

Schiller Institute Conference

At the Crossroads of a New, Multipolar World

by Professor Henry Baldelomar

The following is an edited transcript of the June 15 address by Prof. Henry Baldelomar, the Chargé d'Affaires at the Bolivian Embassy in Washington, D.C., speaking in his capacity as Professor of International Affairs at Nur University in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, to the June 15-16 online conference of the Schiller Institute, "The World on the Brink: For a New Peace of Westphalia!" Prof. Baldelomar spoke on Panel 2, "The Development Aspirations of the Global Majority." His remarks were delivered in Spanish and were simultaneously interpreted into English, as published here. Subheads have been added. The video may be viewed [here](#).



Prof. Henry Baldelomar of Bolivia

Good morning, it's a pleasure to be here with you at this conference of the Schiller Institute.

Unquestionably, these feelings of concern which darken the whole international community because of what's happening, are also the result of a long process of the way the international system has been shaped. Let's recall that since 1991, the international system has been going through a very complicated process, perhaps the longest such process, of establishing a new international order, which almost the entirety of the Global South has joined, to be able to turn the page on what, to some degree, was a pattern of behavior of relations between the North and the South. It is in fact true that we have left behind some schemes and the architecture of power associated with colonialism. Nonetheless, throughout this whole period, especially since 1945 until 1991 or perhaps a little later, it has been characterized by systematic emphasis on depen-

dence in all of its ramifications: Enormous dependency economically and technologically; dependence on trade, because our trade balance between the South and the North is highly disadvantageous to the South.

Also, with regard to the technologies required for public health, the COVID pandemic has unmasked the terrible health conditions not only in the South, but we've also seen the difficulties in the North. How-

ever, countries in the South have had to carry out enormous efforts to be able to overcome the consequences which the COVID pandemic brought with it.

Unquestionably, we are at a crossroads in the efforts to consolidate a new economic order. Bolivia has firmly adopted the need to concretize this aspiration of a multi-polar order, because this new configuration will allow the Global South to be able to achieve levels of development. And when we're talking about these levels of development, we're obviously not talking about the 1960s and '70s, that idea which, for example, ECLAC (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) had promoted. This is the ECLAC model of development which to some degree was a very limited approach. In fact, it's far too small for the challenges that the South faces to be able to really have development. Because, when we talk about development, this has to be translated unquestionably into the elimination of all of the indicators of structural violence.

'A Region of Peace'

Latin America is a region which is characterized by being a region of peace, and in fact, if we look at the

other continents, perhaps leaving Oceania aside, the number of armed conflicts which have occurred in our region is significantly less than those which occurred in other continents. One way or another, that attribute means that this gives us a certain amount of prestige, one might say, to be a region of peace. Nonetheless, this is eclipsed, or at least darkened, by grave structural indicators. The difficulties faced by very large social sectors to be able to have basic services, such as sewage systems, such as the educational system, which in many countries in Latin America are facing grave difficulties. There is almost technological obsolescence. There are problems in public health as well, and poverty and misery which are the most serious indications of social violence.

Perhaps we should also talk about this idea of Latin America as a region of peace, because you can't have peace if you have indicators of structural violence. You can't have peace when there are broad areas which lack even the possibility of satisfying minimal requirements, such as being able to bring food home. You can't talk about peace in a region where you have pockets of discrimination. You can't talk about peace when the levels of insecurity for citizens in some of the cities are growing. You cannot talk about peace when the international criminal organizations, such as trafficking of persons, of drugs, and also, to a somewhat lesser degree, arms trafficking—this hits civil society in Latin American countries as well.

Nonetheless, perhaps this difficult picture which we listened to in the first panel, beyond the economic and social indicators which we see in South America, we have the possibility of being able to turn the page and have the opportunity for development. In South America, and specifically in Bolivia, which is a country which over its history has been an exporter of raw materials since our colonial period up until quite recently, Bolivia has pretty much been a mono-producer of raw materials. In the past it was silver, then tin, and in recent years, lithium. In recent years, Bolivia has become a big exporter of natural gas; the main markets have been Argentina and Brazil. However, when we talk about development, we don't want to simply reproduce that same scheme of generation of resources which have been important to be able to improve to some degree the conditions of life. But of course that's not the most effective and efficient way to take advantage of the

enormous amounts of natural resources which Bolivia possesses. Our intention, therefore, is—once we are able to establish and strengthen the BRICS, which Bolivia has stated its desire to join—to apply for membership, that the BRICS should become not just a new structure of power internationally so we will no longer be subordinate in the South with regard to the North. We will be able to have international relations in a framework of principles of equality, solidarity, such that all the peoples of the world can achieve certain levels of development.

A New Economic Order

The purpose of the BRICS also needs to be translated into establishing a new international economic order. Traditionally, the institutions which arose from Bretton Woods—the IMF, the World Bank especially—are based almost totally as guarantors, not for the purposes of development of the countries of the South, but guarantors of the economic interests of the greatest powers, especially those which own the largest number of shares in these two important institutions. Thus the rather asymmetrical relationship one can see in the composition and decision-making bodies for these organizations. This has always been a kind of obstacle or difficulty for the countries of Latin America, especially for the Global South, to be able to achieve more successful levels and the total development that they require.

The challenges we have, have to do with achieving a greater level of integration in our countries in South America. We have had a number of integration experiences—the Andean Community of Nations, MERCOSUR, ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America), and other such bodies. Some of the limitations which these integration processes have, have to do with the weakness in transportation and other infrastructure. To be able to have efficient infrastructure integration, we have to have a whole scheme, which is efficient, of integration of transportation, using all the different modes of transport. I'm speaking not only of highways, but also railroads, waterways. They must all be developed and integrated to be able to improve our physical integration and to allow the countries of South America, especially Bolivia which—because of a war which was provoked in 1879—is a land-locked nation, and therefore our ties with the international market unfortunately have to go through some difficulties to

have access to specific ports. The fact of the matter is, for Bolivia, the BRICS is not only a kind of scheme of power relations, but also an opportunity such that the resources which are needed to achieve that level of full-set development can flow, and that we change that asymmetric relationship which exists in international trade and development.

The Future of International Law

I would also like on this occasion to comment briefly on situations which have occurred and which are tied to the weakening of international law. We have been witnesses in the last 40 years or so, to three developments which should cause us to think very deeply about the role of international law, in order to avoid what is now happening in Gaza. In the recent years, there have been three such cases which should lead us to a certain amount of shame about the international system: what happened in Rwanda, what happened in Kosovo, and now what's happening in Gaza. It were important in the framework of these aspirations not

only of the Global South, but of the entire international community, of humanity as a whole, to also develop more creative and efficient ways of guaranteeing that never again will these kinds of developments occur, such as what we are now seeing in Gaza. Unquestionably, this casts a shadow on the dignity of man when these kinds of atrocities are carried out against peoples. Without question, this is a kind of ethnocide, a kind of crime that's underway in Gaza.

Bolivia has hopes that, bit by bit, slowly, to the degree to which the BRICS becomes powerful and grows in terms of the number of states, we will also take up the challenge of bringing to the international community a view of international law that does not depend on the use of force, so that never again will we have situations like these three which I mentioned. These are not from long ago, they're just from the end of the last century and this last one of Gaza is in the beginning of this century.

Finally, to conclude, I would like to underscore that Bolivia, in addition to having important natural resources, we believe these should be converted into a kind of trampoline towards industrialization of those resources. We believe that South America especially has a tremendous opportunity. Those countries which have great lithium resources—this famous lithium triangle of Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia in South America—we hope that there will be maturity to be able to think in the long term and with a purpose of constituting in South America a region, which can provide not only the natural resource of lithium but, of course, contribute to the possibility of the transformation of its reduced fossil fuel consumption, to be more efficient so that climate change doesn't worsen. But it would be very important as well that we be able to unify our wills in each of those three states to make this a resource which will serve humanity and not become simply yet another case, as has occurred in the past, where natural resources were exploited and the peoples that own them simply were left without anything and watched how those resources were transferred to the North. Rare earth minerals are another example of such opportunities, of course, for South America to make a contribution. But that must be translated as well into aspirations for full development, which will reduce those economic indicators which are in fact structural violence.

That's it for now, and I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity.



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