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FEATURED Q&A

What Was Achieved at the Summit of the Americas?



Western Hemisphere heads of state gathered this month for the Summit of the Americas. Two of the hemisphere's most controversial leaders, U.S. President Donald Trump and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, were not on hand, however. // Photo: Peruvian Government.

Q Heads of state from throughout the Western Hemisphere gathered in Lima April 13-14 for the Summit of the Americas. Absent from this year's summit were two of the hemisphere's most controversial leaders—U.S. President Donald Trump and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro—as well as a more than usual number of other heads of state who decided not to attend. How did their absences affect the summit? What were the summit's biggest achievements and shortcomings? How much progress did attendees make in addressing the hemisphere's most pressing problems?

A Francisco Villagrán de León, visiting scholar at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University and former ambassador of Guatemala to the United States: "The summit, whose official focus was corruption, was an important moment for Latin America's leaders to face one of the region's most prevalent and serious challenges to democratic governance and the rule of law. In the past three years, a number of presidents and former presidents have had to resign, have been jailed, have been prosecuted or are under investigation. The summit theme was thus important and timely, and it would have been unfortunate if any of the attendees had managed to change the subject. The absence of a number of heads of state—Donald Trump, Nicolás Maduro, Raúl Castro, Daniel Ortega, Jimmy Morales and most Caribbean prime ministers—had the net effect of keeping the summit focused. (Maduro, it should be noted, was not invited based on an agreement reached at the 2001 summit in Quebec, under which any leader who had disrupted constitutional rule

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Nicaraguan Police Release Some Protesters

Police reportedly freed some 180 protesters who had been detained amid deadly protests in Nicaragua. The White House also condemned the violence and blamed Nicaragua's government.

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POLITICAL

Malaria Cases Soar in Venezuela

Malaria cases in Venezuela grew last year at the fastest rate of any nation in the world, the World Health Organization announced. The WHO added that the outbreak is likely to spread to neighboring countries.

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ECONOMIC

Argentina Gets 32 Bids for Road Projects

Argentina received 32 bids for six road projects, representing approximately \$8 billion in investment. Since taking office in late 2015, President Mauricio Macri has sought to upgrade the country's infrastructure.

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Macri // File Photo: Argentine Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Nicaraguan Police Release Protesters, U.S. Blasts Gov't

Nicaraguan authorities have released some 180 protesters who were detained in the past several days amid violent anti-government protests, Nicaraguan daily newspaper *El Nuevo Diario* reported Tuesday. Some of the protesters said authorities shaved their heads and abandoned them along a road after being released from the Jorge Navarro penitentiary, also known as La Modelo, just outside Managua. In a statement, the National Police said the detainees were handed over to their families and religious committees. Five television stations also returned to the air after President Daniel Ortega's government cut their signals during the height of the protests, in which some two dozen people have been killed, the Associated Press reported. In a statement Tuesday, the White House condemned "the violence and repression propagated by the government of Nicaragua and any closing of media." The unrest began last week when demonstrators took to the streets to protest planned changes to the country's pension system. On Sunday, Ortega announced that he was scrapping the reforms.

Malaria Cases Soar in Venezuela, Outbreak Likely to Spread

Malaria cases in Venezuela grew last year at the fastest rate of any nation in the world and are likely to spread to other countries of the Americas, the United Nations' World Health Organization announced Tuesday, Reuters reported. Researchers estimate there were 406,000 cases of malaria in Venezuela in 2017, up nearly 70 percent from the year before and five times higher than in 2013. Economic migrants fleeing Venezuela are carrying the disease, which is spread by mosquitos, into

other parts of Latin America, the WHO added. The organization is urging authorities to provide free screening and treatment regardless of citizenship status to avoid further spread of the disease. Venezuelan officials reported 240,613 malaria cases in 2016, many in the state of Bolívar on the border with Guyana, but migrants have been fleeing in large numbers to Colombia and Brazil as well. In related news, last month the Pan-American Health Organization warned that Venezuela has seen 886 cases of measles, a deadly contagious virus, since June, the Miami Herald reported. The second-largest outbreak in the hemisphere this year is in Brazil, with 14 cases, and all of them were imported from Venezuela. Colombia has also reported three confirmed cases, each from Venezuela. Just two years ago, the World Health Organization had declared Latin America to be free of measles.

BUSINESS NEWS

Brazil Helps Boost Santander's Profit by 10% in First Quarter

Madrid-based banking giant Santander said Tuesday that strong growth in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America helped push overall profits up 10 percent in the first quarter of the



Botín // File Photo: Banco Santander.

year. "2018 has started well, with the group generating double-digit profit growth driven by strong results in Brazil, Spain and Mexico and improved performance in the U.S.," Santander's chairman, Ana Patricia Botín, said in an earnings release. Profit from Latin

NEWS BRIEFS

Judge Rules U.S. Must Continue Accepting DACA Applications

The Trump administration must leave protections in place for undocumented young people and resume accepting applications for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, a federal judge ruled on Tuesday, *The New York Times* reported. Judge John D. Bates at the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia blocked the shutdown of the program, saying that the administration's claims that the program was "unlawful" were "virtually unexplained." The administration now has 90 days to justify ending the DACA program.

Three Mexican Film Students Found Dead After Being Caught in Gang War

Three Mexican film students were killed when they unwittingly became caught in a territorial war between drug gangs, prosecutors in the Mexican state of Jalisco said on Monday, the Associated Press reported. According to officials, the students had been kidnapped and killed by members of the New Generation cartel, which then dissolved their remains in sulfuric acid. The students were abducted on March 19 near Guadalajara in a case of mistaken identity, the Los Angeles Times reported, citing law enforcement authorities.

Argentina Receives 32 Bids for Road Projects

The Argentine Transportation Ministry announced on Tuesday that it had received 32 bids for six road-building contracts in the country, Reuters reported. The projects are being offered as public-private partnerships and will require an investment of approximately \$8 billion. Winning bids for this round, which is the first phase of an infrastructure plan that will require \$26.5 billion in investments, will be announced on June 1.

America grew to nearly 1.1 billion euros (\$1.34 billion) in the first quarter, 23 percent higher year-on-year. Higher net interest income and fee income reflected a rise in volumes, higher spreads and greater loyalty from customers in Latin America, the bank said. Operating expenses also grew in the region, however, which the bank attributed to investment plans in Mexico and the expansion of the bank's retail network in Argentina, where it recently acquired Citibank's retail network. Despite the rise in profit, Santander's shares fell the most in six months on Tuesday during trading in Madrid, Bloomberg News reported. Market analysts said investors reacted negatively to a 23 percent slump at Santander's business in the United Kingdom, as well as concerns about its capital levels.

Raízen Buying Shell Assets in Argentina for \$950 Million

Royal Dutch Shell announced Tuesday that it was selling its stake in downstream infrastructure in Argentina to Brazilian firm Raízen for \$950 million, La Nación reported. The sale includes the company's refining capacity in Argentina, as well as its sales operations. The deal will reportedly also include the Buenos Aires refinery, 645 service stations, as well as Shell sales operations for maritime and aviation fuel, chemicals, lubricants and asphalt in Argentina. However, the deal does not include Shell's stake in oil and gas exploration and extraction in the country. São Paulo-based Raízen, in which Shell has a 50 percent stake, is one of the largest energy producers and distributors in Brazil. The two firms also reached commercial agreements worth approximately \$300 million that will allow them to cooperate in gas distribution. Shell, which has operated in Argentina since 1914, has invested millions of dollars in the Vaca Muerta shale gas and shale oil play in the country's west. The move is part of a larger plan by Shell to sell \$30 billion in assets worldwide to reduce its debt, which led it to sell downstream operations in Chile and Brazil.

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would be banned from future summits.) U.S. Vice President Pence—who has emerged as the Trump administration's point man on Latin America—went instead of Trump and is generally seen to have played a positive role. Another positive aspect of the summit was Peru's role as host. The fact that there was no major confrontation between the United States and countries like Bolivia, Cuba or Nicaragua was due to Peru's skillful diplomacy. The situation of Venezuela, surely the region's most serious political crisis, was not dealt with, but it would have been impossible to reach consensus on any type of regional action anyway, and it was not the summit's purpose. In the end, the summit declaration committed the region's governments to a serious agenda for combating corruption. This includes strengthening the Mechanism for Follow-Up on the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (MESICIC), an important peer-review system whose main weakness is that it has no means of ensuring compliance. It is encouraging that all of the countries agreed to fight corruption, but their commitment must be backed up with action. Latin American societies are losing patience, and the future of democracy hangs in the balance."

A Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: "This year's summit, like most of those preceding it, illustrated two discouraging features of inter-American affairs: the limits to cooperation among Latin American nations, and Washington's indifference to relations with its southern neighbors. Venezuela's tragic breakdown and the suffering of its population is today the highest priority on hemisphere's agenda. Sure, a sizeable majority of Latin American presidents (although not their Caribbean counterparts) strongly condemned the Maduro government and refused recognition of Venezuela's upcoming presidential election. Their statement, however, echoed previous

declarations and offered no commitments to collective action. Yes, the gathering's central theme of corruption received serious attention. Participants agreed on a forceful, detailed agenda of domestic and regional measures to battle endemic graft. Although

“ Although perhaps a useful first step, the agenda was more aspirational than practical...”

— Peter Hakim

perhaps a useful first step, the agenda was more aspirational than practical and unlikely to do much to curb deeply imbedded corruption. In Brazil, for instance, prosecutors and judges have launched Latin America's most effective anti-corruption effort, but they are often stymied by other branches of government. In many countries, even highly publicized cases, such as the region-wide Odebrecht scandals, are rarely pursued—in part because many top leaders, including several summit participants, are involved. Donald Trump had a legitimate excuse, but his 11th-hour decision to skip the summit was widely viewed as another sign of his indifference to the region. Mexico has endured Trump's offensive rhetoric and open hostility for two years, with hardly a mention of the importance of U.S.-Mexico ties. Unsurprisingly, Latin American governments have become increasingly anxious about U.S. policy, particularly after hearing Washington complain about their expanding commerce with China, praise the Monroe Doctrine, or suggest a military option in Venezuela. True, the U.S. and Latin America have been drifting apart for many years, but relations remained largely cordial, backed up by considerable goodwill—which is now turning into suspicion and resentment."

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A **Agustín Crivelli, investigative economist at the Scalabrini Ortíz Center for Economic and Social Studies in Buenos Aires:**

“The first observation that must be made is that it is extremely striking and paradoxical that the summit themed ‘Democratic Governance against Corruption’ took place in a country where the president had just resigned amid a corruption scandal, having recently pardoned a dictator, Alberto Fujimori, who was serving a sentence for corruption and genocide. Once again, Venezuela’s problems were not addressed from a standpoint of cooperation, nor was there a search for solutions through dialogue and diplomacy. To the contrary, the summit seemed to seek to isolate Venezuela and Cuba, but the United States government did not achieve the necessary consensus to sign a resolution calling for collective sanctions against Venezuela. Ultimately, this was a summit devoid of substance and ideas. The leaders who were present made political statements that made clear their ideological positions, which in many cases showed complete alignment with Washington and its conservative positions. The real problems were not addressed. Officials did not address political persecution in Brazil, a wall on the border between Mexico and the United States, or the serious decline in human rights in many countries in the region.”

A **Jaime Aparicio Otero, former ambassador of Bolivia to the United States:** “The Summit of the Americas process was a hemispheric initiative to rebuild the inter-American system in a new international scenario defined by the end of the Cold War. At the Miami Summit in 1994, all 34 governments of the Americas in attendance were representative democracies committed to collective defense of democracy and

open economies. In the 24 years following Miami, the mood of the region has gradually changed, and diverging views have shattered the consensus of the 1990s. After the Quebec Summit in 2001, deep divisions emerged and have made consensus impos-

“**The mood of the region has gradually changed, and diverging views have shattered the consensus of the 1990s.**”

– Jaime Aparicio Otero

sible. Now, the region is ideologically divided between representative democracies (the Lima Group) and authoritarian populism. This year’s summit in Lima had the lowest participation of heads of state since 1994. For the first time, a president of the United States did not attend a Summit of the Americas. The absence of the Americas’ most controversial presidents, as well as blatant contradictions with the principles that originated the summit process, such as a lack of consensus to unanimously condemn the Venezuelan dictatorship or the presence of Cuba, resulted in an inconsequential summit. In addition, the central theme of the Summit, ‘Democratic Governance against Corruption,’ could not be more ironic. Many of the presidents seated at the summit table, such as Enrique Peña Nieto and Evo Morales, are accused of corruption. In the last decade, corruption has undermined promises and appeals to social values. Clearly, the facts do not measure up to the rhetoric of the Lima Summit.”

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