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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

THE EAST ROOM

7:26 P.M. EDT

Mr. President, the General Assembly, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

This is my very first opportunity as President to welcome the Chiefs of Delegation to the General Assembly of the Organization of American States. I am very delighted to be here, and it is a great privilege and pleasure to see all of you here this evening.

It has been my good fortune to have met many of you when I was in the Congress and to meet many of you when I was Vice President. I have had an opportunity to see many of you as President, and it is a great pleasure to have you in the White House on this occasion.

Your presence here tonight is testimony to the wisdom of the Western hemisphere's pioneering effort to create a free association of sovereign nations about a century ago. The durability of your inner-American system rests on its ability to adapt to changing hemispheric and world conditions, and to respond to the new problems and the needs which arise.

I just noticed that some of my good friends and old colleagues in the House of Representatives and the Senate are here, and I welcome them as well.

Let me add at this point, it is a comment by my good friend and old colleague, Bill Mailliard, and he has said this, and I fully concur: "The bedrock strength of this Organization comes from the wealth of wisdom that the member States and their representatives bring to the solution of our common problems. Today this General Assembly is carrying on the tradition of adaptability to change, as we see it, in considering recommendations for reform."

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Just as the inner-American system was the pathfinder in the field of international organizations, it could likewise become a pioneer in reforming the traditional way in which international organizations do business.

The basic concept which holds this Organization together is that strength and progress come from cooperation rather than from conflict.

In this country, we are extremely proud of our achievements under a democratic form of government and a productive economic system. We recognize that every State has the right to adopt its own system of government and its own economic and social organization. Fortunately, we live in a hemisphere with a rich tradition of diversity.

One of our continuing tasks is to resolve issues that from time to time divide us. For example, we are now updating our relationship with Panama over the issue of the Canal. This new relationship will accommodate the important interests of both of our countries and all of the nations of the world which depend upon the Canal.

The world we now live in is increasingly fluid and complex, containing many new centers of power. There are new and more subtle challenges to the well being of mankind and the new issues reflect the major concerns of our people -- economic development, growth of trade, sufficient food production, a healthy environment and managing the growth of population.

As the world economy becomes much more complex, the line between domestic and international economic policy becomes ever less distinct. We know we have differences, and we certainly will continue to have them, but despite such problems, I am personally confident that we will shape the relationships necessary to improve the lives of all of our people.

The nations of this hemisphere have individually and jointly made great progress in their efforts to promote the well being of their peoples. Our cooperation for development requires constant redefinition and imaginative new solutions to the common problems that we face.

The United States is proud of its continuing contribution to this joint effort. There is no reason we cannot conquer the last vestiges of poverty in a hemisphere which is so richly endowed.

The tradition of mutual cooperation, which is at the heart of our inner-American system, adds another dimension to the requirements of global interdependence.

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We must be particularly conscious of the need to avoid unnecessary damage to each other's interests. For this reason, I am supporting modification of recent legislation passed by the Congress which singles out a few nations of the hemisphere for what seems to be discriminatory treatment.

International cooperation that assures mutual respect among nations is more essential than ever, and the opportunities particularly in this hemisphere are without precedent.

I wish you the greatest success in your deliberation and hope that together we can take full advantages of the opportunities for cooperation that present themselves to us, who are the fortunate inhabitants of these great Americas.

Thank you very much.

END (7:54 P.M. EDT)