4-1-1994

Clinton Administration Convokes Hemispheric Presidential Summit For December 1994

Patricia Hynds

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Clinton Administration Convokes Hemispheric Presidential Summit For December 1994

by Patricia Hynds

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, April 1, 1994

On March 11, President Bill Clinton announced that his administration will host a summit of the hemisphere's "democratically-elected" heads of state in December of this year. Leaders attending the summit the first such hemispheric presidential meeting in nearly three decades will analyze methods to cooperatively strengthen democratic processes throughout the region, as well as guidelines to begin building a vast free trade zone that will eventually span both the North and South American continents. "Today's announcement is good for our nation and good for our hemisphere," said President Clinton in a special ceremony in Washington to convoke the summit, the first such conference since a 1967 meeting of hemispheric leaders in Uruguay. "The Summit of the Americas will be an historic event, will be the first meeting of hemispheric leaders in over a generation, and it will be the first-ever hemispheric meeting of democratically-elected leaders." According to Clinton, the summit reflects a new era in US-Latin American relations. On the one hand, Latin America is now the fastest growing market in the world for US exports, which immensely increases US interest in both reinforcing political stability throughout the continent, and in further opening regional markets to foreign trade. On the other hand, from Washington's vantage point, the advent of "democratically-elected" governments in nearly all Latin American and Caribbean countries has for the first time forged a commitment to shared goals and values across the continent, offering a unique opportunity for hemisphere-wide political and economic cooperation. "Let me say a word about why this summit matters so much to us here at home in the United States," said Clinton. "Our nation has a major stake in the prosperity and freedom of the entire hemisphere. Our exports to Latin America and the Caribbean have more than doubled in just seven years, rising to nearly US$80 billion in 1993. That has generated hundreds of thousands of new jobs for American workers. If we can continue to bring down hemispheric trade barriers, we can create a million new jobs by the turn of the century. At the same time, the rising tide of democracy in this hemisphere helps make us more secure. Democracies tend not to fight one another; they make better partners in trade and diplomacy. As we work with our neighbors to build more free, prosperous, and secure relations throughout this hemisphere, this summit will advance our common efforts and our shared interests." Although the specific summit agenda must be worked out with participating governments throughout this year, the US is proposing two broad themes for discussion. First, "democracy and good governance," which will focus on methods to collectively strengthen democratic processes, reinforce honest and effective forms of government, and institutionalize constitutional rule. "Human rights was the big task in the 1970's, elections was the task of the 1980's, and in the 1990's the big task is reinventing government, fighting corruption, and making democracy work," explained one senior Clinton administration official. "We believe that it's possible for there to be no more pendulum swings back away from democracy to authoritarianism in the hemisphere. We feel that, unlike in the past, there is a very broad coalition of interests, both in the US and in Latin America, that makes possible this optimism about the consolidation and deepening of democracy." Not surprisingly, since the US is only inviting what it considers "democratically-elected" leaders to the summit, Cuban President Fidel Castro will be
excluded from the conference. The military government in Haiti will also be barred from attending. Instead, Haiti’s exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide will be invited. The second theme is "trade expansion, investment, and sustainable development," which will focus on efforts to push economic integration and investment as a basis for regional growth, while promoting a development strategy that protects the environment and alleviates poverty. "In the economic area, we want to foster an open regionalism, a hemisphere increasingly integrated by trade and investment flows, but open to the global economy and increasingly competitive in that global economy," said the same senior official. Although the US is the organizer and host of the conference, which will be held in Miami at an estimated cost of US$12 million, US officials stress that the goal is to forge a "multilateral" approach to problems, with the summit agenda and all conference conclusions reflecting a process of consensus building throughout the Americas. US officials will repeatedly tour Latin American nations in the coming months to consult with participating governments. Business, labor, and non-government organizations from across the hemisphere will also be asked to propose initiatives for the summit. In fact, this process of pre-summit consultations has already begun. March 19-22, Vice-President Al Gore toured three Latin American countries Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia to discuss proposed agenda items and related issues with government and business representatives. In early April, Gore will begin a second tour, which will likely include Venezuela, the Central American countries, and possibly other nations as well. In the second half of the year, Secretary of State Warren Christopher also plans an extended trip to the region. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 03/07/94, 03/08/94, 03/10/94; Tass, Washington Post, press conference transcript by White House Office of the Press Secretary, White House Background Briefing, 03/11/94; Reuter and Reuter Transcript Report, 03/10/94, 03/11/94; Inter Press Service, 03/07/94, 03/11/94, 03/14/94; Notimex, 03/08/94, 03/09/94, 03/14/94, 03/16/94, 03/18-21/94; Associated Press, 03/10/94, 03/11/94, 03/16/94, 03/20/94, 03/21/94; New York Times, 03/11/94, 03/22/94)

-- End --