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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
 TO BE DELIVERED TO
 THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF
 THE O. A. S. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE EAST ROOM

This is my first opportunity as President to welcome the distinguished Chiefs of Delegation to the General Assembly of the Organization of American States. I am delighted you are here -- in Washington and in the White House. Some of you, I understand, were disappointed not to see Henry Kissinger in your capitals. I know exactly how you feel. There are times when we don't see much of him in our own capital.

Your presence here tonight is testimony to the wisdom of the Western Hemisphere's pioneering effort to create a free association of sovereign nations a century ago. The durability of our inter-American system rests on its ability to adapt to changing hemispheric and world conditions and to respond to new problems and needs which arise. But its bedrock strength comes from the wealth of wisdom that the member-states bring to the solution of common problems.

Today, this General Assembly is carrying on the tradition of adaptability to change in considering recommendations for reform. And just as the Inter-American System was the pathfinder in the field of international organizations, it could, likewise, become a pioneer in reforming the traditional way in which international organizations do business. The basic concept which holds this organization together is that strength and progress come from cooperation rather than conflict.

In this country, we are proud of our achievements under a democratic form of government and a productive economic system. We recognize that every state has the right to adopt its own system of government and its own economic and social organization. We live in a hemisphere with a rich tradition of diversity. One of our continuing tasks is to resolve issues that could divide us. We are now updating our relationship with Panama over the issue of the Canal. This new relationship will accommodate the important interests of both of our countries and all of the nations of the world which depend on the Canal.

The world we now live in is increasingly fluid and complex, containing many new centers of power. There are new and more subtle challenges to the well-being of mankind. And the new issues reflect the major concerns of our people: economic development, growth of trade, sufficient food production, a healthy environment and managing the growth of population.

As the world economy becomes more complex, the line between domestic and international economic policy becomes ever less distinct. We know we have differences and will continue to have them. But despite such problems, I am confident we will shape the relationships necessary to improve the lives of all our peoples.

(MORE)

The tradition of mutual cooperation, which is at the heart of our inter-American system, adds another dimension to the requirements of global interdependence. We must be particularly conscious of the need to avoid unnecessary damage to each other's interests. For this reason, I am supporting modification of recent legislation passed by the Congress which singles out a few nations of the Hemisphere for what seems discriminatory treatment.

International cooperation that assures mutual respect among nations is more essential than ever. And the opportunities, particularly in this Hemisphere, are without precedent. I wish you success in your deliberations and hope that, together, we can take full advantage of the opportunities for cooperation that present themselves to us, who are the fortunate inhabitants of these Americas.

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