

**Speech to the Joint Session of Congress of Bolivia by
Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter**

**By
Jimmy Carter
18 Dec 2003**

Carter and staff from the Center's Americas Program visited Bolivia in mid-December to meet with political party leaders, and legislators to explore democratic ideals and their role in the Center's information initiative. The Carter Center soon will begin supporting efforts by the government to pass, implement, and enforce an access to information law.

La Paz, Dec. 18, 2003

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Members of the Senate, members of the House, distinguished guests. Thank you, Senator Vaca Díez, for the wonderful introduction and for inviting me to speak to this year's final session of Bolivia's Congress. I am pleased to visit your country, to meet with your people, and to enjoy your nation's amazing beauty and hospitality.

I came here to learn the views of Bolivians on the current political situation, to demonstrate my support and concern, and to discuss the possible role of The Carter Center in further enhancing democracy. We have had the opportunity to consult with many of your political leaders and have received a warm welcome from them and from all Bolivians.

I wish to express my deepest regret for the violence that you have experienced this year, violence that is abhorrent to all peace loving people. I lament the loss of life and extend my condolences to the loved ones of those killed and injured. An impartial investigation of these tragic events can serve to bring healing to the families and the country.

However, the investigations and trials must be nonpartisan and fair. In considering past political actions, the expert assistance you have requested from international experts can bring international and domestic legitimacy and confidence to the proceedings.

Bolivia has entered a very special period in her history. You have enjoyed democracy with its benefits and its faults for more than two decades, and you have demonstrated that even in times of greatest conflict, democracy is your preferred method to resolve problems. But now you face a crossroads in your journey and only you can choose the path you will follow. Will it be a new Bolivia, unshackled from the constraints of the past, or a Bolivia still trapped by social and economic divisions?

As I have listened intently to voices from across the spectrum of Bolivian thought and ideology, two things have struck me. First, I have a profound sense that there is far more that unites you than divides you. You are united in the belief that change in Bolivia is both necessary and positive. All have agreed that a new covenant must be forged between the government and the governed, between the state and the

country and the others, The Carter Center and many others will be eager to assist in finding an agreement.

I realize that the issue of coca production is very important to you. An objective study of domestic needs by international and national organizations, possible change in acreage used for coca cultivation, and control of illegal plantings, should be a common goal. I have found that the president and all party leaders agree on these basic premises.

I have heard many of your various demands, some of which will take time to satisfy and some of which appear irreconcilable. The expectations are

We have seen in other countries how lawmakers and civil society have reestablished broken relationships as they drafted and