



## Latin America and the Challenges it Faces

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More than a geographic denomination, Latin America and the Caribbean is a region characterized by multiple idiosyncrasies, which make it an attractive place vis-à-vis other continents, and yet despite our great cultural and environmental wealth we are far from being the envy of the world in terms of living standards.

Problems such as poverty, inequality, violence, environmental degradation and drug trafficking are some of the factors that distinguish us as a region and that prevent us from growing. Yet these problems need to be addressed jointly and not separately, as we have been doing. It's not that I think we have been doing badly, I simply believe that we have to attack these demons from another angle.

The first challenge with which the region must come to grips is inequality. I believe that, for starters, we have to improve the quality of education, not to make it free as many students are demanding. We have to improve the conditions of teaching at all levels, and in higher education we must become proactive and equip students with better tools.

By improving education conditions we will improve competitiveness and productivity, we can become more innovative and in that way we can achieve greater local development, thereby making it possible to reduce inequality and consequently tackle poverty. This is a virtuous circle, a process of participation by all of society, and one that will help to consolidate the region's place in this globalized world.

The next challenge for Latin America is violence, which we will have to attack from two sides. On one hand, every country faces a problem of violence related to poverty and inequality. I said earlier that improving the quality of education was a first step, but we also need to generate more and better jobs – rather than subsidies, what we need is more working tools.

The last challenge, and one that is no less important, is environmental deterioration. The way to go about this is not to ban the exploitation of resources, but to generate awareness among big companies and to provide incentives so that production will be pursued in an environmentally more friendly manner.

The foregoing is what concerns me about Latin America, but my worry for my own future is that I will not have an active voice as a citizen to participate in seeking solutions to my country's problems, and that the tools I am acquiring as a professional will not be adequate to cope with the competitive world we live in.

My generation and I will have to prepare ourselves more thoroughly to participate actively, whether in the private or public sector, and we will have to innovate not only through the preparation of policies but also through the production and provision of services so that, in both sectors, we can bring about the changes that will help the society in which we live.