

34 Countries at Brazil's Arab Summit. Only Half Sent Chief of State

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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The summit for South American and Arab countries only starts today in Brasília, capital of Brazil, but the work schedule for after the event has already been defined, yesterday, by the ministers of Foreign Relations of the countries involved.

The next edition will take place in 2008 in an Arab country that, according to minister Celso Amorim, may be announced today.

Before that, in 2007, there will be a meeting for the ministers in Buenos Aires, capital city of Argentina, and, in November this year, a meeting for the high officials in both regions' governments will be organized, at the head of the League of Arab States, in Cairo.

The idea is to have the summit organised every three years, that the foreign ministers meet at least every two years and the government officials meet every year.

"And if need be we'll have other ministerial meetings," said Amorim. Sectorial meetings will also be organised, to discuss specific themes, such as trade, culture and politics.

Yesterday the ministers also added some points to the summit's final declaration, which will be presented today to the heads of state and government.

In one of these points, in the cultural field, Morocco offered to hold a center for studies on South America. Cultural exchange is one of the high points of the summit.

The ministers agree in also to add a position concerning the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), focus of the war between Argentina and England in the 1980s, and about the islands in the Arabic Gulf, that are currently being disputed by the United Arab Emirates and Iran.

According to information from the Brazilian foreign office, the Itamaraty, the text included yesterday "exhorts" the search for pacific solutions over these deadlocks and that answer the interests of all the parties involved.

In the remainder of the declaration, the text that had already been approved by the ministers in March, during the Marrakech meeting, was kept.

"This is the position taken by the 34 countries, which was approved in Marrakech," said the secretary general of the Arab League, Amr Mussa.

The document suggests the creation of mechanisms to promote trade relations between the two regions and the establishment of partnerships in strategic sectors, like energy, telecommunications, transports and research.

It also foresees, among other things, respect for multilateralism and international law; condemnation all forms of terrorism; the search for pacific solutions for regional conflicts, through sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

"It is an already approved process and there is great enthusiasm. There is a ministerial presence as never was seen before in international meetings," said Amorim.

"And what happened today is just a prelude to what will happen tomorrow (today), a demonstration that what the summit aimed to arouse, it already did, that is this proved interest in the political, economic and cultural fields," he added.

According to him, 60 ministers, from various ministries, of the 34 countries involved are in Brazil to participated in the events of the summit.

Presence

In the same sense, Amr Mussa stated that the absence of some heads of state, especially from the Arab countries, does not empty the summit.

"All Arab countries are present," he stated, referring to the fact that all governments sent at least their Foreign Relations ministers. For him, this is a sign of the importance the Arabs are giving the event.

For the Algerian minister, Abdelaziz Belkhadem, the summit will "consolidate the friendship bonds that already exist and establish the bases for a greater cooperation between the two regions".

Algeria is summit's co-president, together with Brazil, and also holds the rotating presidency of the Arab League.

Iraq

The Iraqi minister of Foreign Relations, Hoshyar Zebary, added that, for his country, the event is especially important, as it is taking place immediately after the new government's inauguration, recently elected.

For him, the summit represents the opportunity for Iraq to start partnerships with South America. Zebary also said that, in the declaration, the participating companies support the Iraqi elected government.

The minister of Foreign Relations from Sudan, Mustafa Osman Ismail, said that his country's government sees in the summit an opportunity of expanding their trade and economic relations.

The deputy minister from Peru, Armando Lecaros, in his turn, expects the summit to result in "concrete and promising actions between our countries".

Debates

The summit begins today. Of the 34 participating countries, 17 will be represented by heads of state or government, the others sent their Foreign Relations ministers as heads of the delegations.

The opening of the event will take place in the morning, in the Ulysses Guimarães Conventions Centre, and will have speeches by the presidents of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of Algeria, Abdelaziz Boutlefika, and of Peru, Alejandro Toledo, who is holding the temporary presidency of the Community of South American Nations. Mussa, of the Arab League, will also speak.

During the rest of the day and tomorrow morning there will be the assembly meetings for the heads of state, of government and of the delegations. Since the final declaration has already been discussed, the debates should be concentrated over three themes.

The first is bi-regional economic cooperation, through supporting trade and investments. The second one refers to political dialogue and the third to cultural exchange. According to information from the Itamaraty, each representative

should speak about their vision and ideas about these subjects.

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