

**LECTURE BY JUAN MANUEL SANTOS, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA, AT BROWN UNIVERSITY**

***“WHY PEOPLE SHOULD GIVE MORE THAN A DAMN ABOUT
LATIN AMERICA”***

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Half a century since the Alliance for Progress

On the 13th of March we celebrated the 50th anniversary of a milestone in the relations between the United States and Latin America.

That day President Kennedy, at the White House, delivered a historic speech before the Latin American diplomatic corps. Let me quote him:

“Our nations are the product of a common struggle –the revolt from colonial rule. And our people share a common heritage –the quest for the dignity and the freedom of man. (...)”

But President Kennedy went much further in his 1961 speech by making a striking admission and proposing a bold new initiative:

“As a citizen of the United States let me be the first to admit that we North Americans have not always grasped the significance of this common mission, just as it is also true that many in your own countries have not fully understood the urgency of the need to lift people from poverty and ignorance and despair. But we must turn from these mistakes –from the failures and the misunderstandings of the past– to a future full of peril but bright with hope”.

Under these premises, President Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, a 10-year plan for the Americas aimed at making the sixties the decade in which Latin America would see unprecedented democratic, social and economic change.

This lecture wants to be a tribute to that historic vision, the most ambitious initiative ever launched to achieve development in the Americas.

It is a great privilege to give one of the *Ogden Lectures* at Brown University –where my beloved and only daughter Maria Antonia is a student–.

Although there are days when I wonder –I have to say it– if parts of my job are in line with the teachings of Professor Josiah Carberry.

The Alliance for Progress was preceded by ‘Operation Pan America’, which began with a proposal made in 1958 by a visionary and audacious Brazilian President, Juscelino Kubitschek, to President Eisenhower.

And what was the purpose of Operation Pan America?

Very simple. Its goal was to broaden the focus of the Inter-American System –until then almost exclusively based on legal and defense issues– to include cooperation in social and economic development.

In the middle of the Cold War, President Kubitschek presented his proposal for cooperation as a way to counter "*strange and undemocratic*" ideologies –he meant communism–.

We can say that Operation Pan America, and the principles it represented, had important effects, particularly for our integration.

In the two years after its launch –1959 and 1960– the Inter-American Development Bank, the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), and the Central American Common Market were created.

Even President Kennedy, in the speech that launched the Alliance for Progress, said that it would be “*an approach consistent with the majestic concept of Operation Pan America*”.

The United States pledged up to 20 billion dollars in aid to countries south of Rio Grande to promote social progress and economic development, a program larger and more ambitious than the Marshall Plan itself.

Two opposing views

THE TRAGIC ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY IN 1963 MEANT THE LOSS OF THE AMERICAN LEADER WHO BEST UNDERSTOOD THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LATIN AMERICA.

In less than three years in office President Kennedy visited four Latin American countries, and received seven Latin American Presidents at the White House.

But since then, Vietnam, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflictive and dangerous zones of the world have captured the attention of Washington's decision makers. Latin America has been left in the back burner at best and out of the kitchen at worst.

Nothing is more telling than the conversation between President Richard Nixon and Donald Rumsfeld, then a young White House aide, in 1971.

Nixon told Rumsfeld:

"The only thing that matters in the world is China, Russia and Europe. Latin America doesn't matter. Consciously, people don't give one damn about Latin America now. They don't give one damn about it".

How things had changed in just ten years!

We went from President Kennedy's message of integration and cooperation to President Nixon's virtual denial of our relevance.

To a greater or lesser degree, Kennedy's warning became true:
NORTH AMERICANS HAVE NOT GRASPED THAT THEY
SHARE A COMMON MISSION WITH LATIN AMERICA.

And after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain even the specter of communism, as a pretext for cooperation between our countries, vanished.

The military dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean have also disappeared to the point that today –with only one exception, and I hope not for long– all our countries live under democracy.

The threat of communism was then replaced by another cause: the War on Drugs.

President Nixon declared the War on Drugs in 1971, a war ratified by President Reagan when he characterized the drug problem as a threat to national security.

In Colombia we have fought against drug trafficking, perhaps more than any other country on the planet. In this very bloody struggle we lost our best leaders, our best police officers, our best judges, our best journalists...

But let me be clear. We fight organized crime and the illegal narcotics trade from our own convictions, because we know that they are a powerful enemy of Colombian democracy and a threat to communities and families around the world.

In the end, we managed to break up the large *cartels*, and have significantly reduced the hectares of coca planted in our country and the tons of drugs exported.

Unfortunately, the business goes on. So, we continue to fight this scourge, attacking all the links in this evil chain, because, for us, it REALLY is an issue of national security.

We continue to cooperate with our partners because we fully understand there is a co-responsibility in which we all have the moral obligation to fight a threat that respects no borders.

Our achievements have been possible, in part, because of Plan Colombia, arguably the United States' most successful bipartisan foreign policy initiative of recent times.

When Plan Colombia was launched, our country was considered by many as a nation on the brink of becoming a failed state.

Today, as Secretary Clinton said recently, and many other analysts have agreed, Colombia has gone from being a source of danger to becoming a source of inspiration and a crucial partner in confronting the grand issues affecting the future of humanity.

But we do not feel victorious, nor has the problem disappeared. Organized crime is always looking for the path of least resistance. As Colombia strengthens its judicial and law enforcement institutions, and the cost of operating from our country increases, drug lords look for other less severe environments.

The drug trade, with its inevitable consequences of violence and terror, is migrating to other regions such as Central America and Caribbean nations, to Mexico, and to our South American neighbors. Even West Africa has become a distribution center.

40 years later, the drug problem continues to wreak havoc worldwide.

That is why there is a growing sentiment that calls for new strategies, new visions, new approaches to this problem. And this is only possible if we do it globally, because it is a challenge that affects not just a few countries, but the entire world.

And in that discussion, the United States, as the biggest consumer in the world, must be present.

We on our part, with the moral authority and technical expertise that our sacrifices and our achievements have given us, are ready to participate in this debate, to share our experience and explore alternatives with other countries.

But, I repeat, we cannot do it alone.

The importance of Latin America

Back in 1960, Colombian President Alberto Lleras came on an official visit to the United States and made this alarming statement:

"Latin America is on the brink of an economic and social crisis without precedent in our history."

It was not just any leader who said this.

Lleras was a man of international stature, whose condition as a statesman was well known throughout the world and particularly respected in the hemisphere. He was the first Secretary General of the OAS.

With this statement, President Lleras wanted to issue a warning: unless Latin America received economic support, the region could follow the Cuban path towards insurrection.

Well... over half a century after a Colombian president came to the United States and sounded an alarm about the needs of Latin America, I –in the same country and representing the same office– want to deliver the opposite message.

I AM NOT HERE TO TELL AMERICANS THAT LATIN AMERICA NEEDS YOUR HELP. NO.

Today I come to tell you, with deep conviction and with absolute respect, that it is time for the United States to reassess its priorities in international relations and turn its eyes to its own hemisphere.

NOT BECAUSE IT'S IN THE INTEREST OF LATIN AMERICA,
BUT BECAUSE IT'S IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA.

For its own sake, the United States cannot – and should not– continue to ignore the enormous economic, political, environmental and human potential that exists south of the border.

While the rest of the world, while Europe and Asia, are strengthening their ties to our region, the U.S. is passive, is disengaged.

THIS IS NOT ONLY WRONG, IT IS SUICIDAL!

I hope –I really hope– this message is being heard.

I hope we enter –as President Obama has recently said– “*a new era of partnership*”.

What kind of partnership? President Obama described it well: that one in which *“neighbors join with neighbors to unleash the progress that none of us can achieve alone”*.

I must say that in Latin America we are ready, more than ready, to participate in this new era.

ALL WE NEED IS FOR THE U.S. TO TRANSLATE THESE GOOD INTENTIONS INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS.

Meanwhile, as someone with a special affection for the United States –a country I admire and am fond of, where I lived and studied for several years–, today I would like, from this podium at Brown University, to help –not only the government but also academia, the private sector, and the American people– to overcome the ‘Hyperopia Syndrome’.

Hyperopia, or farsightedness, is defective vision in which one can see distant objects well, but has trouble focusing on what one has close at hand.

Let me tell you, or remind you, why people –to paraphrase President Nixon– “*should give more than a damn about Latin America*”.

The Latin American contribution to world

LATIN AMERICA –LIKE COLOMBIA– IS WELL KNOWN, BUT NOT KNOWN WELL.

Think about this: Latin America is an area of about 8 million square miles, larger than the United States and China combined.

It has a population of nearly 600 million people, twice the United States. With a very important characteristic: it is a mainly young population, with an average age of 27, and a dynamic and growing middle class.

What has Latin America given the world?

The most vibrant literature of recent decades comes from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Nobel Prize winners such as Gabriela Mistral, Miguel Angel Asturias, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, and Mario Vargas Llosa, were born in our region.

We cannot forget other greats of world literature such as Jorge Luis Borges, Ernesto Sábato, Julio Cortázar, Mario Benedetti, Juan Carlos Onetti, Juan Rulfo, José Donoso, Jorge Amado, Roberto Bolaño, and, of course, my good friend –who was my teacher and is now a professor at this university– Carlos Fuentes.

Carlos, thank you for all I have learned from you and the doors of curiosity and discovery that you opened for me and for all your students.

Talking about art, no one can deny the importance of the Mexican muralists such as Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros; of the also Mexican Frida Kahlo and Rufino Tamayo; of the Uruguayan Joaquin Torres García; the Chilean Roberto Matta and Claudio Bravo; the Cuban Wilfredo Lam, or of Colombian Fernando Botero, one of the most renowned living artists in the world.

Film surprises us positively with directors as prominent as the Mexicans Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro; the Brazilians Fernando Meirelles and Walter Salles, or the Colombian Rodrigo García, plus excellent representatives of Argentine cinema, which has won two Oscars for best foreign language film.

And why not assess the Latin American contribution to the world of music?

Rhythms we all know, dance or sing, like the bolero, tango, samba, mariachi, vallenato and salsa, have shown the world the passion of Latinos.

The songs of Shakira, Juanes, Mariah Carey, Jennifer Lopez, Christina Aguilera, and Gloria Estefan would be unthinkable without their Latin heritage.

The list could go on endlessly, but I don't want to overwhelm you.

There are so many Latin Americans contributions in areas such as science, medicine, architecture or philosophy; so many outstanding athletes, including the Colombian Edgar Rentería, the most valuable player of the last baseball World Series; so much talent that the world still doesn't know.

The Hispanic force in the U.S.

The reality of Latin America, moreover, has already crossed your borders. To witness the vitality and the capacity of Latin Americans, one does not have to go far.

The Hispanic population in the United States exceeds 50 million – over 15 percent of the entire population–, and is the largest minority in the country. According to demographic projections, by 2050 it will account for 30 percent.

One out of four children born here is of Latin origin.

In fact, the United States is the second largest Spanish-speaking country in the world after Mexico!

There are nearly 10 million Latino voters in the United States who have the power to tip the balance in the electoral process.

Latinos are proud of their roots, of their language and culture, but they are also true Americans, willing to work and give their lives for the country in which they live.

Many young Latinos are defending American interests with courage and honor, in places as far away as Iraq and Afghanistan, and some of them have come home wounded or in white coffins.

Thinking about them, and their sacrifice, I ask the following question:

Where does the real strategic interest of the United States lie?

Perhaps, it lies closer to home, in contributing to a more prosperous, peaceful and just Latin America, and making it your real partner for the future.

Secretary Clinton summed up the dilemma in a very telling comparison: what has been invested in the Plan Colombia in eleven years –with all the benefits it has brought– is spent (and I sincerely hope not wasted) in Afghanistan in just one week.

The decade of Latin America

In September of last year I spoke to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

There, I expressed my conviction that this is the decade of Latin America and the Caribbean; that the world should look at this region as a strategic partner to solve the great challenges humanity is facing.

Our region has what the world needs: food, water, energy, forests, biodiversity, and a young and growing workforce; all these in a continent with democratic stability and sound economic policy.

Latin America is composed of different countries with many common cultural aspects, but each with particular strengths.

To the extent that our countries are integrated and work together –as indeed is happening– these strengths are united and make the region an unavoidable economic and political power.

Let me briefly give you eight good reasons which have led me to say that this is the decade of Latin America:

FIRST: We are growing our economies and with that, we increase our opportunities. Latin American countries have sustained high rates of growth and predictions are even greater.

In 2010 Latin America showed a strong economic recovery with a GDP growth of over 6 percent.

According to *The Economist*, if the region can keep up the growth of the past few years, it will double its income per person by 2025, to an average of 22,000 dollars.

A recent study by HSBC predicted that five Latin American countries –Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela– will be among the 30 largest economies in the world by 2050.

Two of them –Brazil and Mexico– will be within the top ten economies, ahead of countries like France, Italy, Canada, South Korea and Spain.

SECOND: We plan and we execute the plans we make. Latin America was one of the regions least affected by the recent global financial crisis thanks to adequate fiscal and monetary policies.

Our region reacted to the debt crisis of the eighties with financial, monetary and fiscal reforms that helped shield it from situations like this.

These reforms contributed to greater macroeconomic stability, with more independent central banks, controlled inflation and low debt.

I myself, as Minister of Finance in 2000, had to face the worst recession in Colombia in seventy years, and went ahead with measures that not only saved the financial institutions and public savings, but also the homes of hundreds of thousands of people with mortgages.

On the other hand, since the Latin American economies were the least affected, because we have learned from our experiences, we were also the fastest to rebound after the crisis, driven by a global demand for commodities and the inflow of international capital, which sought refuge in –who would believe it!– safer emerging markets.

THIRD: We see the world as an opportunity, not as a threat.

The Latin American countries have embraced globalization by creating the right conditions for foreign investment.

With few exceptions, the region is moving towards a more favorable investment climate.

Several countries, including Colombia, guarantee legal stability for investors and promote the signing of agreements for the reciprocal protection of investments.

The result is that Latin America is today the second largest recipient of Foreign Direct Investment in the developing world.

The United States is still the largest investor in the region, followed by Spain and Canada.

It is good to note, however, that other countries such as China and India are entering Latin America with increasing confidence and enthusiasm, investing in sectors such as infrastructure, mining, agriculture, and technology.

FOUR: Democracy is the foundation of our future. Today we can say with great satisfaction that, in Latin America, democracy is the rule and not the exception, with political systems that promote civil liberties.

These days, many countries in the region have celebrated 200 years since independence from Spanish rule.

Remember that –along with the United States– Latin American countries were the first in the modern world to establish republics, with democratic systems and elections, and were also the first to eliminate atrocious institutions such as slavery.

This democratic tradition, which was interrupted in some countries by military dictatorships, is present across the continent, and we can safely and proudly say that democracy is here to stay.

There are many nuances and ideological tendencies, but a single democracy is alive and kicking from Mexico to Patagonia.

As President Obama said, *“the lessons of Latin America can be a guide for people around the world who are beginning their own journeys toward democracy”*.

FIFTH: It’s all about the People. The governments of the region are committed to improving the quality and coverage of their education and health systems, and to reduce poverty once and for all.

We are aware that investment in education is the only way to move permanently towards development, and we have made education a top priority in our government’s agenda.

In fact, many countries in the region, including Colombia, have already reached the Millennium Development Goal of having 100 percent of children in primary education.

With an important characteristic: unlike many other regions, Latin America countries now have more girls than boys enrolled in secondary schools and universities.

We are preparing our students for a globalized world, encouraging the learning of English and other languages.

Allow me to make a reciprocal reflection: How many U.S. schools are teaching Spanish, a language spoken by at least 400 million people in nearly 25 countries? How many business and travel opportunities haven't been lost because Americans don't speak the second most widely used Western language on the planet?

Poverty and an appalling income distribution remain a huge challenge for Latin America, affecting one third of its population, and we are confronting it with different programs.

However, it is good to say that, since 2002, more than 40 million Latin Americans have been lifted out of poverty, and it has also improved income distribution.

I have to say this is not enough at all! Much more has to be done, and this is one of the key challenges, one of the obligations, we have in the foreseeable future.

SIXTH: United we are a world power. Latin America is increasingly integrated.

Mechanisms for political dialogue, such as the Iberoamerican Summits, the Rio Group and the South American Union of Nations –UNASUR– operate regularly and effectively, and have allowed the region to act with one voice in other international organizations.

It is important to note that, with political maturity, our countries have been able to resolve their differences –sometimes complex– through these institutions.

Colombia and Venezuela, for example, had very tense relations a few months ago because of disagreements on matters of regional security. We resolved them through dialogue, and a few weeks ago it was decided that representatives from both countries would alternate as Secretary General of UNASUR.

In the commercial field, our region is increasingly integrated, through existing mechanisms such as Mercosur, the Andean Community, Central American Common Market, CARICOM, and multiple Free Trade Agreements between our countries and the rest of the world.

We have learned to cooperate. FOR MANY DECADES, FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, WE SOUGHT THE ANSWER TO OUR NEEDS IN THE NORTH, AND NOW WE ARE FINDING IT LOOKING SOUTH AND DISCOVERING THERE OUR OWN NORTH.

SEVENTH: We are the source of sustenance. Latin America has the capacity and potential to produce the food, energy and water the planet is demanding, especially since hard times are expected, driven in part by global warming and in part by low productivity in other regions.

The growth in China and India alone, which will contain, at mid-century, a third of the world's population, represents an immense challenge for the world, which must find a way to feed and quench the thirst of about 3 billion people in these countries.

Our region, with its tropical location, with the quality of its soils, forests, and rivers, can meet this demand for food and water without affecting the ecological balance.

In the field of energy, known oil reserves found in our region are increasing, and let us not forget that we have been pioneers in the field of alternative energy and biofuels.

As *The Economist* has pointed out, Latin America has 15 per cent of the world's oil reserves, a large stock of minerals, more than a quarter of its arable land, and 30 percent of its fresh water.

Everywhere you look, we have a promising future in these fields.

EIGHTH: We value and protect our Biosphere. Our region is the richest in biodiversity on the planet with the most mega-diverse country in the world, which is Brazil, and the most bio-diverse country per square kilometer, which is Colombia.

The Amazon region accounts for 20 percent of the world's freshwater supply and 50 percent of the planet's biodiversity.

With the appropriate financial compensation, we have an enormous capacity to reduce the rates of deforestation and plant new forests, changing the history not only of the region, but of the world.

When we see, day after day, the terrible and irreversible effects of global warming, Latin America emerges as an environmental power that can benefit humanity.

This was touched upon by former Vice-President Al Gore in a recent visit to our country, where he reiterated his proposal to put a price on carbon.

I told him then, and I repeat it here: Colombia supports the creation of a carbon tax, and is prepared to lead this proposal in the region.

Go South! And go fast!

After the arguments set out above, there only remains one question:

Is the United States, its government and its people, aware of the immense potential that lies beyond its southern border?

As the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti wrote, it is time to remind them that "the South also exists."

And not just as a promise for the future, but as a powerful and positive reality for the present.

I am sure you know the famous phrase that Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, wrote in 1865, inviting America's youth to discover new horizons: "*Go west, young man!*".

Well, today, dear friends of Brown University, I want to give you a new slogan: **GO SOUTH, YOUNG WOMEN AND YOUNG MEN!
AND GO SOON!**

**DO NOT MISS THIS TRAIN! BECAUSE THIS TRAIN IS
LEAVING THE STATION, NOW!**

Of course, like others, we still have many problems and many areas for improvement.

We must increase investment in research and development, innovation, green technology, and work on the quality of and access to education.

We have to reduce the tremendous gaps in income distribution within our population, and reduce the unacceptable inequality of opportunity.

In this we have failed and it is, without a doubt, the biggest challenge we face if we are to cross the threshold of development.

It is important to use our advantages in the production of commodities, but at the same time we must avoid dependence on them, strengthening our industrial capacity and increasing the productivity of nonagricultural sectors, particularly green technologies.

Many countries, including Colombia, face criminal groups financed by the drug trade, and we must strengthen our commitment to combating, eradicating and punishing them.

We welcome the expansion of democracy across the continent, but we are also aware that we must consolidate it and improve its quality day after day.

Despite the choices and challenges with which we are confronted, there must be no doubt that Latin America is a region of political, economic and social stability, packed with potential, able to face the challenges of the future and contribute to humanity's most urgent needs.

Latin America deserves to have a louder voice in the international arena, and is beginning to find that voice.

Latin America, to paraphrase Gabriel Garcia Marquez, is not condemned to live another "hundred years of solitude."

Next year, the leaders of the countries of our hemisphere will gather in the beautiful city of Cartagena de Indias, where we will be pleased and honored to host the Sixth Summit of the Americas.

There we can revive the spirit of cooperation that the Alliance for Progress symbolized a half century ago!

If President Kennedy could be here today, I'm sure he would be proud to see how Latin America has found its own road to development.

I'm sure he would help us challenge, as we do today –with respect and arguments– Nixon's phrase that has served as a pretext for this discussion.

Maybe he would point to him and say: *You were wrong and I was right!*

Maybe he would quote President Obama's words of March 21st:
“Latin America is more important to the prosperity and security of the United States than ever before”.

That said, if some Americans still do not give a damn about Latin America, it is simply for lack of information and understanding.

They are suffering from that 'Hyperopia Syndrome' I mentioned before: that defective vision which, fortunately, is easily correctable.

Latin America is moving forward, at a fast pace, towards a future of progress, hope and opportunity, and whoever is not at its side, who is not its partner, will miss the trip.

Having heard these arguments, perhaps you can help me answer the following question:

Does Latin America matter to the interests of the United States?
DOES IT?

I think I can guess your answer.

YES, IT MATTERS!

IT MATTERS MORE NOW THAN EVER BEFORE!

Definitely more ... MUCH MORE THAN A DAMN!