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## Mrs. Bush's Remarks at a White House Conference on the Americas

Hyatt Regency Crystal City  
Arlington, Virginia

 [En Español](#)

1:55 P.M. EDT

MRS. BUSH: Thank you all very much. Thanks so much. I'm so happy to be with you today at this very important summit. I want to recognize Carlos Gutierrez, the Secretary of the United States -- U.S. Commerce, who is here, Department of Commerce; Dr. Tom Shannon, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, who also has joined us.

Members of the diplomatic corps, welcome. Civic, religious and business leaders, distinguished guests -- bienvenidos. And thank you for coming to the White House Conference on the Americas. This conference has brought together people of many nationalities and backgrounds, united by one goal: improving opportunities, and lives, throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Advancing this goal is the shared responsibility of every American nation. The Western Hemisphere is home to 35 countries, but we're one regional community. Our people are joined by ties of commerce, family, and faith that borders cannot contain. And our citizens are united by the same dreams: to provide for themselves and their families, to see their children grow up educated and healthy, and to have the freedom to make the most of their talents -- regardless of race, status, or income.

Today, the United States has joined with nations throughout the Western Hemisphere to help people fulfill these shared ambitions. Through the Millennium Challenge Corporation, we've partnered with Latin American nations that invest in their people, foster economic freedom, and work to become transparent.

The United States has signed \$850 million worth of MCC compacts with El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Our Millennium Challenge Compact grants support these nations' development with their strategies -- strategies that will invest in farming, strengthen rural communities, improve education and infrastructure, and help eliminate poverty.

Through our government and the compassion of private citizens, the United States is working to build civic institutions, which offer individuals in Latin America greater independence and self-reliance. And we're especially proud to partner with nations of the Western Hemisphere on two goals required for strong societies: good education, and good health.

Throughout Latin America, nearly a quarter of school-aged children are not enrolled in school. Of those children who do enter school, many fail to graduate. Across the region, more than 40 million adults cannot read. Many indigenous and rural populations lack access to formal education.

Since 2002, the U.S. government has provided more than \$200 million to strengthen education in the Americas. Through initiatives like the Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training, our government has helped train thousands of teachers -- and helped turn nearly half a million children into better readers.

Through USAID, children who live beyond the reach of formal education can benefit from programs like EDUCATODOS, in Honduras. Through EDUCATODOS, community volunteers use interactive radio programs to teach children in the 1st through the 9th grades, educating more than 100,000 rural students a year.

The United States supports person-to-person exchanges that improve education in all American nations. Our colleges and universities cooperate on study-abroad programs. Through scholarships provided by the State Department, more than 5,000 young people from rural areas of Latin America have come to study in the United States.



Every year, the U.S. sends more than 400 of its brightest minds to Latin America through the Fulbright program. While they study, research, and teach, compassionate Fulbrighters are engaged in the cultures of their host countries. They coach youth baseball teams in Argentina; they teach photography in Brazil; they counsel young people in Jamaica; they serve organizations that provide micro-loans to citizens of Ecuador; and they strengthen education for students across the Western Hemisphere.

The United States is working with people throughout Latin America to improve literacy. In March, I visited Brazil's AlfaSol program, which mobilizes entire communities to take responsibility for citizens' education -- and has taught more than 5 million Brazilians how to read. AlfaSol was one of the programs that participated in the White House Conference on Global Literacy, which I hosted in New York last September.

At that conference, we also heard from Gonzalo Fiorilo, head of Bolivia's ALFALIT program. In Bolivia, more than 700,000 people are illiterate, many of them concentrated in rural indigenous communities. Supported by USAID, and with help from local churches and NGOs, ALFALIT instructors teach people to read, write, and count in both Spanish and their native language.

At the White House Conference on Global Literacy, Gonzalo told the story of Emiliana, a woman living in a small Bolivian town. At three in the morning, Emiliana's two-year-old son started convulsing and lost consciousness. Emiliana rushed him to the hospital, but she couldn't find anyone to help her. With the literacy skills she developed through ALFALIT, Emiliana followed signs until she found the emergency room -- and the doctor on duty.

Later, Emiliana was able to read instructions the doctor had written for her, until her little boy recovered completely. Emiliana says, "I never imagined that knowing how to read would save my son's life."

The United States is helping to save lives throughout the Americas by keeping people in good health. Our country stands with people everywhere who feed the hungry, comfort the ailing, and heal the sick. Since 2001, the U.S. government has provided more than \$1 billion to improve health care in the Western Hemisphere.

I've seen the impact of these resources firsthand, at the Camino Seguro program in Guatemala. Founded by an American volunteer, and supported by USAID, Camino Seguro serves children whose parents earn a living picking through trash at the Guatemala City Dump.

Camino Seguro supports the children's education, and runs a medical clinic and nutrition program. Children receive healthy meals of vegetables, beans, rice, and meat. Little children also receive two daily cups of milk, and vitamins. For many of the children, Camino Seguro volunteers supply their only meal of the day.

Individual citizens, too, are answering the call to help in our hemisphere. Through "Operation Walk," U.S. doctors, nurses, and anesthesiologists serve alongside Panamanian doctors to heal low-income patients. "Operation Smile" sends medical volunteers to repair cleft lips and palates of children in Bolivia.

Since 1961, more than 58,000 Americans have volunteered in Latin America and the Caribbean through the Peace Corps. Later today, I'll meet with the new volunteers bound for Honduras, the Peace Corps' second-largest country of operation. Energetic volunteers will board buses to remote Honduran villages. Many will work alone, far from home. Peace Corps members will join with people in rural communities to safeguard the environment, to improve access to clean water, and to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

This morning, President Bush mentioned the many U.S. citizens who volunteer in the Western Hemisphere, and he said that he hoped there was a website so that others who are interested can find out how they can make a difference. Well, I have good news. There is a website -- (laughter) -- that highlights international service opportunities. Run by USAID and USA Freedom Corps, [www.volunteersforprosperity.gov](http://www.volunteersforprosperity.gov) introduces people to the ways they can help around the world, including in Latin America. Once again, that's [www.volunteersforprosperity.gov](http://www.volunteersforprosperity.gov) -- g-o-v, that is. Many Volunteers for Prosperity partners are working to improve health care in the Western Hemisphere.

HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest humanitarian crises of all time, and an urgent threat in our hemisphere. Here in the United States, more than a million people are infected. Across Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly 2 million more people are living with HIV and AIDS. AIDS claims tens of thousands of lives every year.

The United States has partnered with other governments to defeat this epidemic through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Two PEPFAR focus countries are here in the Western Hemisphere: Guyana and Haiti. In these countries, PEPFAR supports antiretroviral treatment for more than 12,000 people, they care for thousands of orphans, and they support medicines that help HIV-positive pregnant women deliver babies who are HIV free.

The United States is proud to partner with our neighbors to improve women's health. And one of the greatest threats to women's health in countries around the world is breast cancer. In the United States, we've made great progress in the fight against this disease. Twenty-five years ago, women were embarrassed to even talk about breast cancer, and they weren't aware of what they

could do to take charge of their own health. Today, however, women do talk about breast cancer. They join races for the cure, and they go on group outings to get mammograms. Women benefit from early detection -- which is the closest thing we have to a cure.

Much of this progress is due to the work of the Susan G. Komen Foundation, which was established by my friend, Nancy Brinker, in honor of her sister, Susan, who died of breast cancer. Nancy, I think, is out here in the audience. There's Nancy -- Ambassador Nancy Brinker. (Applause.)

Now, Susan G. Komen for the Cure is working to save lives around the world -- including in Latin America.

For many countries in the Western Hemisphere, breast cancer is an urgent health challenge. In Mexico, for example, 40 percent of breast cancer cases result in death. In Costa Rica, that number is 44 percent. Many women are diagnosed too late, at clinical stages II and III. A recent study by the National Institutes of Health surveyed Latin American women over the age of 60, to determine how many had received a mammogram within the last two years. The results are discouraging: In São Paulo, only 34 percent of the women reported a mammogram screening in the last two years.

Our countries can address the challenge of breast cancer together, through a new initiative that's being launched today: The Partnership for Breast Cancer Awareness and Research of the Americas. This program unites the medical expertise of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center with the unparalleled grassroots network and education resources of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the strong commitment of the United States Department of State and the International Institute of Education, and experts from the U.S., Brazil, Mexico, and Costa Rica.

These partners will work with private-sector institutions, NGOs, and governments to increase research, training, and community outreach. They'll help women build the knowledge and the confidence they need to take charge of their own health. And by confronting the challenges of breast cancer together, we'll help build lasting friendships between our countries.

These friendships are improving education and health across the Americas. And throughout the Western Hemisphere, these friendships are allowing people who've lived on society's margins to thrive in society's center -- people like Elisangelo Souza dos Santos.

I met Elisangelo in March, when I visited Aprendiz, a Brazilian NGO supported by several businesses in the United States. Elisangelo was born to poor, illiterate parents who had no access to health care. When his mother was pregnant with him, she contracted rubella -- and her son was born with a severe illness that gradually claimed his eyesight. Because Elisangelo couldn't see, he fell behind in school, and eventually dropped out. By the age of 14, Elisangelo was completely blind. He happened to go to a local clinic for care, though, and he was referred there to Aprendiz.

Established by a Brazilian journalist -- Gilberto Dimenstein, who's here with us today -- Aprendiz brings together schools, businesses, NGOs, shelters, and government agencies to improve job opportunities for at-risk youth. One of the Aprendiz's community partnerships is with a São Paulo radio station. Through his radio internship, Elisangelo developed technical skills for a career in communications. He built confidence and he learned how to express himself. Elisangelo spent his next year with the radio program teaching other young people.

Today, he's using the professional skills he developed through the radio program in his job at a pharmaceutical company. He's studying for university entrance exams, and he plans to become a teacher.

Elisangelo says his universe was once limited to low-income housing units on the outskirts of São Paulo. Now, Elisangelo has been integrated into the life of São Paulo. His broadcasts have been heard across the city, and the people he's met through the radio business -- government officials, athletes, artists -- have given him a sense of belonging, and the confidence that he can work with anyone, and succeed at anything. His experience at Aprendiz, Elisangelo explains, "opened doors to the world."

Through community programs like Aprendiz, alliances like the Breast Cancer Partnership, and the work of civic groups like yours, we can help people throughout the Americas open doors to better opportunities, improved health, and renewed hope. Thanks to each of you for supporting these efforts. May God bless you, and may God bless your important work.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

END 2:12 P.M. EDT

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