



SUPPLEMENT

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50th General Assembly of Organization of American States Canada's Dirty Role to Advance U.S. Imperialist Aims in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Margaret Villamizar -



Hamilton picket against the Lima Group meeting held in Ottawa on February 20, 2020.

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50th General Assembly of Organization of American States Canada's Dirty Role to Advance U.S. Imperialist Aims in Latin America and the Caribbean

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On October 20-21, the 50th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) was held virtually out of its Washington, DC headquarters. The theme of this year's assembly was

billed as "Facing the Challenges of COVID-19 in the Hemisphere: A Collaborative Approach to Address Vulnerabilities and Build Resilience in Times of Crisis, based on the Four Pillars of the OAS."

Participants in the meeting included the 33 members of the organization plus an illegitimately recognized delegation claiming to represent the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela even though Venezuela officially withdrew from the organization in 2017. The Bahamas was elected to chair the plenary sessions over the two days during which delegations from the 33 member states were given an opportunity to make general remarks as well as debate and vote on a number of resolutions and reports. Causes of an interventionist, interfering nature that Canada has taken a lead in pushing at the OAS in tandem with the U.S. in particular were sharply denounced, starting with the first item on the agenda -- approval of the draft agenda.

Nicaragua firmly and categorically rejected inclusion on the agenda of items dealing with "the situation in Nicaragua and with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela," in the form of resolutions its representative denounced as interventionist in nature and contrary to the Charters of the OAS and the United Nations, as well as international law. The same stand was taken by St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In his remarks, the permanent representative of Nicaragua to the General Assembly, Denis Moncada, said that no state or group of states has the right to interfere in the internal or external affairs of any other state or states. He pointed out that this applies not only to military interventions but to any other type of intervention as well. Addressing the supposed theme of the General Assembly, he dismissed as unacceptable claims that the effects of the pandemic can be reduced through interference. Strengthening the sanitary conditions for the benefit of all our countries through sharing our experiences in combatting it should be the preoccupation of this assembly instead of destabilizing, committing aggression and violating the right to self-determination of Nicaragua and Venezuela, he said. The agenda was nevertheless adopted as proposed.

The next fight took place over the report of the Credentials Committee. Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Mexico opposed any recognition of the credentials of the delegation that purports to represent the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which were issued by the National Assembly and not the government of Venezuela, rendering them invalid. St. Vincent and the Grenadines pointed out that Venezuela officially withdrew from the OAS in June 2017 and is no longer a member. All were emphatic that the OAS Charter does not authorize the organization or its General Secretariat to recognize or deny recognition to any state, or allow interference in any state's internal affairs. Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent and the Grenadines reiterated the positions of their governments that they are not bound by any past, present or future resolutions or declarations of the OAS that include any participation by the so-called "Venezuelan" delegation or that speak on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. All three countries requested that their remarks be recorded in the documents corresponding to the session.

Canada's Dirty Role

Canada's shameful role was on display during the two days of plenary sessions. It sought to embroil countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in violating the Charter of the United Nations and what the OAS Charter itself calls for in words, by sponsoring the resolutions interfering in the internal affairs of Venezuela and Nicaragua -- specifically relating to upcoming elections in both countries. A prelude to what Canada's role would be during the official proceedings was provided in the form of a "Dialogue on the Multi-dimensional Crisis in Venezuela" it co-hosted with the U.S. and other members of its anti-Venezuela Lima Group the day before the General Assembly opened. Minister of International Development Karina Gould, who

worked as a consultant for the OAS before becoming an MP, was dispatched to advance Canada's assault on the democratic rights of the peoples of the Americas at this forum.

At the General Assembly proper, the job of flogging the resolutions against Nicaragua and Venezuela that Canada took a lead in promoting fell to Minister of Foreign Affairs François-Philippe Champagne and to Canada's permanent representative to the OAS, Hugh Adsett. The whole thing was a pathetic spectacle of the Canadian government's submission to the most reactionary, anti-communist sections of U.S. imperialism obsessed with overthrowing the governments of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba, cloaked in pretentious language about the need for the OAS to assert its "unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights" and what Champagne said was a need to "restore people's faith in our institutions."

The resolution on Nicaragua was titled "Restoring Democratic Institutions and Respect for Human Rights in Nicaragua Through Free and Fair Elections." In speaking to it Ambassador Moncada addressed himself specifically to Canada. Canada has applied illegal sanctions against Nicaragua and for a number of years has been working closely with the U.S. at the OAS, heading up a Working Group on Nicaragua and then sitting on its pompously named High Commission on Nicaragua, which is chaired by the U.S. The Commission has called for the OAS to declare that there has been an alteration in the constitutional order in Nicaragua to be able to initiate a process that could lead to the country's suspension from the OAS as was attempted but failed in the case of Venezuela.

Among other things, Ambassador Moncada said, "This assembly was not convoked for some to tell us what we have to do." He said Nicaraguans highly value human rights, having suffered under a dictatorship, and that Nicaragua is making a big effort to guarantee the fundamental rights of its people and those who transit through the country. He said he wanted his country's rejection of the interfering position put forward by Canada's foreign minister made clear, stating that it was not correct or appropriate to be calling out countries for their internal policies and insisting on interfering in their affairs. In closing, he said it was embarrassing to see Canada following the dictate of the U.S. and acting like a country subordinated to it.

In urging the passage of a resolution on Venezuela titled "The Lack of Minimum Democratic Conditions to Guarantee Free, Fair, and Transparent Elections in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela" Champagne made pointed references to the "illegitimate" President Nicolás Maduro, and the "illegitimate" elections that have been held in the country over the years. He reiterated Canada's support for the "interim" and supposedly legitimate president, Juan Guaidó, despite the imposter's rapidly fading star.

In a related matter, it was announced at the General Assembly that former Canadian Supreme Court Justice Michel Bastarache was re-elected to the Administrative Tribunal of the OAS, which is supposed to ensure oversight and accountability at the OAS. Canada playing such a role is the height of hypocrisy, given its historic role operating as a flunkey of the U.S. as it goes about using the OAS to divide the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean in order to assert its hegemony over the region. Canada's role in organizing and leading the Lima Group to do illegal dirty work against Venezuela and to try to split the Caribbean Community of States (CARICOM) is the most obvious example. It was addressed well by Argentina's foreign minister Felipe Solá, who said about the OAS's interference in Venezuela that it served only to create divisions in Our America based on opinions every country holds on Venezuela. Where does this come from, who does it benefit? he asked.

Canada's aggressive interference in the affairs of Venezuela and also of Nicaragua, and the role it played in instigating last year's coup in Bolivia show that Canada's role with respect to oversight and accountability can only be to insulate the out-of-control OAS General Secretariat from being held accountable for its gross abuse of power and serial violation of the OAS's own Charter and rules of procedure.

"Multilateralism That Actually Works"

After the General Assembly concluded, the Assistant Secretary General remarked that it had adopted important decisions for strengthening multilateralism. Given that interfering in the affairs of Nicaragua and Venezuela took up a large part of its agenda -- and dealing with COVID-19 very little -- it is safe to say that what is being referred to is the very imperialist multilateralism Canada champions and works to impose, in opposition to what the UN Charter intended it to mean. Canada's role as handmaid for this exclusionary, interfering multilateralism has become a hallmark of the dirty role it plays at the OAS.

What Canada is up to reflects what U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had to say in a video-taped message to the General Assembly. He said the OAS was an example of "multilateralism that actually works." Addressing himself not to the member states of the OAS but to its nefarious OAS Secretary General who views the organization as his personal bailiwick, Pompeo said, "We stand for democratic values and under your leadership the OAS is not afraid to stand up for these values." In the written version of his statement Pompeo adds that "there is no question" that the multilateralism of the OAS "works because of your [Luis Almagro's] bold stands." He then goes on to issue his "expectations" of the members gathered, saying, "The U.S. expects this body to approve a strong resolution condemning the illegitimate Maduro regime this year, just as we expect all member states not to recognize its illegitimate elections, past or future.... We expect the OAS General Assembly to approve a resolution condemning the Ortega government's failure to meet democratic standards," and "[We] urge the OAS to take stronger action on Cuba. It's a source of anti-democratic forces throughout the hemisphere as it props up the Maduro and Ortega regimes, and causes regional instability."

There is nothing honourable about the role Canada is playing as a tool of the imperialist multilateralism "that works" for the U.S. at the OAS or in any other forum. Congratulations to those who actually spoke on a principled basis for their people and for so many others to say *NO* to the imposition of illegitimate agendas on the countries and peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean in the name of high ideals.

Canada should stop interfering in the affairs of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Haiti and any other country where it is violating the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the norms of diplomacy -- something no amount of Liberal hypocrisy about working for free and fair elections, human rights, democracy and a "rules-based order" can hide.

Opinion: OAS General Assembly Failed the People of the Americas

- Sir Ronald Sanders -

Anyone who followed the 50th regular session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), would be forgiven for believing it was held to discuss Venezuela and Nicaragua.

The assembly was held virtually on October 20 and 21, ostensibly to deal with "Facing the challenges of COVID-19" and seeking a collaborative approach "to address vulnerabilities and build resilience." That theme got scant attention. Reference to it by some ideologically bent countries was cursory. The representative of one powerful state did not even mention it.

The meeting concluded with no collaborative approach to deal with vulnerabilities and resilience.

The key issue now confronting the developing member states of the Organization was shunted aside.

For the richer countries, their principal concern was Venezuela. Their overriding purpose was to secure positions that bolster their efforts to get rid of the Maduro government and force acceptance of Juan Guaidó.

They used all their coercive power to achieve that objective, at the expense of dealing with the most injurious crisis that is devastating nations everywhere.

No wonder ambassador Anton Edmunds of Saint Lucia declared that this "almost singular focus on one country within our region, a country with issues we are well aware of, is starving many of us of the support that we need at this critical time -- be it security-based or otherwise."

That poignant observation fell on deaf ears. So, too, did a cry from the ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Lou-Anne Gilchrist, that the organization "re-focus and become more inclusive in its approach toward development."

Those who control the OAS appear to have little interest in the issues of survival that confront developing states. Increasingly, the Organization is becoming a weapon to advance their political interests solely. In that regard, its relevance to developing countries, which has always been questionable, is now becoming increasingly more pertinent.

CARICOM countries did manage to get through a resolution on Climate Change. But it is significant that the excellent draft, proposed by Barbados, was diluted at the insistence of a few richer countries. One of them rejected it to the end, even though it cannot be better known that Climate Change poses a grave threat to all OAS members regardless of their size or economic power.

In my presentation, I urged that "the OAS should be a unified voice in advocating for strong and decisive action on climate financing, not as a concession, or an act of generosity, but as a moral, political, and environmental responsibility. OAS member states should also be a unified voice for the renegotiating and rescheduling of foreign debt, and for the affordable procurement of vaccines for all when one is found to counter COVID-19."

For the record, rather than because I expected any positive response, I said: "Integration and collective action in the OAS should not be an option, or a choice; it should be an imperative for all -- rich and poor, large, and small."

But the governance of the OAS is fatally flawed. Only power prevails, not reason. And, the secretary-general, Luis Almagro, who, in my view is capable of much better, has allowed himself to become part of that flawed governance. Repeatedly, he has caused the OAS to appear to be enflaming conflicts even ones, such as between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that are far removed from the Americas.

Consequently, the Assembly had to experience the indignity of allowing representatives of Azerbaijan and Turkey to speak, demanding that Almagro keep out of their regional affairs. He had issued a statement, without the knowledge of any official body of the Organization, accusing Azerbaijan of "aggression and escalation" of a complex conflict with Armenia.

In the event, the Mexican government, through the voice of Maximiliano Reyes Zúñiga, Undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, minced no words when he called out this "worrying pattern."

He said: "We note the configuration of a worrying pattern of action of the general secretariat,

consisting of using its administrative powers to make political decisions that impact the direction of the Organization, without previously submitting them to the consideration of the membership.

Such decisions lack legal support and the necessary information that allows knowing their motivation and objectives. Such is the case with the appointment of a special advisor on the responsibility to protect. This matter should have been consulted and discussed exhaustively within the Organization." (Note: I raised this issue in my last commentary and at the Assembly).

Many double standards exist in the governance and decision-making of the OAS. These double standards, which serve the political interests of a few, were especially obvious in resolutions on Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Let it be clear. Both Venezuela and Nicaragua pose concerns on all sides, regarding free and fair elections, independence of the judiciary and detention of persons. But effectively addressing these concerns is undermined in the OAS by those who employ tactics of bullying and exclusion.

The resolutions were both drafted and settled by an exclusive group. Yet, the resolution called on the government of Nicaragua to support "inclusive and timely negotiations." The contradiction of applying a standard to Nicaragua that they ignore for themselves is either lost on them, or, self-righteously, they don't care.

The Venezuela resolution was drafted by an exclusive group which included the representative of Juan Guaidó. Not surprisingly, it required all OAS governments to accept Guaidó's agent as the representative of Venezuela, thereby pushing them into implicit recognition of Guaidó, as the so-called interim president of Venezuela, regardless of their own respective national interests and policy.

Additionally, it employed language of belligerence likely to widen divides, worsening the situation in Venezuela. This was less about democracy in Venezuela and more about the imposition of one political class and ruler over another, when the choice of a leader of any country is a matter for that country's people alone.

The 50th General Assembly of the OAS failed to tackle the important theme set by its 33 legitimate member states. Sadly, it also failed the people of the Americas who continue to be plagued by COVID-19 and are looking to governments to find a solution collectively.

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Mexico's Statement

**- Maximiliano Reyes Zúñiga, Undersecretary for
Latin America and the Caribbean -**

Esteemed Ministers,
Esteemed representatives.

It is an honour for me to participate in this 50th regular session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States on behalf of my country, as well as the President of Mexico

Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard.

We meet in unusual circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has represented a great challenge for the world and, in particular, for our hemisphere.

That is why Mexico participates in this event to reaffirm its multilateralist vocation. We consider that cooperation is an essential pillar of peaceful coexistence among nations and of the search for solutions to the common challenges that we face.

Mexico is no stranger to the fact that in the hemisphere there are difficulties in political dialogue that have halted important advances on numerous issues.

Faced with these events, the Fourth Transformation of Mexico's public life, led by President López Obrador, will always defend the principles of non-intervention, self-determination of the peoples, the peaceful solution of disputes, and respect, protection and promotion of human rights.

For this reason, we reaffirm Mexico's historical position against the unilateral economic and financial sanctions implemented as a means of pressure. The greatest victims of these are always those most in need, a reason that makes them unacceptable.

On the other hand, Mexico has expressed, on different occasions, the desire that the peoples of Nicaragua and Venezuela soon find a peaceful and democratic solution to the situation in their countries, preserving at all times their legitimate right to decide on their destiny. Mexico opposes any measure that seeks to exclude a member state of our Organization from the political dialogue.

Mexico is also concerned about the recent trend of going beyond the technical nature of Electoral Observation Missions. We emphasize that the actions of the Electoral Observation Missions must be impartial in nature, limited to logistical and institutional support and that they are conducted under the principles of rationality, transparency, austerity and accountability.

Democracy is also strengthened by eliminating corruption. Mexico renews its commitment to combat this scourge by incorporating an active citizenry to keep an eye on government actions.

In terms of human rights, Mexico maintains its firm support for the rights of Indigenous peoples, the LGBT population, and gender equality.

Likewise, Mexico reaffirms its full support for the Inter-American Human Rights System and stresses the importance of respecting its autonomy. My country will remain committed to strengthening the work of the Commission and the Court.

In terms of comprehensive development, we must continue working on strengthening measures for comprehensive disaster risk management, in order to face the threats of climate change.

However, in terms of cooperation, it is worth noting the indifference with which the OAS has behaved in this pandemic.

We note with concern the lack of concrete actions by the General Secretariat during this health emergency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My country reiterates that the OAS General Secretariat must always act within its own institutional framework and avoid making any pronouncement on behalf of the membership. It is the member states, and not the General Secretariat, who decide the direction of the Organization.

In this sense, we note the configuration of a worrying pattern of action on the part of the General

Secretariat, consisting of using its administrative powers to make political decisions that impact the direction of the Organization, without previously submitting them to the consideration of the membership.

Such decisions lack legal support and the necessary information that allows knowing their motivation and objectives. Such is the case with the appointment of a special advisor on the responsibility to protect. This subject should have been raised for consultation and discussed exhaustively within the Organization. Mexico views this appointment with great concern.

We observe the same pattern regarding the refusal of the General Secretariat to renew the mandate of the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We firmly reiterate that these actions undermine the autonomy and independence of the Commission.

Likewise, we corroborate this performance in the 2019 Bolivian elections, where the General Secretariat used the Electoral Observation Mission in a factious manner to denounce an alleged fraud without previous verification. The elections last Sunday [October 18] in that country showed the same electoral trend as in 2019.

This factious use generated instability, violence and constitutional disorder in Bolivia, and created an international environment of confrontation. The General Secretariat is not there to qualify elections or governments. Therefore, Mexico suggests that Mr. Luis Almagro submit to a process of self-criticism based on his actions against the OAS Charter and for damaging Bolivia's democracy, to determine if he still has the necessary moral authority to lead this organization.

My country denounces the Secretary General's desire to intervene in the internal affairs of our States and to hurt our democracies. What happened in Bolivia must never be repeated.

Yesterday marked a year since the Bolivian elections in which Evo Morales was the winner. One year later, the MAS was ratified and Luis Arce was elected President on a peaceful and democratic election day, an example for the whole world, much to the regret of you, Secretary General and your Electoral Observation Mission. The Bolivian people have given you a historical lesson, hopefully you will learn it.

As long as you continue to lead the Organization, the repercussions of what happened in Bolivia will always be present. You have delegitimized the Electoral Observation Missions and led the organization to clash with the current democratic reality in the region.

Mexico, in adherence to its solid multilateralist tradition and its constitutional foreign policy principles, will continue to promote dialogue and diplomacy as the best way to seek common and consensual solutions. This is what we have done at the head of CELAC, and deeply appreciate the vote of confidence of all Latin American and Caribbean countries to continue leading it next year.

We reiterate the call of Mexico to privilege the unity of the peoples of America.

Thank you very much.

(October 20, 2020. Translated from original Spanish by TML.)

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