

# Mexico's New Diplomacy

## Interview with Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge G. Castañeda



Photos courtesy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Office

Minister Castañeda at the Monterrey Summit.

**VOICES OF MEXICO:** In the days prior to September 11, spectacular advances could be foreseen in the negotiations on migration with the then-recently inaugurated Bush administration. Eight months later, what has been done to reactivate those negotiations and what has been achieved?

**MINISTER JORGE G. CASTAÑEDA:** The terrorist attacks against the United

States meant a pause in bilateral negotiations on migration, but certainly not a suspension of our dialogue. What has changed is the pace in reaching our objectives. A little after 9/11, Presidents Fox and Bush recognized that the fundamental conditions that made a broad migratory agreement necessary were still present in both countries, with the important addition of the issue of secu-

urity as a matter of concern to the United States, particularly regarding its borders and ports of entry.

We understand that our two countries' bilateral agenda must take into account new priorities. Nevertheless, both governments are aware that migration plays a central role in that agenda, as was shown by the rapid resumption of the work of the High Level Group on Migra-



tion after 9/11. Our view of migration has not been fundamentally altered, since the main problem has not changed either. We continue to actively promote a broad migration accord that would include the most generalized regularization possible for Mexican residents in the United States; the issuing of more H2 visas for our workers; the definition and implementation of a temporary workers program; the promotion of increased border safety; and the fostering of development in the Mexican communities that send more migrants to the U.S.

A crucial achievement in the negotiations has been the launching of programs for regional economic development in Mexico, particularly in those states and municipalities that have the highest migration rates. This point is a central component of the Partnership for Prosperity that we established last March in Monterrey, one of the most ambitious initiatives that we have ever undertaken to promote a greater socioeconomic convergence of our peoples.

The new concerns that stem from the attacks and the international cam-

paign against terrorism have been added to the negotiations with the United States more as opportunities than as obstacles. The agreements reached by both countries in Monterrey were made possible by this shared vision, which demonstrate the importance of the border, both as an economic link and a port of entry.

**VM:** President Fox once said in the United States that with NAFTA we should work toward not only free transit of goods but also of people. But, what measures and policies has the Mexican government developed to protect Mexicans who cross the border illegally?

**MJC:** Within the framework of the broad negotiations, Mexico introduced the issue of security as a priority on the migration agenda. This allowed Mexico to emphasize the importance of knowing the profile and location of our migrants as a major element in bolstering U.S. internal security, as this would mean greater orderliness and protection of our fellow countrymen who are in the United States to work and make money, not to threaten U.S. national security. We should never lose sight of their great contribution to the American economy.

We have already made significant progress, particularly with regard to bi-national programs for migrant security, efforts to prevent border violence and trafficking in persons, cooperation in cases of emergency in the area, and mechanisms for safe, orderly repatriations. These issues were part of the Plan of Action that Mexico and the United States signed in June 2001. We must not forget that, more than a starting point, these actions go straight to the heart of the matter. Mexicans who cross the border, particularly in

summer, are exposed to grave dangers in desert areas where there is less surveillance and no walls separating the two countries. Many die in the attempt. For the Mexican government, averting more Mexican deaths is a priority and to that end we have put into practice different systems of protection and aid along the border, in coordination with U.S. authorities, such as the INS, the Border Patrol and local police forces. For our part, the authorities of the National Migration Institute, the Beta Groups and the Ministry of Health, among other institutions, have reinforced a variety of safety measures in these remote areas, including surveillance and rescue missions in aid of those who find themselves in situations of danger, distribution of water and easy-to-prepare food and transfer of migrants to safe places where they are given the medical attention they require. As a result, the number of migrants who die in their attempt to cross the border has dropped significantly.

**VM:** Globalization and its collateral phenomena have placed the concept of sovereignty under discussion. Do you think that our traditional foreign policy principles of non-intervention and self-determination continue to be valid, or is it time to move toward other ways of conceiving and implementing a strategic foreign policy in today's international relations?

**MJC:** This is one of the issues that sparks the greatest debate in Mexico among those interested in foreign policy, and I believe that it has led to several misunderstandings. The principles of foreign policy incorporated in the Mexican Constitution in 1988 already existed in the United Nations Charter. They are universal and time-

less in nature and we do not question their validity. Nevertheless—and here lies the first misunderstanding—they are values, criteria that serve as a guide for decision-making; they are not, in

such as ensuring full observance of individual rights and protecting human rights in general.

Secondly, it is a recognized fact that several of these principles have under-

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themselves, therefore, a *program* for foreign policy, as many would like to believe. Until recently, these principles—in particular those of non-intervention and self-determination—were used as shields to avert foreign scrutiny, at a time when the country was clearly lagging behind other nations in areas such as democracy and respect for human rights. This abuse of the principles distorted the way they were understood, blurring their relation to other government objectives,

gone profound changes in recent decades. Principles do not disappear; they evolve. States have decided to cede sovereignty in many fields of action, both for the common good and in their own interests. The universal trend of favoring the protection of individuals over the protection of states has in fact reduced the breadth of those principles. This positive evolution has been the result of continuing international negotiations and is rooted in commonly accepted legal norms we would



With President Vicente Fox.

like to see applied in all states. Today, Mexico's international behavior fully incorporates this evolution. Without falling prey to rhetoric about those principles, we can become front line players in the current international system and active participants in its transformation.

**VM:** One of the main objectives of *Voices of Mexico* is to contribute to

culture abroad, thus fostering an open dialogue between Mexico's arts and humanities community and those of other countries. On the other hand, and independently from the first strategy, the federal government is committed to keep supporting the populations of Mexican origin living in other countries, most particularly in the United States, establishing close ties between them and our country, fostering both in-

tural products abroad, but also to present our country as an attractive place for foreign tourism and investment.

Regarding the second policy area, the ministry's Program for Mexican Communities Abroad is the instrument that the government has established to bring people of Mexican origin closer to Mexico's culture. But this program goes much further than that, as it carries out many other academic, educational, health, cultural and sports projects that seek both to strengthen their ties with our country and facilitate their own insertion into the communities they live in. To this end, we have carried out intense diplomatic efforts to eliminate the barriers and obstacles most Mexicans face due to their condition as migrants or minorities, or often their cultural and educational background. Additionally, we are also promoting greater personal and group development among Mexican immigrants and their families.

This program has already had important successes in education, health and culture. For example, in education we have increased the coverage and depth of the programs the ministry conducts along with the Ministry of Public Education, as well as other public and private institutions in Mexico and the United States. With regard to health, we have coordinated a series of activities aimed at promoting preventive medicine and health care for the most vulnerable sectors of the Mexican community in the United States, on issues such as addictions, cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and domestic violence. We have also supported cultural activities in these communities through "Spanish-language reading circles" in California, Arizona, Illinois, New York and Texas; children's

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supporting and disseminating Mexican culture, art, history and thinking in the international community. Could you explain to our readers the kinds of activities and policies that have been developed to strengthen cultural policy in the United States to favor the social climate in which communities of Mexican origin live there?

**MJC:** One priority in Mexico's international strategy today has been transforming people's perceptions of Mexico abroad. At the same time that the government works domestically to fight the evils that have damaged our international image so greatly—like corruption or insecurity—the Ministry of Foreign Relations has promoted a better understanding of our country's political renovation, economic potential and cultural wealth.

Here, I would like to stress that we are promoting Mexico's culture abroad in two main directions. On the one hand, we have undertaken an ambitious strategy to promote Mexico's rich

dividual and community development. Both tasks are government priorities, but I think that to carry them out effectively, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between their objectives and strategies. In one case, we are trying to attract other peoples to Mexico; in the other, the purpose is to support our fellow citizens abroad, particularly in the United States.

With regard to cultural promotion abroad, we have strengthened the Ministry of Foreign Relations' Office for Cultural Affairs so it can be more effective in disseminating Mexican culture and therefore contribute to the rebranding of Mexico as a modern, plural and democratic nation. As an essential part of this strategy, we decided to create the Institute of Mexico, a new entity within the ministry that will bring under one roof Mexico's cultural centers around the world providing them with a common identity and a single legal framework. Our aim is not only to promote Mexico's culture or cul-

drawing contests; touring painting and photography exhibits; courses and lectures; and radio campaigns.

**VM:** Relations with Canada have become strategic for Mexico, both because we are partners in NAFTA and because we each border on the United States at a time in which U.S. national security has become an issue that has an influence on the dynamics of international politics. Where do relations with Canada fit into the government's foreign policy priorities?

**MJC:** President Fox has decided that Mexico's new foreign policy should develop along two central guidelines: on the one hand, deepening our strategic relationship with North America, and

on the other, achieving a more active participation in the international system. Under this dual conception, the relationship with Canada plays a central role. Since the signing of NAFTA, trade relations between our two countries, as well as their relationship with the United States, have generated a strong economic convergence that not only increased the exchange of goods and services among all three countries, but also revealed the potential for greater integration in other fields. The logical evolution of the treaty and the political and economic maturity of Mexico, which made our democratic change feasible, open up the possibility of moving toward the creation of a new supranational institutional framework in

the North American region, designed on the basis of open markets—including the labor market—and a new sense of community. Canada's experience is significant in this regard because of its greater integration to the U.S. economy and, at the same time, because it ultimately offers a different perspective.

This economic convergence and the creation of a trilateral institutional framework are similar to those we have been witnessing in Europe for nearly five decades, although they will of necessity have their own dynamics and characteristics. What is important is that this transition is possible and close at hand, and that it offers advantages for all three countries, not just Mexico. The strategy of integration in North



America promotes our foreign policy interests and at the same time will be an anchor for Mexico's emerging democracy, just like the European Economic Community was for Spain's democracy in the 1980s. The difference is that Spain was able to take advantage of already existing institutions, while Mexico must first promote their creation. This is the ultimate purpose of establishing a new, closer and more profound

new issues such as the environment and sustainable development, international organized crime or the rights of minorities, issues that together form what is known today as the "new international agenda".

Mexico is committed to strengthening the international system and its rules. For that reason we supported and took part in the negotiation of an international convention to protect and

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relationship with the United States and Canada, which will nurture a new international identity of Mexico and a new sense of community in North America. **VM:** Beyond the anecdotal, the matter of Fidel Castro and Mexico's vote in the Human Rights Commission in Geneva make for a conceptual transformation of the role Mexican diplomacy must play in the international sphere, a diplomacy that is more active and more committed to democracy, the free market, human rights, the fight against drug trafficking, etc. In that sense, what position will Mexico take, as a firm defender of multilateralism, vis-à-vis the United States' growing unilateralism on such important issues as the International Criminal Court?

**MJC:** Multilateralism and international law are the foundations of our shared international system. In the last decades we have witnessed a strengthening of multilateralism, as the international community gets involved in

promote the rights of the disabled during the Durban Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in September of 2001. At the United Nations, we also presented a proposal for a convention against corruption that is now being negotiated in Vienna.

As a matter of course, as was the case with the great majority of nations, we have also watched with concern the United States' tendency—it must be said that this is not only attributable to the current administration—to withdraw from or avoid involvement with a great many important international agreements, not only the one creating the International Criminal Court, but also, to mention just a few, the Kyoto Protocol on the environment; the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and Their Destruction (or Mine Ban Treaty); and the

protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. We should also remember that the United States withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 and has not made any plans to rejoin this organization. We believe that no power can be a part of the international system without subjecting itself to a minimum set of rules adopted to improve international coexistence. Nevertheless, particularly after the September terrorist attacks, the United States seems to have become aware of the limits of unilateralism and of the support it has received from the global community, which in reciprocity requests its solidarity on many other issues.

We would like this policy of "multilateralism *a la carte*" to move into a terrain of firmer global commitment. We also believe that in the complex world created by 9/11, all nations should resist the grave temptation of reducing policy options to a simple dualist or Manichaeian ethic. In any case, this is an argument that Mexico is putting forward today in all international fora.

**VM:** In this framework, we have one obligatory question: What is Mexico's position vis-à-vis certain U.S. actions abroad and unilateral foreign policy positions, for example, the certification of other countries' fight against drug trafficking or some of its stances about the recurring and increasingly profound crises in Latin American countries (Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala)?

**MJC:** Clearly, the United States is today the international system's hegemonic power, possessing a political and economic weight that greatly enhances its capability for action. Its condition as an unrivaled power may lead it to make unilateral decisions that direct-



Castañeda with other U.S. and Mexican cabinet members at the White House.

ly serve its interests and —it should be recognized— may sometimes affect the interests or rights of other nations (I have already referred to some important examples, like the Kyoto Protocol or the Statute of Rome). Additionally, due to the tragic events of September 11, the United States has focused its foreign policy more on regions and issues specifically linked to the fight against terrorism and, as a result, seems to be paying less attention to Latin America. Nevertheless, Mexico and the United States continue to exchange points of view about the situation in the region, as in the cases of Colombia, Venezuela and Argentina. These discussions are very constructive, for they help strength-

en mutual cooperation efforts and are part of a bilateral commitment to build a new, broader and more mature relationship, one that does not compromise Mexico's foreign policy principles or actions.

The process of certification in the fight against drugs is an excellent example of what can be achieved through dialogue. As a result of intensive lobbying efforts, Mexico managed to persuade U.S. authorities, particularly in the U.S. Congress, of the fact that certification was a counterproductive and unilateral policy, rightfully achieving its temporary suspension. Those efforts would not have been successful if we had not been able to show that Mex-

ico was committed to continue fighting drug trafficking, and living up to its commitments.

As the recent arrests of important drug traffickers prove, Mexico is keeping its word. Only through commitment and delivery was Mexico able to stop the certification process. It is with concrete actions of this kind that the government of President Fox is strengthening our mutual trust and cooperation, factors that are indispensable for dealing with the common challenges we face.

**VM:** Could you draw a balance sheet of Mexico's role as the chair of the UN Security Council?

**MJC:** The record of the first Mexican chair of the Security Council in February is very positive, just as is, in broader terms, that of our participation in the council since January 2002. We are a member who is listened to and respected; we dutifully carried out all our obligations, managing the workload on issues such as international peace keeping operations and problem solving in other areas. We had no

of our chair there was a session to review the month's work, which allowed for additional dialogue among council members and other UN member states.


I think we can feel satisfied with Mexico's role in the council, particularly while we chaired it. Moreover, I would like to emphasize that the catastrophic predictions about the supposed problems we were going to face in advancing our positions vis-à-vis the

lines already established by the World Trade Organization.

Mexico's membership in NAFTA and in many other commercial treaties places us in a vantage position. Such accords have allowed for an unprecedented expansion of our foreign trade, they have given us considerable experience in the process of trade liberalization, which will continue in coming years, and they have allowed us to deepen our dialogue and relations with other countries and regions, particularly with the countries of North America and the European Union.

One of the aims of creating a free trade area in the hemisphere, as has been proposed, is to contribute to increasing the competitiveness of national economies and, to that extent, induce greater economic growth, job creation and, thereby, a higher standard of living for the hemisphere's population. But we should not lose sight of the other factor that I have pointed out: the deepening of our dialogue and political links with other countries, with the ensuing strengthening of our international position.

**VM:** Do you have anything more to add?

**MJC:** I would just like to express my gratitude to *Voices of Mexico*. For more than a decade this publication has done an extraordinary job of disseminating contemporary Mexican thinking beyond our borders. I think that these efforts become even more important during the current period of change in our country, a time for leaving behind old habits and trying to consolidate a new civic and democratic culture in Mexico, while we seek to take on a more active and constructive role in the world. Thank you very much. 

### The strategy of integration in North America will be an anchor for Mexico's emerging democracy, just like the EEC was for Spain's democracy in the 1980s.

difficulty in assuming the chair in February (the post, as you know, is rotated monthly) despite the fact that we had only recently joined the council.

When we chaired the council, we especially advanced two issues highlighted since our 2001 membership campaign: greater transparency in the council's work and greater democratization with the active participation of more members of the international community. At our initiative two public debates were held, one on the situation in Burundi, with the participation of its president, and another on the problem of refugees, with the participation of UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers. In addition, following its program, the council looked at the situation of more than 10 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia. It also held an emergency meeting about the crisis in the Middle East, with the participation of Secretary General Kofi Annan and delegations from Israel and Palestine. For the first time, at the end

great powers, particularly the United States, were all ill founded.

**VM:** Eight years after NAFTA and with the prospect of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, what policies and strategies have been considered with regard to regionalization and trade diversification?

**MJC:** Just as the World Trade Organization is the main mechanism for promoting multilateral trade liberalization, bilateral and regional accords allow us to foster our trade relations with other nations and regions. In turn, these accords complement and foster greater multilateral liberalization. That is why we will continue implementing them. For Mexico, signing regional accords does not limit hemispheric integration; rather, it serves as a first step in reaching broader accords.

In fact, the different accords that have been signed are compatible with greater hemispheric integration and, in addition, are consistent with the guide-