

10-30-2009

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### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Second Africa-Latin America Summit Encourages South-South Ties." (2009). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13824>

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## Second Africa-Latin America Summit Encourages South-South Ties

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Region*

*Published: 2009-10-30*

In late September, diplomats and heads of state from 38 South American and African countries met on Isla Margarita, in Nueva Esparta state, Venezuela, at the II Africa-South America (ASA) Summit. The main purpose was to create a political and trade bloc capable of transforming the two regions into a first-rate world player.

Host President Hugo Chavez was deeply committed to capitalizing on the gathering and sharing successes with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The two knew, however, that the leader responsible for the summit was Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who had called for the first meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2006, and whose country has most energetically developed trade and political relations between the continents.

Until the next meeting in Libya in 2011, the heads of state will need to work hard to figure out how to put into practice all or some of the 96 points spread over the 28-page Nueva Esparta Declaration. The points include strengthening multilateral-cooperation mechanisms, agreeing on actions against hunger, promoting multilateralism, initiating reciprocal-assistance programs in areas such as agriculture, biotechnology, economy, trade, and tourism, and, most of all, deepening global human rights policies and implementing the ambitious goal of reforming the UN Charter to democratize the agency and correct the existing imbalance in the Security Council, where the Third World has no permanent representative.

The final text is explicit on that point, stating "full support for reforming the Security Council" to make it a "more democratic, transparent, representative, effective, and legitimate body that responds to the new political realities," referring to underdeveloped countries' lack of participation.

The Nueva Esparta Declaration also lists, among its central issues, the need to establish "a new international financial architecture" in which the dollar ceases to be the currency of international transactions, and the desire to establish joint energy projects, initiate cooperative actions against the drug trafficking that assails both regions, and respect the principle of noninterference in the sovereign decisions of peoples.

Perhaps the most controversial point, because it advocates ignoring patent laws, was the decision to promote, through national and international initiatives, production of generic medicines and drugs to respond to the dramatic spread of the HIV virus in Africa.

In addition to Lula, Chavez, and Gaddafi, other personalities were notable for their presence or their absence at the summit. Among the former were African Presidents Joseph Kabila of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and Jacob Zuma of South Africa, who were the most besieged by the press and who took part in dozens of bilateral meetings.

The latter included Presidents Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and Alan Garcia of Peru, the only South American presidents who did not attend, and who have, because of their increasingly close ties to the US, been distancing themselves from the large and small problems that plague South America.

Analysts from the major international media agree that the summit was little more than a significant collection of expressions of good intentions that will be difficult to achieve immediately. Nevertheless, they said, the South American region registered advances with the formal creation of Banco del Sur (see NotiSur, 2009-04-17), the launching of multinational Radio del Sur, and the finalization of an important business package, although it will benefit Brazil and Venezuela almost exclusively.

Other countries, like Argentina, have been eyeing Africa but have been unable to penetrate their markets, and everything indicates that little was achieved at the numerous bilateral meetings between President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and her counterparts from Togo, Mali, and the Central African Republic, despite the hopes raised in late 2008 when Fernandez traveled to Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.

### *Summit includes plenty of rhetoric*

The summit was not short on rhetoric. Lula said, "The 21st century finds us ever more united, and there is no global challenge that cannot be met together and no challenge that can be met without the participation of South America and Africa." Everyone agreed, but some press reports questioned whether everyone shared Lula's optimism when he said that the declaration was "an extraordinary political victory in the integration process of South American and Africa that can change the political and economic geography of the world forever."

Chavez said, "This summit has been vital, since in the 21st century world structure, which will be multipolar, Africa and South America will be one great pole to act as a counterweight to the US. Let us create real power, and our union will contribute to what our liberators called world balance. There will be no more imperialism because this summit marks the emergence of an entity capable of defeating poverty, hunger, and economic recession, that dramatic triad through which the destructive actions of imperialism are filtered."

Gaddafi, the third major leader at the Margarita meeting, was undoubtedly given the task of presenting the most audacious and controversial of the proposals that would have to be prioritized for that "great pole" described by Chavez: creating a military alliance similar to the North American Treaty Organization (NATO), but to protect the South.

"We must create an alliance to be able to guarantee a historic and strategic action that can reduce the vacuum that we have so that the South is connected like NATO is in the North," said the Libyan leader. Gaddafi explained that his proposal was "not a bellicose action. We have our rights, we must provide ourselves with those organizations, and I believe that our objective must be to have this

strategic alliance functioning by 2011," when III ASA is held in Libya. "We must begin to work on implementing this project and have it ready within two years."

To begin, Gaddafi said he favored quickly calling a "strategic presidential meeting charged with defining our region's priorities to meet the challenges of the coming years."

### *South America chalks up successes*

Amid the euphoria, the presidents of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela formalized the Banco del Sur, an idea proposed by Chavez in 2006, which had signed the first letter of intent in 2007. Chile's President Michelle Bachelet said that she hoped that her country would soon become a full member. The multilateral entity's objective is to compete regionally with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other lending institutions controlled by the industrialized countries.

The seven heads of state who signed the charter agreement have stated on various occasions that the bank's purpose is to finance South American economic development through a model different from that of existing agencies. At the ceremony at which, unexpectedly, Banco del Sur was announced, Chavez called on the African countries to imitate the South American model to then be able to create a biregional bank for all of South American and Africa. "Look at the paradox," he said. "We send our reserves north and they give us credit with our own reserves."

Gaddafi agreed and recalled how the global debt crisis unfolded in the 1970s as international institutions promoted debt using petrodollars deposited in banks in the North by Venezuela, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other oil-producing countries.

The final big news of the summit also had a South American flavor and also brought an invitation for Africans to participate. It came from Venezuela, when Chavez announced the initiation of broadcasts from Radio del Sur, "a network that, like Telesur [the multinational South American TV network operating since 2006], has been created to break the information monopoly of the major powers." He said that the network would be "an integration instrument to strengthen the culture and history of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa and to make known the revolutionary political struggles of the peoples of the South."

Radio del Sur, which began broadcasting Oct. 1, is a network of 48 Latin American and eight Portuguese-speaking African stations. Initially, 35% of programming will be Latin American music produced in Caracas and 65% will be programs produced by affiliated stations. "Soon, we, and I think all of Africa present here, will also be there speaking in other languages but with the same language," said the 80-year-old Mugabe, who became for all the participants a symbol of the II ASA Summit.

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