

Western Hemisphere Affairs

Thomas A. Shannon Jr.



U.S. Department of State

Thomas A. Shannon Jr., Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs

I have spent my 22 years in the Foreign Service working in Latin America and Africa. I am what is known as a “dusty roads” diplomat. I have dedicated myself to countries in transition—countries that have struggled to make democracy real for their people, and to provide the prosperity and security necessary for human development.

Because of this experience, I know what democracy means to the disenfranchised. I know what economic opportunity means to the poor and excluded. And I know what freedom means to peoples attempting to gain control of their own destinies. I have experienced first hand the dramatic transformational role the United States can play during such transitions.

When Secretary Rice asked me to return to the State Department to become the Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, she charged me with revitalizing our diplomacy, building new and lasting partnerships in the Americas, and articulating the president’s commitment to individual freedom and social justice.

I have sought to meet this responsibility by implementing an agenda in the Americas that is both straightforward and comprehensive: the United States is committed to working with our partners in the Americas to consolidate democracy, promote prosperity, invest in people, and enhance the security of the hemisphere’s democratic states.

Our policy reflects a common agenda shaped through the Summit of the Americas process. It is based on two guiding principles, both enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter:

- The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.
- Democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of the peoples of the Americas.

CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY

The Americas have made an historic commitment to democracy. This commitment is to more than an electoral process. It is also to the fundamental rights



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A Nicaraguan farmer receives medical attention from U.S. Army reservists on a humanitarian aid mission to rural workers in El Sol, Nicaragua, in July 2006.

and liberties that underlie our open societies, to the institutions and constitutional procedures that give structure to our democratic states, to the development of the political parties and civil societies that represent our citizens, and to the democratic governance necessary to create just and fair societies in which all citizens have a covenant.

The United States is committed to fostering democratic governance and protecting fundamental rights and liberties in the Americas. Working bilaterally—through our foreign assistance programs and diplomatic outreach—and multilaterally—through the Organization of American States and the other institutions of the Inter-American System, we are helping our partners in the Americas attack poverty, inequality, and political marginalization and exclusion. We are standing up to tyranny, especially in Cuba. And we are working to ensure that all the peoples of the Americas have the rights and the capabilities to enjoy and express their citizenship in all its dimensions: political, economic, and social.

PROMOTING PROSPERITY

The Americas are experiencing a revolution in expectations. People expect their democratic governments to be responsive and accountable, and to deliver the benefits of free markets, trade, and economic integration to all citizens. Access to economic opportunity and the social mobility that it creates are now understood to be fundamental components of social justice.

The United States is helping to create economic opportunity in the Americas through our free trade agenda, now encompassing two-thirds of the gross domestic product of the hemisphere. We are also working through our foreign assistance programs, especially the Millennium Challenge Corporation, to fight corruption, promote the rule of law, and create the kind of democratic and just governance necessary to ensure that economic opportunity is not trapped by elites but instead courses through society.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

People need capacity and skills to take advantage of economic opportunity. Poverty, inequality, and social exclusion have denied many in the Americas access to opportunity. Through the Summit of the Americas, the democratic leaders of the hemisphere have committed to providing their citizens the tools to become agents of their own destiny.

The United States, by helping our partners invest in people through improved education and training, health care, access to capital, economic infrastructure, and security for their families and their property, is helping to unlock the vast potential of the peoples of the Americas. Our action, again, is channeled through our foreign assistance programs. It is also enhanced by our commitment to the Inter-American Development Bank and other multilateral development institutions.

PROTECTING THE DEMOCRATIC STATE

In a hemisphere committed to democracy, free trade, and economic integration, the principal security threat



Photo: USAID/Jorge Vinueza

Thanks to a small loans project of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Ecuador, Maria Isabel Coral has been able to expand her small store and increase her profits, allowing her to pay for her two daughters' higher education.



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Traders work in the futures dollar pit at the Brazilian Mercantile and Future Exchange in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

no longer comes from other states. Instead, it comes from non-state actors, such as terrorists, drug and people traffickers, and organized crime. It is also comes from natural disasters, environmental disasters, and pandemics.

The United States, working through the Summit of the Americas and the Organization of American States, has helped reshape the hemisphere's security agenda and institutions. We have built new forms of cooperation that go beyond traditional military and security assistance. Through law enforcement and intelligence cooperation, increased communication between disaster and emergency management agencies, and better coordination among environmental and medical authorities, we are creating the ability to respond to new threats. We are building a new understanding of the linkage between security and our economic prosperity and the well-being of our democratic institutions. We are also building a hemisphere in which open societies are protected and resilient.

Our agenda in the Americas is positive, people-focused, and committed to our fundamental political, economic, and social values. It is based on cooperation and collaboration, and it is committed to open discussion with our partners and to the common institutions of the Inter-American System that we share with the other 33 democratic states of the Americas.

Our agenda recognizes the transformational power of democracy. It understands the central role that economic and social development play within democracy; and it asserts that all political and economic activity must enhance and respect human dignity and individual freedom. ■

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Shown here following the signing of the U.S.-Peru Trade Agreement at the Organization of American States (OAS) in April 2006 in Washington, D.C., are (left to right) then-U.S. Trade Representative Robert Portman, Peruvian Minister of Production David Lemor, Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab, and Peruvian Foreign Trade Minister Alfredo Ferrero Diez Canseco.

Mexican actress Salma Hayek holds a child while speaking with Nicaraguan youths during a visit to the Quincho Barrilete Foundation in Managua, Nicaragua. She and American actress Ashley Judd were traveling together to promote a global initiative called “YouthAIDS,” a program to educate young people about HIV/AIDS.



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Members of the U.S. military construct a school in Honduras as part of New Horizons, a Joint Task Force (JTF) humanitarian exercise.

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Nicaraguans with relatives in the United States wave U.S. and Nicaraguan flags during a holiday celebration in Managua, Nicaragua.



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Ambassador John F. Maisto, U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS), is among the participants from 34 countries at the 36th General Assembly of the OAS in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in June 2006.



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