Dr. Judy Genshaft, President of the University of South Florida,  
Dr. Jorge Nef, Director of Latin American Caribbean Studies,  
Distinguished participants,  

Dear friends:  

First of all, let me congratulate you on organizing such a valuable Symposium that will allow for an important exchange of ideas and experiences regarding the present and the figure of our Hemisphere. It is inspiring and encouraging to see how the academic environment follows closely and attentively the daily reality of the state of international affairs, and at the same time projects into the future by offering its critical approach and vision.

For me personally it would have been a great pleasure to join you in such an interesting and important debate. As a matter of fact, when Dr. Nef and I started talking about the Symposium and the possibility of my participation, I did not hesitate for a minute to confirm my interest and assistance. At that moment, I was heading the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development in Santo Domingo. Times have changed and my present responsibility requires my full dedication to the daily matters of State. Still, I would like you to know that I will certainly make time to benefit from your research and exchange which I am sure will be very valuable for me as a scholar, practitioner and statesman.

We are living in very critical times; beautiful and dangerous times. Never in the history of the world have we had so much knowledge, so many riches, and so much experience. Science and technology have progressed to the levels we could not have imagined. We are producing goods and services at unprecedented speed. We have managed to connect, in one way or another, almost all the points of the Globe, For hundreds or even thousands of years we have dreamed of living in one, globalized world. In our times we have finally achieved it.

Now that we have reached these highest levels of knowledge, production and connectedness, the question is: how are we going to manage it? How are we going to run this huge global enterprise? This is where the issues of international relations and global governance gain crucial importance and will define the future of our planet. The way we as nations and peoples interact will lead us towards ever greater harmony and prosperity or will doom us to conflict and destruction.

We are deeply interdependent. Each action activates a chain of reactions that impact the life of the whole Universe and bring back to us its own effects. At this point of time, there is nothing that happens in Kazakhstan, Uganda, Greece, Jamaica or Indonesia that does affect us in a certain way.

Each day the number of transnational families is growing. Citizens of foreign origin represent an ever bigger and more important voting constituency. With international trade, we export and import culture, even politics. Security measures in other countries define the level of security we can enjoy at home. The political stability
achieved in any nation of’ the world produces a direct impact on the rest of the World.

Our times present us with a great opportunity and an even bigger challenge. Our responsibility is great and we all share it.

In the realm of international relations we are necessarily moving towards a new paradigm. We wonder if the bipolar world of strongly opposed geopolitical blocks is moving towards a multipolar collaboration or unipolar imposition. There are indications that speak for both trends.

We, Latin American and Caribbean countries, share the Western Hemisphere with the most powerful nation in the World, and probably the most powerful nation in the history of the world. It is a blessing and a difficulty at the same time.

We benefit from incredible opportunities for knowledge and technology transfer. The closeness of the United States market creates an enormous stimulus for production and service delivery. With the help of US institutions, many lessons in democracy have been successfully applied across Latin America and the Caribbean. Our talented youth studies at the best universities in the World.

Now, on the other hand, how do you negotiate with such a powerful, overwhelming neighbor? How do you manage to set your own priorities on the agenda? How do you defend your culture and values against the impressiveness of a nation that has almost uniformed the taste and likings of the whole world’s population? How do you adjust its economic and democratic development precepts to the reality of each and every developing nation?

In the course of the 20th century we have advanced a lot in creating platforms, bodies and mechanisms for inter-American. multilateral discussion and collaboration. We have put to work a series of regional and hemispheric integration processes. When we look back, I strongly believe that we can be proud of our progress.

Nowadays, the nations and peoples of the Americas reach out to each other, share experiences, participate in problem solving, and commit to common future. We have grown in awareness and exchange. We have institutionalized and organized our hemispheric coexistence.

At the same time, the United States of America has become the sole great power nation in the World. It is moving forward with its own agenda and priorities. It is moving with an impressive speed and strength. How can we leverage it for the benefit of all and create spaces for consensus building?

Regional. hemispheric and global institutions have to be reinforced in order to assure participatory and inclusive decision making processes. It is the responsibility of all to promote democratic governance on the global level.

In today’s interconnected, interdependent World, where the smallest nation’s problems can produce imbalances or, on the contrary, its brightest achievements can propel others towards progress, we are “doomed” to inclusiveness and collaboration.

Distinguished participants of the Symposium:

It seems to me that your research and analysis as well as the dynamic debate that will originate during the next two days will be an invaluable contribution to a better
understanding of our World and could offer insight into possible roads we could design, build and travel in order to assure well being, security and prosperity for future generations.

I would like to thank you in advance for endowing all of us who care about the future of our peoples with such a generous gift. I am looking forward to getting to know your work and discussion, confident that it will throw light on issues of great importance.

At the same time, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep esteem and appreciation to the University of South Florida and its Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program for organizing the Symposium. The Global Foundation for Democracy and Development feels honored to collaborate with you and will be pleased to contribute to your future efforts.

I wish you all good work and great success.

Sincerely,

Leonel Fernández
President of the Dominican Republic
Honorary President of the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development