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LIVING TOGETHER IN THE AMERICAS

IRA J. KURZBAN

I want to take this opportunity to speak with you about the peoples of the Americas. We live in a hemisphere of over 725 million people. By the end of the year 2025 it will be over 1 billion people, less than a quarter of whom will be from North America.¹

For about 200 years, we in North America, with few exceptions, have lived as if our political world ended at the Rio Grande and our economic world ended at our doorstep. We have been more concerned about the migrants or refugees who come to our shores than the reasons for which they have come. We in the developed world have worried that they in the developing world will take what we have. As our economic conditions deteriorate at home, the shrill voices of nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-alienism have reared their ugly heads.

But development is not only material development. It is human development. One of the most developed countries materially and culturally in the 20th century was Austria in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet Austria fully embraced Nazism and anti-Semitism, notwithstanding its development. Development without human development is not development at all. When will we realize that a child who goes to bed hungry in Bolivia or Brazil is no different than a child who goes to bed hungry in Appalachia or Miami? When will we understand that a child beginning her first day of class in Peru or in Honduras who is dressed in her best clothes and eager to learn to read and to learn about the world is no different than our own children entering the first day of school? Does a person with a sixth grade education, or a person who is illiterate from Paraguay or Ecuador, have any different aspirations for his children than the aspirations that United States citizens have for their own children? Do the citizens of Jamaica and El Salvador have any less hope for democracy, any less hope for stability, any less hope that their children will grow up in a better world than we do in this country? For those who fight for democracy today in Haiti, at the risk of their own lives, are they doing anything different than

1. THE WORLD ALMANAC AND BOOK OF FACTS 1990, at 773 (Mark S. Hoffman ed., 1990).

we would do if the military overthrew our President, murdered our congressmen, and summarily executed our people? Are the Haitians who flee oppression today any different than persons who have fled oppression anywhere. Would we act toward our own families, when faced with a bloody and brutal military regime, any different than they have?

We in North America often misunderstand that persons who are less fortunate than we, that persons who have less material goods than we do, that persons who live in misery or poverty instead of affluence, are no less human than we are.

We in South Florida, perhaps, realize more than the rest of our country that we are part of a much larger hemispheric community. In Dade County, 57% of the people live in homes where the first language that they speak is a language other than English. In Broward County, that number is 17.7%, and in all of Florida, 17.3%.²

We here recognize that whether or not we wish to live in isolation, the rest of the Americas will not allow us to do so. Whether or not we want to ignore the realities of our brothers and sisters to the south, we can no longer do so. Look at Haiti. As soon as democracy was smothered in Haiti, generals in other countries became emboldened. The recent events in Venezuela and Peru are ever present reminders of the inter-relationship of democracies in the Western Hemisphere.

If we are to live together in this hemisphere, we must join together. We must treat those in Central America, in South America, and in the Caribbean as we would treat all Americans. We must treat them as friends, not as adversaries; as partners, not as employees; as colleagues, not as students. Ultimately, we must make the hemisphere a livable place, not for the few, but for the many; not for the rich, but for the rich and the poor; not for those who live in North America alone, but for those who live in all the Americas. This is our obligation and responsibility as human beings in this hemisphere.

2. Andres Oppenheimer, *Mariel Made Area's Latins More Latin, Survey Finds*, MIAMI HERALD, April 29, 1983, at 1C.