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CELAC Summit: Preserving Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace



The presidents of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel, of Honduras, Xiomara Castro, and of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, called for maintaining peace in the region without external interference, pointing to great powers such as the United States, during the inauguration of the eighth summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in Kingstown, capital of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Leaders of the 33 countries of the region met to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace and to give continuity and deepen the 100-point agenda set by consensus at the VII summit of the regional mechanism held last year in Buenos Aires, where a roadmap was established for a new integration process to "promote unity and diversity political, economic, social and cultural peoples."

Paradoxically, neither Argentine President Javier Milei nor Foreign Minister Diana Mondino participated in the regional meeting. Until the arrival of the far-right Milei to the Casa Rosada, on December 10, Argentina played a central role in the consolidation of the regional mechanism created in 2011, a position that only decreased in intensity during the presidency of neoliberal Mauricio Macri (2015-2019).



Saint Vincent and the Grenadines hands over the helm of CELAC to Honduras, satisfied with results such as the meeting between Presidents Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela) and Irfaan Ali (Guyana) that allowed understanding and lowering tensions over the disputed Essequibo area, and the full formation of the group's Nutrition and Food Security Plan, in addition to the unprecedented contacts with the European Union and Africa.

The call of the host Prime Minister, Ralph Gonsalves, was to seize the moment, work hard to promote the causes of the subcontinent and agree on positions that allow the interests of the 600 million inhabitants to be defended in one voice.

"Peace in Latin America and the Caribbean must be based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries," said Xiomara Castro, who assumed the pro tempore presidency of CELAC until 2025, with the commitment to preserve peace in the countries of the region. Petro said peace in the region implies "political, commercial and military autonomy," while criticizing U.S. policies.

The Honduran president, who received the presidency from the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalvez, is also president pro tempore of the Central American Integration System (SICA), said that as a worthy representative of the Honduran resistance she assumes with honor this new stage before the Great Homeland.



Xiomara Castro and Ralph Gonsalvez

"I reaffirm my unwavering commitment to peace. This 2024 marks ten years since the proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, ratified at the second CELAC summit held in Havana, Cuba," he said.

He stressed that in the last decade the region has faced great difficulties and, however, "it has managed to maintain the historical custom of being a zone free of armed conflicts and wars." The problems and differences of the countries of this bloc must be resolved among ourselves, without interference or external pressures, with dialogue as a tool and always thinking about regional well-being and the self-determination of the peoples," he emphasized.

After emphasizing that the territories of peace are free of conflicts, and are spaces of justice, memory and truth, he stressed that peace in Latin America must be based on the principles and non-interference in the internal affairs of each State, on the principles of national sovereignty, equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

"We must foster friendship, cooperation and exchange between us. Latin America has in me a defender for peace," he said.

For his part, Cuban President Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel said that in order to advance in integration, it is essential to preserve peace, "a fundamental condition for the enjoyment of all human rights, in particular, the supreme right to life."

He added that the region must concentrate all its capacity, intelligence and resources on confronting "the real enemies of our species: hunger, poverty, climate change, illiteracy, disease, the depletion of natural resources and the growing marginalization to which the vast majority of the world's population is subjected."

The UN's Vision

During the inauguration, UN Secretary-General António Guterres paid tribute to Latin America and the Caribbean for its status as a continent of peace in a world at war and recognized CELAC's efforts in this regard.



Guterres insisted on the need to preserve the spirit of solidarity for peace and security, sustainable development, social cohesion and in the face of the climate emergency and praised the bonds of unity that supported the peace process in Colombia or the Joint Declaration for dialogue between Venezuela and Guyana. "However, both cases also underscore that implementation requires sustained efforts. And we know that peace is much more than the absence of armed conflict," he added.

The official warned about the expansion of violent and organized crime and arms trafficking, which have become one of the most important security threats for the region and recalled the impact of these challenges in Ecuador and Haiti, where the "situation that is already disastrous is worsening day by day": Gangs hold the country hostage and use

sexual violence as a weapon. Meanwhile, the U.N. humanitarian aid plan for that nation needs strong financial support, he added.

Guterres mentioned the challenges of small island developing states in the face of a global system that fails to provide affordable long-term financing to countries in need. Finally, he called for a renewed social contract, based on trust, justice and inclusion and anchored in human rights, in all their dimensions.



António Guterres

"Around the world, authoritarianism and extremism are growing, democracy and civic space are eroding while disinformation and hate speech are being empowered by new technologies," he warned.

CELAC brought together its leaders during the meeting that saw its birth in Caracas, Venezuela (2011) and successively at the summits in Santiago, Chile (2013); Havana, Cuba (2014); Belén, Costa Rica (2015); Quito, Ecuador (2016); Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (2017); Mexico City, Mexico (2021) and Buenos Aires, Argentina (2023).

The Genocide

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Friday called on UN Secretary-General António Guterres to accept a motion by CELAC to put "an immediate end to the genocide" in the Gaza Strip, where more than 30,000 people have died, the vast majority of them civilians. The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza requires us to be able to put an end to the collective punishment that Israel imposes on the Palestinian people," Lula said at the summit.

For his part, Colombian President Gustavo Petro accused France, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union "Germany supports genocide, and France, and the European Union, and the United Kingdom, and especially the United

States in its Democratic version, support dropping bombs on the people, because they are demonstrating on all humanity." Said.



Petro accuses France, Germany, US, UK and EU of supporting genocide in Gaza
Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said they will discuss the ineffectiveness of international justice to stop the daily massacre of Palestinians. He wondered "where is the international justice to protect the people of Gaza" and pointed out that it only serves to "advance the interests of US imperialism, Europe and the West, to cover up the crimes of the murderers they send to massacre".

Likewise, the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves, described the deaths at the hands of Israel's armed forces of thousands of Palestinians as genocide and called for humanitarian aid for that people. He recognized the existence of a humanitarian crisis and the need for countries to unite in their resolve to take measures to promote peace.

He spoke of the importance of supporting democracy and the development of the world, and warned of the ambitions of some states to dictate to others what they should do.

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