



General Assembly

Sixty-third session

52nd plenary meeting

Monday, 17 November 2008, 12.30 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 12.35 p.m.

Address by Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Republic of Bolivia

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Bolivia.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Republic of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Republic of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to greet you, Mr. President, and to acknowledge the presence of the representatives of the States Members of the United Nations. I would like to express my thanks for the opportunity to be here at the United Nations to share with the Assembly the process of change that we initiated in 2006 in the context of a democratic and cultural revolution seeking to achieve equality among Bolivian men and women.

I wish to recall briefly something that is known throughout the world. I come from a background of social struggle and social movements, specifically the indigenous farmers' movement. I remember clearly the many peaceful demonstrations we held that were aimed at putting an end to injustice and inequality among my

country's most marginalized sectors, the indigenous movement, the farmers' movement and the original workers' movement. For almost 200 years, we were excluded, marginalized and discriminated against in our republic. Our natural resources were pillaged. The indigenous farmers' movement has therefore always sought to change the social structures. We have used democracy as a tool to change economic policies that do not provide an answer to the economic and social concerns of the majorities that make up the indigenous movement.

I would briefly like to recall how we moved from a union and communal struggle to an electoral one. After so many demonstrations and so many marches from Chapare, Cochabamba and Caracollo; after marching for kilometres and kilometres and weeks and weeks to seek social justice, to seek equality from the Government in office and to seek that they heed the demands of the peoples; and after signing many agreements, one after another, the time came when we asked: When are these agreements going to be implemented?

After one of the most recent and largest mobilizations in 1994, the Government offered us satisfactory agreements. We went back to our regions to celebrate with great joy. Weeks and months went by and nothing changed. The agreements were not implemented. We therefore asked ourselves when those agreements entered into between the Government and union leaders following those great marches would be carried out.

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We came to the conclusion that they would be implemented when we had political power. What did we have to do to become political leaders? How could we create a political tool for liberation that could be used to defend national sovereignty, dignity and the groups that had been so neglected throughout Bolivia's history? To reiterate, those groups include indigenous people and workers, as well, of course, as patriotic members of the middle class and intellectuals, all of whom joined the first-ever political movement in the country's history comprised of indigenous peasants.

We had organized a political movement that was not created by political scientists, experts or intellectuals. That movement grew out of marches, mobilization and, especially the native peasant movement, although some city-based groups also joined. We also told ourselves that if we wanted to build a political liberation movement, we first had to put an end to political serfdom. Sinecures were rife; in the countryside, the various parties merely participated in election campaigns, but they never went to peasant communities.

As we began to build, the movement grew little by little. In the beginning, we could barely get a member of Congress elected. In the second elections we participated in, we elected four members to the national Parliament. By the third elections, we succeeded in winning 27 of the 130 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

The first time I participated in the National Congress, I was expelled for having said something important. I told members that they were only thinking of how much money they could make and how, while I never saw them worrying about their towns, regions or districts. Based on what I believed and had seen, I came to the conclusion that the Parliament was the supreme mafia of the State. I had to pay a price for that. Unfortunately, I was expelled. I left happy, however, without worries or bother, but we returned in 2002 with 27 parliamentarians. In 2005, we won the elections.

I say this to illustrate how we began at the bottom to build a new Bolivia that would be united and where there would be equality and dignity. We now have the opportunity to achieve what we believed as union leaders in the Palacio, the Government and the State, and to keep our promise of equality, dignity, unity and respect for our diversity. We are very diverse, both

physically and economically. Once in Government, we launched some very profound economic transformations, including nationalizing our hydrocarbon resources. That has made it possible for us to address some needs by using the country's own economic resources.

Bolivia has suffered continual budget deficits since the 1940s or 1950s and has never enjoyed a surplus. That is a matter of record. In 2006, the first year of my Government, thanks to nationalization, Bolivia had a budget surplus. We have begun to grow economically. For example, prior to the nationalization of natural resources, including hydrocarbons, Bolivia received barely \$300 million of the \$1.5 billion generated by hydrocarbon resources. Last year, we received \$2 billion. That figure continues to grow. We hope that the price of a barrel of oil will not decrease further this year. If the price remains between \$60 and \$70, that natural resource will produce \$2.5 billion for Bolivia, accounting for nearly 50 per cent of our export earnings. Before I became President in 2005, Bolivia's export earnings amounted to barely \$2.7 billion; by September 2008, our exports were worth \$6 billion. And we are a small country with many economic and social problems.

We have begun to address our social problems and needs gradually. Nevertheless, as we began to make changes, groups emerged from various regions to challenge and destabilize the Government and to launch attacks against our democracy, our way of life and even the export of gas.

I have asked the President of the General Assembly to allow me to speak today in order to inform representatives about how, through dialogue, we have been able to resolve the confrontation between small opposition groups and the national Government and social movements. Some groups claim that they have been trained to lead Bolivia and to dominate Indians and workers. They do not accept that a union leader could become President in order to turn Bolivia into a democracy.

As our armed forces did not acquiesce in the attempted coups d'états, in September and October those groups attempted a civil coup. They seized airports and State institutions in several departments and States. They disrupted gas exports to Argentina and Brazil. I recall, for instance, that when I was a union leader, I was accused of being a terrorist merely for

having marched in demonstrations. Yet those groups attempted to destroy democracy by taking over State institutions. I believe that they carried out genuine acts of terrorism, genocide, conspiracy and sedition.

I am here to thank this international forum for having defended democracy, the rule of law and truth in my country. Regrettably, however, I have another truth to tell. The United States was the only country to fail to repudiate those acts of terrorism, sedition and genocide. Others did, however. The United Nations, the Union of South American Nations and the Organization of American States defended truth, democracy and the rule of law.

We are in negotiations to determine how to reach agreement with those groups. I had little experience with negotiations as a union leader, but as President I have had to negotiate with opposition groups. It has been necessary to carry out those negotiations with transparency, sincerity and honesty in order to bring our peoples together. In that connection, I should like to emphasize the solidarity and important role of the United Nations and the entire international community.

During the dialogue between the Government and the opposition, I asked for reasons. If we were wrong, tell us what we are wrong about. As they had no argument to make, they kept silent. Of course, social movements and the national Government are respected for their decisions and their ability to achieve consensus on issues.

The Assembly is aware that we are expanding the transformation of our country by putting in place a new political constitution for the Bolivian State. What are we attempting to accomplish thereby?

With regard to the most maligned group in Bolivia's history — the indigenous peoples — article 1 of the new political Constitution recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples, as the United Nations has already done. Thus, we are talking of a multinational State where, for the first time, the State is for everyone — people of mixed race, creole, indigenous and black. We are all physically diverse and, in our new political Constitution of the Bolivian State, we recognize the diversity of the people of my country.

However, it is important that we find a way for the State and its public institutions to be a solution for the Bolivian people. The executive, legislative and public powers have to be at the service of the people.

Politics is service, after all. Our ancestors left us a trilogy of indigenous prescriptions: *amasua*, *amayuya* and *amaquilla* — do not lie, do not steal and do not be weak. Despite our approximately 20 reform constitutions, none has ever recognized these moral principles. They are humanist values that have never been acknowledged by the various legal and constitutional instruments of our country.

Of course, political, civil, labour and cultural rights, as well as equality between men and women, will be enshrined. We have a law by which a minimum of 30 per cent of women must participate in our institutions of authority. That is equality. We have made progress on the local level in that regard, but it has been harder to advance at the national level. Under the new Constitution, it will be possible to move forward together.

Opposition groups constantly question me on whether the Government is going to put an end to private property. Do I want to take away people's houses and confiscate their cars? That is completely false. Economically, we are very diverse; there is private property and there is State property. The new political Constitution of the Bolivian State enshrines a pluralistic economy in which private property and collective property are respected, as is State property.

It is typical, for example, to have collective property in the countryside. Where I was born, there is no private property. The land is collective and belongs to the entire community, and that is respected in the new political Constitution of the Bolivian State. I repeat: We have private and State property.

Under no political constitution of the Bolivian State was coca leaf recognized as a national product. Scientifically, as some United States and European universities — including Harvard, which we thank — have recognized the coca leaf in its natural state is not harmful to human health. However, it is demonized. We are not defending cocaine. I would never do that. We do not agree with coca leaf being turned into cocaine, but in the culture of the indigenous peoples of the Andes, it is traditional to consume the coca leaf. I very much regret that the United States Drug Enforcement Agency does not recognize the traditional consumption of coca leaf.

The new political Constitution of the Bolivian State recognizes coca leaf as a natural product that is a cultural property of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia.

We have to combat its derivative, and we are doing so in Bolivia while respecting human rights.

Furthermore, as recognized in the new draft Constitution, it is important that we live in harmony with mother Earth, not just with human beings. The new Constitution is therefore aimed at defending the environment. Defending the environment is defending humankind.

The new political Constitution of the Bolivian State has another new element. It will not be possible for any country to set up a military base on Bolivian territory. I and my social movement have been victims of the military bases of the United States; we want to put an end to that struggle of our peoples and enshrine in the Constitution the absence of foreign military bases on Bolivian soil.

The new political Constitution of the Bolivian State also declares that war will never be waged with any neighbouring country because war is not a solution for our peoples. It brings death and destruction and no one wins. The only winners are the transnational companies, the industrialists and the arms manufacturers. To the credit of the conscience of our peoples and social movements, we reject any declaration of war under the new political Constitution of the Bolivian State.

I wish today to thank the international community for having supported us in this process of change in the context of the cultural and democratic revolution. There have been many demonstrations calling for respect for human rights. It is very important to be constantly with the people, to heed them, to dialogue with them and listen to what they are asking for. If the President and the Government cannot meet the demands of the people for lack of financial resources, it is important to acknowledge that; but we are also seeking funds to address those demands, and when we speak to the opposition, we speak with them face to face and let the people judge who is right.

As we are all aware, these are difficult times for my Government, given the provocation coming from certain sources. We also have the obligation to do away with individualism, sectarianism and regionalism. It is crucial to consider the equality of our peoples. We need to seek equality and justice among all our peoples — all peoples of the Earth.

In regard to some international issues, I would refer to the so-called financial crisis. We have heard over the past two weeks that developed countries have given 30 times more money to the banks of Wall Street than to development aid funds which is needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). That money should go to the victims rather than to those who have caused this crisis. It should go to those who have lost their homes because they cannot pay their debts, and to those who have lost their jobs due to this crisis. It should not go to the directors of the banks that have caused this international crisis.

The so-called new Washington consensus of the Group of 20 continues to put its trust in free trade. I question free trade. Free trade is not part and parcel of fair trade of peoples. Therefore, in order to emerge from the crisis, we must discard the neo-liberal model and the capitalist system.

In Bolivia, we have begun to change gradually. That has helped us not only to gain self-respect, but also to begin to resolve our social problems. How have we done so? Pardon me for speaking the truth: I was elected President with nearly 54 per cent of the vote. Opposition groups constantly challenged me to relinquish my mandate. I accepted, and offered to give up power and to let the people judge us. There was no problem. Our support rose from 54 to 67 per cent. The people are so wise. And that is why this economic model must be changed. The unfair trade imposed by some international bodies is not a solution for my country or for others.

In order to emerge from the financial crisis, we must change the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). As a union leader, I have participated in quite a few of the international conferences convened as alternative to the summits of heads of State. Now, I am much more convinced that the time has come to consider how to change the WTO rules. The world economic system must be restructured by all 192 countries represented here at the United Nations, not by just 20 countries. Perhaps those 20 countries feel responsible for the financial crisis, which has done great harm to countries throughout the world. That is why all countries must participate actively.

We support the idea of a United Nations summit aimed at restructuring not only the international financial system, but also the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. I wish to say very

strongly that it is important that we invest in profound economic and social transformation. That means changing the economic model. Those of us who have emerged from poverty and social struggle are convinced that it is not only through dialogue and cooperation, but also, and fundamentally, through the participation of the international community that we can change our countries and the entire world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Republic of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.