

**Remarks by Organization of American States Secretary General Luis Almagro accepting the 2017
Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award:**

Thank you, Thank you Charlie for the generous introduction and thank you to Bill, to the IFES Board of Directors, and Denise, the co-chair of our dinner this evening.

I would also like to thank the Manatt family, who are here representing Charles T. Manatt, the award's namesake this evening. It is an honor to be here with you this evening, amongst many good friends, an illustrious crowd and my fellow honorees.

First of all, I would like to offer warm Congratulations to you and the entire IFES family on your 30th Anniversary. Universal suffrage is a cornerstone of democracy. Your commitment to promoting democracy, good governance and free and fair election practices is an important example of the role the international community can play in strengthening these values around the world.

IFES and the OAS have a longstanding tradition of cooperation in these efforts with national electoral authorities and election observation, a relationship we finally got around to formalizing through a cooperation agreement in 2014.

In this space, we often talk about shared principles and values. Today, and at this moment, I pleased to underline the sincerity in my voice when I speak of our shared values. The unwavering commitment of your organization to democracy, good governance, and human are truly values that we have in common.

I would also like to congratulate my fellow honorees this evening. Thank you to each of you for your inspired remarks.

The very premise that each year these awards are presented to representatives of different political stripes, different countries and different elements of the democratic process is an important reminder of the fact that democracy is strengthened by its many voices-- a reminder that we must care as much about our opponents right to express their views, as much as our own.

And although we don't always agree on how to get there, everyone who chooses the path of public service does it for the greater good.

Friends, Members of the Diplomatic Community, Current and former Members of Congress, ladies and gentlemen, my fellow honorees-- it humbles me to be here with you this evening receiving your recognition.

It is particularly humbling that it is for my efforts advocating on behalf of the citizens of Venezuela, a country whose tragedy we, in the international community, have watched slowly unfold.

Over the past few years we have witnessed the democratic institutions in Venezuela, its rule of law and effective governance all be dismantled, piece-by-piece. Instead, they have been replaced by dictatorial rule, corruption, and violence.

Democracy in Latin America has been hard earned, and the price paid by many countries has been high. The achievement of the consolidation of a hemisphere of democracies over the last two decades is an accomplishment that this region should be very proud of.

It was a demonstration of the clear success of the hemisphere's commitment to the principles that are at the very heart of the Organization of American States. The commitment to democratic institutions, individual liberty and social justice based on the essential rights of man are enshrined in the preamble of our founding charter.

It is this institutions commitment to the principles of democracy

Your recognition today is particularly humbling because I am being recognized for meeting my responsibilities as Secretary General of this Organization.

This is my job description. This is why this institution has created numerous treaties to promote and protect the rights and principles.

As Secretary General, it is my responsibility to be the staunchest defender of these rights and it is my responsibility to give my voice to those who have had theirs taken away.

The path that the regime in Venezuela has chosen has been methodical and deliberate.

In a democracy, a government's legitimacy comes from directly from the ultimate sovereign, the people. After years of corrupt practices resulted in the loss of their popular support, instead of changing course, the regime instead sought to dismantle their democratic institutions and choose increasingly authoritarian practices to hold onto their power and protect their privileges.

The courts have been politicized to the point where they serve as puppets of the corrupt regime. There is no more rule of law.

The essential elements and fundamental components of democracy have been systematically and repeatedly violated. There is no separation or independence of powers, the practice of periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage, no longer exists.

Instead they have been replaced by an illegitimate so-called "National Constituent Assembly". From the outset, the process that created this institution was plagued by irregularities and violence.

The Venezuelan business that has been managing its voting platform since 2004 has publicly stated that the outcomes were manipulated.

In March, the Venezuelan Supreme Court tried to remove the constitutionally mandated authorities of the legitimate, democratically elected National Assembly. In response, Venezuelans took to the streets on mass to protest the loss of democracy.

The government responded to their voices with tear gas and bullets and more that 100 Venezuelans' were killed in the weeks that followed.

The regime constructed the false 'constituent assembly', depriving the National Assembly of its constitutionally mandated authorities.

Democracy's death spiral in Venezuela began with the illegal annulment of the recall referendum, a move that is equivalent to annulling a constitutionally mandated election.

Elections are at the heart of the democratic process. Their free, fair and transparent execution is a key symbol of the health of a democracy.

Everyone, especially dictators, love elections when they win. The real test of a democracy is how leaders respond when they lose. The peaceful transition of governments is a hallmark of the democratic process.

We have since witnessed the perversion of every governing institution, from the bureaucracy responsible for the basic health and wellbeing of their citizens, to those that are intended to guarantee basic security, to those that exist to protect the human rights.

Now what remains of the institutions are focused on preserving the control of the regime and rewarding those in power.

Any individual who dares to stand up against the government suffers. The regime has activated Plan Zamora, a state policy which turned the country in to a military operations theater systematically targeting and repressing any individuals who are critical or oppose the Government of Venezuela as internal enemies.

In recent months, thousands have been arbitrarily detained, released, tortured and even killed. Hundreds have been illegally brought before ad-hoc military tribunals on trumped-up charges, including treason for expressing opposing views.

The numbers of political prisoners reached the highest levels seen in that country since the military dictatorship of the 1950s.

The crimes cannot go on with impunity. The Regime in Venezuela has implemented a state policy of human violations and a systematic attack against the civilian population. It is clear for the world to see.

This is why I appointed a former prosecutor from the International Criminal Court and a panel of independent legal experts to investigate and assess whether crimes against humanity have been committed.

The international community has a duty to ensure that those responsible for these crimes are held accountable. The OAS will work to support efforts to investigate these crimes and explore the possibility that these crimes be tried by the ICC.

The most important question before is how do we help restore democracy in Venezuela? How do we restore the political life of a country?

The history of our region tells us there are only a few ways dictatorships end; sanctions, death, military intervention, revolution or a coup d'état. None of these solutions are good. All of these would result in greater suffering for the people of Venezuela. This is not what we want.

We do not want to isolate the Venezuelan people, but support them, and condemn the dictatorial regime.

The ideal situation for everyone involved is a negotiated solution, but such a solution is not possible if clear preconditions are not met.

It has been made clear, time and again what the requirements are:

The Constituent Assembly must be annulled. There must be an immediate end to all repression in the country including the release of ALL of the political prisoners.

A full investigation of the corruption and criminal acts by members of the Regime and their subordinated to ensure there is accountability for the crimes committed against the people of Venezuela.

The restoration of the constitutional order with full respect for the separation of powers, include that the establishment of a Supreme with legitimately appointed judges.

This process must start with full, free and fair, universal elections with qualified interaction observation.

Until these conditions are not met, we cannot pretend that this Regime has interest in restoring democracy to this country.

Negotiations cannot be based on handing out little pieces of power; they must be grounded on the full return of democracy to the country.

This evening, I am not here to accept this award because my efforts for the cause of Venezuela warrant recognition, I am here so that I can highlight the tragedy that has taken place in Venezuela. I am here to call on the international community to do more.

So far, everything we have done has been too short a step taken a little too late.

The international community must continue to apply more severe sanctions against the regime and its authorities. We must target the criminals that have and are destroying the vibrant society of the Venezuelan people.

The countries of the hemisphere have declared that they will not accept the results of the Constituent Assembly of July 30, 2017, and therefore must recognize that all actions stemming from that body lack legitimacy.

Finally, we must admit that the deterioration of democracy represents a threat to peace and security in the hemisphere.

Why does this matter? Yes, the humanitarian crisis creates the threat of a migratory crisis beyond the three million Venezuelan's that had fled in the past few years, that contributes to the destabilization of the region.

Yes, the elimination the rule of law, destabilization and purveyance of corruption and organized crime is spreading throughout the region in the form of drugs, and arms and other forms organized crime.

But these are obvious and direct threats; they are not the only threats.

Corruption and bad practices are contagious. They are a disease that is easily spread, and establish a very dangerous precedent.

If the elimination of democracy is allowed to take place unchecked, an authoritarian Venezuela sets a very disturbing example for the future of democracy in the region.

As a hemisphere rooted in the proud tradition of democracy and human rights, we must uphold our commitment to principles and values.

We must continue to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

And, we must maintain this commitment to all the people of the Americas.