

The Fifth Ibero-American Summit

The Fifth Ibero-American Summit, bringing together presidents and heads of state from 21 Ibero-American nations, had as its central theme the participants' commitment to encouraging education, as a means for confronting the serious economic and social imbalances that exist in most Latin American countries. Held October 16-17 in the city of Bariloche, Argentina, the summit was attended by old and new protagonists. As has become customary, Fidel Castro was one of the most talked-about figures, although the expectation of an explicit pronouncement against the economic blockade suffered by Cuba was not fulfilled. However, in one of the three resolutions signed, the assembled leaders expressed their rejection of the imposition of "unilateral restrictive measures which affect the well-being of the Ibero-American peoples while impeding free exchange and universally recognized open commercial practices, as well as violating the guiding principles of regional coexistence and the sovereignty of states."

Mexican and Colombian leaders drew attention with speeches pointing out that economic vulnerability, corruption and drug trafficking, among other problems, jeopardize the governability of a region which remains far from achieving its objective of economic modernization combined with social development. Colombian president Ernesto Samper kicked off the political debate by questioning "neo-liberal" development policies and underlining the need to reevaluate them, since "The social costs of indiscriminately opening up [economies] could destroy the efforts for democratization undertaken in the '80s." He also noted that Latin American countries' foreign debt is being paid at the cost of creating a social debt, and stressed that the destabilizing effects of corruption and drug trafficking can be fought only through joint action.

Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, participating in a summit for the first time, was

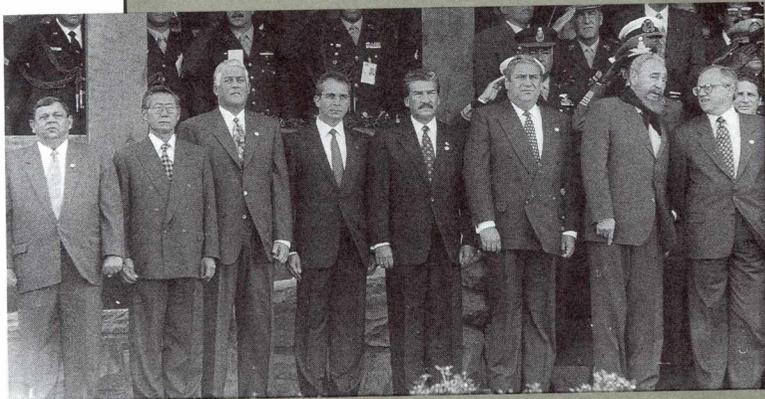


Photo: Presidencia de la República

another who went beyond the initial bounds of the meeting. His speech proposed reinforcing the ideals of economic development, democracy and justice and giving new value to the democratic and ethical exercise of politics. He urged carrying out education today for a democratic culture and practicing open politics with the objective of regaining the "social credibility [which has been] lost."

The meeting was attended by heads of state from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala,

Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain and Uruguay. The presidents of Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Portugal and Venezuela sent representatives.

The summit's final statement was divided into three documents. The main one deals with education, setting forth the commitment to promote the more effective use of resources devoted to education, as well as increasing public and private assets in this field, in light of the fact that education spending is a social investment. The second document refers to issues of a technical nature, establishing a follow-up program for projects derived from these gatherings. The third covers topics of special interest and condemns nuclear testing, calls for a struggle against terrorism and drug trafficking and proposes the carrying out of coordinated actions to reduce unemployment. This last point will be the central topic of the Sixth Summit, to be held in Chile in 1996.

Despite the great publicity surrounding these gatherings, analysts agree that they still have not succeeded in putting forward concrete actions for addressing the most urgent needs of the participant nations.^V