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Commencement Address for University of Miami

May 5, 2016

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees of the University of Miami for bestowing this honor on me. Although it is my understanding that the decision in this regard was taken by the Board before Dr. Julio Frenk's appointment as President of this university, I also extend my deepest appreciation to my former colleague in President Vicente Fox's cabinet for his support. I would be amiss if I did not recall and acknowledge here today that Julio and I were perhaps the most liberal members of an otherwise rather conservative group of people, particularly on social issues. We supported each other and became good friends for this, among many additional reasons. Thank you Julio, for your friendship and support over the past fifteen years.

I have been visiting Miami now for over a quarter century, and I have seen how this city has grown, changed and triumphed, on

occasion against serious odds. The University of Miami has, of course, evolved with it, and is a faithful reflection of the community it springs from and serves. As Miami has changed, so has UM.

Today, this city is not only 35% Latino, but it includes a broad variety of foreign-born residents, some with papers, some without. If thirty years ago, people of Cuban, Haitian and Nicaraguan origin made up a large majority of Miami's roughly 1.5 million Hispanics, today the mosaic is remarkable: Cubans and Nicaraguans of course, but also Hondurans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Venezuelans, Colombians, Peruvians, Mexicans and even Brazilians and Argentines are present in large numbers. Miami is a Latino community, and a Latin American city.

So is the University of Miami. Twenty five percent of undergraduate students graduating in 2016 are Latino/Hispanic; 28 per cent of you, the graduate students are also. There is no other major American university with similar numbers that is not on the border with Mexico. The University of California campuses in

Berkeley, Los Angeles or San Diego have much smaller percentages of Latino students, as does the University of Texas in Austin. Moreover, Hispanic students at those fine institutions are overwhelmingly of Mexican origin- fine with me, of course, but inevitably a less diverse student body than the University of Miami's.

All of which leads me to a reflection on what your role might be in the coming years, as you embark upon your professional life, whether here, elsewhere in the United States, or in Latin America, although I suppose this is also valid if you ship off to Europe, Africa or Asia. I start with my own experience, over the past four decades or so, as a minor and lonely voice, but on occasion a relevant voice in Latin America, and in the United States. If I have accomplished anything useful in my professional career as a public intellectual, a teacher, a government official and an intemperate pundit, it has been to serve as a bridge between several communities that often speak past each other, rather than to each other. Americans of Anglo backgrounds with US residents of

Latino heritage; Latin Americans with their US neighbors, friends and sometimes adversaries; Mexicans with everybody else, and Cubans with themselves. I have been much less successful in this self-designated or self-imposed endeavor than I would have wished; you can achieve much more, in a different era, and with far greater skills and perseverance.

The University of Miami has a natural vocation for becoming, more than it is already, a link between the United States and Latin America. It will obviously not be the only one, but it can attain a presence in the hemisphere's institutions of higher education, civil society, government, media and social media on a much larger scale than today. And you are the principal players in meeting this challenge.

The great misunderstandings and conflicts of the past have largely been overcome. The last, lingering one, has been laid to rest thanks to President Barack Obama's wise decision to normalize US relations with Havana, despite the persistence of widespread human rights violations in Cuba and the total absence

of democracy by any imaginable definition. But disagreements remain, and continue to be incredibly costly to both halves of the hemisphere. I will only mention two, because today's advanced degree graduates and the University as a whole can play an important roll in addressing them, if not in solving them overnight.

The first one is drugs. The war on drugs launched by Richard Nixon in 1971 has been a miserable failure. Miami suffered from it in the eighties; Colombia did in the nineties, and Mexico has paid an exorbitant price for pursuing a senseless, bloody and incredibly expensive war of choice since 2007. Today, the consensus in Latin America, and as importantly, in most of the United States, has shifted. The prohibitionist, punitive approach is being increasingly abandoned, and different forms of decriminalization are being adopted, from Uruguay to Mexico City, from Washington DC to California.

You can make a major contribution in consummating this change of paradigm, in the US and in Latin America. Some of you will favor legalization; others will not. Both attitudes are equally

respectable. But few still believe that the war on drugs across the region and the world makes any sense at all. Miami and you are a crossroads for this debate; it should be held here, as much as anywhere else.

Secondly, corruption is Latin America's bane since time immemorial. We have never known exactly what to do about it, but now, in Guatemala and Brazil, in Honduras and Argentina, in Mexico and Chile, countries transformed by economic growth into middle class societies are no longer as tolerant as before. People take to the streets, sign petitions, and vote out governments over corruption issues as never before.

But a direct attack on corruption in Latin America cannot be undertaken without support and information from the United States. Miami has always played a central role in this regard, and it is called upon today to exercise more influence than ever before. You can be message-bearers, enforcers, "influencers", whistle-blowers and go-betweens like no others can: you know Latin Americans, and we know you, like no one else does. Corruption in

Latin America will not diminish if everyday citizens, judges, the media, officials and activists do not take to the streets, and if institutions do not do their job. But neither will it vanish without full-throttled international cooperation, and US involvement in particular. Miami can and should be the vanguard of that cooperation, for the very reasons that have made this city, and its foremost university, what many call the “capital” of Latin America.

But there is perhaps a more important task before you today, a challenge that is emerging from the way the 2016 presidential campaign is shaping up in the United States. This contest can become one of the nastiest, most conflictive and painful campaigns in recent years, both for Americans of Hispanic origin and heritage, as well as for the inhabitants of much of Latin America, where that origin is located and where that heritage springs from.

There is no sense in being euphemistic. I am referring to the stances, rhetoric and attitudes assumed by who is now the presumptive Republican nominee for the presidency. Donald

Trump has offended millions of Mexicans, threatened millions of Central Americans, and jeopardized the integrity of hundreds of thousands of families from Latin America in the United States, with or without papers.

As State Secretary of Foreign Affairs I eagerly promoted a change in the way US Mexican relations has been historically conducted in both sides of the Rio Grande. I promoted “the whole enchilada approach”, a radical change in US Mexico relations aimed at recognizing the reality that was brought to both countries by NAFTA: higher integration on trade and investment and a byproduct of these, higher levels of labor market integration best depicted by a change on trends of illegal/illegal migration. Yes, an issue that is political sensitive in the Federal Congress relative to the steep increase in Mexico national’s legal migration that is an inevitable only natural consequence of being neighbors and partners.

For many years this information has been kept top secret and yet the information explains the obvious: first, that people prefers

to behave lawfully when given the correct incentives; second, that migration is fueled by demand for chip labor; and third, that the federal authority has turned a blind eye for decades to illegal migration (if not openly and selectively promoting it), as this component represent a vital engine for the national economy.

Over the NAFTA period 1995-2010, Mexico grew significantly in the total number of legal migrants, but specially did so in the number of Mexican citizens who entered legally with a work visa. According to data from the U.S. immigration authorities. Mexico went from the fifth place (24,598) with 7.3 percent of total U.S. legal admissions associated with temporary employment visas in 1995, to the second place with 665,106, which represented 20.7 percent of the total in 2010. In 1995, the U.K. ranked first with 12.9 percent, followed by Canada, Japan, India and Mexico. In 2010, the first place was Canada, concentrating 37 percent of total employment visa admissions, followed by Mexico, India, Japan, the U.K., and Canada and Mexico combined at 58 percent of total work visas, of which in the

case of Mexico the majority corresponds to high skilled workers, and Intracompany transferees. With the correct legal framework, and incentives, cooperation is better than confrontation; and bridges are better than walls. US-Mexican relations has always been the history of two good AMIGOS, and no one, however loud tries to convince us otherwise, would certainly fail.

Part of this folly is undoubtedly election season madness, and will not translate into policy, whoever wins. But the damage has already been done, in part, and will grow and intensify through November. You cannot avoid it, nor repair it; nor can I dare to state how I would vote if I were an American citizen.

But there is a great deal this graduating class can do, in summer and fall, and once we all move on and the nightmare recedes. Again, the metaphor of the bridge can help. Citizens of the United States, Latinos or not, but especially if they come from communities and organizations with large Hispanic populations, must explain to their compatriots, especially where they may be sensitive to the racist, xenophobic messages spouting from the

campaign, that those messages are lies, are hateful, and are highly noxious for US relations with its neighbors, for the type of peaceful, productive and prosperous partnership that everyone desires.

Latinos can say what we foreign national from Latin America cannot, or at least not easily. And graduates from prestigious universities with large, collegial, harmonious relations between all its diverse members, are an example of how the Republicans' vision and distortions have no connection to reality to life in the United States, in its Hispanic community and in Latin America.

But you can also be a bridge in the other direction: reassuring your friends, relatives, colleagues in the region that the conservative candidate does not represent all Americans; that your fellow students, professors, co-workers and friends from all walks of life have no truck with Trump. Not only is the United States much better than the Republican candidate; Miami, its university and its marvelous graduates of 2016 are the best proof of this. Gracias.