

Address by Dr. Alberto Baillères, Delivered at the Mexican Senate on the Occasion of the Presentation of the “Belisario Domínguez Medal of Honor 2015”

Address delivered at the former seat of the Senate located on Xicoténcatl 9, in the Historic Center of Mexico City, November 12, 2015.

President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto

Senator Roberto Gil, President of the Mexican Senate

Chief Justice Luis María Aguilar

Congressman Jesús Zambrano, President of the Mexican House of Representatives

Mayor of Mexico City, Miguel Ángel Mancera

Governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco

Honorable Members of the Senate

Distinguished Members of the Cabinet:

Con formato: Inglés (Estados Unidos)

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I am grateful, delighted and deeply moved for having been conferred the Belisario Domínguez Medal of Honor by the Mexican Senate. Honorable Senators, I appreciate this award, although I admit that my only true merit is my great love for Mexico, which is and has always been my greatest motivation.

President Enrique Peña Nieto, it is an honor to have your presence at this ceremony, as well as the presence of the legislative and judicial branches. This medal that has been generously bestowed to me today fills me with pride and, I must confess, with certain reservation: pride for the implicit recognition that, through me, the Mexican Senate makes to the work of millions of Mexican entrepreneurs, and reservation for receiving this award alongside the illustrious men and women who have been honored with this medal in the past.

I understand that on this occasion the Senate is honoring Mexicans who are dedicated to entrepreneurial activity that generates wealth, jobs and contributions to the public treasury. It also is honoring those who seek to strengthen our homeland by building and leading companies that produce and distribute goods and services to meet the needs of society; those who are committed to abide the law and who dutifully respect human rights; those who look after the personal, emotional and material wellbeing of

their collaborators; and those Mexicans who believe that the reward for their business activity should be in accordance with the benefits received by society and not the result of privileges, perks or abuse. I have always maintained that material wealth is a means, not an end. And, when this wealth is invested in the country, it becomes a social tool that benefits all.

I share this medal, which I receive with indescribable emotion, with many entrepreneurs who have served Mexico faithfully and effectively, who have worked with others in the construction of a modern economy that sustains the living standards attained by our society. We have collectively accomplished a great deal, however, I sadly admit that such achievements are still below our aspirations and have not reached many of our citizens. We have an urgent and unavoidable debt to these individuals that we must, and I am sure we can, settle in the near future.

My father belonged to a post-revolutionary generation of entrepreneurs that spans from the second to the sixth decade of the last century. Together with great teachers, engineers, doctors, artists, intellectuals and politicians, they established the foundations of modern Mexico. This generation was proud to be Mexican and mestizo; they celebrated our national identity and cultivated our traditions with dignity. They had confidence in their ability to rebuild a nation with vast economic and social deprivations. They worked hard to end ignorance, bigotry, poverty, violence and social and economic backwardness. These serious shortcomings reinforced their commitment. It was a generation that built national education and health systems, as well as institutions, infrastructure and industries.

During my childhood and youth, I lived through and enjoyed that glorious era of national reconstruction. I was captivated by the passion of achievement and by a commitment to consolidating a sovereign, free, just and prosperous nation. Guided by the dedication of my great teachers – Miguel Palacios Macedo, Mariano Alcocer, Mario de la Cueva, Virgilio Domínguez, Eduardo García Máynez, Josué Sáenz, Javier Barros Sierra, Lucio Mendieta y Núñez, among others – I understood the effort that was

taking place at the national level, the imperative necessities of development that our nation demanded, and the responsibility that I shared with my contemporaries regarding the future of Mexico. My generation of entrepreneurs continued the work of our predecessors with dedication and enthusiasm. We participated alongside our workers and collaborators in building industries, financial institutions, commercial and service establishments. We innovated and adopted the best technologies, and we worked shoulder to shoulder with the government to boost development in the country. We participated with enthusiasm in the creation of the Mexican Social Security Institute, the Federal Institute for Workers' Housing (INFONAVIT) and the Retirement Savings System as the pillars of our welfare institutions. We applauded the expansion of the public education system and health programs, and we joined the educational crusade through the founding and financing of private, non-for-profit educational institutions.

Today I look back and am astonished by the social, economic and political advances that our nation has achieved. The honest recognition of these improvements does not prevent me from acknowledging the lack of prosperity and justice that prevails, but I am not frightened by it. I maintain that we can face these shortcomings and continue to fight to overcome them.

What better inspirational guide for Mexicans than that of an illustrious citizen, Dr. Belisario Domínguez, to confront deprivation and injustice that still exist! With all due respect, I dare to imagine what his message and advice would have been if he were present today in this House. I venture to say that Don Belisario would appreciate the significant advances in our country during the past 102 years since his death. Even more, he would undoubtedly notice all that we have accomplished in just the past twenty years.

For example, in the economic sphere, he would be amazed to learn that in this short period the annual income per person has increased by nearly one third. In social matters, he would be pleased to see that absolute poverty reported by the World Bank

has been reduced to a third. As a doctor, he would definitely celebrate the infant mortality rate that has fallen by two thirds and the life expectancy that has increased by nearly 5 years. In terms of education, he would see that access to secondary education has increased from 57% to 88% and that tertiary education has doubled to reach 30% of the population in only 20 years. And all this has been possible even with 31 million more Mexicans! Politically, he would notice how we have progressed in the construction of a democracy. He would observe the formation of a plural Congress where all political forces are represented by the popular will expressed at the polls.

However, Don Belisario would energetically complain about the painful shortcomings and injustice- including poverty, violence, corruption and the weak rule of law - which still afflict the nation. He would urge not only the Senate, but all government offices, political parties, employers, workers, peasants, artists, intellectuals, teachers, young people - each and every Mexican - to continue fighting vehemently against those obstacles and to do it with loyalty to our institutions, with unity, patriotism and true commitment to the values that Don Belisario defended: democracy, justice and freedom. Surely, as a good doctor, he would also remind us of his prescription for attaining the greatest happiness on earth: the "VATE formula," an acronym in Spanish that stands for virtue, joy, work and stoicism. "In all actions of your life," Don Belisario advised, "remember the 'vate' formula and be assured that [...] it will guide you through the intricate paths of life and will specify the line of conduct that you must follow."

He explained his formula in these terms:

Virtue is to do good deeds and avoid evil. It is the radiant light that illuminates the conscience of all men [...].

Happiness must be the inseparable companion of the good man. [...].

I speak of the inner joy that comes from the tranquility of the soul and the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Working is the most positive and most rewarding of distractions, which allows a greater enjoyment of all other distractions. He who does not work cannot be happy. [...]

Stoicism is the serenity of the soul that allows man to be master of his being, rejecting [...] fear, depression, grief and sadness, as harmful encumbrances that never help resolve a difficulty and significantly contribute to making a bad situation worse. [...]

Don Belisario would probably end by saying, as then, that if every Mexican “did their duty, the homeland would be saved.” Next, I assume that Don Belisario Domínguez would request the firm commitment of all Mexicans to navigate through the life of our beloved Mexico with virtue, joy, work and stoicism, and in his words, to “tenderly love our motherland.”

My experience in life gives me the privilege of a better perspective of the historical moment that our country is going through. With some regret, I realize that those who lack this perspective have succumbed to hopelessness and immature impatience: problems discourage us, difficulties upset us, we are indignant when we find faults and we look down on all we have achieved. If Don Belisario were here, he would warn us, as he did in his letter to the Senate: “To weak spirits, it seems our ruin is inevitable.” But, to counteract these attitudes, we must think that the present and the future, both individual and social, are a journey of life and not a utopian destination. It is a pathway filled with joys and difficulties where it is imperative to move forward and overcome the obstacles without losing sight of the compass that guides us. It is important to renew the spirit and commitment, to celebrate and enjoy what we have accomplished. It is the never-ending way of life to continue facing, without respite, its problems and challenges.

I have two great loves in my life: my family and our Mexico. I have always been very optimistic about the country’s future. I am convinced that Mexico will soon be a developed country, and this assertion is not based on unfounded confidence, but on

hard evidence of what we have achieved over the past 20 years. How long will it take? Another 20 years? 50 years? It may seem like a long time, but for the historical perspective of a nation that is nothing. What could this period of transformation be reduced? The answer calls for all Mexicans to passionately believe in our country and, respecting the plurality of opinions, to unite around the higher goals and the infinite love of our country. The wonderful history of our nation has shown that when we are united, we can accomplish great things and overcome adversities that seemed – in their moment – insurmountable.

I am convinced that the government, the political parties and the entrepreneurs are not going to change Mexico alone. It is its citizens who will transform Mexico once we are able to discard pessimism and replace it with a realistic and founded optimism and passionate love for our motherland.

Recently, this administration, in concert with the political parties, agreed on historic measures to build the future of Mexico. The citizens were pleasantly surprised by a political class that showed that when there is a shared vision, dialogue, goodwill and love for Mexico it is possible to attain structural changes that until recently were unimaginable. With the education reform, the State diligently took control of the most important issue of the country's development agenda. Education that cultivates civic and human values, that nurtures, informs and trains individuals, and supports and propels the economic, social and human achievements of Mexicans.

Quality in education is the most powerful instrument for reducing the inequalities that afflict our country. That and other important reforms that have been carried out will accelerate the economic and social development of Mexico. My sincere congratulations to Mr. President Peña Nieto and all members of Congress!

Leaders of the three branches of government, Honorable Senators:

With a common vision of freedom, justice and prosperity for our beloved Mexico, and with the commitment to find the ideal means to achieve these goals, it will not be long before Mexico becomes the country that we all want: a developed and just nation. Our country and our people are dear to my heart. Facing the radiance of the present, I glimpse the splendor of Mexico's future because our country is called to greatness. The 21st century will be Mexico's century!

I am moved, thrilled and grateful. This award is the best legacy for my beloved family. It is impossible for me to express in words my appreciation to the Senate for such a distinction, taking into account the honor the Belisario Domínguez Medal represents in this solemn ceremony, in this historic and honorable chamber where all government branches are present.

Before this body, I reiterate my absolute commitment to Mexico. I will continue to devote every minute of my personal and professional activities to contribute, in any way I can, to the greatness of our beloved Mexico.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

i The World Bank, World Development Indicators , WB, 2015. The information was obtained from the table "Gross National Income (Constant Pesos)," that corresponds to Mexico, calculated as a value in 2015 between the value in 1995, less the unit.

ii According to international standards defined by the "Millennium Development Goals," of the United Nations.

iii The World Bank (2015). "Poverty Headcount at USD\$1.90/day (2011 PPP) (% population)": 1995: 8.6%; 2015: 2.7%., "Poverty Headcount at USD\$3.10/day (2011 PPP) (% Population)": 1995: 23%; 2015: 10.3%.

iv Op. cit. "Mortality Rate, under 5 (per 1 000 live births)": 1995: 35; 2015: 13.2.

v Op. cit. "Life Expectancy at Birth": 1995: 72.7; 2015: 77.3.

vi Op. cit. "School Enrollment Secondary (%)": 1995: 57.2; 2015: 87.2.

vii Op.cit. "School Enrollment Tertiary (%)": 1995: 13.8; 2015: 29.9.

viii Belisario Domínguez, Escritos, Biblioteca del Pensamiento Legislativo y Político Mexicano, Cámara de Diputados, México, 2013. [Available at <http://biblioteca.diputados.gob.mx/janium/bv/md/LXII/escritos.pdf>. Consulted: 08/11/2015.]