

Notes from India N° 4

“My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition”.

Indira Gandhi

(A Profile in lines)

**Indira Gandhi in Venezuela (1968-2013):
45th Anniversary of a Historic Visit**

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"... Humankind is balancing on the brink of the collapse of the world economic system and annihilation through nuclear war. Should these tragedies occur, can anyone of us, large, small, rich or poor, from North or South, West or East, hope to escape? Let us analyze the economic crisis. We of the developing world have no margin of safety. We shall be the first and worst sufferers in any economic background. In this interdependent world, where you cannot "stir a flower without troubling a star," even the most affluent are not immune to such disturbances".

Indira Gandhi

Introduction

The Sixties represented a transitional phase in the history of India, in terms of many aspects, the most significant being:

a) The imperative need to resolve issues of extreme urgency such as food for a famine ridden nation, given the collapse brought on by British colonial exploitation.

b) The consolidation of a political system rooted in democracy and the promotion of a climate of political stability in the face of pressures from political parties that were hoping to and were gaining ground, thanks to the electoral decline of the Congress Party¹ and the absence of key leaders of the independence movement.

c) The need to continue to make adjustments to the economic growth and development plan, inherited from the first government of Jawaharlal Nehru².

d) Dealing with a scenario of border tensions and war with neighbouring countries (Pakistan: 1947, 1949, 1965 and 1971; and China: 1962 over the McMahon line³) coupled with foreign support to separatist and extremist groups for the territorial dismemberment of the Indian Union in key geopolitical areas such as Kashmir.

Equally challenging in these years, was the presence in the entire Asian region, of an intense climate of Cold War, as manifested in the effects of the Korean War (1950-1953), the Vietnam-Cambodia, Afghanistan Wars, the build-up of internal tensions in Bangladesh and the consequences of the interventionist yo-yoing of the erstwhile Soviet Union (USSR), its hegemonic military practices towards this part of the world and the military counterweight of the United States (USA), looking to safeguard its sphere of influence. Similarly, we must not forget the developments taking place west of the Indian coast, across the Arabian Sea - we are referring to the conflicts in the Arab-Saharan world and the decolonization process (Egyptian, Libyan, Algerian and Sudanese revolution), Arab

nationalism and socialism, the Suez Canal crisis, the Yemen conflict and the rebuilding and modernization of Saudi Arabia among others. Of special significance, post 1958, is the creation of the Jewish Nation State in Palestine, with the ensuing consequences of expropriation of lands and displacement of the Palestinian people and the prevailing racist face of the new State of Israel with its growing global political importance, thanks to the Zionist project and the Jewish lobby in Europe, United States and the then Soviet Union. In general, the scenario was one of high political and military volatility, impacting the Indian lands to the South.

Another conflict scenario that Hindustan had to take cognizance of and deal with was the role played in those years by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the international context and by its allies such as Pakistan, which enjoyed China's moral and political support, as well as its support in terms of provision of arms for military conflicts with India, thus helping its aspirations to usurp Kashmir.

It was a multi-dimensional scenario characterized by a crisis of confidence, power blocks resulting from bipolar systems, circumstantial military interventions and political and ideological conflicts, with their own specific pragmatisms. The alliances forged between the PRC and USA, in a sea of conspiracies that threatened New Delhi's democratic model, were an example of this. Given this scenario, India had to flex its muscles with an incipient military build-up, to defend its sovereignty and also periodically counter attempts at separatism and political and religious dogmatism in the Indian Sub-continent. At the same time, it was of vital importance to continue to sign Indo-Soviet treaties and move forward with transfers and development in the field of science and technology and to strengthen national economic policies, which would eventually help overcome the crisis situation inherited from the British Empire and mitigate the high social costs that the Indian people had to bear.

India's foreign policy rose to the challenge of countering such threats in the spirit of its own age-old ideals and the pragmatism called for in view of the new confrontations. Moreover it was extremely important to position India's leadership with the legacy of it being an active sponsor member of the Bandung Conference in 1955 and one of the founders of the Non-Aligned movement. The glorious history of the struggle for freedom of a people subjected to colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism, went hand in hand with the decisive efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru to not rest until India was positioned as a leading world power. These were times when the five principles of peaceful co-existence were becoming popular, generating an intense debate on new horizons in the structure and co-existence of international relations, which humanity would have to accept, rising above the insanity of briefcases and security code buttons set to activate a nuclear bomb that could destroy our entire planet.

Indira Gandhi, the only daughter of Kamala Kaul and Jawaharlal Nehru, came from a background marked by discipline, personal sacrifice, and hard work. We shall mention a few relevant aspects of her life in order to provide a brief glimpse into her background:

a) She was born in 1917. When she was two years old, in 1919, the whole of India was shaken by the impact of the Amritsar or Jallianwala Bagh massacre in the Punjab region, in which 379 Indians died and 1200 were injured. At the tender age of thirteen, she had already experienced her father's separation, underground movements and the repressive action of the British colonizers.

b) In **1930**, she organized a movement involving children and the youth, the *Vanar Sena*, which was formed with the intention of helping the Congress Party in her country.

c) 1931 and the years to follow were marked by personal losses; her grandfather Motilal Nehru died in that year. In 1934 she began studies at the Santiniketan University, headed by the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, who in 1913 had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 1935, she left with her mother for Badenweiler – Germany where she attended the Ecole de Bex in Switzerland. Her mother died in the year that followed and she moved to England to prepare for admission into the Oxford University, and in 1937 she joined the Somerville *College*.

d) After her father's visit to England, she returned to India and in 1938 joined the ranks of the Congress Party, actively participating in the struggle for her country's independence.

e) On the 15th of August 1947, her father assumed charge as the Prime Minister of independent India and with this began Indira's long journey as First lady, assisting her father and interacting at the highest levels. This allowed her to understand internal and external realities of India first-hand and gave her an opportunity to get to know emerging world leaders who were broaching the idea of Non-Alignment in the face of the existing power blocks.

f) In 1959, she took leadership of the Congress Party. Upon her father's death in 1964, as we mentioned earlier, Lal Bahadur Shastri was appointed as the Prime Minister of India and Indira Gandhi was given the post of Minister of Information and Broadcasting, which she held till 1973. However the death of Prime Minister Shastri in 1966⁴, resulted in her becoming the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress Party and by constitutional provision, the Prime Minister, in that year itself. Thus she became the first woman to occupy such an important post, within merely nineteen years of independence.

g) In her period, it was relatively common for the Prime Minister to also take charge of other ministerial portfolios. Indira Gandhi was also Minister of External Affairs during the years 1970-1973, Minister of Finance between 1969-1970, Home Minister between 1970-1973 and Defence Minister in 1975.

h) She exercised office as President of the Congress and Prime Minister of India for fifteen years, from 19th January 1966 to 24th March 1977 and for a second term from 14th January 1980 to 31st October 1984, the day on which she was assassinated by her Sikh security guards.

The year 1966 witnessed Indira Gandhi's ascent to power, post her achievements as Information and Broadcasting minister. From that moment onwards she began building the base for modernization, winning over the leadership and consolidating her position in the hearts of the Indian masses, gradually winning the affection of the people. This period was also marked by her experiences and direct clashes with the patriarchal political class of her country. Her detractors included Congress Party members, who were mired in the corruption of the very power that they had newly inherited from the British, as well as other opposition forces who did not have faith in her ability to exercise the office of Prime Minister.

Gradually and sometimes with negative consequences, Indira Gandhi centred her goals on propelling her government towards plans for national development. The following among her actions are worthy of mention:

a) Continuation of work in and strong support to the Science and Technology sector at all production levels in agriculture and industry.

b) Intensive Educational Programmes that were consistent with the nation's economic plans.

c) Modernization of military defence equipment and technology transfers for the development of the power and nuclear defence sectors.⁵

d) Administrative modernization of India's state machinery.

e) Promoting the role of women in Indian society, helping them overcome the inherited obstacles of exclusion and segregation, practiced in Hinduism.

f) Dealing with issues of tribal uprisings and multiple threats by separatist organizations, religious fanatics and saboteurs, with firm use of military force and by responding as a unified nation to defeat destabilizing terrorist attempts in India.

b) Bringing balance in the face of instability, characterized by a shaky peace with Pakistan, negotiations for which were being jeopardized by its deployment of weapons acquired from China or United States.

h) Seeking and obtaining financial aid from the Western World in general and in particular from the United States to the tune of 435 million dollars to help finance the development programmes. Seeking assistance in the form of grains and cereals to ensure food security and bring stability to a country reeling under a vicious cycle of drought in that period.⁶

I) Measures to control the birth rate, applied on the rural and urban male population with few positive results.

J) Managing the Non-Alignment based foreign policy, which was aimed at guaranteeing democracy in Asia and counterbalancing Chinese dominance in South-East Asia.

k) Striving to build a country whose future would not be dependent on the financial and food support of the United States⁷ or any other external power and shaping a future that would be the result of the collective efforts of its large and traditional work force.

l) Promoting the green (agriculture) and white (milk) revolutions.⁸

Many analysts view this period as a controversial one: Indira Gandhi had to deal with the conservatives in the Congress Party and the significant and critical opposition of Morarji Desai of the Janata Party. She almost lost her post as Prime Minister after the 1967 election and had to make power concessions to the conservative wing of the Indian parliament. Her foreign policy fluctuated between support to the United States and the Soviet Union. The military power that India acquired under her initial mandate was projected favourably to the Indian masses to help her get re-elected in the 1971 elections, post the military triumph over Pakistan after 11 months of war.

1. Preparations for the visit

On the 10th and 11th of October 1968, Indira Gandhi made a visit to Venezuela. It was a short stay in the Caracas region bordering Ávila. The visit awakened many expectations and was met with much enthusiasm by the two countries involved. Various institutions participated and a high degree of solidarity, affection and support was expressed by the Venezuelan public towards the Indian Prime Minister.

A special delegate of the Indian Foreign Service, Mr. H.R. Krishnaswami,⁹ was sent by New Delhi to coordinate details of the visit. This official coordinated all details pertaining to the illustrious Prime Minister's tour of Latin America. Likewise, the Indian Foreign Affairs Ministry appointed His Excellency Bejoy Krishna Acharya,¹⁰ Ambassador

of India to Brazil and concurrently to Venezuela¹¹ and the Honourable Mr. A.N. Gorwara, in his capacity as Secretary of the said Embassy to help with the visit.

On Wednesday, the 9th of October, a rehearsal of the Prime Minister's reception ceremony was held. This was organized by the Director of Protocol of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Mr. Hugo Orozco, Officers of the Caracas Garrison Command and Mr. Manuel Angarita, of the Ceremonial and Historical Heritage of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Airport Director Salvador Bottaro.¹²

Indira Gandhi had started her tour of Latin America on the 23rd of September 1968; Besides Venezuela, her itinerary included Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Colombia. It must be clarified that our country had severed ties with the government of Peru given the violation of constitutional and democratic order in the coup d'état that took place on the eve of the official visit of the Head of State of the Indian Government. Her entourage included 29 officials and 6 journalists. On the eighteenth day of her journey through South American lands, which had begun in Colombia, she arrived on a flight from Bogota, in a DC-9 Viasa aircraft, at the Maiquetía International Airport. As planned, she landed at fifteen minutes to one in the afternoon and was received with full honours by the "Simon Bolivar" Marine Infantry Battalion commanded by Lieutenant Commander Alfredo J. Landa Saa, befitting her stature as Head of State.

2. The impact of Indira Gandhi's arrival in Venezuela

"We want to be friends with everyone. India's policy is to consolidate the friendship which already exists; where there is indifference, create understanding and interest, and where there is hostility, make every effort to minimize it".

Indira Gandhi

The Prime Minister of India was received by the President of the Republic Dr. Raúl Leoni, the President and Vice-president of the National Congress, Dr. Armando Vegas and Dr. César Rondón Lovera respectively. The President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Dr. José Manuel Padilla Hernández, President of the Supreme Electoral Council, representatives of the Clergy, Council of Ministers, Financial, Comptroller and Attorney General of the Republic and the Military High Command were also in attendance. The Airport was filled thanks to a significant turnout by the Venezuelan public. The people of

Venezuela, who found inspiration in India's struggle for independence, did not hold back in expressing their affection for her leader.

Her visit, although lasting a mere 18 hours, was intense; both on account of the busy schedule that had been planned for her as well as in terms of the many people that it gave Indira Gandhi an opportunity to meet.¹³ This was the first visit ever by an Indian Prime Minister to Venezuela and President Leoni greeted the Prime Minister warmly, first with a firm handshake and then the traditional Indian salutation.

Images of this lady of imposing stature, in a traditional green coloured sari with black checks, shot with golden threads, a simple string of pearls and a watch, her only accessories were beamed simultaneously into thousands of Venezuelan homes by the *National Television Channel/OCI 5*. The National Press published an open invitation to this event on the day of her arrival.¹⁴

The review of the Marine Battalion by both leaders was immediately followed by speeches by both leaders, some salient points from which are mentioned below:

Indira's Speech:

- In her opening words Indira Gandhi expressed gratitude and communicated her immense pleasure at being in Venezuela. She brought a message of love from her people and government to the people of Venezuela and its leaders. She expressed a desire to learn from this young Venezuelan nation and said that she wished for closer ties between the people of India and Venezuela, along with a better understanding of each other. Talking of which, she said that it was important to consider a key aspect, which is that the public is like a flame that shows you the path and the horizon. The people of a country play a key role in understanding and maintaining the present basis of diplomacy, which is the cornerstone of a mutually beneficial relationship between the governments of India and Venezuela.
- She reiterated her desire for world peace and a better understanding of the so called Third World countries.
- She wished that people should get to know her country and the work being carried out in India, through the broad educational, agricultural and social programmes aimed at improving India's precarious situation.
- She hoped that her visit would deepen the ties between her country, the largest democracy in Asia and ours.

She reiterated her vision and the spirit of fraternity that she wished to carry forward to the future, saying: “...*I come to build bridges of love between Latin America and my country*”¹⁵.

These words clearly demonstrated the political will of the Asian leader and showed the path that Venezuela and the rest of the region would have to take in the Cold War era, with complete clarity on a) the concepts of integration and firm friendship b) working together to find a solution to short and long term issues: initiating the process for drafting of work plans and joint programmes that would help in the achievement of the development goals of both parties.

Venezuela’s speech:

President Leoni, on his part, highlighted the following aspects in his speech:

- He expressed his pleasure at the Prime Minister’s acceptance of the invitation to visit Venezuela and his admiration for her and extended the most cordial welcome on behalf of the people of Venezuela.
- He stated to the Indian Head of State that he considered India to be a progressive and peace loving nation.
- Venezuela, like India, was battling economic inequality, within and beyond its borders and this was the main reason for ignorance, poverty and injustice. President Leoni pointed out that like India, Venezuela too considers it to be an indispensable factor for success in our fight against poverty and to ensure a fair and lasting peace, built on the fundamental principle of equality between States and the inalienable right of people to self-determination and self-rule, free of foreign and odious interferences.
- He extended a warm welcome to Her Excellency Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the representative of a progressive and peace loving nation.

Another point to consider and highlight in the Venezuelan President’s speech, was the fact that India and Venezuela shared common realities and motives. This aspect would be of much interest in furthering dialogue at mid-level diplomatic relations, which would allow mutual support in international organizations such as United Nations, contributing towards strengthening international relations, while maintaining their sovereign positions.¹⁶ The national foreign policy in this government’s period (1964-1969) was centred on the

aspiration to convert Venezuela into an international actor, in a scenario of slowly evolving multi-polarization, dissension and global decolonisation processes, which were taking place in spite of East-West conflicts and tensions.¹⁷

Her arrival was marked by festivity, warmth and hospitality, solidarity and applause. Security was provided by female personnel deputed by the Venezuelan State; flags from both countries lined the runway and many journalists intent on doing their job, unmindful of the pushing and shoving by the military police, covered the event. Indira Gandhi, requested permission from the Venezuelan President and breaking protocol, walked over to accept the bouquets of flowers offered by Venezuelan people and by children from the Indian communities residing in the country. President Leoni offered his arm to the Prime Minister and escorted her down the “Calle de Honor” lined by soldiers and as they moved through the passenger terminal, they were greeted by unceasing applause. The Ambassador of Venezuela in India, Juan Uslar Pietri and the Head of the Indian diplomatic mission in Caracas H.E. Bejoy Archaya followed close behind, along with the Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister, Mr. Dayal. Before entering the official vehicle, Indira Gandhi broke protocol once again, stopping to receive a bouquet of flowers from an Indian girl named M. Rao, daughter of a UNESCO official in Venezuela. Her desire to mingle with the people of the host country showed her human side, nurtured by the sincere affection of the people of the land of Bolivar. We must highlight the spontaneous affection that she displayed in her meeting with a delegation of the Missionary Sisters of Charity and two of the three Indian priests who came from the state of Yaracuy (central western region of Venezuela) to meet the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru at the Maiquetía International Airport. Indians at the airport spontaneously began to sing the National Anthem of India, composed by Rabindranath Tagore, as she left for the city of Caracas.¹⁸

3. The sari-clad lady in the Venezuelan capital

“...*I walk this new world in the name of peace*”, declared Indira Gandhi, upon her arrival in Caracas. The first stop in her agenda was the National Pantheon¹⁹, which she visited accompanied by the Venezuelan Foreign Minister. She laid a wreath at the tomb of the Liberator and signed the Visitor’s Book. Here too, a large number of people greeted and applauded her and sought her autograph.

Later she had a meeting with the President’s family in La Casona, where the Leoni family got to know more intimately, the woman and mother of two children, on whose shoulders rested the responsibility for the entire subcontinent. She strolled through the gardens of the President’s house. The President as well as Ambassadors Uslar and Acharya

exchanged opinions on the visit and discussed the reactions that this illustrious leader was evoking in the capital and the rest of the national territory.

Subsequently she had a media press conference in the Tamanaco Hotel, which lasted for an hour, in which she responded to questions posed by thirteen journalists, in a receptive, agreeable manner and in good humour. She captivated those present with her personality and demonstrated great skill in dealing with polemic questions that could affect her foreign policy, based on the principles of: non-intervention, respect for sovereignty and other's ideas and peaceful coexistence. She declared that she enjoyed these dialogues enormously as they gave her an inkling of what people in the host country thought about her and her country. The press conference touched on various topics of interest and some of the issues highlighted were: a) the food problem in India b) birth control to help resolve the population issue c) cancellation of her visit to Peru d) the large pensions that her government had to pay to the Maharajas or kings in her country and d) cultural aspects such as the taboo on eating beef in her country, which in their country is an important part of the diet.

To start with she thanked the Government and the Venezuelan public for the warm reception extended to her upon her arrival in the country and regretted her short stay in Venezuela. She stated that although her visit was brief, it was much better than not visiting at all. It was very important for her to experience firsthand, the reality of Latin American countries. Her predecessors did not get the opportunity to visit and understand the situation of countries separated from India by oceans, owing to the circumstances prevailing in their time. It was the first time that a visit to Venezuela and the Latin American region had been a Foreign policy priority of an Indian Prime Minister.

She then explained the objectives of her trip to the region. A few of the important points she mentioned were:

- Her country had problems that were common even to developed countries, which were extremely prosperous. Even those countries had hunger and development issues.
- India had made much progress in the last 20 years after its independence and the obstacles that it was facing were a consequence of the years of foreign domination that it had suffered.
- The food-related issues in her country were the result of three (3) consecutive periods of drought. The food-related problems that her country was suffering were not as bad as the media was projecting to the world and this was creating a false image of India as a starving nation, full of misery. She criticized this situation.

- Regarding the problem of overpopulation, she clarified that this was not because the birth rate in India was way higher than in other countries (the birth rate that year was 2.5%) but because the standard of living of the Indian family and consequently that of the nation had risen.
- She indicated that the life expectancy in India in the last two decades had risen. In the past the average age was 32 years and in 1968 it was 52 years, thanks to effective policies for improvement in diet and general living conditions.
- Regarding the issue of birth control, she explained the measures adopted in the family planning programme. These measures did not include birth control, given that this was a choice to be made by families according to their will. Family planning, she said, was conceived to teach families to live better and healthier. She clarified that none of the religious leaders had reproached this activity. She explained that birth control was not as important as increasing production to improve the distribution of wealth. Subsequently the prosperity of the people and the industrialization of the country would help balance the population.
- She accepted a shameful reality of her country - the fact that the Indian Government was paying its kings annual pensions to the tune of 6 million dollars. This was on account of the commitments made by the old allies of the British at the time of declaration of independence. She clarified that this question was being strongly debated and that she was sure that a decision would be taken on this matter. Effectively during the second mandate of Indira Gandhi, these financial privileges were abolished. Their palaces were expropriated and converted into museums, which allowed the Indian public and the world to see the opulence of a generation of aristocrats, result of centuries of exploitation of the majority rural population of India and the system of large estates.
- Regarding the cancellation of her visit to Peru, she clarified that this was an invitation that had been extended by a government that had now been replaced by a dictatorship. Logically she wasn't obliged to go or the new government wasn't obliged, for that matter, to receive her.
- Regarding the arms race in the Indian Subcontinent she responded that her country was buying arms like any other country. Her country had an extensive territory and it's many borders required greater security measures, given that it was at the receiving end of many threats to its security.
- She highlighted that her trip through Latin America and her meetings with the press had worried her about the dramatic comments being made about the Indian situation and its precarious food system. She declared that the social issues were similar to other

countries in the world and that poverty and suffering were not the exclusive heritage of India. She said that the view that the western civilization held of her country was incorrect and stated that it had significant achievements in the field of economic development to its credit.

- She highlighted the need for India and Latin America to forge better ties and build the bridges that would make it possible to understand the issues that they both faced.
- She stated that she would be happy to see Venezuela join the “Uncommitted” or “Non-aligned” nations. This would help in relieving tensions and preventing conflict. War, she asserted, does not solve problems.

As night fell, the setting moved to the Casa Amarilla in front of the Plaza Bolivar. After the protocol events, a banquet was held in her honour and she was introduced to the diplomatic corps. We will focus on the statements made by both Heads of State at this soiree, which spoke of the understanding and communication between the presidents. A joint declaration stated that:

Firstly, the Head of Government meeting had set in motion a new phase in the history of diplomatic relations between India and Venezuela, with a greater assurance of cooperation for a better future, within the framework of commercial and diplomatic relations.

Secondly, on this night of the 10th of October 1968, at the Casa Amarilla, President Leoni spoke of the importance of undertaking a process of national transformation in Venezuela and India to help overcome the legacy of underdevelopment handed down to both in the past. He also spoke of the need to improve the standard of living, both in material and economic terms as well as in the social and spiritual realm. This generous proposal, he warned, had been stumbling on obstacles - the result of a world divided into two large groups. On the one hand the developed and highly industrialized countries, with a high degree of technical and scientific development and on the other, representing almost two-thirds of the world's population, were the so-called “underdeveloped countries”. These countries had not yet attained a status that was conducive to economic development, in spite of being positive players acting for the welfare of the international community.

Thirdly, the Venezuelan President expressed the imperative need to fight strongly and firmly to defend our right to a better quality of life and greater participation in global progress. The inequalities existing between these two large groups of nations, posed a challenge that it was important to understand and overcome.

Fourthly, he made an appeal that the failure of the IInd United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held in New Delhi, where the lack of political will was evident, should not be repeated. Little progress had been made on issues of multilateral cooperation between industrialized countries and the South. He reiterated that developing countries should demonstrate firm will, founded on the values of equality.

This report was the fruit of the conversations and exchanges of view between Prime Minister of India and the Venezuelan President. Both parties agreed to draft joint work plans, which we have categorized into the following key focus areas:

- They recognized the need and scope for mutual cooperation in the fields of commerce, culture, technology and sciences.
- The Government of India expressed its intention to establish a permanent Mission in Caracas in the near future
- Both parties were in agreement that the United Nations and its Charter provide the best framework for safeguarding international peace, while its subsidiary agencies provide the means to promote beneficial economic cooperation within the community of independent nations.
- They agreed on the right of all nations to follow their own policy lines, free from direct or indirect interference. This was a right to be absolutely respected.
- Venezuela and India reiterated their faith in the democratic system of government and they declared that economic progress, linked to social justice was the objective of their respective national policies, while the weight of national economic sacrifice rested on their own people.
- They recognized the importance of international cooperation and peace to facilitate national development and progress. But even international cooperation would be ineffective unless the current dangerous trends that were leading to polarization of economic wealth and economic power in developed countries were stopped from filtering down to underdeveloped countries. This situation would have to be corrected to rectify the existing pattern of international trade.
- They reiterated their ample support to the principles incorporated in the UNCTAD II resolutions made in New Delhi in 1968, the main focus of which translates in particular to the fact that the export of manufactured and semi-manufactured products to developed country markets should be facilitated through non-reciprocal duty concessions, making a deliberate effort to bring the benefits of modern technology and applied sciences to underdeveloped countries.

- Both Heads of State were in agreement that a special effort should be made to deepen bilateral relations between the two countries, both of which were not troubled by political issues.
- Prime Minister Indira Gandhi welcomed the proposal for a visit by the Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Ignacio Iribarren Borges to India. She also thanked the warm and cordial hospitality of the Government and the people of Venezuela. She clarified that although her visit had been short; it was a very successful one and gave her a clear impression of the way of life of the Venezuelan people. She in turn extended a warm invitation to President and Mrs. Leoni to visit India.

It may be considered that this joint declaration took the relations between the two countries to a higher level. Venezuela and India, through this declaration, laid the foundation for a relationship of frank understanding and opened up a path of tremendous potential. There is much to be achieved yet and we must work towards doing so.

4. Indira Gandhi and reactions in the Venezuelan capital

The media in general deserves special recognition for their work in covering and promoting Indira Gandhi's visit to our country. Prior to her arrival in Venezuela, the media carried many stories on India - the independence struggle, her leadership and the challenges that the Asian country faced. Dailies such as *El Nacional* and *El Universal* gave maximum coverage to this event through their journalists: Mariahé Pabón, Gumersindo Villasana and photo journalists: Bottaro, Gordo Pérez, Beltrán. There were many others whose names and surnames went unrecorded, as at that point of time the Press was not particular about citing sources²⁰.

We must mention some of the opinion pieces that were published supporting, analysing, promoting and highlighting the significance of Indira Gandhi's presence in Caracas. Writers such as: Maruxa Nuñez de Villavicencio and her work *Indira Gandhi: La mujer hindú en la independencia*, Sofía Imber *Yo la intransigente*, Mariahé Pabón en *Indira Pryardashani Gandhi, Tagore, Gandhi y Nehru, hicieron de su espíritu un molde para hacerse a todas las vicisitudes*, were most active in reporting on this visit in the daily *El Nacional*. These writers, among others, made efforts to educate the public about the country that India was and the example that it set for the Venezuelan public in its independence struggle, inspired by *Mahatma* Gandhi's ideals of non-violence. They talked of the Nobel prize winner Tagore's pen and the architect of Modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru, whose daughter, Indira Gandhi, had an important tryst with destiny, to set foot on the land of

Bolivar with dignity and find inspiration to continue with her work in the Indian Subcontinent.

Another media source that merits special mention was the National Television Channel, Canal 5, which aired the Prime Minister's visit in black and white on the national channel. This had a tremendous popular impact on the people from all cross-sections of the country, who had the opportunity to see Indira Gandhi from their homes in Venezuela, on this day (The author of this work was 10 years old and remembers being called by his parents to see the arrival of Indira Gandhi at the Maiquetía International Airport on television. Four years later he began to study the Vedas and the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as other topics related to India in general. The contributions that the people of India have made to humanity continue to merit the author's deep admiration to date).

The expression of solidarity by Venezuelan women was not late in coming. Ms. Belén Ramos de Bello, who at that point of time, was aspiring for the candidature of the Presidency of Venezuela and represented the Independent Organizations Block stated in *Message to Indira*, which was the title of her document: "*it was an honour for the country and especially for the women of Venezuela, who see in her a stimulating example of how much can be expected of a woman...We the women of Venezuela consider ourselves attuned to the sentiments of the Indian woman and her great and beautiful ideals of liberty, unity and tolerance*"²¹. This document was handed over personally to the Head of the Indian State (**Govt.**) by Ms.Ramos and Mr. Heraclito Larrábal, the leader of the Block. Likewise, the party of the Government in office, Acción Democrática, issued a statement in the press directed to the Venezuelan public. In a special publicity item related to the visit, it highlighted the following aspects a) It was a people's party that included women as it believed that women have full right to enjoy political rights b) It offered greetings to the Prime Minister in the context of her visit to Venezuela; and c) Highlighted the stimulus that her presence provided to Venezuelan women in their struggle for assertion of their democratic rights, the welfare and the progress of Venezuela. The socio-democratic party of the IVth Republic in Venezuela, once again, demonstrated its tendency to identify with the causes and struggles of the countries in the South. It would in its subsequent governments, be responsible for being the guarantor, promoter and partner in various fronts for solidarity of people in the Latin American, Caribbean, African and Asian contexts.

Before her departure to Trinidad and Tobago to continue with her tour, the President of the Municipal Council of Caracas, Mr. Rafael Ravard, presented Ms.Indira Gandhi with a handwritten Certificate declaring her as a Most Distinguished Guest of Caracas.

Lastly the Heads of State exchanged two messages²² on the occasion of the departure of India's illustrious representative, which further deepened the fraternal ties between both Heads of State, ratifying a greater will to ensure better relations and to continue to build bridges of understanding between the two countries.

The Foreign Minister, Ignacio Iribarren Borges and the Chief of the Army, General Manuel Bereciartu Partidas, bid farewell to Indira Gandhi, walking her to her Presidential (?) jet at the Maiquetía International Airport, in the absence of President Leoni. She was extended the same honours that she received upon her arrival and moments before her departure, she had a few words of farewell for those present: *“I leave, grateful for the attention received. You have been very kind to me.”*²³ Precisely at 8.05 am she left for Puerto España, a Caribbean country that had received its first Indian immigrants in 1848, hired by the owners of British plantations to replace African slave labour, the “beneficiary” of the unilateral abolition of slavery decreed by the British in the year 1830. This was the initial period of the industrial revolution and adaptation of the capital-labour ratio to the context of economic liberalism. Thus wage labour would come to be the new standard in the capitalist labour market paving the way for a new “maturity” in its social relations of production. We must not ignore the new neo-slavery production system that was implemented not only in Trinidad but also in British Guyana, Jamaica and other regions, which had the approval of Great Britain. In this last leg, her agenda included a meeting with the natives and descendants of Hindustan. Active Indo-Caribbean solidarity was essential to re-establish dialogues that had already been initiated one hundred and twenty-five years prior to the time of her visit to our region; it was indispensable for Indira to reap the fruit of this period and take it back to her own land as a reality to resume the struggle in her own country.

By way of conclusion

In 2013, we celebrate the forty-fifth year of the historic visit of Indira Gandhi to Venezuela and on the 31st of October, twenty-nine years would have passed since her tragic death. It is necessary for present-day Venezuela to understand the importance that India has in the South-South context, in the IBSA integration model (India, Brazil and South Africa) in the BRICS block (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the Non-Aligned movement and in the commercial and power sector. The XVIIth Summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (MNAC) shall take place in 2015 in the city of Caracas and this will be a good time to receive many heads of state, among them the Indian Head of State.

We must work towards reinitiating and re-establishing these relations with a greater and decided will to engage in action that not only promotes mutual benefit but also the guarantees that come with accepting the challenge to build deeper ties and engage in dialogue and prioritize this relationship. The diplomatic channels of both countries should take this goodwill forward. Towards the end of the year 2011 and in particular in 2012, we witnessed positive signs of political and economic rapprochement between the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Government of India. We must mention

the recent visit by a delegation of ministers from India to the Venezuelan capital. The agenda included the following:

a) A visit by a 35 member delegation of companies representing the pharmaceutical industry in India to meet with their Venezuelan counterparts last February and explore opportunities to establish mutually beneficial relations. The visit was organized under the auspices of the Council for Pharmaceutical Exports of India (Pharmexcil); b) 18 members of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) accompanying H.E Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry of India, visited the country in July; c) Visit in August by Mr. V.S. Sampath, Chief Electoral Commissioner of India, following an invitation extended by Dr. Tibusay Lucena Ramírez, President of the National Electoral Council (CNE); e) The signing in the city of Caracas of a series of agreements between the company *Reliance Industries Limited* (RIL) of India and the state- run enterprise *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) on 25th of September last year to promote greater production in the Orinoco Oil Belt in Venezuela and supply up to 400,000 barrels of petrol per day to India.

Multilateralism in the Venezuelan foreign policy should not remain a mere slogan and should not be unequal. It should be as broad a term in action as in word and open up avenues for alternative examples of economic, scientific, technological cooperation and in particular deepen the culture and practice of a dialogue based democracy with other countries that are practicing and perfecting it.

India is a key player in ensuring that the land of Simón Bolívar, *Mahatma* Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru become a universal paradigm inspiring faith and founded on values such as peaceful struggle, non-violence, truth and the global nature of its peoples, in a world where unilateralism aspires to dominate and set the standards of international co-existence.

Notes

¹ The Congress Party (CP) or the Indian National Congress was the political force that united the Indian public and led the struggle for independence in India, which was attained in 1947. Subsequently it practically dominated the majority of the regional governments of the country till 1996. Founded in 1885, right from its inception onwards, it strongly defended the need to establish limited democratic reforms under the British rule. In this phase it adopted a conciliatory stand vis-à-vis the colonial machinery. Later in 1905, it did an about turn and focussed its efforts towards *Swaraj* (in Sanskrit 'self-governance'); in 1920, it adopted new anti-colonial strategies, guided in this by *Mahatma* Gandhi, incorporating the following actions, among others: Non- violence, truth, civil disobedience and peaceful resistance against British hegemony. In 1929, the C.P was chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru. On this occasion, the organization called for total independence. This led to a massive wave of repression involving imprisonments and massacres all over India. During the 2nd World War, given the depletion of the financial resources of the metropolis and the chaos that characterizes wars, the C.P rejected extending any form of support to the British war fronts, initiating instead a campaign that had high impact. It was called the "*Quit India*" movement and it led to violent confrontations and the consequent imprisonment of around 60,000 activists. Once independence was achieved in 1947, the Congress Party controlled the central government and most of the governments that came to power in India for 20 years. In 1955, it adopted a programme based on the ideology of "democratic socialism" and internationalism. This organization was split in 1969, but the dominant faction (the New Congress Party) continued to dominate the New Delhi and regional scenario, thanks to the presence of Indira Gandhi.

² The British withdrew on 15th August 1947, establishing an independent country. India took its first steps as a self-governing nation and member of the Commonwealth. Nehru was elected as the Prime Minister of new India, occupying this post in the context of the birth of the New Constitution of 1950, which established a republican, democratic and federal form of government in the Indian Union. Nehru was devoted to the implementation of the five-year plans that translated into the first major achievements in terms of significant growth rates in the industrial and agricultural sectors. This was in the context of an economy shattered by a paradoxical reality (India when the British arrived in their land, was one of the most prosperous countries of Asia and the world and when the British left, it was one of the poorest). His effort to turn Hindustan into a solid economy would bear fruit in merely sixty-five years after independence, with it occupying the position of the second most important emerging economy in the world, with numerous examples of the success of its model of development. On the other hand, these economic plans were accompanied by significant struggles in the national scenario. Now it became extremely important to introduce the policy of peaceful coexistence in international relations in the United Nations (UN), with regard to various conflicts. Some of the important steps include: support to the resolution on Korea adopted in 1950, in which it opposed Great Britain and France in the Suez Canal conflict in 1956. In 1959 it had its first military skirmish with China on border issues. Under his governance, India became a role model for independence struggles, an inspiring example for Afro-Asian people. India thus became one of the founders of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM) along with the Egyptian statesman Col. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Josip Broz Tito, President of Yugoslavia, whose communist government was independent of the Soviet block and Achmed Sukarno, first President of the Republic of Indonesia. Till his death on the 27th of May 1964 in New Delhi, Nehru continued to exercise a strong influence and enjoyed the stature befitting the generation of the leaders of the independence movement.

³ The so-called *MacMahon* line, in this case, refers to the mountain territory of the state of Arunāchal Pradesh located in the North-east of India, sharing a border with China to the south and to the South-West Myanmar, Bhutan to the West and to the South-east, with the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland. This region is mentioned in the Sanskrit Puranas from the Vedic era. The Akom kings of Assam annexed this territory to the administrative region of its kingdom. Later in 1826 it became part of British India and an important border area of the colonial administration. In 1912 it became a part of the territory of the State of Assam and later in 1954 it became a part of the North-Eastern Border Territory thanks to the Jawarhlal Nehru government. China has claimed this territory and has rejected the British proposal that recommends that the border with Tibet should follow the geographical lines of the Himalayan range. This criterion is known as the MacMohan line; this demarcation has functioned as a de facto border for India in the simmering territorial dispute that led to an incursion by the troops of the People's Republic of China into this region during the years 1959 and 1962.

⁴ It would be interesting to mention the situation that Lal Bahadur Shastri was faced with. From August 1965 onwards, Pakistan had been staking claim to the territory of Kashmir, a region divided between the two countries since 1947, by means of an undeclared guerrilla war against the Indian army. This incident is known as the second Indo-Pakistan war. In September that year, the war had reached a stalemate with high cost to life and materials. India suffered 3000 casualties and Pakistan 3800 deaths. After the intervention of the United Nations Security Council on the 20th of September 1965 a ceasefire was demanded and the warring parties abided by the decision of the international body from 22nd September 1965 onwards. On the 4th of January 1966, Prime Minister Shastri held a meeting with the Pakistani President, Muhammad Ayyub Kan, in the Soviet city of Tashkent (present capital of Uzbekistán) to negotiate an agreement that was signed six days later and involved the withdrawal of troops from both countries. Unfortunately hours after the meeting and the signing of the Agreement, he died of a heart-attack. Today India controls a major part of Kashmir, a territory that now known as the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan administers the rest (the North-eastern part), which is called Azad Kashmir ('Independent').

⁵ The national nuclear programme was initiated by his government in 1967 as a response to the nuclear threat by the People's Republic of China. The objective was to bring stability and guarantee the security interests of a nation that was independent of the nuclear superpowers. In 1974, India successfully carried out an underground nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes, in the Pokhran desert in Rajasthan, marking the birth of the youngest nuclear power.

⁶ . "India's need for these provisions is urgent, almost desperate. Monsoon rains can be the difference between malnutrition and hunger and are often scarce, to the extent that in 1966, India was hit by the worst drought of the century". In a Special Report: "*La India Turbulenta de Indira Gandhi*". *Semana*. Caracas 11 to 10 October, 1968, p. 37.

⁷ We must keep in mind that Indira Gandhi, during her first government, did not enjoy good relations with the United States, as she did not bow down to the Republican administration and was firm about the dignity that she owed to her country, in particular the Richard Nixon government. Kalyani Shankar in his important work: *Nixon, Indira and India. Politics and Beyond* talks of the various pressures, the dirty games played by the White House, the CIA, US diplomatic staff posted in New Delhi and the trap set by President Nixon for the Indira Gandhi government, based on various exclusive documents in the United States National Archives in College Park in Maryland and the National Security archives of the George Washington University. He also includes correspondence and secret memoranda (currently declassified) between the White House, the Department of State and the United States Embassy in New Delhi, documentation of the American Central Intelligence Agency and texts on national security, in addition to telephone transcripts of conversations between the National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Nixon. It must be taken into consideration that pejorative adjectives used by Nixon for Indira Gandhi reflected his vindictive nature. He attempted to damage her personally and politically during his government's rule, going to the extent of establishing alliances with China and Pakistan to threaten the Prime Minister and weaken her resolve. History proved the American pride wrong. See transcript of the telephonic conversation between Nixon and Kissinger in *Diplomatic Confrontation* p. 22. *Nixon, Indira and India. Politics and Beyond* of Kalyani Shankar. New Delhi. Macmillan Publishers India Ltd, 2010.

⁸ It is important to clarify that during the sixties, India implemented various agricultural innovation programmes with the firm and extraordinary support of the government. The green revolution took its first steps, progressively changing the situation of chronic scarcity of food in India to one of increasing cases of excess production of wheat, rice, cotton and milk. Punjab was one of the most successful regions. This revolution was brought about with four important steps: 7.1 new varieties of seeds; 7.2 chemicalization of Indian agriculture (massive use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides among other products; 7.3 combined national and international commitment to cooperation for development of new varieties and improvement in seed production and 7.4 promotion of the establishment of Agricultural Science institutions.

⁹ See "Sin modificación programa de la visita a Venezuela de la Señora Indira Gandhi", *El Nacional*, Caracas 9th October 1968, p. D-5.

¹⁰ See: "Mañana a las 12 y 45 pm. Leoni recibirá a Indira Gandhi en el aeropuerto de Maiquetía", *El Universal*, Caracas 8th October 1968, p. 8.

¹¹ We must clarify that the elevation of diplomatic ties between India and Venezuela to the rank of Ambassadors and their respective Diplomatic Missions, was approved on 13th July 1962. See: "Elevación de legaciones al rango de embajadas", in Ministerio de Relaciones: *Libro Amarillo* 1963. Caracas, National Press, 1963, p. 120.

¹² See: “Llega el jueves. Mañana ensayan recepción a la Ministro Indira Gandhi”, *El Universal*, Caracas 8th October 1968, p. 24.

¹³ Her official agenda was as follows: 12.45 pm Arrival in Venezuela. Once the reception protocol formalities were completed she was taken, along with President Leoni and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela Mr. Ignacio Iribarren Borges to Hotel Tamanaco in Caracas city. At 2.45 she was taken to the National Pantheon where she laid a wreath at the tomb of the Liberator Simon Bolivar. Later at 4:00pm she visited President Leoni and his wife Carmen América Fernández de Leoni at the Presidential palace La Casona. At 5.30pm she attended a press conference at the Hotel Tamanaco and at 7.45pm she visited the Casa Amarilla located in the heart of Caracas, where she had a Presidential level meeting with her Venezuelan counterpart and a banquet was held in her honour. Next she met the chiefs of mission of the diplomatic corps attached to our country and later President Leoni and his wife held a reception in her honour.

¹⁴ See: “Televisora Nacional en transmisión directa desde Maiquetía, invita a ver la llegada de la Sra. Indira Gandhi. Primer Ministro de la India. Hoy a las 12.30 del mediodía”, *El Nacional*, Caracas 10th October 1968, p. D-9.

¹⁵ See: “Vengo a tender puentes de afecto entre América Latina y mi patria. Dijo Indira Gandhi al llegar”, *El Nacional*, Caracas 11th October 1968, cover.

¹⁶ Venezuela in particular was experiencing a period of turbulence in its democratic system, as the country had suffered a suspension of constitutional guarantees in 1967 and the Acción Democrática party government suffered a political split in its left wing, resulting in the People’s Electoral Movement (PEM). The Venezuelan political scenario was dominated by the Acción Democrática party, the Leoni government continued with the Rómulo Betancourt government’s policy in terms of the economic and social policies. Similarly, his government also had to fight in the guerrilla fronts of the FALN (National Liberation Armed Forces) that had opened up in the country and at that time he was seeking the advice of the American CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) with regard to repressing these movements. This was the beginning of an unfortunate phase in XXth century Venezuela, in times of representative democracy, known as the era of political persecution and forced disappearance and also as the IVth Republic.

¹⁷ Romero, María Teresa: *Política exterior venezolana. El proyecto democrático, 1959-1999*. Caracas. Los Libros de El Nacional. Editorial CEC. S.A, 2004, p. 191.

¹⁸ The anthem that the Indian community sang spontaneously at the airport caused a sensation. Journalists highlighted this event. The translation of the verse is as follows: “Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, Dispenser of India's destiny. Thy name rouses the hearts of [Punjab](#), [Sindh](#), [Gujarat](#) and [Maratha](#). Of the [Dravida](#) and [Orissa](#) and [Bengal](#); It echoes in the hills of the [Vindhya](#) and [Himalayas](#), mingles in the music of [Yamuna](#) and [Ganges](#) and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea. They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise. The saving of all people waits in thy hand, Thou dispenser of India's destiny. Victory forever. See: “Recorro este nuevo mundo en nombre de la paz. Dijo Indira Gandhi al llegar a Caracas”. *El Nacional*, Caracas 11th October 1968, pp. D-2 and D-3.

¹⁹ Indira Gandhi made a similar visit to the Quinta de Bolívar in the city of Bogota-Colombia and was accompanied by the head of the Foreign Affairs Department - Misael Pastrana Borrero, Chief of Protocol - Hernando Manrique and the Indian Delegation. She laid a floral wreath at the statue of Bolivar. She walked around the old mansion and showed a lot of interest in the painting “Paso por el páramo de Pisba”, an allegorical work depicting his march through the frosty Andean mountains with his battered army. When she came out of the house, a simple Colombian peasant woman personally gifted Indira Gandhi a pair of espadrilles. This humble gesture demonstrated the transparent and sincere heart of the nation. Later in the Colombian capital the Prime Minister visited the Museo del Oro of the Colombian Republic Bank. See: “Indira Gandhi visitó la Quinta de Bolívar y colocó una ofrenda floral”, *El Nacional*, Caracas 10th October, 1968, p. A-11.

²⁰ To get an exact idea of the journalistic sources recorded, we invite the reader to read various newspaper references. A total of thirty-eight (38) reviews and twenty-three photographs, including complete pages, opinion articles, publicity and special reports were dedicated to the illustrious visitor.

²¹ See: “Mensaje a Indira de la mujer venezolana”, *El Nacional*, Caracas 11th October, 1968, p. D-3. See the following messages: From Indira Gandhi: “*His Excellency Dr. Raúl Leoni. Caracas. I thank Your Excellency, the soldiers of the Armed Forces and the people of Venezuela for your warm hospitality. My visit was very short, but it left me with an idea of the progress that Venezuela has made and a personal insight into the grand aspirations that the country has. I hope that my visit will cement closer ties of friendship between your country and mine. Indira Gandhi*”. On behalf of Venezuela: “*Her Excellency Indira Gandhi. I thank you very much for your cordial farewell message. You leave behind a trail of goodwill that will deepen relations between our two countries. I wish you success in your crucial mission and I reiterate my assurance of friendship and the admiration of the Venezuelan people*”. In: “Mensajes entre el Presidente e Indira Gandhi”, *EL Nacional*, Caracas, 12th October 1968, p. D-7.

²² See : (1968, 12th October 12). En el avión presidencial viajó Indira Gandhi a Trinidad, Caracas, *El Nacional*, p. A-1.

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