



**REPORT**

**Public discussion**

**DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**March 15, 2019, Buenos Aires, Argentina**

**OPENING REMARKS:**

**Marcelo Camusso**, Director, Institute of Political Science and International Relations, Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (UCA), Argentina

**Jakub Klepal**, Executive Director, Forum 2000 Foundation, Czechia

**Gabriel Salvia**, General Director, Center for Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL), Argentina

**SPEAKERS:**

**Mariana Aylwin Oyarzún**, Former Minister of Education, Chile

**Jorge G. Castañeda**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mexico

**Tamara Taraciuk Broner**, Senior Americas Researcher, Human Rights Watch, Venezuela/Argentina

**Daniel D. Zovatto**, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, International IDEA, Argentina

**MODERATOR:**

**Ignacio Labaqui**, Professor, Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (UCA), Argentina

Marcelo Camusso, Director of the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations at UCA, welcomed the discussion participants.

Jakub Klepal, Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation, opened the international forum highlighting the importance of contributing to and fostering democratic solidarity in Latin America, just as the Czech Republic received solidarity from democratic governments, NGOs, and media during its autocratic period. When communism was defeated in a process led by Václav Havel, the founder of Forum 2000, there was a sense of obligation to contribute to people who were not so lucky and still live under an autocratic government - as in the cases of Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia.

Representing CADAL, General Director Gabriel Salvia emphasized that human rights are more important than state sovereignty and that individual people should be the main actor in international relations. These are the main values held by the Argentine organization that also has a program of democratic solidarity inspired by Václav Havel.

Moderator Ignacio Labaqui opened the discussion by pointing out that 40 years since the start of the democratic wave is a great moment to reflect on the current state of democracy in the Latin American region.

Mariana Aylwin Oyarzún, Former Minister of Education of Chile, commented that the deterioration of democracy occurred as Latin America moved away from the ghost of the last dictatorships 30 years ago. There are 3 countries under dictatorship in Latin America - Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba - and Bolivia is getting close to becoming a dictatorship as well. Mexico and Brazil are two large countries with an uncertain future and populist governments. On the other hand, there is optimism in Argentina – it is often emphasized that a crisis as big as the current one did not lead to political instability. It also indicates that in Latin America the main problems are inequality and the vulnerability of the growing middle class. There is a need for a greater democratic culture.



## DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY

Today, Venezuela is a very sensitive issue for the future of Latin America. This issue is always present in the collective unconscious of Latin Americans. The way it will be resolved will determine the optimism or pessimism of the future of the region.

Aylwin also touched on the issue of Cuba and the need for Latin Americans to pay more attention to this case. This dictatorship still has the sympathy of the global left and often goes unheeded by the democrats on a global scale.

Jorge G. Castañeda, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, addressed the issue of the two largest economies in the region. New elections have reversed the political scenes in Mexico and Brazil. The newly elected presidents, Jair Bolsonaro and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, represent threats to human rights. In both cases, this threat is translated not only into intentions, but, more importantly, into real laws. Regarding immigration, he commented that AMLO is following in the footsteps of Donald Trump and the most racist U.S. government in a long time, including committing acts that violate human rights.

Castañeda commented that there was a coincidence between the boom of commodities and the assumption of leftist governments, which allowed for distributive policies and led to the reduction of extreme poverty. However, there was little success in terms of inequality. He concluded that the biggest problem with these governments is corruption.

Tamara Taraciuk Broner, Senior Americas Researcher of Human Rights Watch, addressed the issue of human rights in Venezuela. She stated that there has been a systematic pattern of abuse in Venezuela since 2014, always following the same modus operandi. The Venezuelan crisis is an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in Latin America; diseases that were eradicated have returned. Regarding the migration crisis, more than 3.4 million people have left Venezuela - most of them to other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The societies of the Latin American region have received more migrants than other countries, since they remember how Venezuela received refugees from Latin American dictatorships – it's about returning the favor. This immigration wave is a great challenge for the democracies and economies of Latin America.

Taraciuk expressed a cautious optimism commenting that today Venezuela is experiencing a massive internal mobilization thanks to the figure of Juan Guaidó. As a new face, different from the Venezuelan political traditions, he gives hope for new protests. This comes along with the international pressure seen in sanctions or tribunals. It is an optimistic but urgent situation. If international pressure is not redoubled, there is a high risk of losing all progress made thus far.

Daniel D. Zovatto, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of International IDEA, began his comments by pointing out that there has never been a better time in Latin America. The region has never had such a widespread democratic process. However, democracies in the region are very heterogeneous and there are no general measures for the region as a whole. He said that all indicators show a lot of concern - there is a lot of dissatisfaction with democracy and indifference among young people with the democratic political system. In Latin America, there is a combination of old problems - such as institutional weakness - and new problems related to the impact of the fourth industrial revolution. The way we communicate with society has changed and a new way of rethinking political parties is needed to better represent the population.

Zovatto also touched on the subject of Venezuela and commented that the current authoritarianism in Venezuela is different from the one we saw in the last century. The multilateral system from the time of WWII has been weakened. Maduro cannot be defeated by using the old remedies – the only way is to reach an agreement with and disrupt the military apparatus. When it comes to Venezuela, the initiative needs to come from inside of Latin America.