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Energy Development in the Americas

Latin America's development needs are so immense that just to stand still—in relative terms—let alone aspire to catch up with Europe and the United States, will require vast new economic growth and energy supplies. The hemisphere's energy resource potential is still very unevenly identified or known, but it looks somewhat like the following:

- While half of the countries in the hemisphere import all of their oil supplies, a few nations—Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, and Trinidad and Tobago—are at present self-sufficient in energy. Although Brazil and Argentina have substantial hydrocarbon reserves, oil reserves in Brazil would supply the country for only 2 years at current consumption rates.

- Much coal is available in Venezuela, Colombia, and Chile and some is located in Brazil. The quality is not always high-grade and transportation is difficult, but it may still have chemical value, provided liquefaction and coal gasification become cheaply available.

- Three large nations—Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico—have rapidly turned to nuclear energy. However, the lead-time requirements for implementation are formidable.

- The unprecedented increases of energy costs since 1973 have had an adverse impact on almost the entire region, but the willingness of Venezuela and other oil-producing countries to assist their Latin American neighbors to overcome difficulties is an encouraging boost for hemispheric harmony.

The Organization of American States has long been concerned with specific aspects of the energy question, notably with the effort to promote greater peaceful use of nuclear energy in the Latin American countries. We also recognized the need to examine nonconventional energy sources, such as gas generation from municipal wastes and solar energy—both direct solar power and power obtained indirectly through solar conversion and biomass.

The fact remains, though, that two-thirds of Latin America's countries suffer from a substantial deficit in their energy supplies. It is therefore essential for Latin America to move forward jointly with the United States in a cooperative response to the hemisphere's energy challenge by a three-part focus on:

- *Energy planning and energy management.* Latin America needs to develop and train greater numbers of people to manage and conserve energy resources.

- *Research into energy development.* Latin America does not need to compete with the United States in energy research but must stimulate the development of indigenous energy resources. Particularly challenging are the fields of biomass and solar energy, and promising results have been obtained in Brazil and Puerto Rico in research on producing an efficient alcohol fuel based on sugarcane and potentially on cassava.

- *Support for feasibility studies on energy development in the hemisphere.* The time seems opportune for the United States and Latin America—working through the Organization of American States and other organizations—to join together in positive action programs for hemispheric energy development. Working sessions, looking toward a high-level meeting, should be initiated without delay.—ALEJANDRO ORFILA, *Secretary General, Organization of American States, Washington, D.C. 20006*