



REPORT

Public Discussion

**SOCIALISM, POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA: PRESENT
AND FUTURE**

Santiago de Chile, 4 May, 2018

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

Roberto Ampuero, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chile

Ignacio Sánchez, Rector, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

Jakub Klepal, Executive Director, Forum 2000 Foundation, Czech Republic

Oscar Arias, Former President, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Costa Rica

Nicolás Ibáñez Scott, President, Fundación para el Progreso, Chile

SPEAKERS:

Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate, Peru

Tamara Sujú, Activist, Human Rights Lawyer, Venezuela

Jorge Quiroga, Former President, Bolivia

Juan Pablo Cardenal, Journalist and Writer, Spain

Rosa María Payá, Activist, President, Latin American Youth Network for Democracy, Cuba

Antonio Ledezma, Activist, Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas, Venezuela

Mariana Aylwin, Senator, Chile

Álvaro Vargas Llosa, Writer and Columnist, Senior Fellow, Independent Institute, Peru

Francisco Ramírez, Student, Member, Latin American Youth Network for Democracy, Chile

MODERATORS:

Axel Kaiser, Executive Director, Fundación Para el Progreso, Chile

Jorge Sahn, Director, Center for International Studies, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

The event began with words from Roberto Ampuero, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Chile, who emphasized the importance of democracy, noting that there are no good dictatorships and even the worst of democracies continue to be better than the best dictatorships. Additionally, he stated, “democracy and freedom are not given, they are a ‘work in progress’”. More details about his speech can be found [here](#). Oscar Arias, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former President of Costa Rica, reflected on the current situation in Latin America. He discussed why totalitarian governments arise, and the reason why our people are more prone to populisms. He emphasized the intolerance that prevails in Latin America and that what characterizes a democracy are differences and dialogue.



IDEAS FROM THE FIRST PANEL ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LATIN AMERICA

- *The Venezuelan Tragedy and the Needed Assistance:* Tamara Sujú affirmed that the political authorities of Venezuela not only violate human rights, but are also involved in drug trafficking and corruption. She referred to the grave humanitarian crisis and the need to allow “humanitarian intervention” by state governments and international organizations. A “narcotiranía” like that of Venezuela, which cannot be voted out, has to be accepted as reality.
- *Socialism of the 21st Century and the Immediate Future:* Jorge Quiroga placed responsibility on Socialism in the 21st century for the wrongdoings in his country, and offered a warning about the importance of the coming weeks for the region, with upcoming elections in Venezuela and Colombia. In addition, he warned about the circumstances of Cuba with the recent election of Diaz-Canel.
- *Populism and Elites in America:* Mario Vargas Llosa maintained that the United States could face a very serious problem if it becomes a demagogic and populist country. Similarly, Vargas Llosa referred to the upcoming presidential election and possible victory of Manuel López Obrador, which he considered to be like committing “suicide by electing an irresponsible populist and demagogue.” He called on Mexicans to “look at what is happening in Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia and see where electoral irresponsibility can lead.” He emphasized that we must eliminate pessimism and remember that unexpected changes can occur, like the fall of the USSR or the conversion of China to a capitalist economy. “We have seen how democracy has defeated empires that seemed eternal.”
- *The Disturbing Chinese Influence and its Regime:* Juan Pablo Cardenal stated that “China will not become democratized as it develops,” and said that it will continue to persecute dissent and its control over its population. Cardenal also spoke about the influence of the Chinese public democracy and its effects on Latin American democracies. One of the problems we face is that the Chinese are more politically active than we are, and that at a minimum, we must counter this statement. It is the elites who have been chosen from various fields, and it is them, whom the Chinese invite to the country to show a biased view and propaganda of the regime, as it seeks to legitimize its dictatorship.

IDEAS IN THE SECOND PANEL ABOUT THE FUTURE OF LATIN AMERICA

- *Three Major Problems:* Alvaro Vargas Llosa mentioned three major problems the region will face in the future: how the inter-American system can fight dictatorships, the challenges of those countries that have freed themselves from populism, and how Brazil, as a South American power, can moderate optimism in its situation. Corruption is the source of instability in the region, which leads to weak institutions, but Llosa assured that there is good news: “the popular reaction, contrary to these politicians, [is that] today there is a rejection against corruption.”
- *Free Venezuela:* Antonio Ledezma made a call to intervene in Venezuela, which was already “invaded” by President Maduro and the national authorities, in order to release it. Ledezma insisted that the principles of humanitarian intervention, when a regime does not guarantee its people their fundamental rights, is essential.
- *More Pressure on Cuba:* Rosa María Payá made a call to increase the internal pressure on Cuba. According to the Cuban activist, “the challenge is to attack the origin of evil, not to look at the powerful who want to keep everything, but at the people.”



SOLIDARIDAD DEMOCRÁTICA

- *Alarmingly Low Support of Young People fighting for Democracy:* Mariana Aylwin referred to the public study which showed that high school students would support a dictatorship if it solved certain problems. Aylwin remarked that “democracy is essential for the common good, for the right of people, and for the peaceful development of communities.” Reducing social and economic gaps, as well as strengthening the democracy of citizens, is very important. Governments have to be effective in solving these problems. Today in Chile, the problem is that democracy has not been valued as it was in the past, where international communities strongly supported the country to move towards a democratic path.
- *The Role of Young People and Civil Society:* Francisco Ramírez, the Chilean student present at the panel, claimed that it is necessary to give a special warning about the role of civil society, and that he prefers to be grouped with young Latin American activists than with parties who take away civil liberties. Thanks to social networks, we are able to share experiences more easily.

Finally, space was given to the public, who offered questions and reflections. There was a call for solidarity with the Nicaraguans, after the mobilizations of recent weeks, which left a large number victims or injured people. The panelists agreed that all dictatorships must be fought, and that any other attitude is immoral. No country is inherently safe from populism, and each generation must continue this battle.