

Great Projects Top South American Summit

by Gretchen Small

The Heads of State of the 12 nations of South America held their second-ever summit in Guayaquil, Ecuador on July 26-27, amid the greatest crisis faced by those nations since their independence battles nearly 200 years ago. The President of Uruguay, and the Prime Ministers of Guyana and Surinam, could not personally attend, but sent representatives, due to crises at home.

The summit was dismissed in the international media as an insignificant meeting of Presidents who are about to leave office. It is true that five of the Presidents are scheduled to leave office by March 2003 through elections, and another four Heads of State face political crises so great that they could be run out of office on a rail at any time. But it would be a mistake to ignore the revived drive for integration under way across all Ibero-America, in which the South American summit process is playing right now the most interesting part.

The first ever such summit was held on Aug. 31-Sept. 1, 2000, at the initiative of Brazil's President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. There, President Alberto Fujimori of Peru gave voice to the explosive political potential inherent in the idea of integration under today's conditions of global catastrophe. In his address to the gathering, Fujimori called upon his fellow Presidents to join forces, stop the bankers' bleeding of their resources through debt manipulations, and fight to ensure their nations finally develop, prosper, and, perhaps, establish a future "United States of South America." Sources in the region informed *EIR* recently, that Fujimori's visionary speech of a year ago had received prior approval from several of the Presidents attending the Brasilia summit.

Fujimori was ousted less than three months later by a Project Democracy-run coup, which had the full political and economic backing of Wall Street and the U.S. State Department; but the movement towards integration was continued. The Brasilia summit established a regionwide network, the Initiative for the Regional Integration of South America (IIRSA), to coordinate the physical integration of this *largely undeveloped* continent.

IIRSA has drawn up plans for long-needed projects to integrate the continent from north to south, from the Orinoco River in Venezuela to the southern tip of Argentina, and from east to west—joining, finally, the Atlantic to the Pacific. A series of beautiful color maps, depicting the *corridors of development* which are envisioned growing around these infra-

structure "great projects," can be viewed at www.iirsa.org. The overview map is shown here.

IIRSA's progress was a principal item on the agenda of the July 25-26 second summit in Guayaquil. The Heads of State were presented reports on all 162 transport, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure projects identified thus far by IIRSA.

Development Is a Human Right

None of the Presidents at Guayaquil was as daring as Fujimori two years ago. Nor did they evidence publicly any recognition that they cannot build what they want to build, nor even defend their nations from outright destruction, without breaking with the failed global monetary system killing their countries. They refused, reports make clear, to face the fact that free trade must be dumped, insisting instead on the self-contradictory demand for *fair* free trade, and focusing much energy on attacking recent moves to revive protectionism in the United States and Europe.

There was much discussion of the need to get around the critical financing bottlenecks, which make it impossible for their nations to get credits to build even basic hydroelectric projects. But no one admitted that there is *no* solution within this dying financial system; nor, that their nations are not suffering mere "financial turbulence," but a *terminal* crisis of the global system, from which they can escape only by battling for a return to economics based on the nation-state.

The tone of the Presidents was angry, however, and the agenda was the right one. The 34-point "Consensus of Guayaquil on Integration, Security, and Infrastructure for Development" signed by the Heads of State at the summit's conclusion, expressed an intention to secure human rights for their peoples, including their "universal and inalienable right to development."

Exactly 180 years ago, the principal Liberators of South America, Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín, met in Guayaquil to coordinate the final independence of the Spanish colonies in South America, Ecuadoran President Gustavo Noboa noted in his speech inaugurating the summit. Today as well, he said, the Presidents met to discuss "the destiny of our peoples." The objective of the IIRSA project founded at the Brasilia summit, is to make a tangible reality, the ideal of integration inherited from the founding fathers. "Today, however, its realization has become an imperative which cannot be put off, if we truly wish to overcome underdevelopment and all its consequences, the most painful of which are poverty, ignorance, and migration."

Ibero-America is extremely vulnerable, Noboa acknowledged. And a principal factor in that vulnerability is "the heavy weight of servicing the foreign debt," which permanently channels off the resources which we need so our people can reach "the standard of living to which they have a right as human beings."



This map by the IIRSA project of the South American Presidents shows the economic integration of the continent that they are seeking. The priorities are the integration of the big rivers into one navigation system (shown in black), and the building of modern road-rail “corridors of development” (indicated in gray).

Free Markets Are Not Functioning

In an echo of the future envisioned by Fujimori, Noboa reminded his fellow heads of state, that the project begun in Brasilia two years ago, seeks not only to build physical projects which connect and integrate the region, but to realize

something even greater, “the construction of an integrated space” which can politically defend the fundamental interests of South American peoples. Having laid the bases for a “South American Project,” Noboa asked the meeting in Guayaquil to “consolidate, deepen, and expand it. Current reality demands an overview and common action.”

The other speech which helped define the summit was that of the previous summit’s host, Brazil’s Cardoso. He said that free markets and the international financial system, as presently conceived, are not functioning for all, and that the financial markets “destroy in a short time, what took years to build. . . . This is a world of unilateralism,” which must be made more democratic, and less egotistical.

Several specific initiatives were adopted. One, was to concentrate efforts on developing an integrated energy grid and services, with an eye to drawing up a specific plan. The final statement identified the electrification of Ibero-America’s marginalized rural and urban areas as “one of the greatest political, social, and economic challenges facing the governments of the region.”

The Presidents were also adamant, that they will not accept any supranational intervention into

their neighbor. South America will not endorse any intervention by the United States, nor any other country, in the Colombian conflict, Noboa stated at the summit’s close; there will be no continental military force formed to intervene.