

**SPEECH BY DIEGO FERNANDEZ, SPANISH EDUCATION COUNSELOR
FOR UNITED STATES AND CANADA, IN THE 24TH CONFERENCE OF HACU**

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Buenos días,

Good morning to everybody,

Muchas gracias, Thank you Chancellor Agnes Mojica for your introduction,

I would like to thank the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and in its name President Dr. Flores, for inviting the Embassy of Spain to participate in this International Plenary Session of its 24th Conference. The Embassy of Spain is honored to participate in such a high academic forum and to discuss a topic, our common cultural legacy, which we find decisive for the future.

I also feel personally much honored for sharing the floor today with Dr. Jorge Bustamante. I have enjoyed your intervention and I have learned from your experience and knowledge.

I would like also to thank the honorary consul of Spain, and the other representatives of Spanish institutions of San Diego for being here today.

Before I start, I would like to mention that the Embassy of Spain has a Memorandum of Understanding with HACU. The Embassy of Spain shares with HACU the common objective of helping promote the Hispanic community in the United States. We have put in place several activities with HACU. We have shared academic forums, for example we

have participated jointly in activities of the Association of Young Hispanic Leaders. We feel HACU as a strong partner of the Embassy in the United States.

We believe HACU is one of the great examples of the hard work and success that Hispanic groups have had in the last thirty years in the United States of America. Hispanics, in all their rich diversity, have grown to become one of the decisive changing instruments in this great country. The growth of HACU runs parallel to the higher influence of Hispanics.

I want to use the great example of HACU as the base for the idea I want to send you today.

Let's use our common legacy to build our common future.

We have a strong cultural Hispanic legacy in the United States of America. This legacy means that we have a common past, a common culture and a common language. That is something to be proud of, and to cherish, but we should look to the future. We should use that legacy to build a better future for our community. We have to strengthen those common ties to attain higher goals. We have to keep our common Spanish language and our common culture to gain and increase our influence in the United States, in Latin America and in Spain.

And I believe HACU is an example of how to work in that direction. It is an association that has proven since its creation that there is a way of advancing by uniting, by sharing and by adding value to our Hispanic heritage.

This Hispanic cultural heritage in the United States is very rich. It is richer than many people imagine. As many have explained better than me, and with more academic rigor, Hispanics were in this land before the Pilgrim Fathers they have been permanently here since then and they have shaped the United States of America.

I am not a historian so instead of giving you a list of many conquerors, cities, and events, that you probably know better than me, I just want to give three examples to illustrate that legacy.

The first one is in the capitol building in Washington DC. The second one is about a family and the third is about a shared name.

The Capitol Building is a striking architectural and artistic milestone; it is also the best symbol of American democracy, one of the longest lasting democracies in the world. In that building in its main room, the Rotunda, where presidents wait before being sworn in, or are honored when they pass away there are eight paintings that show decisive events in American history. Two of those paintings show how Spain helped to shape America as we know it now. One shows Christopher Columbus arriving at the island of San Salvador and the other shows Hernandez de Soto discovering the Mississippi river. Also in the capitol building 2 statues represent each of the 50 states. One of the two that represent California is a statue of Fray Junipero Serra, the other one is a statue of President Ronald Reagan. This paintings and statues symbolize Spain's contribution to this great country.

The family I want to speak of is the family of a person I admire, Joel Gomez, Professor at George Washington University. His family has lived during five generations in a place that right now is in Texas near the border with Mexico. His family during that time has been successively Spanish citizens, Mexican citizens, Texan citizens and United States

citizens, and they have always spoken Spanish as a first language. There are more families like that, that have been in this land before it was independent, they are Hispanics but they are not immigrants. They are part of the Hispanic diversity and at the same time they are founding members of this society.

Finally, I will speak about a common name. When I was born my parents wanted to give me a very Spanish name. They thought about a time, the 16th and 17th century, in which Spain shaped the history of Europe, America and the world. It can be discussed if it was a positive influence, it can be discussed if it was done with the correct means but it can not be doubted that during those centuries Spanish artists, writers and conquerors left an indistinct legacy. And some of them, for example Velazquez and Almagro shared a first name that stills echoes strongly in the United States, Diego. I have to confess you that I always feel very proud to visit a city like the one we are now, a city that has a pure Spanish name, and that has a Spanish past and a Spanish present. I always feel lucky to share my name with the city of San Diego.

I have given three examples of this legacy but there could be many more, like how Puerto Rico was part of Spain until 1998, how Spain helped the thirteen colonies during the war for independence, or how many republican exiles were received in the United States universities after the civil war. Spain and United States share a common history and that is one of the reasons we should work for a common future.

I personally know what means the challenge of conserving and protecting cultural and historical heritage. I worked four years in that field from 2000 to 2004. I worked in relation with international institutions like UNESCO. I know how hard it is in a fast changing and developing world to keep heritage safe and to be able to lend it to our

future generations. There are many good examples of this kind of work, like what is being done in Fuerte Guijarros here in San Diego.

I am convinced that Governments and institutions should invest in it, should find ways to promote it, and should disseminate that knowledge. But that is not enough; we should use our history, our culture to prepare for the future.

I believe we should use our legacy as a bridge to unite in a triangle of culture and language, the United States, Latin-America and Spain. If we work on our Spanish language and our culture we will be able to create stronger bonds with the rest of Hispanic countries.

But how can we do it. How can we use the strong and long-lasting Hispanic legacy of United States, to have a better future? The answer is, in my opinion, by promoting more intensely Spanish language and Spanish culture.

Language and culture is what unites all Hispanics in the United States and abroad. We have different racial and geographical origins but we have a strong common language. So we should do anything that is in our hands to keep that bond.

Here is where I want to use this opportunity HACU has given me to show the programs the Embassy has, in the education field, that aim in this direction. I would like to show you how, in my opinion, more Latin American countries, more American institutions and more individual persons can collaborate in expanding Spanish language in the American school system.

The education office of the Embassy of Spain has been working in the k-12 levels of education for the last thirty years. We have a network of 4 attaches (one is here with us today), 26 educational advisors, more than a 100 schools with agreements, and almost 1000 visiting teachers. We work in more than 25 states.

This network, and this experience, have resulted in several programs. I want to describe now what I feel are the three most important ones and I want to invite you to participate actively in them in order to improve them.

The most striking program is the Spanish visiting teachers program. Highly qualified teachers from Spain come to teach Spanish to American schools. We bring between 200 and 400 teachers every year. The program started in 1985 in New York and California and it expanded in the late nineties to more than 20 states. More than five thousand teachers have come since then. Each teacher stays three years in the United States and then goes back to Spain. Since they have full responsibility of their classes they have a direct impact in the kids. During a whole year an American student has had, or is having, a teacher that comes from a Hispanic country. That teacher brings his culture, his language and his experience.

Thanks to this program maybe half a million US citizens have had a direct experience with a Spaniard, and, as we all know from when we went to school, we never, never, forget our teachers and what we learnt from them

How could other institutions collaborate in this program? Well, here I am asking other Latin American countries to put in place similar programs. The Spanish Embassy is aware that American multicultural schools are contracting also teachers from other Hispanic countries like for example Mexico, Argentina or Colombia. But, those teachers

are not coming through governmental programs; they are reaching the United States in an individual basis, which means the level of qualification is heterogeneous. And also those teachers since they are not in exchange programs they do not return their experience to their countries of origin. It is not difficult or expensive to organize this program. I think countries like Mexico, Argentina, Colombia or Chile should put in place their own visiting teachers programs. We know these countries have those highly qualified teachers so I urge them to work on it.

Another important program of the Spanish Embassy is the North American language assistant program, or also called Cultural Ambassadors program.

The Embassy of Spain selects every year more than 2000 recent graduates from the US and sends them for a whole school year to immersion English-spanish schools in Spain. The program started in 2004 with 100 positions and has grown to more than 2000 for the current school year. These assistants have in Spain a similar effect as I have mentioned with the teachers. They bring the US to our schools and to our students.

I assure you that sometimes they are the only, non-movie American, which our kids get to know.

After six years we have seen that many returning assistants are becoming Spanish teachers when they come back to the US. It is a program that helps increase the sensibility for the Hispanic legacy in American graduates.

How could other institutions use this program? Precisely universities are the institutions I would like to ask to participate actively in this program. We would like for universities to participate in the selection process. As we have already done with four universities of the

west coast (thanks to the great work done by the Education Attaché in Los Angeles, Mr. Miguel Angel Perez Abad, who is accompanying me today) the Embassy could reserve a number of positions for universities. I believe it would be a great opportunity for Hispanic graduates to spend a whole year in Spain sharing their first language, English, and improving their heritage language, Spanish. When they come back they will be an additional tie between our cultures.

The third program I want to mention is the International Spanish Academies network. 86 immersion schools of the US have signed since 2005 an agreement with the Embassy to improve their immersion programs and to collaborate with the Embassy in creating a network. We are assisting these schools, in training, materials, certification and many other aims. Today I am visiting three of those schools at Mision Viejo.

Immersion schools are, in the US and in Spain, the future of language learning. To learn a language before the age of 12 scientifically has been proven to be more effective than doing it afterwards. Also science has proven that bilingual students are in general, higher academic achievers in comparison with monolingual students. In Florida many students from immersion schools have better results in English than monolingual students. The quality of both languages is mutually increased in immersion schools.

If we want US and Spanish citizens to be bilingual in English and Spanish we have to expand our immersion schools. We are doing it in Spain and we are helping to do it in the US by signing these agreements.

How Could someone help this program? Well, I want to ask you to consider sending your children, and your grandchildren, to these schools. They are public schools, they are prestigious but they are not well known. But in the same way we, as parents, search good

schools for our kids and, we even change the neighborhood we live in, in order to send them to good schools, we should do that also with International Spanish Academies or other immersion schools. I assure you it is the best way for your children to keep the Spanish language, and I assure you it will even improve their English.

I want this opportunity also to make an announcement in relation with immersion or content language learning schools. Next Tuesday September 28th we will present an award the Embassy of Spain has created to recognize Spanish schools in United States. With the sponsorship of Banco Santander and other Spanish private and public institutions we are looking for the best English-spanish immersion schools in elementary, middle and high school level. The opening for candidates will last until December. The decision will be taken in March and they will have an economic award given by Banco Santander and a public recognition at the Embassy in May of 2011. We hope this award will help raise awareness of the quality of this special type of language education. If you know of a school that could apply for this price please tell them.

I could speak about more programs that the Embassy of Spain has in the education field, like language resource centers in 12 universities, or summer courses in 10 Spanish universities but I hope my idea has reached you.

If we want to have a strong Hispanic future we have to invest in education and more precisely in language education. Language goes with culture. If we assure that future generations of Hispanic citizens of the United States keep Spanish as one of their own languages, they will feel directly their bond with the Spanish past, with that legacy that we have spoken about.

Teach a language and a culture at the school level and you will keep it forever.

As Eduardo Lago has said, he is a Spanish writer and current Director of the Instituto Cervantes of New York, a new type of Spanish language is being created in the United States. It is a new type of Spanish resulting from the mixture of all the types of Spanish spoken in the world and that the different Hispanic communities have brought to the United States. I would like to add to what he says that this new type of Spanish could be our legacy for the future.

If we do the correct efforts, if we make our children speak it, and write it, if we consolidate Spanish as the second language of this country we are going to expand the legacy and in the future we will not have to discuss about it and just enjoy it.

Para terminar quiero felicitar a HACU por esta conferencia y darles las gracias a ustedes por compartir su tiempo conmigo.

To end I want to congratulate HACU for this Conference and to thank you all for sharing your time with me this morning.