

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our meeting today is taking place at a key moment for North America.

North America faces challenges and opportunities that will set the course for our region and the world in the years to come.

The opportunities are evident.

Nearshoring offers the opportunity to consolidate our economic and commercial partnership and to turn North America into a productive and powerful driver of industrial and technological development that will shape the remainder of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The United States can consolidate its position as the world's undisputed economic, technologic, and innovative powerhouse, and Mexico can consolidate its development.

Unfortunately, I regret to inform you that Mexico is not prepared to fully harness this historical opportunity because to do so we will need to first address the following issues:

Provide sufficient, clean, and affordable energy.

Develop human capital, mainly in healthcare and education. We must harness the potential of the people of Mexico.

Develop infrastructure, including ubiquitous access to internet.

Strengthen public security.

We have regressed in all these issues because our system of checks and balances has been weakened.

Mexico is not prepared. We are regressing to the ways of the past, and we are far from moving forward.

I am here today to say that governance and democracy in Mexico are at stake. The lack of a strong legal system hinders public trust and progress.

In the last few years, Mexicans have seen democracy erode.

Both organized crime and the government of President Lopez Obrador pose a threat to democracy. For decades now, Mexico has faced increasing crime and violence, but what we are living through today is something completely different.

Organized crime has taken hold of our territory and economy in unprecedented ways.

Organized criminal groups have amassed power and influence, and their existence impacts the lives of millions of people.

Just imagine for a moment that you were a truck driver, and you can't get from Dallas to Detroit because there are gangs controlling the interstate highways. They attack and kill drivers to steal their goods, and then those goods are traded in the black market while the authorities are complacent.

Just picture, you're an orange grower in Florida and you must pay a monthly fee to criminals so you can export your oranges.

Just picture, for a moment, that to open a restaurant in DC, you need to pay protection money to the local mafia, who also force you to sell drugs out of the business.

Well, that's what is happening in Mexico. I would like to add a few more data points to these scenarios:

According to Science magazine, organized crime is the fifth largest employer in Mexico. In 2021, Glen VanHerck, leader of the US Northern Command, stated that organized crime controls one-third of Mexican territory.

According to the Mexican Statistics Bureau (INEGI), homicide is the first cause of death among people between the ages of 15 and 35. Under President Lopez Obrador, this trend has hastened and worsened to unprecedented levels.

Civil security agencies have been dismantled, and areas have been abandoned by local police forces. The National Guard created under Lopez Obrador's administration has simply not delivered. He has also meddled with the essence of the Armed Forces by assigning them to tasks that distract them from their main homeland security function.

More than an anti-crime strategy, his campaign slogan, "Hugs Not Shots," has become criminal negligence because the hugs have been for the criminals, and the citizens have taken the bullets.

The Mexican government simply gave up in the quest for people's security.

In the best of cases, Lopez Obrador is feeble and incompetent in the face of crime; in the worst cases, he takes advantage of it to consolidate his power.

This is why he has weakened the electoral authority and has attacked the judiciary time and again.

In a protest that took place at the doorstep of the Supreme Court of Justice in May last year, a Mexican state governor of the President's party brought two coffins. Inside them were mannequins with the faces of two Supreme Court Justices: one of them of the Chief Justice.

Could you imagine that happening in broad daylight in DC?

Do you know what the reason was for this grotesque protest?

Well, it happens to be that the Justices whose faces were inside the coffins dared to rule that a bill submitted by the President, and supported by his party, was unconstitutional. The bill intended to override the autonomy of the electoral institutions. For President Lopez Obrador, a vote against his

proposals by a Supreme Court Justice means treason.

Lately, he has threatened to amend the Constitution to unseat all Justices of the Supreme Court, which would imply the end of independence of the judiciary in Mexico and the obliteration of the only surviving counterbalance to his power.

In other cases, such as the energy sector, the rules of the game were changed illegally, forcing companies to engage in litigation or to negotiate political favors in what is a perfect example of crony capitalism.

Lopez Obrador has also attacked, threatened, and put pressure on journalists and the media like no other president before him.

Today, Mexico is undergoing an electoral process with the dice completely loaded in favor of the President's candidate.

She has all the resources and government programs available to her to try to win over the votes of the poorest of Mexicans.

Despite its campaign promises, this government has done nothing but foster crony capitalism. The two flagship projects of this administration have cost three times more than originally budgeted, all thanks to corruption.

Recent investigations by journalists have proven that the President's sons have benefited from influence trafficking.

This level of corruption is scandalous, even for Mexican standards. Dear friends, I know that I am describing this situation at a time when you are also undergoing dire circumstances.

This great country has its own challenges.

But for the United States, the relationship with Mexico has been curtailed to two main issues: immigration and fentanyl trafficking.

Such a limited agenda reveals a huge shortage of imagination and ambition.

Remembering the great scholar, Robert Pastor, I must say that our relationship is much more diverse, rich, and positive. We have enormous potential.

However, I must be very clear about this:

Should MORENA remain in power, issues like immigration, fentanyl, or any other bilateral issue for that matter, will find no long-term solutions.

Solving the immigration and fentanyl issues requires three things that the current Mexican government does not have: a state strategy, institutional capacity, and the true will to collaborate.

The president's candidate only promises and offers continuity, and she claims that Mexico has

never been better.

But there is no state strategy. Lopez Obrador sees immigration as the means to blackmail the American government and sees fentanyl as a problem pertaining only to the American people.

There is no institutional capacity. Lopez Obrador has destroyed and debilitated civil and military intelligence and security. But he does not hesitate to use them to persecute his opponents and journalists critical of him. The cartels that control drugs and human trafficking will continue to grow.

There is no will to collaborate with the United States. Lopez Obrador's populist and nationalistic vision has only one priority: to keep the United States as far away as possible so that he can continue to consolidate his power. He will pretend to cooperate, but he will not.

Today, our countries are partners, but not allies.

In September 2023, a very offensive event occurred that humiliated the Mexican people: in the midst of the Ukrainian invasion, Russian soldiers took part in our Independence Day parade in Mexico City's main square.

Another enraging action against those of us who love freedom occurred in 2021 when President Lopez Obrador invited the Cuban dictator José Díaz Canel as the main speaker at our Independence Day ceremony.

It is in the interest of millions of Mexicans that the United States becomes our partner and geopolitical ally.

One must speak inconvenient truths to friends. For many decades, most Mexicans perceived the strength of the United States as the greatest threat to the sovereignty of our country as an independent nation.

But today, the greatest threat to the sovereignty and governance of Mexico is the power and influence of organized crime.

A few years ago, criminal bands were using small dirt roads and thoroughfares. Today they control the main highways of the country that are the backbone for the movement of goods in and through North America.

The Super Bowl will be played this Sunday, right? Well, you need to be aware that the guacamole you will most likely eat was made with avocados from Michoacán that were probably exported only after having paid protection money to criminals.

So in this scenario, I would like to propose four things:

First, a state strategy. Immigration and fentanyl are a shared problem, and shared problems cannot be solved unilaterally or in isolation.

Second, institutional capacity. It will be indispensable to rebuild the institutions in Mexico to deal

with current challenges.

Third, an authentic will to rebuild and regain trust with a diverse bilateral agenda that will help address our issues like allies without double standards or blackmail.

Finally, to find solutions to our problems, we need to think outside of the box. We have a shared destiny.

We are now facing new threats to the sovereignty of our nations, and challenges in public health and security.

The fate of millions of families compels us to act boldly and responsibly to create, negotiate, and carry out deeper agreements that will strengthen our regional security.

Due to our electoral law restrictions, I cannot make specific public policy proposals but what I can do is listen to the Mexicans who live on both sides of the border. Experts have spoken to me about the need to create a North American Customs Agency with highly trained binational staff certified by both countries, with a double mandate: to stop the import of precursors of fentanyl from Asia through Mexico and to stop gunrunning, arms trafficking, from the United States into Mexico.

As for combating climate change and forest protection, young environmentalists have proposed creating a North American Climate Emergency Agency.

For three administrations now, Mexico has unsuccessfully sought to create an anti-crime strategy that will help us regain peace and calm for our people. We are sick and tired of violence and of living with fear.

Only a few days ago, a friend from the United States talked to me about the pain his children endured from having attended the funerals of five of their very dear friends from college, all of whom died of an overdose.

As I told you before, in Mexico, homicide is the first cause of death among young people between the ages of 15 and 35. The death of Mexican and American youth brings profound pain and horror to our communities.

We cannot face unprecedented challenges with conventional responses and institutions, and saving the lives of innocent fellow citizens and regaining peace and calm for our peoples is the best way to defend the sovereignty of both our nations.

We cannot define sovereignty with 19th century criteria in the light of the threats and challenges of the 21st century.

Let mutual trust and respect between our two countries guide us in creating the institutions and cooperation strategies that the circumstances call for.

I would like to conclude by presenting two scenarios for the future of Mexico and the United States.

In the first one, Mexico gets back on the democratic track to consolidate the rule of law, it confronts organized crime head on, reclaims its territory, reduces violence, eliminates extortion, and provides basic legal certainty to businesses.

In this scenario, Mexico and the US build a relationship that brings about not only prosperity but also security, safety, and democratic stability to North America.

In the second scenario, Mexico's democracy continues to erode.

Organized crime spreads, and the military gains political power and is incapable of providing security. Mexicans are victims of insecurity, extortion, and violence, which hinder growth and development in entire regions.

Mexico continues to be a trade partner but is not a geopolitical ally of the US. Mexico's populist government flirts with Russia and China, and threatens to build new partnerships.

What I want to say is that in our June 2 election more than the presidential seat and the legislature are at stake. The constitutional order itself and two contrasting visions of our country are also at stake.

The election is a matter that pertains exclusively, of course, to the people of Mexico. But under the current circumstances, it is indispensable that the democratic forces of the whole world become observers of our electoral process.

This is why I ask you to stand by us during this difficult period until the election in June. I ask you to please follow Mexican affairs closely and support our civil society organizations and democratic institutions.

Please do not leave Mexican democracy off the bilateral agenda.

Do not think even for a split second that the interests of the US in immigration, security, trade, or other agendas will advance if we regress to authoritarianism in Mexico.

I urge you to help us prevent the silent death of Mexico's young democracy.

As President Joe Biden has stated, and I quote, "In the face of the sustained and alarming challenge to democracy and universal human rights around the world, more than ever, democracy needs champions."

President Biden, you have to walk the talk. Let your actions speak louder than your words. Let us then work together so that Mexico becomes a strong, sovereign, and developed country and a trusted friend and partner of the United States.

Thank you.