**ADDRESS TO THE MALAS CONFERENCE**

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Dear colleagues and guests,

My name is Francisco Mayorga. I am Rector of Universidad Privada Boliviana (UPB) and currently President of MALAS, of which I have been a member for over twenty years. It is an honor for me and for UPB to host this annual MALAS conference.

Allow me to quickly brief you on who we are. UPB is a private, non-profit university that has been rated as the best private university in Bolivia. We have a faculty of 580 teachers and researchers, 70 of which hold Ph.D. degrees. We have 4,000 college students in 18 careers, including 8 in engineering, in campuses in Cochabamba, La Paz and Santa Cruz.

Thank you all for being here, for attending this conference, and especially to the members of MALAS board and to Laura Guzman of UPB, who have worked strenuously to make possible this event.

We were hoping to hold it presentially in Bolivia, in a hybrid mode, of course, and we made plans to welcome a group of colleagues from MALAS in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba.

Unfortunately, we are going through an episode of political tension, and a prolonged strike in Santa Cruz has forced us to cancel the presential component of the conference.

To those of you who were planning to come I say: please hold on to your tickets. As soon as the clouds clear here in Santa Cruz, we will organize a special academic event at a convenient date, so that we may welcome you personally here, and that you may come to discover the wonders of the diverse geography and the multicultural society of this beautiful and hospitable country.

I should like to take this opportunity to reflect upon the role of Latin American Studies, not only in the Midwest, but also in the US in general, and in the Latin American countries as well.

First, I would like to offer the view from the South. In our universities and colleges, we have four major areas of Latin American studies:

1. international relations, which focus on diplomacy and our political relations with the United States
2. economics, which emphasizes our trade and finance relations with the multilateral organizations, and the recurrent issues of financial instability and inflation
3. sociology and political science, which focus on the changing social and cultural landscape, often using the old Marxian tools of political economy; and
4. literature, a field that was not very much in the interest of the rest of the world until the advent of revolutionary poetry and the Latin American historical novels in the sixties.

In the US these fields remain of interest in many of the university’s curricula, and they include Latin American History and Geography, but I am afraid that we are moving away from the occasional limelight due the expanding border of knowledge and technology, which powerfully attracts the interest of young students, and the changing global landscape.

The succession of wars in the Far East and the Middle East, the issues of Russia and Eastern Europe, and the growing importance of China have persistently grabbed the interest of Washington and the sources of funding for academic research.

Gone are the times when Teotihuacán, Tikal and Copán were a magnet for historians, when Hiram Bigham put the wonders of Machu Picchu at the center of archeological studies and the Tahuantinsuyu as an important chapter of Latin American History and, more recently, when the Cuban Revolution and the adventures of Che Guevara attracted many students to the field of Latin American studies, or the experiment of the “Chicago boys” in Chile, the results of which were mixed at best, as we have seen in recent months.

But Latin America continues to evolve in its economic, political, and social dimensions. New issues such as the impact of global warming, the preservation of the wealth of nature, the implications of technological change for employment and rising migration to the US, and the necessary transformation of education in the face of the rate of progress of knowledge and technology, should continue to capture the interest and imagination of academics North and South of our hemisphere.

The presentations that are being made in this conference, and many other research efforts around the US and Latin American universities, suggest that our fields continue to deserve the interest of science, the interest of history and geography, the interest of management science, and the interest of the students of political science in the dangerous currents of the ongoing global transition.

In this scenario, I have frequently wondered about two specific perspectives: first, what can we do from the South to mobilize the interest of the sponsors of research in the North to restore their interest in the study of Latin America; and second, what can we as MALAS do to serve as a catalyst for academic cooperation between the Latin American universities and the universities of the Midwest.

The fact that we are holding this conference here in Bolivia, and the collaboration of America and Bolivian scholars, may be an indicator of the kind of efforts that we could continue to make to continue to build bridges between North and South. Please count on Universidad Privada Boliviana, our faculty, our students and our infrastructure facilities, as a development pole for bridge building with MALAS members.

Bridges in the form of academic exchanges are essential to reinforce the foundations of international cooperation for knowledge, for mutual learning and understanding, for the development of the Western civilization, and for peace in our hemisphere.