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Office of the Press Secretary
June 6, 2005

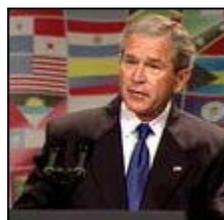
President Discusses Trade, CAFTA at Organization of American States

Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

[In Focus: Trade](#)
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11:50 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. Welcome to the United States. Thanks for having me. Madam Secretary, thank you for your service; thank you for your friendship; thank you for your short introduction. (Laughter.)



VIDEO **Multimedia**

President's Remarks

[view](#)

Ambassador Maisto, members of the United States Congress -- four members, by the way, of the Florida delegation have joined us today, and I'm grateful that they have come. Secretary General Insulza, thank you; congratulations. Thank you for coming by the Oval Office the other day to give me a briefing. Assistant Secretary General, thank you, sir; it's good to see you again. Distinguished visitors and guests. I'm honored to be here at this meeting of the Organization of American States.

The ties that bind the Americas are particularly vivid here in Florida. I mean, if you spend any time in this state, you'll find people from all over our hemisphere who live here. This state has benefited because immigrants from throughout the hemisphere have made their homes here. I know firsthand -- I'm pretty familiar with the state's Governor. (Laughter.) He keeps me abreast of what's taking place in this state.



You know, our ties are represented in different ways. Perhaps you know this, but my brother was lucky enough to marry a fantastic woman from Mexico; the First Lady of Florida is Mexican-born. A United States Senator from Florida, Mel Martinez, was born in Cuba. No, the ties in our hemisphere between America and our hemisphere are particularly strong in Florida. It's a perfect place to have the meeting. Thank you for choosing Florida.

As I look out at the distinguished foreign ministers, I find we have much in common. We're the children of the New World, founded in empire and fulfilled in independence. Our people are united by history and geography. And the United States shares a commitment with you to build an Americas that lives in liberty, trades in freedom, and grows in prosperity.

We come together at a great moment in history, when freedom is on the march around our world. In the last year-and-a-half -- think about this -- we've witnessed a Rose Revolution in Georgia, an Orange Revolution in Ukraine, a Purple Revolution in Iraq, a Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, a Cedar Revolution in Lebanon -- and these are just the beginnings. Across Central Asia, hope is stirring at the prospect of change -- and change will come. Across the broader Middle East, we are seeing the rise of a new generation whose hearts burn for freedom -- and they will have it.

This love of liberty has long roots in our own hemisphere. Not long after the United States won its independence from Britain, patriots throughout the Americas were inspired to take their own stand. One of them was an Argentine general named Jose de San Martin. During the struggle for independence from Spain, the general declared, "In the last corner of the earth that I might find myself, I will be ready to sacrifice my existence for liberty."

San Martin's dream of liberty has found a home in the Organization of American States. This organization's founding documents calls the Americas to its "historic mission to offer to man a land of liberty, and a favorable environment for the realization of his just aspirations." That mission was given its clear direction in the Inter-American Democratic



Charter declaring that "the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote it and defend it." And today what was once a distant dream is now within our reach: an Americas wholly free and democratic and at peace with ourselves and our neighbors.

In the new Americas of the 21st century, democracy is now the rule, rather than the exception. Think of the dramatic changes we have seen in our lifetime. In 1974, the last time the OAS General Assembly met in the United States, fewer than half its members had democratically elected governments. Today, all 34 countries participating in this General Assembly have democratic, constitutional governments. Only one country in this hemisphere sits outside this society of democratic nations -- and one day the tide of freedom will reach Cuba's shores, as well. (Applause.) The great Cuban patriot Jose Marti said it best: La libertad no es negociable.

The dramatic gains for democracy we have witnessed in our hemisphere must not be taken for granted. Democratic change and free elections are exhilarating events. Yet we know from experience they can be followed by moments of uncertainty. When people risk everything to vote, it can raise expectations that their lives will improve immediately -- but history teaches us that the path to a free and prosperous society is long and not always smooth. Each nation must follow its own course, according to its own history. Yet the old and new democracies of the Americas share a common interest in showing every citizen of our hemisphere that freedom brings not just peace -- it brings a better life for themselves and their families.

In the new Americas of the 21st century, bringing a better life to our people requires choosing between two competing visions. One offers a vision of hope -- it is founded on representative government, integration into the world markets, and a faith in the transformative power of freedom in individual lives. The other seeks to roll back the democratic progress of the past two decades by playing to fear, pitting neighbor against neighbor, and blaming others for their own failures to provide for their people. The choices we make will determine which vision will define the Americas our children inherit -- we must make tough decisions today to ensure a better tomorrow.

To give our children a better tomorrow, our citizens must see that democracy delivers more than promises. They need to see in their daily lives that their hard work and enterprises are rewarded. They need to see that in a democratic society, people can walk in the streets in safety, corruption is punished, and all citizens are equal before the law. And when the people of the Americas see that opportunity and social mobility are real, they will know that in a free and democratic society, the only limit to how far they can go is the size of their dreams.

The United States believes it has an obligation to help build this better tomorrow for all the citizens. Working with our partners in the region, my government has helped the leaders of this hemisphere meet our goal of delivering treatment to 600,000 HIV sufferers across the region. In 2002, the United States launched the Millennium Challenge Account to help poor nations and to revolutionize the concept of development aid. My administration's approach is based on the common sense idea that development aid works best in countries that are proving their commitment to govern justly, to invest in their citizens, and to open up their economies. Under this program, aid will go to those who deliver results for their people.

Next week, Honduras will become the second country to sign a Millennium Challenge compact -- for a \$215 million program that will help Honduran farmers grow better crops, as well as money to build highways that will open markets for them around the region and the world.

To advance economic development in the Americas, the U.S. government already makes about \$5 billion in loans and grants to the region throughout [sic] the Ex-Im Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the Trade and Development Agency. In preparation for the Summit of the Americas later this year in Argentina, my administration will be looking for new ways to prime the real engines of hope in the Americas: its small businesses and private enterprises and entrepreneurs. When people throughout the Americas see their lives improve and opportunity more abundant, their faith in democracy will grow and our hemisphere will be more secure.

In the new Americas of the 21st century, one of the surest ways to make opportunity real for all our citizens is by opening our doors to trade. My government is pursuing this goal at all levels: at the global level through the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, at the regional level through Free Trade Area of the Americas, and at the bilateral level with Free Trade Agreements with individual countries like Chile and Mexico and Canada. And the United States Congress is now considering the Central American and Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement, which offers an historic opportunity to bring prosperity to the citizens of our hemisphere who have not known it.

For the young democracies of Central America, CAFTA would bring new investment, and that means good jobs and higher labor standards for their workers. In these nations, wealthier citizens already enjoy access to goods and services produced abroad. By reducing tariffs on U.S. goods, all consumers in these countries will enjoy better goods at lower prices. These lower prices will also give Central American small businesses and farmers

and entrepreneurs less costly access to U.S. machinery and equipment which will make them more competitive and help their economies grow. By bringing economic growth to Central America, CAFTA will contribute to the rise of a vibrant middle class. And that makes us reach -- a step closer to our goal, a goal of the Americas where the opportunities in San Jose, Costa Rica are as real as they are in San Jose, California.

For U.S. farmers and businesses and workers, CAFTA would expand opportunity by creating a more level playing field for our goods and services. Under existing rules, most of Central America's exports already enter the United States duty free -- but U.S. exports still face hefty tariffs. By passing CAFTA, the United States would open up a market of 44 million consumers for our farmers and small business people. CAFTA will replace a system that is often arbitrary with one that is fair and transparent and based on common rules.

For the Western Hemisphere, CAFTA would continue to advance the stability and security that come from freedom. An Americas linked by trade is less likely to be divided by resentment and false ideologies. An Americas where all our people live in prosperity will be more peaceful. And an Americas whose countries have reduced the barriers to trade among ourselves will be a more competitive region in a global economy.

CAFTA is more than just a trade agreement. It is a signal of the U.S. commitment to democracy and prosperity for our neighbors -- and I urge the United States Congress to pass it. (Applause.)

In the last half-century, the nations of the Americas have overcome enormous challenges: colonialism and communism and military dictatorship. At the start of this new century, these divisions have fallen away, and now we have it within our means to eliminate the scourge of poverty from our hemisphere. In this room we still represent many different countries with different traditions and different mother tongues -- but today we can say with pride that we all speak the common language of liberty. And by making the blessings of freedom real in our hemisphere, we will set a shining example for all the world. Thank you for letting me come by. Que Dios los bendiga, may God bless you all. (Applause.)

END 12:03 P.M. EDT

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