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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA

CLOSING ADDRESS OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION,
DR. ALBERTO BALTRA CORTES.

Gentlemen:

After three weeks of arduous work, accomplished with perseverance and optimism, the first session of the Economic Commission for Latin America is now drawing to a close. With this Commission we have begun to advance towards a better future in which united, in a community of interests, we shall face our common problems seeking solutions that will benefit each one of our countries without prejudice in any way to the interests of the community of peoples who live on the fertile and peaceful lands of this Continent - the hope and the future of mankind.

I feel that this is an opportune moment to assess in a broad outline the task accomplished during what we might call the working days of American fraternity, in the results of which we may take justifiable pride.

First, and most important, we have succeeded in establishing upon solid foundations, which will ensure its fruitful existence, the first body created by the United Nations to deal with the problems, desires, anxieties and aspirations of our America. We have in our hands, therefore, an instrument which, properly utilized, may make a substantial contribution to the economic progress and well-being of our peoples.

Such was the opinion of the Latin American governments when they sent their delegations, composed of prominent representatives, who have shed lustre on our debates, in which they took part with purpose and consistency.

I feel sure that I convey the feeling of the Latin American representatives when I express our great pleasure at the presence at this inaugural session of the representatives of the United States, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom who have taken an active and brilliant part in its deliberations. Their presence, aside from

* This document is a revised translation of the original which was issued in Santiago.

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demonstrating their interest in the success of this Commission and their praiseworthy efforts towards that end, has served to remind us that in the complex reality of present-day economics, the problems of our Continent cannot be dealt with without taking into consideration our ties of interdependence with world economy.

Gentlemen, it is less than three weeks since we opened our general debate which I consider has been of great value, for it provided us with a picture of the economic questions with which each Latin American country is particularly concerned, and it also showed the outstanding characteristics of their economic structures as well as the attitude of the governments toward the difficulties which they confront and the future they expect. In this way we have had an opportunity to view the general economic panorama of this America and - a most important point - this knowledge reached a vast public thanks to the generous co-operation of the press and radio whom I wish to thank on behalf of all.

The discussions gave evidence of the complex and many-sided character of the problems to be studied, which cannot surprise us when we consider the multiple factors which have contributed to make those problems so diverse in the majestic geographic setting of Latin America. But, as I have previously stated, the twenty-four voices heard here were not discordant; on the contrary, they gave evidence of a harmony of purpose that constitutes the strongest assurance for the success of this Commission in its task. I also made a short analysis of the questions which had been brought up for discussion which I shall not repeat now nor shall I list the various praiseworthy suggestions. But I shall venture to point out the general directions indicated by them, for in this way the criterion guiding us in our work can best be appreciated.

We all agreed on the urgent need for a complete and accurate survey of our economies and we therefore requested the Secretariat and the specialized agencies to conduct certain general surveys and specific studies.

Many and diverse are the needs that must be satisfied in Latin America but, among the various tasks, we have given preference to the more urgent ones bearing in mind also the limited technical resources thus far available to the body whose work we have initiated. Dispersion of effort would lessen the efficiency of our work; we would even run the serious risk of turning the Commission into an academic body producing meaningless resolutions devoid of practical influence on the

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future of our countries.

It has been encouraging to note that all the representatives are clear in their minds that the work of this Commission must be co-ordinated with the functions of other international bodies whose purposes are akin to ours. It is only by such co-ordination that we shall be able to discover how to avoid the overlapping of functions which is a diversion of energy from the common good we seek.

In this connection we wish to thank the representatives of the Inter-American Economic and Social Council for the understanding they have shown at all times, which greatly contributed to the auspicious agreement we concluded with that body.

I also wish to thank the representatives for their too generous praise of myself at the last of our plenary meetings. I thank them all in behalf of the supreme interests of America for the intelligence and the devotion which they have displayed in the performance of the tasks which we have successfully concluded. Finally I extend my gratitude to the Vice-Chairmen, to the Rapporteur, to the Chairman of the Working Group, to the specialized agencies and to the staff of the Secretariat for their enthusiastic co-operation which enabled the Chairman to overcome the difficulties encountered.

Perhaps the casual spectator of our debates may have thought that there is not and that there never will be an end to our economic problems. I know, as you do, how complex are the economic problems which afflict many of our countries. But I believe as you do that we can face the future with confidence, for the resources of Latin America are abundant and our peoples are young, courageous and active.

In all our countries there is a legend which tells of a lost city in the vast stretches of Patagonia, in the impenetrable jungles of the Amazon or in the scorched desert, where, according to the myth, there live superior beings who spread beauty over everything they touch. And there are always adventurers who, prompted by dreams and illusions, go in search of that city. Yet the city of the Caesars, or the country of El Dorado is only a symbol signifying that the soul of Latin America still lies asleep or hidden in some isolated retreat. Now after attending the first session of our Commission we can declare without any doubt that Latin American countries are becoming clearly aware of their common interest and destiny. We can say without hesitation that Latin America, awake and alert, is prepared to win the progress to which the abundance of her natural resources and the qualities of her peoples entitle her.

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