

## AMERICAS: Smiles, Handshakes Won't Cover Up Tension at Summit

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MEXICO CITY, Jan 9 (IPS) - There will be the usual smiles, pats-on-the-back and relaxed photo-ops at the Special Summit of the Americas next Monday and Tuesday in Monterrey, Mexico.

But the easy camaraderie will cover up tension between the United States and left-leaning Latin American governments, and between several Latin American countries as well.

On the eve of the fourth summit of the Americas, relations between the United States and the governments of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela are uneasy due to divergent political views and visions of continent-wide integration.

There is also tension between Chile and Bolivia over the latter's long-standing demand for an outlet to the sea.

"Although the faces in the photos will be smiling and the final declaration will be full of good intentions, the gathering is unlikely to eliminate the tension between a number of countries in the Americas," Bruno Negrete, an expert on international policy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, told IPS.

The key issues on the summit's agenda are economic growth with equity, social development, and democratic governability. The meeting will be attended by the heads of state of the 34 members of the Organisation of American States -- all of the countries in the region with the exception of Cuba, which was expelled in 1962.

As of Friday, 30 of the 56 clauses in the final draft declaration remained bracketed -- in other words, no consensus had yet been reached. But according to Mexico's ambassador to the OAS, Miguel Ruiz, that is normal.

Observers said the difficulty of reaching agreement on a final declaration reflected differences on questions like security, terrorism, and the negotiations for the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

"The summit will be a pretence, because the discord between leftist governments like those of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela and the right-wing U.S. administration is something that will not disappear with photo-ops and hugs," Hemispheric Social Alliance spokesman Héctor de la Cueva commented to IPS.

Social movements in the Americas, many of which are represented in the Hemispheric Social Alliance, will hold forums and demonstrations parallel to the summit, and on Sunday will present their proposals to the foreign ministers in a special meeting organised by the OAS.

"We don't believe the governments will take into account civil society's positions because (the positions) make an in-depth criticism of the current economic and integration models. But we will present them anyway," said de la Cueva, the head of the Mexican Network of Action Against Free Trade.

The first summit of the Americas was held in December 1994 in Miami, the second in April 1998 in Santiago, and the third in Quebec, in April 2001.

The summits are described by the OAS as meetings of countries with democratically elected governments and free market economies that hold multilateral negotiations on an egalitarian basis and that reach decisions by consensus.

Unlike 1994, when the FTAA project was launched and a majority of governments in the Americas saw eye-to-eye with Washington's dictates and views on the economy, left-leaning governments have a strong influence today in the region, in countries like Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela.

This week, spokespersons for the George W. Bush administration questioned the Argentine government of Néstor Kirchner's relations with Cuba.

There is an even longer history of tension with Venezuela, governed by the controversial Hugo Chávez, who Washington accuses of maintaining overly cosy ties with socialist Cuba.

At the height of the Cold War, the Cuban government of Fidel Castro called the OAS, which organises the summits of the Americas, "the ministry of U.S. colonies."

Nor are Washington's relations with Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at their best, because the two giants have conflicting visions of the FTAA and of the World Trade Organisation talks on the opening of trade.

Furthermore, in response to a new U.S. measure under which visitors to the United States began to be fingerprinted and photographed on arrival as of Jan. 5, Brazil has begun doing the same with visiting U.S. citizens.

But there is also friction between Latin American countries. Chilean President Ricardo Lagos said the "maritime sovereignty" of his country would not be open to discussion in Monterrey, in response to a remark by Bolivian President Carlos Mesa, who announced his intention to try to negotiate an outlet to the Pacific Ocean through Chilean territory.

Bolivia lost its Pacific shoreline to Chile in a war that ended in 1879.

"The Americas are no longer the unity of interests and visions that was talked about in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, which is why the Bush administration is nervous," said

Negrete.

But Washington has actually done little to work with his neighbours to the South, although several new initiatives, like a proposed guest-workers programme for immigrants, indicate that he apparently plans to change that somewhat, the analyst added.

In the declaration that emerged from the U.S.-sponsored Miami Summit of the Americas, the countries in the region described themselves as promoters of a market economy and free trade, and proposed creating an FTAA by 2005 at the latest.

Today, there are contrasting visions and interests, while the FTAA, which will create a free trade zone from Alaska in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south, excluding only Cuba, is taking shape with a much less ambitious blueprint.

But according to Ruiz, Mexico's representative in the OAS, who is heading the negotiations to finetune the last details of the final declaration to be signed by the presidents next Tuesday, there is nothing that will stand in the way of reaching consensus on a final draft.

The Hemispheric Social Alliance's de la Cueva, however, said "We know that in the end, the presidents will shake hands, and as usual there will be a relaxed photograph full of smiling faces. But we mustn't fool ourselves, because many differences will still be lying just under the surface." . (END/2004)