

Joint declaration

During the official visit of President Hugo Chávez Frías to Cuba on the tenth anniversary of his first meeting with the Cuban people, a far-reaching exchange of ideas between the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the President of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba and their respective delegations took place. The two heads of state agreed to sign a document containing the following points:

We wish to draw attention to the fact that the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is the most blatant expression yet of a hunger to dominate the region and, were it to come into effect, it would mark an intensification of neo liberalism and create unprecedented levels of dependence and subordination.

We have made an historical analysis of the integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean and we find that, far from responding to aspirations of independent development and regional economic complementarity, it has acted as a mechanism to increase dependence and foreign domination.

We also find that the profits obtained over the last five decades by the big transnational companies, the weakening of the import substitution model, the foreign debt crisis and, more recently, the spread of neo-liberal policies coupled with a greater transnationalisation of Latin American and Caribbean economies and with the proliferation of negotiations to reach free trade agreements like the FTAA have set the foundations which give rise to the scenario of subordination and backwardness plaguing our region today.

THEREFORE:

We resolutely reject the FTAA's content and proposals and we share the conviction that the so-called integration on neo-liberal bases the FTAA represents would consolidate the scenario described earlier and would only lead to a greater disunity between Latin American countries, to more poverty and despair for the largest sectors of people in our countries, to the denationalization of the region's economies and to total subordination to foreign dictates.

We wish to make clear that, if indeed integration is, for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, an absolute necessity if they hope to develop in the midst of the accelerating formation of large regional blocs which occupy commanding positions in the world economy, only integration based on co-operation, solidarity and a common willingness to advance hand in hand towards higher levels of development can satisfy the needs and desires of Latin American and Caribbean countries while preserving their independence, sovereignty and identity.

We agree that the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (BAA), proposed by President Hugo Chávez Frías at the Association of Caribbean States' 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government held on Margarita Island in December 2001, outlines the guiding principles for true Latin American and Caribbean integration based on justice; we commit ourselves to work together to make this a reality.

We reaffirm that the cardinal principle by which the BAA must be guided is the most extensive possible solidarity between the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean; that it must rest on the thought of Bolívar, Martí, Sucre, O'Higgins, San Martín, Hidalgo, Petion, Morazán, Sandino and many other founding fathers; that there must be no selfish nationalism nor restrictive domestic policies which obstruct the aim of building a Great Homeland in Latin America, the Homeland dreamt of by the heroes of our emancipation struggles.

In this token, we are in complete agreement that the BAA cannot come into being based on mercantilist criteria or selfish concerns for company profits or for any national benefit to the detriment of other peoples. Only a broad Latin Americanist vision which acknowledges the impossibility of our countries developing and being truly free in isolation from one another, will lead towards the achievement of what Bolívar called "...seeing the greatest nation in the world come into being in America, greatest not so much because of its size and wealth but because of its liberty and glory", a nation which Martí conceived of as "Our America" to differentiate it from the other America, the expansionist one with the imperialist cravings.

We also affirm that the aim of the BAA is to transform Latin American societies by making them more fair, better educated, more participative and with more solidarity and that, in order for this to happen, the BAA is conceived of as an all-embracing process which will assure the elimination of social inequalities and promote quality of life and the peoples' effective participation in forging their own destiny.

We share the opinion that, in order to achieve the aims mentioned above, the BAA must be guided by the following cardinal principles and bases.

1. Trade and investment must not be ends in themselves but tools to achieve fair and sustainable development, since true Latin American and Caribbean integration cannot blindly follow the market nor can it simply be a strategy to expand foreign markets or boost trade. To achieve our aims, the state must efficiently play the role of regulator and coordinator of economic activity.
2. Special and differentiated treatment which takes the level of development of the different countries and the size of their economies into account and which guarantees that all nations taking part have access to the benefits deriving from the process of integration.
3. Economic complementarity and cooperation among countries involved as opposed to competition between countries and products in order that efficient and competitive product specialization is encouraged, one that is compatible with balanced economic development in each country, compatible with the strategies for the battle against poverty and with the preservation of the peoples' cultural identity.
4. Cooperation and solidarity which find their expression in special plans for the Least Developed Countries in the region and which shall include a Continental Plan to Fight Illiteracy using the modern techniques which have already been tested in Venezuela; a Latin American plan for free healthcare services for people who do not have access to these services and a regional scholarship plan in areas most useful for economic and social development.
5. The creation of a Social Emergency Fund as proposed by President Hugo Chávez at the South American Countries Summit held recently in Ayacucho.
6. Development of communications and transport between Latin American and Caribbean countries that foster integration and which include joint plans for roads, railways, air and sea transportation lines, telecommunication etc.
7. Actions to foster sustainable development through standards which protect the environment encourage the rational use of resources and prevent the proliferation of patterns of consumption which are wasteful and foreign to the reality facing our peoples.
8. An integration of energy industries between the countries of the region which will ensure a stable supply of energy products to the benefit of Latin American and Caribbean societies. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is advancing this idea by setting up Petroamerica.
9. Encouraging investment of Latin American capital in Latin America and the Caribbean with the aim to reduce the dependence of the region's nations on foreign investors. Steps to achieve this would include creating a Latin American Investment Fund, a Southern Development Bank and the Society for Reciprocal Latin American Guarantees.
10. The defence of Latin American and Caribbean culture and of the identity of the peoples in the region, showing particular respect for and promotion of autochthonous and indigenous cultures. The creation of The Southern Television Broadcasting Company (TELESUR) as an alternative

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instrument to broadcast coverage of what really happens in our countries.

11. Measures to ensure that intellectual property regulations do not become deterrence on much needed cooperation in all areas between our countries as they work to protect the heritage of Latin American and Caribbean countries from the voracity of transnational corporations.
12. Harmonising positions in the multilateral arena and for negotiations of all kinds with countries and blocs from other regions, including the struggle for democratization and transparency in international institutions, particularly in the United Nations and its agencies.

In the year in which we celebrate the 180th anniversary of the glorious victory of Ayacucho and of the call to Panama Anphyctionic Congress which tried to open the way to a process of authentic integration for our countries, frustrated from that time on, we state our conviction that now, finally, with the consolidation of the Bolivarian revolution and the undeniable failure of the neoliberal policies imposed on our peoples, the Latin American and Caribbean peoples are on the path to their second true independence. The emergence of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas proposed by President Hugo Chávez is the best expression of this.

Signed in Havana, on the fourteenth day of the month of December, two thousand and four.

Fidel Castro Ruz

**President of the Council Of State
of the Republic of Cuba**

Hugo Chávez Frías

**President of the Bolivarian
Republic of Venezuela**

Fuente:

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