

REMARKS BY ABRAHAM F. LOWENTHAL ON RECEIVING
THE WOODROW WILSON AWARD FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Washington, DC September 28, 2017

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MAC (McLARTY) FOR THAT GENEROUS AND SWEET INTRODUCTION, AND ALSO TO MARIO VARGAS LLOSA FOR HIS KIND WORDS.

I DEEPLY APPRECIATE THIS AWARD. I THANK CYNTHIA ARNSON FOR HER INITIATIVE TO LAUNCH A SPECIAL PUBLIC POLICY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR LATIN AMERICANS IN MY NAME, HER PROGRAM BOARD FOR SUPPORTING THIS INITIATIVE AND JANE HARMAN FOR AUTHORIZING THE FELLOWSHIP.

I WANT TO TAKE THIS OCCASION TO THANK MY LATE PARENTS (OF BLESSED MEMORY), MY SISTER, MY CHILDREN AND STEPCHILDREN, AND ESPECIALLY TWO REMARKABLE WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN SO SUPPORTIVE: JANET, THE MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN, AND JANE JAQUETTE, MY ASTOUNDING AND INSPIRING BETTER HALF.

I ALSO WANT TO RECOGNIZE ALL THE TEACHERS, MENTORS, COLLEAGUES, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED SO MUCH TO MY EDUCATION AND TO BUILDING THIS LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM AND THE INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE OVER THE YEARS.

I THANK JIM BILLINGTON FOR INVITING ME TO WASHINGTON TO ESTABLISH AND DIRECT THE PROGRAM, AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT OUR DYNAMIC TENSIONS ULTIMATELY STRENGTHENED BOTH THE PROGRAM AND THE CENTER.

I WANT TO EXPRESS APPRECIATION TO THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE PROGRAM'S ACADEMIC COUNCIL, INCLUDING FERNANDO HENRIQUE CARDOSO, WHO HELPED DEVELOP AND PROTECT THE PROGRAM. I SALUTE ALEX WILDE, LOU GOODMAN, THE LATE RICHARD MORSE, BILL GLADE, JOE TULCHIN AND CINDY ARNSON, MY PEERS IN DIRECTING THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM, EACH OF WHOM, IN DIFFERENT WAYS, STRENGTHENED WHAT WE BEGAN. THEY, THE ALUMNI OF THE PROGRAM, SALLIE MITCHELL TOWNSEND AND NUMEROUS OTHER DEDICATED STAFF, AND MANY OTHERS HAVE HELPED MAKE THE LATIN

AMERICAN PROGRAM AND ITS AFFILIATED INSTITUTES WHAT THEY HAVE BECOME. IT HAS ALSO TAKEN, AND WILL TAKE, THE MATERIAL SUPPORT OF MANY SPONSORS--FOUNDATIONS, CORPORATIONS, NGOS AND INDIVIDUALS— TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE PROGRAM’S GROWTH THUS FAR AND TO SUSTAIN THE NEW FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.

WHEN WE LAUNCHED THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM, WE HAD SEVERAL CLEAR AIMS:

FIRST, WE WANTED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF ATTENTION PAID TO LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN BY EXPOSING THIS PRESENT-MINDED AND SELF-CENTERED CITY TO LATIN AMERICA’S CREATIVE THINKERS AND DOERS AT THE NEXUS OF THE WORLDS OF IDEAS AND ACTION.

SECOND, WE SOUGHT TO HELP OUTSTANDING LATIN AMERICANS DEVELOP A GREATER APPRECIATION OF THE HUMAN, INTELLECTUAL, SOCIETAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES OF THE UNITED STATES, AND TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION BETWEEN PEOPLE FROM THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAS ON SCHOLARSHIP AND ON ISSUES OF SHARED CONCERN.

THIRD, WE WANTED TO EMPHASIZE PLURALISM IN DISCIPLINARY, METHODOLOGICAL, PROFESSIONAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES—NOT TO DEVELOP A HOUSE LINE, NOR AN ARTIFICIAL BALANCE BETWEEN EXTREMES (FOR EXAMPLE BETWEEN THE TORTURERS AND THE VICTIMS, AS I REMEMBER DISCUSSING WITH JIM BILLINGTON)—BUT RATHER TO PROMOTE OPEN DISCUSSION OF AND DIALOGUE ABOUT COMPLEX ISSUES.

FOURTH, WE AIMED TO ILLUMINATE KEY POLICY ISSUES AND CHOICES, AND TO ASSURE THAT OUR WORK WOULD HELP DECISIONMAKERS AND POLICY INFLUENTIALS UNDERSTAND AND FACE IMPORTANT CHALLENGES. I INTRODUCED THE TRANSITIONS PROJECT IN 1979, WHEN ALL BUT TWO OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN NATIONS WERE UNDER MILITARY RULE, AS GROUNDED NOT IN “WISHFUL THINKING,” BUT RATHER IN “THOUGHTFUL WISHING,” NORMATIVELY DRIVEN, BUT CHARACTERIZED BY RIGOROUS THINKING, BASED ON RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS. THIS APPROACH HAS BEEN THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM’S HALLMARK FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM IS PART OF THE WILSON CENTER, DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF WOODROW WILSON. WILSON WAS NOT A PERFECT MAN, OR AN ENTIRELY SUCCESSFUL PRESIDENT, BUT HE WAS GROUNDED IN THE CORE VALUES OF ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP, DEMOCRACY, SELF-DETERMINATION AND INTERNATIONALISM.

AT THIS COMPLEX AND UNCERTAIN TIME, THESE VALUES AND THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE LATIN AMERICAN PROGRAM ARE TRULY MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER. LET US ALL WHOLEHEARTEDLY REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO THEM.

Abraham F. Lowenthal, professor emeritus at the University of Southern California and president emeritus of the Pacific Council on International Policy, is the founding director of the Latin American Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and of the Inter-American Dialogue.