

**Remarks by His Excellency José Miguel Insulza
Secretary General
Organization of American States**

**IFES Democracy Awards Dinner
October 2, 2007 - Washington, DC**

I am very moved and grateful for this award. It is an honor to receive it from IFES, formerly known as the International Foundation for Election Systems, an institution that can rightfully be proud of its major contributions, over 20 years, to the promotion and maintenance of democracy all over the world. I am also very proud to receive this award from President Jean-Pierre Kingsley, who has contributed greatly to the cause of free and fair elections in the Americas. And finally, I am pleased to receive this honor together with the Honorable Lee Hamilton, who has contributed so much to the noble causes of freedom, peace and democracy throughout the world.

Thank you also for your kind references to my democratic credentials. Since I reached the age of reason I have thought of myself as a democrat, because I lived in a country which was at that time noted for its attachment to democracy and the rule of law. Unfortunately, this only lasted for the three first decades of my life. A bloody military coup destroyed democracy and all democratic institutions in my country and gave way to a dictatorship that again made Chile well known, but this time for negative reasons. In order not to give in to the enemies of democracy, I was forced to live outside my country for many years. During that period of struggle, I lost some very dear friends, some magnificent human beings whom I still remember and admire very much. I think that that experience strengthened in me some democratic ideas and taught me, the hard way, some experiences that I want to share with you tonight.

The first thing I learned is that all democracies share some basic principles and rules that cannot be left aside, neglected or taken for granted. When I was young there was a lot of poverty and injustice in my country and I first entered politics to fight against it. At that time, we liked to draw a distinction between "formal" democracy and "real" democracy. Formal democracy referred to electoral democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, political parties, things that we took for granted. Real democracy was going to be the one that was going to help the people satisfy their basic necessities.

The terrible experience of 1973 and the years that followed showed us that democracy is made of elections, of freedom of speech, of political parties, of a free press, of all those things we lost and took so long to recover. There is no such thing as a formal democracy. There is only one democracy, and the first step in this process is free, fair and competitive elections in a climate of complete freedom and respect for human rights.

That is why we are so proud of the progress that we have made in recent years in the Organization of American States (OAS). In the last two years—to look at the short period of time that I've been here—the majority of the members of the Organization of American States held elections. There have been fifteen presidential elections, several parliamentary ones, four referendums, two elections of constitutional assemblies, a large number of municipal and state elections, and the OAS has observed the majority of these. They haven't been perfect elections, but they have been above the minimum standards. Some have been very close, showing worrisome divisions in society, but the results have been accepted and the winners have taken office. This is oceans apart of what we had in the region only twenty years ago and we are proud of it.

But, there is also a second lesson that we must learn, which I referred to many times during my campaign to become Secretary General of the OAS: to be called democratic, governments must not only be elected democratically, they must also govern democratically. This is the quintessential nature

of democracy: it is indivisible. You cannot accept parts of it and forget other parts.

When we encountered democracy in Chile we discovered that we were going to have something called a “protected democracy” in which you could only do some things. Some people could vote, others could not vote; some parties could exist, but others could not exist.

I must say therefore that the second reason is that there is no true democracy in a country in which elections are held, but no opposition parties are allowed. There is no true democracy if opposition parties are allowed, but the electorate has no way of knowing what these parties have to say. And there is no true democracy when governments attempt to address the needs of their peoples, but at the same time silence the opposition and flaunt the rule of law. There is no “protected”, “supervised,” “intervened,” “popular” “authoritarian,” “indigenous,” or “segregated” democracy. There is only true representative democracy.

A third lesson is that democracy must be able to deliver. Politics has to do with values and ideals, of course. But it also has to do with results, with tangible results that are beneficial for the people. In the framework of democracy, there can be good governments and bad governments. It is licit for people to wonder whether democracy exists in their countries if a significant percentage of the population is condemned to live in poverty, ignorance, and illness under governments that are not genuinely concerned with addressing their needs. Or when there is rampant corruption that allows a few to become wealthier at the cost of the misery of others. Democracy and democratic governments have to do with results. And that is why there have been several recent events of instability in our region. These were not caused by ideology, but rather by the incapacity or inability of governments to deal with their peoples’ basic needs in a continent that is not poor, but unfair.

Fourth, the rule of law and the separation of powers are essential features of democracy. That is why I usually prefer to speak about democratic republics, in which representatives and authorities are chosen, but must govern according to previously established rules, which include limits to their powers and accountability of all their public actions. If there are no checks and balances in democratic rule, if there are not robust public institutions and if we have only governments of persons and not governments of laws, then the possibility of individual strongmen taking over increases, especially when there is the good excuse that these leaders are indispensable to confront the problems of poverty, crime, inequality or corruption that some of our countries face. But strong rule is not the answer, precisely because strong rulers are not accountable and therefore their governments are more prone to indiscriminate favoritism, inequality and corruption.

Finally, I believe that in democracy, agreements, consensus and compromise play a large role. And this is something that comes directly from my own life experience. When we won the referendum in 1988 we had a choice. We had won with approximately 57 percent of the vote, but we decided to take into consideration that we needed the remaining 43 percent to build a stable democracy in our country. We decided not to impose only the rule of the majority, but to work together to build really solid democratic institutions. I think that that decision has proven to be a real success. Because, I believe strongly in something that my friend Hector Aguilar Camín said: politicians, especially in a democratic system of government, are there to solve people’s problems and not to create them.

Many times when I am asked about my country and its successes, I say that the only true miracle of Chile in the last two decades has been our politics. Our capacity, first to create a stable majority to govern a country in a democratic, predictable and progressive direction; and second, when there is need for larger decisions of constitutional or major policy nature, to reach agreements with an opposition that, in general, has been willing to concur with these agreements. Many historic achievements for Chile, from constitutional reform, to state modernization, tax reform, free trade agreements, the elimination of the death penalty, judicial reform, health reform, education reform etc., have been reached in Chile through large majority agreements that have implied compromise. Of

course, this is not a panacea, and there are many things that I would have preferred to see move faster or in another way. But the country has moved forward. And when I look back on this difficult road of almost twenty years, the coalition of which I have been a member for two decades can answer positively the only valid question that democratic politicians can properly pose to themselves when looking back at their achievements: "Yes, our country is much better today than in December 1989, yes, our economy is three times larger than it was then, yes there are three times less poor people than there were then, yes we have more freedom and more hope and our people can look to the future with optimism."

These are the only true rewards for democracy. This is also what I want to achieve as Secretary General of the Organization of American States, in a continent where there is still much poverty, much crime, and much inequality. But, I also see democratic progress and so much room for improvement; because our economies are growing, the quality of our governments is better and there is again hope for more stability, growth and justice. Of course, the dangers are there, the challenges are still many, but no one said that the democratic way is safe and that anything can be taken for granted.

These are the main lessons that I have learned in the practice of democratic politics throughout my life and I try to abide by them as I lead this organization.

I must admit that in a life entirely devoted to politics and to fighting for democracy, I have had moments of great satisfaction in my country and abroad. This important tribute from IFES is one such moment. It will rest with me forever and give me strength to continue working with you for a better future in the Americas and for a world of peace, freedom and democracy.