

‘I’ve only just been 100 days in government.’ But the Bolivian people have been waiting 100 years for Bolivar.

Waiting for Bolivar

Evo Morales

The new President of Bolivia addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 15 May 2006.

I’d like to send special warm fraternal greetings to you, to the whole European people. I’m enormously happy to be here. It’s a great thing that you should have invited me to this important meeting of two continents – America and Europe.

I come here not just with the idea that you listen to me, but that I can listen to you. The people of Latin America, the native peoples of Latin America, particularly of Bolivia where I come from, are peoples of dialogue, of a culture of balance and fairness.

I come from a humble family. My family and my people, historically, have been excluded, but that doesn’t mean that we exclude others. Historically we have been enslaved, but we’ve never enslaved anybody else. We are an inclusive people. We fight while respecting the diversity of our peoples, and although I was elected President as somebody of an indigenous race, that wasn’t with any view to vengeance. It was an expression of hope. The absence of the state in our countryside communities of our people has left a lot to be desired there. We have social problems that we want to solve. We have cultural and economic problems that we want to solve. And we have structural problems as well in Bolivia.

If you’re talking in health terms, there are communities in the countryside which don’t have any health equipment at all, and have no idea of co-operating either with traditional medicine. Some progress has been made through the involvement of UNESCO, but education has been more or less abandoned. My mother couldn’t read. My father could barely write. So that’s the background from which I start.

I’ve only just been 100 days in government. We’re starting already on a literacy programme through the unconditional support of some Latin American and European countries, and some countries in Asia as well. Already, in terms of literacy, at the end of this month 2,000 people

will have been taught to read and write. We're also making progress through solidarity in other fields. We've now had some 50,000 families provided with legal documents which they didn't have before, particularly women, through international co-operation. Unhappily, there are families which have been totally abandoned, which have no documentation, and therefore do not have any entitlement to their rights as citizens. It's a very worrying position in Bolivia. I know that in Europe, man's best friend, the dog, has a passport to travel around the place, but in Bolivia some people do not have passports or any other documents, for example, allowing them to vote. That's why we have to have this documentation campaign, this registration campaign, and in two months we have registered nearly 50,000 new people. We're going to carry on until we get nearly 2 million newly registered people. Here again we're waiting on help from some Latin American countries. We've done 8,000 free eye operations in less than a couple of months. These are social problems we have in Bolivia that we're working on.

This political moment, this moment of socialism, that is what was originally called the political instrument. This is something that set up the indigenous political movement. It wasn't the creation of any intellectuals or professional politicians. It was a reaction to injustice, a response to the fight for social and economic rights that created this movement, to get rid once and for all of discrimination in Bolivia. To change the policies which have historically always tended towards the extermination of the native peoples on our continent. We have the same rights and the same duties, we want change, and now, happily, this political movement has got me elected President.

I wasn't able to go to University. Unfortunately I wasn't able to study. But the greatest capital that the Evo Morales movement has is honesty. I admire the cosmic commandments of our ancestors. Don't steal, don't lie, don't be weak – those are our three commandments. That's the cosmic law that has brought me this far. It's my duty to carry these laws forward from our ancestors and to change what's been our history.

There's a lot of structural questions that I want to see changed. There are a lot of social problems. So far we've decided to get back control of our natural resources – the renewable ones and the non-renewable ones. Natural resources could allow us to solve social and economic problems in Bolivia. When we fight in favour of the coca leaf and when we fight in favour of water, and against any kind of privatisation of water, and when we fight for hydrocarbons, we're fighting the same battles as our native predecessors – Tupamoro and the others when they were fighting for land. Bolivia has great wealth, and it has great poverty. We're not going to be able to destroy poverty unless we distribute the wealth. If we're going to distribute the wealth we have to recover it first by nationalising it. This question of oil, of natural resources – the oil has already been nationalised twice in the last thousand years. Now, in this millennium, my Government and the Bolivian people and a lot of people in the cities and countryside have decided to nationalise it again. Nobody is being expropriated. Nobody is being expelled. I can be perfectly frank with you. There are a lot of families that need jobs that

come to Europe, although many of them are being expelled. Historically, my country and my region, in fact I could say the whole of America, never expelled anybody. This nationalisation isn't expelling anybody either. I understand that you have to get a return on your investment. But you can't own oil resources. The Bolivian state will control them. There will be control centres. Any company that has invested in Bolivia will have every right to take its profit. But it won't have control. So they're going to be partners, not owners, of our natural resources.

I very much regret that some parts of the media are trying to create confrontation between us and countries or companies or continents. We come from a culture of solidarity and reciprocity. What's important is to find solutions together. It's true that in this process of change in Bolivia we need co-operation, and I have proposals to make so that together we can co-operate and solve problems – solve problems in America or in Europe. I can understand that the Europeans have a problem with migration, with the presence of people, I don't know from what other continents, but certainly from America and Bolivia. A lot of people, because of lack of jobs, come to Europe. The only way to solve that problem is by creating jobs in Bolivia, and providing markets for small farmers and for craftsmen and for micro-businesses, and for co-operatives and associations, and for community businesses. And that will stop the enormous number of Bolivians who come to your continent.

It's important to industrialise our natural resources. Historically, our natural resources have always been pillaged. When, occasionally, the state got control over the oil or minerals, they then weren't able to industrialise and get the added value from these resources. After this nationalisation we're going to have to industrialise as partners – partners with other states, or partners with companies. Nobody's excluded. Nobody's marginalised. We're sure that the industrialisation of our natural resources will certainly slow down the massive abandonment of my country by people going to other continents – it used to be to the United States or Argentina, but nowadays, I have to say, a lot of our people are coming to Europe – to look for a job.

There's one central subject which is a problem for you and for us – cocaine, drug smuggling. As native peoples, we play no part in the cocaine culture, or in smuggling cocaine or drugs. This is a new problem that has been imported, and there needs to be a real, an effective fight against drug smuggling. You can't just use the fight against drug smuggling as an instrument for re-colonisation or oppression. There is a country, there are countries in America which use drug smuggling as a way in which to subordinate other countries to their will. It's everybody's responsibility to fight drug smuggling for real.

But cocaine is not the same thing as coca. The first countries to industrialise coca leaf were European countries in the 1800s. And then they started industrialising it in the United States. You can't have coca leaf legal when it's in Coca Cola, and illegal when Andean native peoples want to use it. My Government isn't going to install free coca cultivation, but we cannot have no coca cultivation either. I'm a coca leaf grower myself. We're now thinking about how we can

nationalise the production of coca leaf. This is going to be a small area under coca for each family: 40 metres x 40 metres per family. We are sure that some of this coca leaf at the moment is going to an illegal market, being diverted, and we don't want that. The eradication policy, with an economic compensation, and the eradication under military force, has left a lot of problems in terms of human rights. The only way to get away from that kind of confrontation is to have coca leaf grown by small farmers, and then on this small plot, 40 metres x 40 metres. Fighting drug smuggling is not just a matter of that kind of control. You also have to keep control of the chemical precursors, and we, and you especially, had better keep control over banking secrecy. Because the real drug smuggler isn't the one who's in prison in Bolivia. The real drug smuggler – we've been looking into this in the small time we've been in government – is somebody moving big money. He doesn't carry it in a suitcase or in the back of a lorry. He works through private banks. So you have to deal with banking secrecy to combat this.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say how very important it is, as part of this change, to say that we are backing democracy. I want to say here in the European Parliament, to all the peoples of Europe, how much I admire the European Union and how much we Bolivians would like to come together with Americans. That's going to be our responsibility. In the meanwhile, let me congratulate the European Union and the European Parliament. It's a process that will need dialogue and patience for our countries. I say this because we in Bolivia have decided to re-found our country, to start again. To get away from the economic models that have not solved our social problems. To get away from the colonial state which, I have to say, with all respect, exists now. But we're not talking about armed struggle. I'm very sorry that some of our neighbours are suffering armed struggle at the moment. But ours is a political movement coming from the most despised and discriminated-against people, the native peoples. The last census said that 62.2 per cent of the population is of indigenous peoples. Actually, I think it's probably more than that. When Bolivia was founded in 1825, 90 per cent of its population were natives, and the 10% left over were the ones who founded the country. But that 90% also took part in the fight for independence. Now we're fighting for democracy through our peaceful re-foundation of the country. We want a democratic, cultural, peaceful revolution in Bolivia. We want to avoid any sort of confrontation. From that we will achieve real change, living together in peace with social justice. I very well understand the businessmen in some countries who want legal security. We all want legal security. But if there's to be legal security, there has to be social security as well. There has to be health, education, housing, jobs. That will happen, above all, if we can get back control of our natural resources and we can get them working for the benefit of the whole of the Bolivian people. That political, economic transformation is what we're aiming for.

Let me say how happy I am with the support we're getting from the Secretary General of the United Nations. There was a summit of presidents and heads of state from Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. I was invited there to a little meeting by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and he

committed all of his support for us. Economic support to make sure that this deep, democratic change in Bolivia can take place. I hope that I can count on your support as well, on your experience in this process of profound change.

I'm sure that Europe is a symbol of democracy, of human rights. If we're talking about human rights, let me ask very particularly for your help to defend human rights in Bolivia, which means creating jobs, health, education, and recovering our natural resources. But I also have to say to you, with every respect, that some of your governments massacred peoples before, when they were dictatorships. Democratic governments, in favour of interests that were nothing to do with Bolivia, massacred Bolivians. Some of the people who escaped then went to the United States, and we have asked for the extradition of people who humiliated Bolivia. I want your support to ensure that those people who did so much harm to Bolivia's economy and to Bolivian human rights, we want them to be brought before a court in Bolivia, like Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and a companion of his, who killed so many people.

As part of this process of change, we're looking for integration – not just political integration, but also integration through building, through roads, through infrastructure in Bolivia. Bolivia is in the heart of Latin America. It has no coastline because of an historic injustice. We need to put a backbone into our country through roads with the association of all our neighbours. We only have one metalled road to one of our neighbours, to Peru. We don't have one with Brazil, or with any other neighbours. I have every respect for my comrade, the President of Brazil. Unlike what some of the media are saying – that we are in confrontation – we have a strategic alliance with the Government of Brazil. Lula's a former trade union leader, a worker. I see him as my big brother. We want to follow his lead. We're not *exclusive*, we're *inclusive*. We want to learn from you. Above all, we need to see from you how to look for solutions in a framework of equality and justice. That's what we're fighting for. Now we have an opportunity with this people's Government, with this native government, with support from a lot of intellectual circles, even middle-class and business circles in Bolivia. That's been the experience so far. Some of our compatriotes, comrades from the cities, have been saying two things to me. They've been saying I'm 'not a native, but now I'm a "nativist"'. And they say the Government used to depress us, but now this Government makes us cry, not from depression, but from the emotion of recovering our sovereignty, our self-respect and, above all, our natural resources. That's why I want to say to you that, through you, we want a strategic alliance for the sake of humanity, for the survival of native peoples, which is not excluding anybody. We want solidarity and reciprocity with other human beings, but we also need to know how to live in harmony with Mother Earth. That worries us a great deal. The Western model of industrialisation is affecting the whole Planet Earth. Mother Earth, if we don't change tack, if we don't change the way we industrialise, then there's no question that in a while you, us, everybody, is going to have a problem of life and death.

There need to be ways of saving humanity by respecting Mother Earth, in harmony with Mother Earth, and there could be important contributions that we

could make on the basis of our experience of life. I'm sure our natural organisations, trade unions, communities, elders' councils, people who come together, who debate at length, propose solutions, don't try to impose policy solutions, but collect ideas for the good of humanity. It's true also that as part of our process of change it's important to participate in the right way. It's not any kind of submission, as being puppets as somebody has accused us of being. What we have to do is share our experience and our principles across the board.

I hope this speech will serve that end. We want to finish off the beggar state. Bolivian presidents used to go around begging for support for the budget of the country. We want to put an end to that. I'm sure that by stepping up exports and getting a better price, a rational price, nobody's trying to blackmail anybody, or impose prices on the market. But by recovering our natural resources we should be able to get rid of the beggar state. I'm sorry that we had it. We want now to change our history. With this new millennium that's starting we want to solve these cultural and social problems. We want strategic allies to defend life. We want to put an end to the hatred, racism and contempt that we've had. We are an inclusive culture, an inclusive people, although we've been excluded. When I heard that I was going to be invited to the European Parliament I felt very happy, and very proud of you. You, too, are therefore an indigenous people, a native people who defends others. I want to be able to count on you to improve life and the social situation in my country.

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