

**STATEMENT OF H. E. THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA,  
MR. HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS, DURING THE TURNOVER CEREMONY OF THE  
CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE GROUP OF 77 FROM THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO  
VENEZUELA**

**New York, 11 January 2002**

Your Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations  
Your Excellency, Mr. Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
Your Excellency, Ambassador Bagher Asadi,  
Distinguished Mr. Mourad Ahmia, Executive Secretary of the G-77  
Distinguished Delegates of the State Countries Members of our Group of 77  
Mr. Luís Alfonso Dávila, Foreign Minister of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and other members of my  
Delegation  
My fellow countrymen  
Ambassador Milos Alcalay, Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations  
Ambassadors of Venezuela to United Nations Organizations  
Distinguished guests of this event  
Distinguished Representatives of the media, ambassadors, officials and other employees of the United  
Nations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, please allow me to extend my warmest wishes for the New Year to our Secretary General, to the staff of the United Nations, to all the representatives gathered here and their Governments and, ultimately, to our peoples, who should always be the true architects of History.

First of all, I would like to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran for its great contribution to the Group during the past year. We have heard Minister Kharrazi's statement and we take this opportunity also to greet President Khatami, well aware as we are of his readiness, his willingness and his devotion to the cause of the South/South cooperation and his search for new ways to achieve peace and integral development.

We recognize now, from our vantage point of the Chairmanship of the Group, the efforts and achievement that Iran brought about to the Group and, consequently, to the United Nations and peoples of the world.

I would also like to express my thanks to all of you but especially to the members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group for the trust they placed in my country, when at the end of the year 2001 they elected Venezuela to this post of such high responsibility.

I have come here for the express purpose of accepting this honor, taking advantage that this time there are no time limits and, consequently, less pressure when speaking.

It is customary that this turn over be attended by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs. However, towards the end of last year, assessing the elements of the present world situation, I decided to come personally, essentially for two reasons: First, as evidence of the great importance that the Venezuelan Government, our people, and our revolution place on this dialogue searching for avenues of change for our world.

Indeed, we live in difficult, worrisome times. Today more than yesterday. Today, 38 years after the birth of the Group of 77; today, more than 50 years after the creation of the United Nations, it is imperative that the world be inspired by the will to dialogue. To find consensus and to continue the search – not of old ways, but of new ways, new avenues for change. Because there are powerful reasons for all of us to be worried for the fate of our world – not only the Third, Fourth or Fifth World – but the whole world. For we have only one

world. Someone started to divide us into first, second and third, probably in terms of geographic or economic criteria, but at the bottom of it all we are all in the same boat - like those on the Titanic, for example. This world cannot be divided into twos or threes. We share the same fate and lived through the same events in the year 2001 - painful, bloody, anguishing, hideous - caused by terrorism in this city, this beautiful city, New York, a city we learned of in "Book 1", when studying English. The city where people live on the ground, travel underground and work in the sky. The city of Frank Sinatra's song "New York, New York", where he says, "If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere". The hideous events that affected this beautiful city and horrified us all, the impact of which will last for a long time and will continue to affect society, the psychological equilibrium of society, not only in New York, and in the United States, but throughout the world.

Thus, as this century begins under the drumbeat of war and under the threat of the horror of terrorism - as well as the "other" terrorism that also exists - that is the misery of everyday hunger, of children dying of malnutrition, and of the threat of new conflicts for millions of people.

I insist brothers and sisters, there is a very powerful reason for us to engage in a world debate, but to do so looking straight at each other, and without any kind of cynicism, without the hypocrisy of the "hypocritical Pharisees", as Jesus of Nazareth used to say when, his words like a whip, he slashed at the powerful ones of those times that wanted a clean cup on the outside, while the inside of the cup was full of injustice. There is too much cynicism in the world, too much double talk. We talk about peace while pain is inflicted on innocent people. We talk about development and millions are dwelling in misery.

I believe the moment has arrived where we should speak the truth openly and without fear, of the truths, the sorrows, the wounds of the world, in order to find real solutions, which is what we all desire.

What happens is, we have different outlooks, different diagnosis, like a group of doctors that do not agree on the diagnosis of an illness. Each one will give his own prescription, while the world dies of hunger, misery, war and terrorism. This is the truth. We should recognize it, in order to find the proper solutions before it is too late. Therefore, I would like to reconfirm the vital importance that my Government and my people put on these debates, but only to the extent that they lead us to practical and speedy action. What we should not do is sit down and debate for a hundred years more while the illnesses of the world spread to infect all.

In second place, I wanted to share this morning with you because, besides this first idea, I want to call upon the Heads of State and Governments of all the world, the sovereigns, to all those, like me, have been entrusted with a temporary and sacred responsibility, having received from our peoples the mandate to make these important decisions.

I call upon all of you and I am doing it in all the forums, in almost all the mechanisms of integration of which Venezuela is a part in South America: the Andean Community of Nations, the Group of Three, the Association of the Caribbean States. It is a call to increment our political will to the highest of levels to enable us to take big decisions.

In my opinion, during the last several years, it would seem as though politics - the Great Politics - have been banished from the stages of the world. It appears to me as though this was part of a plan after the fall of the Berlin Wall, after the fall of the Soviet Union. An attempt was made to impose upon the world the idea that this was the end of history - the end of the road. The idea of pragmatism and electronic technology appeared, and with it the idea that politics are not necessary, that it is the hidden hand of the market that can do and can fix everything. It is the thesis of untamed neo-liberalism - an ominous thesis that has harmed the world so much during the centuries. And now, at the end of the Twentieth Century, it has returned with its poison, its selfishness, without a soul, seeking to banish politics. This is not new. Long before Christ, Plato used to write in the "Politeia" about the notion of the taking of decisions that affect the community, counteracting at that

time any intentions regarding the banishment of politics.

Now it is absolutely necessary that we have a return of Great Politics. It is not true that the hidden hand of the market will solve the problems of the world. This is a false and diabolical idea, indeed.

Neo-liberalism threatens to finish with entire populations in a few years. It threatens to overthrow governments. It has taken countries – countries that were already reaching the first and second levels in the world – to a point where they suddenly find themselves not only at the doors of the fifth level, but to the fifth circle of hell.

Unemployment, poverty, exploitation, inequality and injustice bring about social conflicts, which in turn result in political conflicts and from there to violent conflicts, from which there is only one step to internal wars.

Neo-liberalism is diabolic, I repeat.

I call on all Heads of State of the countries of the Group of 77 that, united, we assume with a stronger will and courage the responsibilities that have been entrusted to us in this period so crucial for the world, in order to forge ahead towards the reaching of our goals and objectives.

Unquestionably, the world is changing. We could ask ourselves: Where are we going? There could be many answers, but I believe most of them will be subject to chance or improvisation. There is not a well-supported thesis available at this moment by which we could answer this question and others like it: Where is the world going? or, Which is the road to be taken during this century?

I was commenting to the Secretary General on our way to this meeting, that if the Group of 77 were to have a Constitution, or a long-term strategic plan- to guide its ideology, its doctrine, its course through the map of the world - we could draw from the Declaration of the Millennium, that was debated upon by us here at the United Nations in 2000, and which all the Heads of State signed and which we assumed as an existential commitment with well established goals. Our Secretary General worked extensively in this Declaration that starts with the beautiful words: “We the peoples”. The peoples of the world are the essence of the political, economic and international relations efforts. Our objective should be the peoples in order to improve their lives, their dignity, their integral development, their human development, their well-being, as our Father Liberator of America, Simon Bolivar would say.

If the Group of 77 would also need a strategic plan of action - we have it already! It is the Declaration of Havana adopted almost two years ago.

From these two documents we will be able to obtain the guidance for the daily work that Venezuela will assume during its Chairmanship of the Group of 77. I ask all the representatives of the 133 countries that we assume - and continue to assume together - our commitment, in the same way it was assumed under the Chairmanship of Iran, perfecting strategies and objectives and facilitating our contacts. I must insist in the need for a major participation of the Heads of State and Government in a “Presidential Diplomacy”, a high-level diplomacy, which is most needed to revitalize and strengthen the Group of 77. This goes also for the Group of 15, over which, coincidentally, we are also presiding. In Venezuela we are now preparing for the Summit of the Group of 15 scheduled for July of 2002. It is also necessary to articulate and strengthen the Group of 15 in order to empower the world we live in. Sometimes one feels that the leaders of the world are logging behind, as it is said in Venezuela “like the funeral of the poor man” one step forward and two backwards. We should ride forward!

The Millennium Declaration is a valid, legitimate instrument that was signed by all the Heads of State of the world and, of course, by the member countries of the Group of 77 – countries that constitute 4/5 of the world

and constitute the biggest arena of dialogue, deliberation and search for the roads for the planet to gather the peoples of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

If we could all read the objectives of the Millennium Declaration, we should applaud. If we revise its objectives, we would have to ask ourselves – as we did at that time during the deliberations of those days, here in New York, a question that I consider essential: How can we reach these objectives? For example, I remember one such objective: “For the year 2015 the number of the poor and the marginal of the planet should be reduced to half of what it was in the year 2000”. Two years have gone by. We would have to ask ourselves and the organs responsible for the follow up of this commitment if we have truly taken steps in this direction. I believe we have not. Rather, I think we have followed another direction - one that increases hunger and poverty in the world. This is something to be worried about. We should try to obtain an answer within the Group of 77. How are we going to cooperate with the United Nations to reach these objectives? I would ask - are we going to reach these objectives within the framework of the economic patterns that prevail in the world today? I must again call attention to the concept of neo-liberalism. Should we continue in that direction? Carrying on the same pattern? The answer for us is quite clear: No, definitely not.

Are we going to approach this goal with the present scheme of international trade? Some months ago, in the Ibero-American Summit in Lima, the Vice President of the World Bank and the President of CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America) informed us on the position of the developed countries. In accordance with their information, the subsidy they give to the production of their countries is about one thousand million dollars per day, in subsidies of the production of food, benefits and services. Meanwhile, they demand from us - the countries of the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh world - that we cannot subsidize our national production because this would transgress the laws of the invisible hand of the market. Are we going in that direction?

Are the majority of the inhabitants of the planet going to accept the imposition of a privileged minority? 20% of the population of the world from the developed countries consumes 80% of the benefits and services that are produced in the planet. It has been demonstrated that the peoples of the third world - even in the remote case that we could reach the same standard of living of the developed countries – would need at least 10 planet earths to sustain the pattern of development that it has been imposed on the world. Is this road the one we want? Are we going to finish with our planet? Are we going to finish with the forests, the waters, the ozone layer? Are we going to end with the lives of our grand children and the rest of humanity? Is this the pattern of development that we are going to follow? The one of death, the road to hell?

These are thoughts to be debated. But I believe that it has to be done with courage. There is a need for more positive energy in the discussion of these issues, beyond the repetitive speeches that are heard everywhere. We have to adopt decisions, and some are very urgent. For example, it would be commendable to debate on disarmament and arrive at decisions on the reduction of military expenses. Bombs kill people. Sometimes, they miss their objective and children and other innocent people die.

Are we going to follow on the road of war? Expending thousands of millions of dollars in technology of death and destruction? Is there no will to change? Are we going to follow with the same cynicism and hypocrisy of talking peace on one side, while spending thousands of millions of dollars on factories for the production of arms of mass destruction, on the other?

Another example is the matter of foreign debt. No one wants to approach this subject. I have tried to do it in some of the Presidential meetings. I throw the ball, but no one responds, neither to debate it nor to review numbers like these, for example: Twenty years ago, Latin America had a debt of around 700 thousand millions dollars. During these twenty years, more than 800 thousand millions has been paid and at present its debt is approximately 900 thousand millions. Fidel Castro has called this debt the “eternal debt “. We will never finish paying it off. It is self-explanatory. And our peoples sink in misery.

I must take this opportunity to point out that Venezuela has paid 15 thousand million dollars in foreign debt.

Venezuela is pursuing a pacific and democratic revolution, somehow misunderstood and thought of badly in some parts of the world and by some centers of power that pretend to establish themselves as universal policemen. Our revolutionary process is democratic. In the past two-and-a-half years, we have had seven electoral processes, as well as two popular referendums – consulting our people for the first time in our history on public decisions. It is necessary to debate about democracy and international cooperation. Economic development and social justice go hand in hand, and fit within the framework of the goals pursued by the Group of 77, which advocates these same strategic lines of dialogue consensus.

The Declaration of Havana lays the groundwork for the strategic plan that we must accomplish during our tenure of Chairmanship of this Group.

A Summit Meeting at the presidential level has been foreseen to take place every five years. I have invited the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, to Caracas. There, we will review the important goals of the Group of 77. Additionally, I have initiated contacts with other leaders of the world: the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi; the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien; the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin; the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair; the President of France, Jacques Chirac. With all of them we could reactivate a constructive dialogue within the so-proclaimed North-South Dialogue. We can also revive the South-South cooperation in matters, for example, pertaining to the poor of the world and the damned of the earth.

As the North American poet Whitman said, “We shall do so it matters not whether five hundred or five thousand years from now, but we should do so.” We will achieve it.

Let Justice and Liberty triumph!