



CONSEJO EPISCOPAL LATINOAMERICANO



Commission of the Bishops' Conferences
of the European Community

**Message to the
European Union-Latin America Summit
in Guadalajara, Mexico
on 28 May 2004**

1. Introduction

We very much welcome the fact that the heads of state and government of the now enlarged EU, Latin America and the countries of the Caribbean are meeting again. Efforts of this nature to promote closer co-operation between Latin America and Europe should be intensified, given that there are enough common problems and challenges that necessitate joint action. By virtue of their traditional values, both Latin America and Europe possess a great deal of potential in this regard, the possibilities of which have so far not been sufficiently exploited. The shared religious and, in particular, Christian heritage forms the basis of the solidarity between our continents. This must be kept alive and strengthened, something already referred to by the bishops of CELAM and COMECE at their joint congress held in Madrid in May 2002.

2. Social cohesion: priority of the summit

We are delighted that the discussions are to focus on the question of social cohesion. There are major deficiencies regarding social cohesion in Latin America, which can also be overcome through greater regional integration. The picture is similar for the now enlarged EU, which must make considerable efforts to enable the new members to actually integrate.

3. How can social cohesion be improved?

Based on the experience of the local churches in Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe in various domains, we would like to draw special attention to the fact that the social cohesion strived for is only conceivable with a common spiritual basis and

common cultural values. It also presupposes that extreme poverty is overcome, inequalities removed, unemployment reduced and equal opportunities made a reality. This requires urgent and specific reforms. There has to be greater investment in education and training, in particular. The forms of co-operation practised so far in the areas of research and education need to be intensified accordingly.

4. Contribution of the privileged élites

The level of awareness of the privileged élites must change as a matter of urgency for them to become conscious of their responsibility to reduce inequalities through being prepared, amongst other things, to contribute their part to the common good and give up some of their wealth by, for example, agreeing to a just and progressive fiscal system and not evading taxes. Social cohesion is unthinkable in Latin America and Europe without real honesty in tax matters.

5. The dimensions of regional integration

With regard to the greater regional integration sought, we point out that this must not be understood in Latin America, the Caribbean or Europe as integration that can only or predominantly come about via economic relations. As much as the free movement of goods and services beyond national borders should be welcomed and produces advantages and benefits, experience in Europe in particular also shows that free trade should be supplemented by joint political institutions capable of taking decisions as well as the free movement of workers and financial compensation for structurally weak regions. Regional integration must also, to a certain extent, signify political, social and cultural integration. Latin America and the Caribbean still have much to do in this respect. The EU must reform its political institutions as a matter of urgency to enable it also to make effective decisions in a democratically legitimate manner in the conditions set by enlargement.

6. EU assistance for the integration of Latin America

The EU should support the necessary integration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean in both political and economic terms, paying special attention not to hinder the process of integration in those regions by virtue of its own interests, e.g. through entering into association agreements with individual countries.

7. Market access for agricultural goods

A very serious problem, so far unsolved, is the fact that both the USA and the EU continue to close off their own markets to agricultural products to an excessive extent whilst, at the same time, subsidising their own agricultural exports. The huge disadvantages of this for Latin America and the Caribbean countries are well known, with some of the markets there being flooded with subsidised products from the wealthy countries of the northern hemisphere. Parallel to this, agricultural producers from Latin America and the Caribbean are refused access to the markets of the North. This is inconsistent with fundamental ethical rules and produces economic

costs that cannot be compensated for anywhere near adequately by development aid. To put it quite clearly: the USA and the EU will lose all credibility in their calls for a free global market if they continue to close off selectively their own markets and to export subsidised goods. Great progress would be made for the future of this planet if the Doha round of the World Trade Organisation negotiations resulted in greater freedom of the markets being achieved on fair and just terms.

8. The problem of debt

Furthermore, the level of debt presents a major problem for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, impeding sustainable development. There is an urgent need for further debt relief initiatives, possibly via regulated and fair debt relief procedures, with corresponding conditionalities ensuring poverty-oriented and sustained investment of the resources that would be freed up. The fight against corruption and improved democratic controls are a priority in both regions.

9. Joint commitment to just structures of global governance

Finally, we hope joint initiatives by the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean on the stage of global politics will also help raise the awareness of other countries that our planet can only have a future if we are successful in finding joint solutions accepted by and of benefit to all on the basis of a strong option for multilateralism rather than individual countries, no matter how powerful they are, pursuing only their own interests and asserting their unilateral views. The leaders of Latin America, the Caribbean and the EU must support the reform and strengthening of the United Nations and the setting-up of the necessary global institutions to establish structures of global governance.

10. Contribution of the churches

As local churches in the different countries, we want to make our contribution by intensifying consultation and co-operation between our churches at local level and emphatically speaking out in our respective countries in favour of a policy oriented towards the global common good, rather than remaining egotistically nationalistic.

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*Bishop Andrés Stanovnik O.F.M. Cap.
Secretary General of CELAM*

*Mgr Noël Treanor
Secretary General of COMECE*