

## International Forum on Federalism in Mexico

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### **Opening speech by Bob Rae Chairman of the Forum of Federations**

Veracruz, 15 November 2001

It's a great pleasure to be here in the historic state of Vera Cruz to share ideas about something most of us consider important to our ways of life: federalism.

*Je suis très heureux de me trouver aujourd'hui dans l'état historique de Veracruz afin de partager avec vous des idées sur un sujet que nous considérons tous très important : le fédéralisme.*

*Es un gran placer estar aquí en el estado histórico de Veracruz para compartir ideas acerca de un asunto que se consideramos muy importante sobre nuestros modos de vida: El federalismo.*

The Forum of Federations is very proud to be a partner in this conference. We are very pleased to work with our Mexican friends to renew federalism in this country.

At a very fundamental level, federalism is about accepting values that are essential for civil society – an acceptance of pluralism, a realization that others are not always like ourselves, the importance of a deep tolerance, a respect for the rule of law and the respect minorities.

We who live in federal countries are used to navigating the landscape of federalism as an everyday activity.

It's almost second nature for us to consider that we have to deal with one order of government when seeking one kind of service and another for another kind.

And you don't have to be a political scientist to know that there are some areas of shared or over-lapping jurisdiction – where we may have to deal with more than one order of government. All that is part of our daily lives – and we take it for granted.

The idea of exchanging views among the federal countries around the globe on the way we practice federalism is very new.

The reason for that, in part, is because we've all tended to think of our own "federalism" as being very specific to our particular countries.

After all, in each federal country the historic circumstances are different. In the case of the country I come from, Canada, our origins as a series of British colonies, speaking two different languages, traumatized by a bloody civil war in the United States just to the

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south, are very different from the historic situation that saw the birth of the Mexican nation.

It is perfectly normal that we should each feel that we invented a federal formula tailored to our own distinct political personality.

No nos hemos reunido en Veracruz para refutar ese punto.

*Nos hemos reunido aquí porque hemos descubierto que a pesar de nuestras rarezas y particularidades tenemos mucho que aprender el uno del otro.*

*No existe un país federal que haya encontrado la fórmula perfecta para la paz, la armonía y la felicidad universal. Todos los sistemas federales, no importa que tan veteranos o que tan bien establecidos estén, son un trabajo siempre en progreso. Tenemos que inventar y re-inventarnos constantemente.*

Just take the example, so often cited during the past two months, of the impact of the terrible events of September 11th. Those events changed our attitudes and our expectations in many ways.

Those awful acts of violence certainly had an impact on our practice of federalism. But as to the exact nature of that impact—it's still too early to say.

One conclusion, however, is clear. Politics and governance matter. Governments at all levels will have to learn to work more effectively together. Policing and security are now international, national, regional and local concerns. All governments will be rightly preoccupied to ensure the security of the public just as surely as they will be to protect people's freedom.

I suspect too that the public will insist that their governments cooperate. Federalism is about integration as much as it is about diversity.

The crisis that currently grips the world underscores our need – indeed our obligation -- to learn more about all the possibilities and potentialities of federalism.

That's where the Forum of Federations comes in.

This relatively new process of sharing and exchanging on federalism is what the Forum is all about. It is why a few of us joined forces about three years ago and tried to imagine some way in which people such as all of us here could meet and talk to each other in an open, frank, constructive way.

There is a lot about federalism that is controversial.

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In all federal countries there are rivalries, conflicting political agendas, and unsettled issues. Getting beyond all that and bringing together practitioners and experts willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work in a non-partisan, open-minded way was a challenge for us when we first launched this enterprise.

We overcame that challenge when the Forum held its first big event at Mont-Tremblant in Canada just a little over two years ago. And we've been overcoming that challenge in many ways since then—

with a series of international events both large and small,  
with publications that add to our understanding of how federalism works internationally,  
and with great occasions such as this one.

*Le Forum des fédérations, dont je suis président, est fier d'être une voix en faveur de la bonne gouvernance et de la démocratie. Notre travail est fondé sur la conviction que l'idée fédérale est juste, et que ceux qui oeuvrent au sein des pays fédérés ont beaucoup en commun. Au cours de la dernière décennie, il y a eu un nouvel attrait pour le fédéralisme à l'échelle du monde. On peut surtout observer cette renaissance dans les pays complexes aux plans régional, ethnique et linguistique. De plus en plus on peut dire que « le fédéralisme, c'est normal .»*

The end of one-party rule and the twin emergence of the demand for democracy and more open markets, have put the question of federalism at the heart of political debates in Russia, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Mexico – just to mention a few. People on every continent are wrestling with how to combine local empowerment and a respect for minorities, with an end to corruption and strong and effective national institutions of integration and coordination.

*A nuestros anfitriones mexicanos quiero felicitarles por su coraje y su franqueza por abrir las puertas a su sistema federal .*

Over the next few days those of us who come from other countries will be hearing more of a lively internal debate.

We are not here to flatter or be flattered. We are not here to exchange soothing platitudes and empty clichés. We are here to share our know-how and experience -- and the perceptions informed by that know-how and experience -- in an honest and candid way.

Let's hope this is only a step in a process that continues for a long time. The idea, after all, is not just to *talk* about doing federalism better. It is to actually *do* it better!

Thank you....