

**VIII Conference of Defence Ministers of the Americas**  
Banff, Canada

Honourable Peter Gordon McKay, Chairman of the VIII Conference of Ministers of Defence

Honourable Ministers of Defence

Distinguished Heads of Delegations

Ladies and Gentlemen

First, let me offer our wonderful hosts: the Government and People of Canada our sincere gratitude for your graciousness and their kind hospitality that we have experienced since their arrival in Canada. We live in a wonderful Hemisphere full of promise, beauty and wonderful people. Therefore, our discussions related to the theme that we have selected: "Hemispheric, Regional and Sub-Regional Defence and Security Enhancement: Confidence Building through Co-operation and Collaboration" will help us achieve the future we all hope for in this hemisphere.

The end of the Cold War has removed the many conflicts that were sustained with the blinders of political ideology. Our leaders have had the time and space to expand our understanding of security and defence far beyond the narrow context of territorial or regime integrity and to focus on what this means for our people.

Our regional efforts now take into account *non-traditional threats*, and security and defence responsibilities no longer fit into neat organizational charts. All the various elements and stakeholders working in the international arena – military and civilian, government and private must learn to stretch outside their comfort zone to work together and achieve results. We must increasingly build *civil-military relations*, focusing on the preservation of democracy, public debate and civil society engagement with security and defence issues, strengthening civilian and police capabilities for just, competent and organized systems with built in accountability mechanisms to ensure the transparency of process.

We know that direct military force will continue to have a role. But over the long term, victory is not determined by "kinetic" military operations but by measures to promote good governance, public safety, economic wellbeing, food security, energy security, social welfare, and sustainable use of the environment; and any successful effort must address the injustices that often lie at the heart of discontent.

But this new understanding goes far beyond our own borders and we now fully appreciate the fact that we are indeed our brother's keeper and those events in the hemisphere and around the world matter to all of us. We no longer turn a blind eye to human rights abuses and we all fear the consequences of global warming, including

natural disasters. We all face a variety of brutal cross-border threats such as gang activity, drug trafficking, and terrorism and we have learned through experience that individual efforts are futile.

These complex and very international challenges require now, more than ever, coordination and collaboration. For the sake of the people we serve, we must not allow out-dated interpretations of nationalism to prevent fruitful collaboration against common threats. We must reach beyond the sound bites and empty rhetoric that has become so common in recent years and put into action mechanisms that facilitate the efficient exchange of information and international responses to common problems. Our enemies are ruthless, the stakes are high, and the solutions are complex but we must not fail.

It is precisely for that reason that I hope that we will leave this appropriately-themed conference with a renewed commitment to put into effect *real* measures that provide *real* hemispheric security. Just as Belize and Guatemala have moved beyond their centuries-old differendum and now exchange training opportunities and coordinate their border patrols as a matter of course, so must all our nations put in place Confidence Building Measures to eliminate mutual suspicion.

Within Belize, bringing civilian, law enforcement and military assets together to support local challenges have often yielded incredibly promising results. The vastly larger, more complex regional and hemispheric effort to get all these different elements to coordinate, cooperate and share best practices is a colossal undertaking, but well within reach – as long as there is the political will and wisdom to do it.

The economic impact of most natural disasters cannot be absorbed by any one state, hence the need for us to cooperate as a region, cooperation which can only be built by the steady accumulation of trust and credibility. The security of all countries of the Americas – whether large or small – rich or poor - is strongly and positively enhanced by strong mutual cooperation. Indeed, our traditional and non-traditional threats are increasingly regional and hemispheric in scope, requiring cooperation across borders. *Common problems require common, coordinated solutions.*

In conclusion, I am convinced, that throughout the region and the hemisphere, men and women seek freedom from corruption, from poverty, from fear and they continue to look to us as leaders. We, the Defence and Security Ministers of the Americas, must possess the political will and wisdom to promote security, stability and prosperity in our region and hemisphere. The examples we set, the foundations we lay, and the investments we make, in the light of mutual concern for sovereignty and goodwill, will enhance the security, stability and prosperity of the Americas.

I thank you all!