



**Message from the Inter American Press Association to the Heads of State and Government of the Americas meeting at the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas**

**AN HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY**

Leaders of the governments that represent the peoples of the Americas, gathered at this 7th Summit of the Americas, under the motto “Prosperity With Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas,” have an historic opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to freedom of expression and of the press and to the people’s right to information, principles that the Inter-American Democratic Charter regards as essential for democratic life and the common good.

Under that proclamation and the mandate that each Constitution requires, government leaders have the obligation to ensure, promote and defend freedom of expression as a fundamental human right without which neither can there be true prosperity, equity and cooperation among peoples and nations.

Beyond the ideological differences and official rhetoric about international intrusions and national sovereignties, the violation of individual and civil liberties, as required by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, must be denounced by all – government leaders and those governed – without censorship, limits or borders.

There are no excuses for our government leaders to remain silent witnesses to the suffering of those citizens that cannot express themselves freely. All should react when someone is persecuted, imprisoned, insulted, attacked or violated for expressing their ideas.

Certainly, no one can remain silent when those abuses and outrages come from the very government. No one can remain silent nor be indifferent to the violations of human rights, to freedom of expression, that are committed, specifically and systematically, by the governments of Raúl Castro, Rafael Correa and Nicolás Maduro. Prisoners of conscience, shuttered news media, silenced journalists and members of the public are evidence of those violations. If this 7<sup>th</sup> Summit seeks to be historic it will have to recognize that elections alone do not democracy build.

Democracy demands a clear separation of powers, independent judges, transparency in public administration, encouraging prosperity, promoting equity, individual guarantees and a respectful environment that empowers diverse and plural ideas, as corresponds to a state of law.

The future will determine if the government leaders assembled in this Summit truly support the idea that full and true cooperation can only be attained through a strong democratic conviction, and no citizen is excluded or discriminated against for free thinking, expressing an opinion or being different.

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