

## Lula Urges Arab Leaders in Brazil to Challenge Economic Order

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha  
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The expansion of economic relations was one of the main topics discussed yesterday during the debates of the summit between Arab and South American countries, which began yesterday and finishes today, in Brazilian capital Brasília.

"The focus of our attentions were common interests, mainly with regard to the economy, trade and investment, and with special emphasis on the creation of mechanisms for the promotion of partnerships," stated Mohamed Benaïssa, the minister of Foreign Business and Cooperation of Morocco, the country that offered - and was accepted - to host the next summit, in 2008.

The day was divided into two panels. In the first, the theme was "Bi-regional cooperation through trade, investment and business". In the second, the topics discussed were "Political dialogue and cultural exchange."

Right at the opening ceremony, president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defended the need for promotion of equilibrium in international trade. "We must position ourselves in the face of an economic order that is resistant to transformation and to the interests of the developing countries," he said.

In the same lines, the Algerian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, declared that the Arabs and South Americans must use globalization in their advantage.

"We may make globalization work in our favor. For this it is necessary to promote South-South trade and greater cooperation," he said.

The secretary general of the League of Arab States, Amr Mussa, in turn, pointed out that "there are already profound roots for this cooperation," especially due to the influence of Arab immigration to South America. He added that now the idea is to go after development, economic growth, justice and international peace as a group.

In the debates, the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, pointed out the relations between both regions must have a clear agenda, showing a route that may be followed not only by Arabs and South Americans, but also by all the developing countries.

He pointed out the need for joint positioning with regard to international foreign trade challenges, greatly influenced by the economic power of the rich countries.

The participants also pointed out the need for promotion of reforms in international organizations like the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), so that they answer to the interests of developing countries.

"It is necessary to change the political and economical system that some developed countries are imposing through international mechanisms," stated the president of Guiana, Bharrat Jagdeo.

Apart from institutional reforms, the participants defended the increase of South-South trade as a matter of utmost importance.

"It is necessary to find other markets that may also encourage investment," stated the prime minister of Lebanon, Nagib Mikati, who also pointed out the "organic" connection between both regions, mainly due to immigration.

The Vice President of Colombia, Francisco Santos Calderón, went even further and, apart from the expansion of foreign

trade, defended negotiations for the creation of a free trade area including both regions.

"With this dialogue we want to create a safe route for investment and trade," he pointed out.

## Transport

The Foreign Minister of Sudan, Mustafa Osman Ismail, pointed out the importance of cooperation in the area of transport so as to reduce the effects of the distance that separates both regions.

"All of us Arabs who came here had a stop-off in a European capital," he observed.

"Dialogue between civilizations" was one of the most used expressions in the debates yesterday. To the president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, the world is not condemned to the "shock of civilizations" nor to the "end of history".

In his evaluation, the Brasília summit shows that dialogue is possible and, alone, is one more step in history.

"The dialogue between civilizations includes opening routes on all levels," added the Libyan minister of Foreign Relations, Abdelrahman Mohamed Shlaqam.

The Syrian Prime Minister, Mohammad Naji Al-Otri, in turn, also defended the deepening of cultural relations, especially through the exchange of university professors.

## Stability

The respect for international law, the search for peace and stability, the condemnation of terrorism and the reform in the UN were also recurring topics in the meetings.

The President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, asked, for example, for the support of participating countries to re-establish the independence of his country and help in the reconstruction process.

He even suggested that economic missions be sent to "see the possibilities for investments" existing in Iraq.

In the same way as for the international economic and financial institutions, the Arab and South American leaders defended greater space for the developing countries in the UN, and even the expansion of the Security Council. Support for the creation of a Palestinian state was also reaffirmed by all.

## Chávez

Some participants proposed specific measures, as was the case of the Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, who gave the idea, for example, of creating a "fund for social care", kept by the countries in the two regions.

He also said that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which Venezuela is part, could also help in cooperation between Arabs and South Americans.

Chávez caused some smiles when talking about creating a clear work agenda to give strategic direction to the relationship between the two regions. He compared the summit to the first date with a girlfriend. "One has to be careful," he said.

The Kuwaiti minister of Foreign Relations, Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabbeh, in his turn, spoke for helping financially the poorer countries and highlighted the projects his country carries out in this field.

At the end of yesterday's meetings, Lula said: "We are already packing to go to Morocco in 2008."

The summit debates will continue this morning, at the last day of the meeting for the foreign ministers.

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