

**INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF
THE OAS STAFF ASSOCIATION
2016 – 2017**

**Kim Osborne
(July 12, 2016)**

THE OAS WE WANT

Distinguished Ambassadors and representatives of the permanent missions,

Assistant Secretary General – Mendez

Esteemed Colleagues, friends, both here at headquarters and those joining us from the field. Good afternoon.

First, I'd like to thank the staff of the OAS for the confidence that they have placed in me, to be their representative for the upcoming year, I accept the challenge of being your Daniel in the lion's den. As stated during my campaign, I am committed to working with you and for you, over the next year, as we navigate together, uncharted territory.

To the member states here present, thank you for taking the time, thank you for your support, I look forward to meeting with you and discussing concrete solutions to the challenges that we face. Your presence here today signals your support for the staff and we are grateful. Thank you!

Amb Mendez, Chief of Staff Koncke, Secretary Anania and other members of Secretary General Almagro's administration, I look forward to working with you in good faith and continue the open dialogue that we have started.

To outgoing President Luiz Acevedo, with whom I have had the honor of serving over the past year, I thank you for your service, your dedication to the staff and wish you the very best. I will no doubt be calling upon you for support and guidance, and I hope that you have not been too badly scarred by the process, so as not to take my calls.

I would like to especially recognize the incoming elected group, a wonderful group of colleagues, with whom I am honored to serve over the next year.

- Catherine Pognat- Who had a family emergency and is out today
- Paulina Corominas
- Rebecca Omana'
- Blanca Ochoa
- Maria Elena Cruz
- Magali Santos
- Marya Hynes
- Carla Sorani & Beatriz Santos

In preparing for remarks today, I chose to borrow from 6 million high school students of MERCOSUR who undertook a campaign to challenge policymakers to create the schools that they want-“La Escuela que queremos.” Their courage and success which have resulted in effecting change provides me with inspiration, as I too would like to challenge member states, the administration and you my fellow staff members to begin our quest to build the OAS that we want- “La OEA que queremos”

As aspirational as it may sound, I truly believe that the OAS we want is within our grasp. I am well aware that for many of you, this may seem but a pipe dream, given the prolonged period of chaos that we have been experiencing - for those who have served for as long as I have, we are looking at over 10 years of uncertainty and instability. This undoubtedly takes its toll on confidence, trust and morale. I am of the view, however, that the opportunity for change is ripe and in the interest of the people of hemisphere, whom we have the privilege to serve, we must begin to take concrete steps towards creating “the OAS we want.” So what is the OAS we want? What is the change that we would like to see within this organization?

The OAS we want is an OAS that serves as model for transparency and good governance, where the Charter of the organization is respected, the General Standards observed and where staff rules are applied consistently and equitably, where each and every member of staff, regardless of position or stature in the organization is treated with dignity and respect, where whistleblowers are protected

and where harassment is no longer overlooked and swept under the carpet. Where those who violate the rules of the organization are not rewarded. The OAS we want values diversity, understands differences and realizes that there is so much more that unites us as a hemisphere than divides us. We want an OAS where nepotism and cronyism are finally abolished and replaced by objectivity, hardwork, professionalism and qualifications. An Organization where square pegs are not forced into round holes. The OAS we want, is productive, delivers on its promise to the citizens of the hemisphere; an OAS that can be the beacon for peace, human rights, security and socio-economic development in the hemisphere. The OAS we want leads, it leads by example, it takes a backseat to no one in living up to the ideals, so aptly stated in its charter. The OAS we want mobilizes the full potential of staff for the greater good of the people of this region. An OAS with a PLAN that promotes productive activities that showcases the best that the organization has to offer. We want an OAS that is well resourced and supported by member states and therefore able to follow through on the needs of our citizens. The OAS we want provides opportunities, benefits and empowerment for everyone. Finally the OAS we want, challenges member states, elected officials and staff to put aside personal agendas and join forces to end poverty, inequality, impunity and injustice. This, my friends is the OAS we want.

The question is how do we get there? How do we create the blueprint for and OAS with a brighter future. How do we balance the financial realities that we face with the diverse needs of our region, where the imperatives of a shrinking OAS do not always align with the aspirations of our people. While I do not profess to have all the answers, I believe that it begins with a coalition for change. A coalition of the three critical forces that make up the OAS, member states, elected officials and staff.

Allow me to begin with the challenge to member states. What kind of Organization do you want to see? If the answer is a productive and functional OAS, then you have an opportunity to hit the reset button. Begin by fully funding the OAS. Allow the OAS to do that which it was created to do. I believe strongly that it is in no one's interest to have an Organization that lurches from one financial crisis to another. The citizens of the Americas deserve no less. Second, as the board of directors of this organization, member state have a responsibility to hold elected officials to the highest standards of integrity and accountability. This position is inadvertently compromised when it is conflated with

offers of employment even while you are still serving as permanent representatives. We respectfully urge member states to ensure separation of powers and adopt the requirement for a 2 year break, before non-elected permanent mission employees can enter the Secretariat. This is not only ensures accountability but it reinforces your commitment to the people that you serve and is the best example of good governance.

To our elected officials, we implore to be good stewards of this organization that we have chosen to serve and you have been entrusted to represent. There is a sense among staff that the OAS' brand and influence in the hemisphere is slowly diminishing, we need to restore and reposition the OAS as a force for good in this region. The same tenets of respect for human rights, transparency and integrity, and anti-corruption that we advocate for within our member states must begin internally. After all, charity begins at home.

To my colleagues both here and in the field, we must recommit ourselves to the values that drew us to the OAS in the first place and which has kept us working here for so many years. We know better than anyone else the true power and value of the OAS to our home countries. We must put aside the cynicism that has become so common among us after years of seeing the bias and injustice, that has almost become the mainstay of this organization. At a time of shrinking resources, we are challenged to be creative in our thinking and innovative in our approaches. This is not the time for narrow squabbling. This is the time to unite around a shared vision for our region and the organization we call home for so much of our lives. We have a shared responsibility in shaping our common future and in creating "the OAS that we want." I Thank you!