor. It also needs new markets. Paraguay is resource rich and can benefit from Korea's experience in development to advance its own economy.

Last June I helped bring a group of infrastructure experts and bankers from Korea to meet Paraguayan officials and discuss development plans. A start has already been made. Korea's Il Sung Construction company started work on a road project here last June. Hyundai has already established a factory here creating needed jobs while KOICA, Korea's overseas development agency, has been actively pursuing feasibility studies for infrastructure projects in this nation.

I have spoken with some detail about what has been taking place in Paraguay. The reason is that Paraguay offers a model of how national transformation can come about. Not only for this nation but every nation in Latin America as well as the developing world. It shows the foundational importance of principles and values, universal principles and values, and their translation into initiatives that promote social transformation, leading to greater political and economic stability. This in turn opens the door for sustainable economic development. As a result it has global implications.

If nations and regions are transformed in such a way, the future peace of the world will be assured as well as the prosperity of the people. The principles and values at the heart of this model uphold human rights and freedoms; encourage enterprise and creativity, and produce prosperity and a sense of worth; and promote the ideal of working for the greater good.

The Global Peace Foundation, in cooperation with partners such as yourselves, is working to lay the foundation for national and regional transformation. Interfaith leadership is also crucial for resolving sectarian conflict and establishing a consensus on values and principles. I want to recognize the work in Nigeria where Christian and Muslim leaders are working together in states like Kaduna to resolve sectarian tensions. They have launched a "One Family under God" grassroots movement to bring their Christian and Muslim followers together in a family of peace.

The idea that all people are members of One Family under God lies at the heart of the principles and values of which I speak. This simple yet profound vision transcends every ethnic, national, sectarian, and religious divide. As such, it has the power to lift us from national transformation to regional transformation, toward the goal of achieving global transformation and a building a peaceful world, ideal world.

The power of a vision to connect regions in innovative ways was demonstrated recently when a group of Nigerian religious leaders traveled to Northern Ireland to share their experiences with community leaders in Belfast working to bridge the Catholic and Protestant divide.

I also want to acknowledge the important work of our partner in Indonesia, Nadhlatul Ulama, a major Muslim civic organization working tirelessly to refute extremist distortions of Islam, and to promote tolerance among all people.

In Korea, my recently published book, “The Korean Dream,” articulates a vision for a united Korea based on the principles and values that have guided Korean history for millennia. It lays out a model for people to act on those principles through civic associations to unite their country. This appeal to root principles and values is paralleled here in the Americas by the call for a Great Hemispheric Awakening to revive the spiritual foundations of the nations of North and South America.

Our world today is gravely threatened by identity-based conflicts, driven by the divisions I have just mentioned. Violence and chaos reign in many parts of the world. Especially, the global south. It is our responsibility, through initiatives such as these, to show that a brighter alternative is there and is possible. The vision of One Family under God can be the antidote to such identity-based conflicts, if we are determined to make it a reality through our commitment and our ownership over that vision.

That is why the models of national transformation are so needed at this time, not only for this nation, for this region, but for the world. I trust you will become owners of this vision; and this call. That you will be the moral and innovative leaders who will implement it, and bring social and national transformation to your communities, nations, and the world.

I urge you to join with me and with everyone here, to rise above the barriers that have separated our human family and become the owners of the vision of One Family under God.

Thank you and may God bless you and your families.