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Barack Obama

Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative Address

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President Obama: Hola Peru! Asu! Muchas gracias. Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you, Cyntia, for your kind words and your great work here in Peru in bringing people together across generations to meet challenges. Please give Cyntia a big round of applause for the great introduction.

So it is wonderful to be here in Peru. I want to thank everybody at Catholic University of Peru for hosting us. I want to thank the government and the people of this beautiful country for your hospitality.

Audience Member: I love you!

President Obama: I love you, too!

So, while I'm here, I'm hoping to enjoy some good food -- some pollo a la brasa. Maybe a pisco sour. But I will not be attempting the Marinera because I usually leave the dancing to my wife, Michelle. She's a better dancer than me.



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But I want to thank all of you for being here -- our Young Leaders of America, both live and online, representing every country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Now, this is my final stop on my final trip abroad as President of the United States. And I've had the usual meetings with world leaders, and we've done important business. But whenever I travel, one of the things that I've been trying to do for the last eight years is to meet with young people. First of all, young people are more fun than old people. Second, because today more than half of the world's population is 30 or younger. And that means your generation will determine the course of our future -- as individual nations and as a global community. Now, the good news is, because I've had a chance to meet so many young people around the world, it makes me very optimistic to know that you are going to be in charge. And that's why I wanted my last public event abroad to be with you.

I often say to young people in my own country: If you had to be born at any time in human history, it would be right now. If you think about all the progress that's been made, not just in your lifetimes, but even in the last few years, fewer people than ever around the world live in extreme poverty. Scientific breakthroughs are paving the way for cures to new diseases. More children are going to school; more girls in particular are going to school than ever before. People across the world are securing their human rights. And technology has reshaped the world, as you can tell, because everybody has their phones. At a time when Earth is now populated by more cell phones than people, you have the power to connect with each other across borders, across nations. You have the tools in your hand to solve problems that we couldn't even imagine when I was your age.

Now, even as we make all these important strides in advancing the rights of more people, even as technology brings us closer together, this unprecedented change also brings challenges. We see it in the widening gap between the rich and the poor around the world. We see it in the forces of extremism and division that too often tear communities apart. So the question for all of us is, how can we make sure that in this rapidly changing world, nobody is left behind and that all of us are stronger and more prosperous?

So over the last eight years as President, I've worked to strengthen our relationship with the Americas. We're more than just neighbors -- we're linked by trade and culture, and family and values. Our students study in each other's countries. Our businesses sell goods across borders. Our tourists travel back and forth.



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And we've moved beyond many of the old arguments to create a new vision for the future -- one that your generation, which is liberated from old ways of thinking, can lead.

During my presidency, the United States recommitted itself to the region, in partnership with your countries, based on mutual interests and mutual respect. We increased trade. We stood up for democracy and human rights, fought against corruption and organized crime. We've promoted clean energy. We've led the global fight against climate change. We opened a new relationship with Cuba.

I strongly believe that this work has to be done with governments, but it's even more important that it's done by people -- because government is important, but it can't solve every problem. So we have to work together at a people-to-people level -- teachers, and doctors, and students, and entrepreneurs, and religious leaders -- all trying to find ways in which we can promote those values of dignity and humanity and respect that so often are threatened.

And that's why we developed this Young Leaders Initiative. Our goal is to find the most innovative young entrepreneurs, the most energetic civil society leaders like you, and help empower you with the training, and tools and connections so you can make a difference in your communities and your countries. This network already has 20,000 people. This fall, we welcomed the first class of 250 YLAI Fellows to the United States. This is just 100 of them. They're from every country across the Americas.

We want to help. So we want to help this generation with grants, seed funding, skills training. Today, I'm announcing the launch of the Latin American and Caribbean Civil Society Innovation Initiative Hub, which is a way to virtually connect civil society organizations across the region so you can learn from each other, share your good work, support each other. We're investing \$40 million in the talents and entrepreneurship of young people across the Caribbean to help start your own businesses and ventures. We're opening what we call the Global Innovation Exchange so that you can showcase your new business or enterprise to people around the world, and that way you can connect and hopefully get resources that you otherwise didn't have.



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And we're moving ahead with more education partnerships, like the 100,000 Strong in the Americas. By the end of the decade, we want 100,000 U.S. students studying in the Americas, and 100,000 students from the Americas studying in the United States. And today, we're announcing a partnership between the U.S. Department of State, Sempra, and CAF, which is Latin America's development bank, to fund the first Innovation Fund competition exclusively between Peruvian and U.S. colleges and universities so students can come together to work on climate change and environmental science.

So we're focused on the hemisphere, we're focused on the region. But it's more than just North America, South America. You're now part of a global network of young leaders from Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Americas who are doing amazing work in their own communities. And while my time as U.S. President is coming to an end, this network is just beginning -- it's never been more important. We need you to stay connected, work together, learn from each other, so we can build that next generation of leadership who can take on challenges like climate change and poverty, can help grow our economies, make sure that women get opportunity. Make sure that every child, wherever they live, has a chance to build a good life.

And I'm going to just give you some examples of the amazing people that are involved in this process. We need leaders like Dr. Valéry Moise. As a young doctor in Haiti, Valéry saw firsthand how issues like acute malnutrition -- hunger -- affected the poorest children in his country. So he and a team of social workers and doctors started an organization called Diagnostik Group, which focuses on improving health care for abandoned children at the largest pediatric hospital in Haiti. His goal is for the group to become the standard for pediatric care and to expand so that he can reach even more children across Haiti. So thank you, Valéry, for the great work that you are doing.

We need leaders like Abbigale Loncke of Guyana. Abbigale, are you here? So after struggling to find her own grandfather home care, Abbigale realized this is a problem for so many other families, so she started Community Health Care, a home care agency. She started out as a service to help families take care of their loved ones but now has a social movement that also provides training and job opportunities for young women in the health care industry. So thank you, Abbigale, for the great work you're doing. And you already heard the great work that Cyntia is doing right here in Peru.



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Across the world and across the Americas, young people are taking the lead. They're seeing problems, they're seeing injustice, and they are finding ways to take action.

And the main message I want you to know is that you have a partner in me and you have a partner in the United States government. And we are going to work together -- we're going to work together. We expect the fellowships to continue, but I want you to know that I will also continue to be involved, even after I'm President, because I want to make sure that we continue to invest in your success. If you succeed, not only do your countries succeed, but the world succeeds. And I'm very excited to see all the great things you're going to do in the future.

So, muchas gracias. Let's take some questions. And now we're going to start with some questions. I'm going to take off my jacket because it's a little hot. I wasn't trying to get a cheer out of that but --



President Obama: All right, so we're going to start with this question from this gentleman right here. Please introduce yourself as you speak.

Hold on, the mic is not working. No, not yet. Do we have a second mic? Testing -- one, two, three. Hold on, here's the technical expert. Here we go. Here's another one. Not yet? Uh-oh. Uh-oh. Here we go. We got to try this one. One of these is going to work.

Question: Testing.

President Obama: Oh, there you go. Hey!

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Luis Santiago [ph]. I'm from Caracas, Venezuela. I'm a YLAI Fellow. We're working on the first electronic health records platform for Latin America, and I was a proud member of this chord of YLAI fellows.



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I'm here to read a question from our YLAI network. There were 200 questions posted on Facebook, but Carlos David Carrasco Muro from Venezuela asks: In Venezuela, there's a debate about what matters most for stability, whether it's peace or democracy. How can we create a world where we do not have to choose between them? Both are important for development.

Thank you very much.

President Obama: Well, it's a great question. And it's a timely question, because I think that after a decade in which we've seen more and more countries adopt democratic practices, you're now starting to see some of those gains reversed. You're seeing some countries that are going backwards rather than forwards in terms of freedom of the press, in terms of freedom of the Internet, in terms of respecting political opposition and civil society. And there are those who argue that democracy is incompatible with development because you need order, you need somebody from the top to tell people what to do in order to achieve.

And I would just suggest that you look at the evidence over the last 20, 30, 40 years. Those countries that pursue democracy, that pursue transparency, where their leaders are held accountable -- those are the countries that are doing best. Those countries that are repressive, that don't respect democracy, that silence critics -- they go backwards economically.

And it makes sense when you think about it, because in this time that we live in, development is based on knowledge and innovation and education and new thinking and sharing of ideas. It's not based on how much land you have, it's not based on natural resources. It's based on your people. And in a democracy, what we're able to do is -- people, through the freedom they enjoy, are able to create, start businesses, start organizations, solve problems. And what's also true then is, they're able to hold the government accountable, so when the government doesn't deliver for its people -- if it engages in corruption, if its policies only benefit a few rather than the many -- people can react and respond, and over time people get better policies from their governments.



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And look at what's happened just along the coast here in Latin America. If you look at Chile, Peru, Colombia -- all of them are growing faster, all of them are doing better because of the new openness and democracy that exists in these countries. And what's true here is true around the world.

Now, the one thing I have to say though is, democracy is more than just elections. Democracy is also a free press. Democracy is also freedom of religion. Democracy is making sure that the rights of minorities are protected, not just the majority. Democracy is rule of law and an independent judiciary. So it's a matter of all these elements coming together.

But the main thing we've learned is that, in this knowledge-based society, you can maintain order for a while with repressive, nondemocratic governments, but it will rot from within. Over time, those governments fail and those economies fail -- because when they make mistakes, they try to hide them instead of trying to solve them. When somebody has a legitimate criticism of a problem, it can be ignored because the politicians don't have to answer. And eventually, those societies end up doing much worse, oftentimes by increasing repression as people get more and more dissatisfied and then society breaks down.

It's also true, by the way, that nondemocratic countries are much more likely to get into wars with other nondemocratic countries. Democracies tend to try to solve problems through diplomacy and dialogue. So not only is there not a contradiction between democracy and development, it is my belief that in order, in this new knowledge-based economy, for development to be successful, you need democracy.

I will say this one last thing, though. Democracy can be frustrating, because democracy means that you don't always get 100 percent of what you want. Democracy means that sometimes you have to compromise. And it means that the outcomes of elections don't always turn out the way you would hope. And then you -- we're going through that in the United States, and I'm doing everything I can to help facilitate a successful transition with the President-elect in the United States. But as long as we keep our democratic systems open, then the society has a chance to try something new, and then it can make a decision and correct problems that they see in the future, and progress will continue.



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Good. All right. Let's see -- right there. Yeah, you. So let's get a microphone to you so we can hear you. And introduce yourself. By the way, I apologize, my Spanish is just okay. So we're doing this in English, but hopefully I'm being clear. Go ahead.

Question: Hi, Mr. President. I'm very glad to be here -- that you are here in my country, in Peru. And for me, it's an honor to be here in this conference. Well, my question is, what do you think about the European Union has come together to promote military integration in defense that -- after the victory of Trump? And do you think we have global paranoia created by the media, or it's real?

President Obama: Good. What's your name?

Question: Jocelyn Ramirez [ph].

President Obama: Nice to meet you. Are you a student here?

Question: I'm a student from UPC.

President Obama: Fantastic. Okay. You have some classmates here. Well, the United States is such a big country that, after any election, people are uncertain. And I think it will be important for everybody around the world to not make immediate judgments but give this new President-elect a chance to put their team together, to examine the issues, to determine what their policies will be -- because as I've always said, how you campaign isn't always the same as how you govern. Sometimes when you're campaigning, you're trying to stir up passions. When you govern, you actually have reality in front of you, and you have to figure out how do I make this work.

The alliance between the United States and Europe, through NATO, is very strong. And the President-elect Trump has already reaffirmed our commitment to NATO. We actually have been asking, under my administration, for Europe to carry more of the burden of defense spending than they've been doing, because the United States spends a lot more than some of our NATO partners. And they recognize and acknowledge, I think, the need for them to spend more time -- more resources on that.



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With respect to Latin America, I don't anticipate major changes in policy from the new administration. I think the work that we've done has been successful in establishing the strongest relationships between the United States and Latin America in modern history. The friendships that we've established with countries like Peru, the reopening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, the investments we're making in trade, in environmental policy, and so forth -- all those things I expect to continue.

There are going to be tensions that arise, probably around trade more than anything else, because the President-elect campaigned on looking at every trade policy and potentially reversing some of those policies. But once they look at how it's working, I think they'll determine that it's actually good both for the United States and our trading partners. There may need to be modifications. I've called for modifications in certain elements of our trading policy. When we established the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement, one of the requirements was for Peru to strengthen its protection of labor rights, workers' rights. And we did that in part because, with all of our trading partners we don't want to be disadvantaged because we're dealing with labor that has no rights, and so it gets the lowest wages and can be exploited. But we did it also because that will help lift the wages and benefits and protections that workers here in Peru enjoy, because ultimately that's good for everybody.

One of the things that I really believe is that when you pay workers well, when ordinary people are getting a decent wage and decent benefits and decent protections, then they have more money in their pockets, and then they go out and they spend that money, which is good for business, and everybody is better off. So that's the kind of attitude that we want to try to promote in the years going forward. And my hope is, is that that policy will continue.

So my message to you, though, and the message I delivered in Europe is, don't just assume the worst. Wait until the administration is in place, it's actually putting its policies together, and then you can make your judgments as to whether or not it's consistent with the international community's interest in living in peace and prosperity together.

Okay. Good. All right. Okay, so what I'm doing is I'm going boy, girl, boy, girl, so that everybody gets a fair chance. Okay, this gentleman right here, in the purple shirt.



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Question: Thank you very much. First of all, I just want to say thank you for being such a great world leader over your tenure. I truly think that you've done your best in making the world a better place.

President Obama: I appreciate that.

Question: My name is Lubi Jorge [ph].

President Obama: Where you are from, Lubi?

Question: I'm from the Bahamas.

President Obama: Hey.

Question: I'm the son of two Haitian immigrants living in the Bahamas. And I'm a human rights activist and also a radio talk show host. I filter my advocacy work through radio, because it's a great form of communication in getting everybody involved.

Nonetheless, you spoke about youth and us shaping the future and the direction of the world, and what it's going to be in the very near future. But I'll give you a quick example of what I experienced and then a question that can apply to all of us here as young people.

As a person being born to Haitian parents, immigrants, in the Bahamas, there is a certain perception on you not being a native. And governments have fed on that over time. And so the average individual that you would come into contact with, they would see you in a certain light. And so the opportunities to assist then, to help your country, then are diminished. For example, I'm trying to bridge the gap between Haitians and Bahamians in the Bahamas, but government officials and other individuals, they would have said, well, you're fighting for Haitians to take over the Bahamas -- when it's not that. I just want Bahamians and Haitians to live in peace in the Bahamas.

And so if you had the opportunity to have all of our prime ministers and presidents in one room, and you had one word of advice that you could have given those leaders in regards to young people, and especially millennials, what would you say to those leaders?



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President Obama: Well, you know, I've had that opportunity a number of times. They don't always follow my advice.

But to your broader point -- look, we live in a world that is smaller than ever before. Because of the Internet, because of modern travel, your generation gets ideas and culture and your politics from everywhere, right? You are listening to everything from Rolling Stones, to Kendrick Lamar, to salsa, to reggaeton to right?

So what is true in music, what's true in food is also true in terms of politics and ideas. And the great thing about young people is, is that that's made your identities both national but also international. So people here are Peruvian, but you're also people who care about what happens around this continent and around the world. It means that you can be both proud of your Haitian heritage and live in the Bahamas, and also be concerned about what happens in Africa, or what is happening in Myanmar. That's a good thing.

Now, I'll be honest with you, older people sometimes are more threatened than younger people by this convergence because -- you know, now that I've got gray hair, I see what happens as you get older -- you get set in your ways and you are afraid of things that are new. And oftentimes, politicians can feed into that sense that everything is changing so fast, let's go back to our old identities -- identities of race or tribe or nationality.

And my main advice, not just to world leaders, but more importantly to citizens around the world is, if you're defining yourself just by what you're not, if you're defining yourself just by the color of your skin or where you were born, then you are not fully appreciating what will give you a strong identity and meaning in your life, and what will lead to prosperity and security for everyone. And that is the values and ideals that we should all promote: That we respect everybody, regardless of what they look like. That we give everybody opportunity no matter where they were born, whether they were born poor or they were born rich. That we have laws that everybody has to observe, not just laws for one set of people and then a different set of laws for other people.

Because the problem with that approach -- a very narrow way of thinking about yourself -- is that that means almost inevitably you have to be in conflict with somebody else.



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If the most important thing about you is that you are an American -- if that's the one thing that defines you -- then you may end up being threatened by people from other places, when in fact you may have a lot in common and you may miss opportunities.

Now, I'm a very proud American, and my job as President of the United States is to look out for American interests. But my argument to the American people has always been, the best way for us to look out for American interests is to also care about what's happening in our neighborhood. Because if their house is burning down, eventually my house will burn down. The best way for my daughters to be secure as Americans is to make sure that people in El Salvador or Guatemala are also feeling some security, because if they're not, then eventually that may spill over the borders to us.

And some of the challenges that we face today are ones that no single group can solve. If you look at something like climate change -- that knows no borders. If there is pollution in China, it affects you here in Peru. If we are going to make sure that the oceans don't rise so that suddenly all of the streets around Lima are two feet underwater, then it's going to require everybody taking the kind of collective action that we talked about in the Paris Agreement.

So I think that we should all have the capacity, and governments should reflect this capacity, to be proud of our particular circumstance, be proud that you're Haitian, be proud that you're in the Bahamas, be proud that you're a young, black man. Be proud of your particular identity, but also see what you have in common with people who don't look like you or don't come from the same place as you do. Because if we see what we have in common, then we're going to be able to work together and that's going to be good for all of us. If all we see is differences, then we're automatically going to be in competition -- and in order for me to do well, that means I have to put you down, which then makes you want to put me down, and everybody stays down here instead of everybody lifting each other up. It's the most important thing we can do.

All right, so it's a woman's turn. Okay, everybody is pointing at this young lady. All her friends were pointing at her, so she has something very important to say.

Question: Welcome to Peru, Mr. President.

President Obama: Thank you.



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Question: My name is Sofia, and my friends and I are students at Laboratoria. I know you have met Mariana [inaudible]. Do you remember about Laboratoria?

President Obama: I'm sorry, what? I'm sorry.

Question: Do remember about Laboratoria?

President Obama: Yes.

Question: With Mariana Costa?

President Obama: Yes, yes.

Question: Okay, I'm a student over there, me and my friends. We are so lucky to be studying over there to get a job in tech, but there are so many young people still without these type of opportunities. So what do you recommend to open more quality education or job opportunities for young people in Latin America?

President Obama: Well, the program you described is doing great work, and there's a lot of good work all across Latin America. One of the goals is to make sure that not only are we providing a great education for people at the youngest ages -- basic reading, arithmetic, all those things -- but today you also need to have some knowledge of technology. And what we're trying to do is to work with governments and NGOs to expand access to the Internet, to digital platforms. And what we also want to do then is to help design curriculum and programs through the Internet so that online learning is accessible in places where previously there might not be opportunities.

And we're seeing some of those investments here in Peru. That's part of the broader educational program that we have throughout Latin America. But we can still do more. And it's not just us, it's a public-private partnership also. So having Facebook participate, and Microsoft and Google and other big companies who have an interest in an educated population -- because the more educated and more wired they are, the more, over time, customers are using their products and their platforms.



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What we want to do is to make sure that everybody, even in the smallest village, has suddenly this library to the world and to the best educational opportunities, even if there's not a big university in that small town. And some of the learning that we can do, it doesn't have to be four years. Sometimes, a six-week program could teach people coding in computers, and suddenly right away that person has a job, and then they can learn more and ultimately go and get a four-year education. But oftentimes what you need is just that first step.

And we're doing this in the United States, by the way. It's not just in Latin America. In the United States, one of the things that we're finding is that we need to expand computer science and literacy in the schools. We need to make sure, also, that we set up technical training systems where somebody who's unemployed in a city where there used to be a big factory but now the factory is closed; or because of automation and robots, fewer people are working there; those people who have lost their jobs, they may not be able to afford to just go to a four-year university, give them six weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks of training. Get them in a job right now, and then over time they can learn even more.

So, congratulations. You guys are doing good work.

All right. Okay, so this is a team effort now. It's good to see this cooperation. Everybody is pointing at one person. All right, this gentleman right here, right in the front.

Question: Hello, Mr. President. I'm a student representative from this beautiful university with this gorgeous group of people. My name is Kai [ph]. And I'm going to give a little bit of context to my question. You see, the smartest man I know is my dad. My dad was born in Cuba. And when he was seven years old, he went to the United States to get an opportunity. He lived all of his university life there, from community college to doctorate, and he managed to do a lot of things because the USA had an open, honest towards him.

Today, many immigrants can bring innovation to the USA because it has still this open, honest policy. But the administration that is set to go after you is allegedly saying that it will have a closed door policy. In your opinion, what do you think that today the stand of the USA is for offshore innovators that want to leave their comfort zone to the USA, to go to Harvard, MIT, Yale, to find -- to strive? And what would be the damages of the USA closing their doors to these young innovators?



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And a final remark, I hope you have two amazing last months of presidency.

President Obama: Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, first of all, I know that your father is very proud that you said he's the smartest man you know. I hope that Malia and Sasha would say the same thing about their father -- I don't know. But I'm sure that made him feel good.

Look, America is a nation of immigrants. Those of you who visited America, if you walk in an American city -- not just New York or Los Angeles, but St. Louis or Indianapolis or Columbus, Ohio -- if you walk down the street, you see people that look like they could be from anyplace. Because the fact is, is that except for the Native American populations, everybody in America came from someplace else. All of us are immigrants. And that's been our greatest strength, because we've been able to attract talent from everywhere.

I use this as an example: You notice that the United States did really well in the Olympics. Now, some of that is because we're a big country, we're a wealthy country, so we have all these training facilities and we can do all kinds of -- best equipment. All that is true. But you know what, China is a bigger country and spends a lot of money also. The big advantage that America has, if you look at our team -- actually, two big advantages. First, we passed something called Title IX many years ago that requires that women get the same opportunities in sports as men do. And that's why -- one of the reasons the American teams did so well is the women were amazing, and just because they've gotten opportunities. Right? Which teaches us something about the need to make sure that women and men, boys and girls, get the same opportunities. Because you do better when everybody has a chance, not just some.

But the second thing -- you look at a U.S. Olympic team and there are all kinds of different sorts of people of all different shapes and sizes. And part of it is because we draw from a bigger genetic pool than anybody -- right? We have people who -- these little gymnasts, they're like this big. Simone Biles came by the White House. She's a tiny little thing. Amazing athlete. Then we have Michael Phelps, he's 6'8" and his shoulders are this big. And that's good for swimming. He couldn't do gymnastics, but he's a really good swimmer.

The point is, is that when you have all this talent from all these different places, then you actually, as a team, do better. And that's been the great gift of America.



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Now, what we have to do not just in the United States, but in all countries, is to find a way to have a open, smart immigration policy, but it has to be orderly and lawful. And I think that part of what's happened in the United States is that even though the amount of illegal immigration that is happening has actually gone down while I've been President, the perception is that it has just gone up. Partly this is because it used to be that immigrants primarily stayed in Texas and Arizona and New Mexico, border countries, or in Florida. And now they're moving into parts of the country that aren't used to seeing immigrants, and it makes people concerned -- who are these people, and are they taking our jobs and are they taking opportunity, and so forth.

So my argument has been that no country can have completely open borders, because if they did, then nationality and citizenship wouldn't mean anything. And obviously if we had completely open borders, then you would have tens of millions of people who would suddenly be coming into the United States -- which, by the way, wouldn't necessarily be good for the countries where they leave, because in some places like in Africa, you have doctors and nurses and scientists and engineers who all try to leave, and then you have a brain drain and they're not developing their own countries.

So you have to have some rules, but my hope is, is that those rules are set up in a way that continues to invite talented young people to come in and contribute, and to make a good life for themselves. What we also, though, have to do is to invest in countries that are sending migrants so that they can develop themselves. So you mentioned Cuba, for example, where your father fled. He left in part because they didn't feel that there was enough opportunity there. Part of the reason I said let's reopen our diplomatic relations with Cuba is to see if you can start encouraging greater opportunity and freedom in Cuba. Because if you have people who have been able to leave Cuba and do really well in the United States, that means they have enough talent that they should be able to do really well by staying at home in Cuba.

There are enormously talented people here in Peru. I don't want all the young people in Peru to suddenly all go -- I don't want you to feel as if you have to go to New York in order to be successful. You should be able to be successful right here in Lima, right?



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So this is true in the Americas, it's true in Europe, where obviously they've been flooded -- and it's been very controversial -- with migrants, some of them displaced from war in Syria, but some of them just coming for economic reasons from Africa. I just left meetings with European leaders, and we discussed the fact that if we're investing more in development in those African countries, and encouraging greater rule of law and less corruption and more opportunity in those countries, then people are less likely to want to come to Germany or Italy for their futures because they feel that they can make a future where they are.

But this is an example of what I was saying earlier. If we think only about, in very narrow terms, about our borders and what's good for us, and ignore what's happening everywhere else, eventually it will have an impact on us whether we like it or not. Because the world is just much smaller than it used to be.

Okay. Let's see, we got -- all right, young lady right there. Go ahead, in the black. Yes, you.

Question: Oh, my God, thank you for this amazing opportunity. More than a question -- well, I have to introduce myself first, sorry. I'm Jennifer Schell, and I'm from Venezuela. We already talked a little about my country, but I just want to thank you for giving us the women's opportunity to make us feel empowered.

I'm the CEO and founder of the TrabajaMama, a social initiative that promotes values for mothers around the world. I'm a mother. I have a daughter, and it's a little bit hard to become an entrepreneur. And I know that you have been supporting woman empowerment. You support a candidate who was a woman, Hillary. You are supported by your wife, Michelle. And what is --

President Obama: Michelle is amazing.

Question: I'm sure, I'm sure. I'm sure of that. So I know how you have been telling a lot of advice for young leaders. What I want -- special advice for female entrepreneurs, for those who have to strive a little bit more, for those who are mothers who have to split their self, and ask herself, should I be a mother or should I be a professional. I truly believe that we can be both at the same time, but I would like to hear it from you -- an advice for all the women, potential women that are going to become a mother, will have our future generations.



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And on behalf of all my YLAI fellows, thank you for this amazing opportunity. And all the fellows that are looking -- there are more fellows looking right now from their countries because they couldn't come to Peru, so thank you for all the fellows that are watching right us now.

President Obama: Okay. Well, it's a great question.

I mean, Michelle probably would have more to say about this because, you know, she's gone through it as a professional woman. But let me offer just a few observations.

First of all, the leaders and the men in every country need to understand that the countries that are most successful are going to be the countries that give opportunities to girls and women, and not just boys and men.

And if you look at which countries are doing best -- most advanced, grow the fastest -- it's partly because you can't have half the population uneducated, not working, out of the house, not in leadership positions, and expect to be as good as a country where 100 percent of the people are getting a good education, and having opportunities, and can do amazing things -- starting a business or entering into politics or what have you.

So this is not just a problem for girls and women; men have to also recognize, this is good for you. And if you're a strong man, you shouldn't be threatened that women are doing well. You should be proud that women are doing well. And families where women have opportunity, that means they're going to be able to bring in more income, which means the family as a whole is going to do better.

And let's be honest, sometimes, you know, that whole machismo attitude sometimes makes it harder for women to succeed, and sometimes that is coming even from those who love them. So, men, those of you who end up being fathers and you've got daughters, you've got to lift up your daughters. Just telling them they're pretty is not enough. You've got to tell them they're smart, and you got to tell them they're ambitious, and you have to give them opportunity.



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So once you have the whole country thinking in those terms, then you need to start having policies that can support women, and the most important thing, in addition to making sure that girls from an early age are getting a good education and that they're not being told, oh, you can just do certain things -- like engineering, that's a man's job, or being scientist, that a man's job. No, no -- girls can do everything. It can't just be, you know, be a teacher -- which is a wonderful profession, but, traditionally, women sometimes are just told there are a few things they can do -- nurse, teacher -- as opposed to anything. Right?

So that starts -- once you've done that, then you have to recognize that the big conflicts that women have in the professional world has to do with family and childrearing. And for biological reasons, women have more of a burden than men do. But it's not just biology, it's also sociology, all right? Men's attitudes is, well, yeah, I don't have to do as much. And even in my marriage with Michelle, I like to think of myself as a modern, enlightened man, but I'll admit it -- Michelle did more work than I did with Sasha and Malia.

So part of what societies can do, though, is they can help with, for example, having smart policies for childcare. One of the hardest things for professional women, particularly when their children are still small and not yet in school, is who's going to take care of my baby when I'm working, and how do I make sure that they're safe and that they're trusted. So making sure that governments have policies in place that help. Now, having a mother-in-law who helps, that's also very useful. But not everybody has the option where they have family members who are close by. So that's an example of something that we have to really work on.

Then we have to put pressure on institutions to treat women equally when it comes to getting loans to start a business. Up until just maybe 20 years ago, in some places -- in the United States even -- a husband had to sign a loan document with a bank, even though it was the wife's business, even if the woman was the one making the money, it was her idea, it was her investment, she was doing all the work. Because of these old stereotypes, you're having men co-sign. That kind of mentality, that kind of discrimination still exists in a lot of institutions. So we have to push back against those, we have to fight against those. Women who are successful, you have to then fight for the younger women who are coming behind you, and make sure that you are changing some of these attitudes. If you are high up in a bank, then you got to make sure that these policies are good for women. If you succeed in politics, then you have to help promote and encourage women who are coming behind you.



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So the last thing I guess I would say would be -- I know that Michelle says this to our daughters: You can be a wonderful mom and have a wonderful family and have a really successful career. You may have to kind of not try to do everything all at the same time exactly. You may have to time things out a little bit and have a husband who supports taking turns a little bit. So it may be that when the child is very young, you're not doing something that is as hard, because having a really young child is already really hard, and you have to sleep sometimes. But then as the child gets older, maybe that's when you are doing something -- maybe your husband is doing something that gives him more time to support that child. So there's going to have to be finding the right balance throughout your life in order to be successful.

But congratulations on the good work you're doing.

All right, I've got time for -- so I only have time for two more questions. I'll call on that gentleman up there with the glasses, in the blue shirt. No, no, right here. Let him ask his question, and then I'll ask the last one. Go ahead.

Question: Hello, Mr. President.

President Obama: Hello!

Question: It's really an honor to ask you this question. Well, my name is Alonso Cornejo [ph]. I'm studying marketing at Universidad San Ignacio Loyola. And my question is about what advice will you give to Peruvian students that they are starting to think different, to making a change not just in Peru, [but] worldwide -- make a change about worldwide. What advice will you give? Right now we live in a world that maybe the bad is good, and the good is bad. So what advice will you give them to chase their dreams, make the country better -- not Peru, just worldwide? That will be my question. Thank you.

President Obama: Well, look, you're already doing so well. I don't know that I can give you the perfect advice. But I'll tell you what I tell my young people who work in the White House and who I meet in the United States, because I think what's true in the United States is true for you, as well.



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We live at a time where you're always seeing bad news. Everybody -- bad news gets a lot of attention. But the truth is that, in some many ways, the world is better now than it was 20 years ago or 40 years ago, or 100 years ago. People are healthier today, they're wealthier today, they're better educated today. The world, if you look overall, is less violent than it was. Look at the 20th century -- millions of people dying everywhere. Look at Latin America and the wars that were taking place everywhere across the continent. And so you actually are living in a time of relative peace and historic prosperity.

And I say that so that you should feel optimistic about the future. You shouldn't feel pessimistic. Yeah, you're always seeing bad news, but the truth is the world is in a place where it can solve its problems and be even better 20 years from now or 50 years from now. You have to start with that hope, that sense of optimism inside you, because if you don't feel that way, then you don't bother to try to have an impact because you think, ah, every politician is corrupt and all the governments are terrible, and people are greedy and people are mean, and so I'm just going to look out for myself. And then nothing gets better. So you have to start knowing that things have gotten better and can continue to get better. That's number one.

Number two, I always tell young people to -- and I don't know if this translates well in Spanish -- but I say: Worry more about what you want to do, and not what you want to be. Now, here is what I mean. I think a lot of people, they say to themselves, "I want to be rich," or they say to themselves, "I want to be powerful." Or they say, "I want to be the President," or "I want to be a CEO," so they -- or "I want to be a rap star." So they say they have this idea, but the people I know who are most successful, usually they're successful because they found something that they really care about, and they worked at it and became really good at it. And over time, because they were so good at what they did, they ended up being rich, or they ended up being powerful and influential. But in the meantime, they were constantly doing what they enjoyed doing and learning, and that's what made them successful.

So what I would say to all of you is, find something you care deeply about. If you care about poor children, then find a way right now that you can start helping some poor children. Don't wait, saying to yourself, oh, someday, when I'm President of Peru I'm going to help poor children. No, go now and find an organization or create an organization that is helping poor kids learn or be exposed to new experiences.



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If you care about the environment, don't wait. In addition to your studies, you could start having an impact right now on trying to improve your local community, or trying to be involved in some of the work that's being done around things like climate change.

The point is that once you decide what it is that you really care about, there are ways for you to now get involved and pursue that passion. And if you pursue that passion and you get good at it, you're not going to change the world overnight -- nobody does. I mean, I eventually, at the age of 45, became a senator and then the President of the United States, but I worked for 25 years in poor communities, and worked on issues. And hopefully I was doing some good, even before I was famous or powerful, so that if I hadn't ended up being President I could still look back and say, I worked on the things that I cared about and I got something done that was important. And that, I think, is the most important advice that I have for you.

All right, last question. It's a woman's turn. So all the men, you can put your -- all the boys can put their hands down. It's a woman's turn.

Okay, go ahead, right there.

Question: Okay, first of all, my name is Melisa. I represent Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas. Besides, I'm a proud member of UPC [inaudible]. And once again, I want to welcome you to this amazing country. And on behalf of this whole audience, I would like to thank you for this amazing opportunity.

Okay, so my question is the following. As it is well known, during your presidency you have stepped up and accepted mistakes you made yourself or maybe the team you're leading. And that's -- I believe that shows how you reaffirm your belief in introspection and how you want to leave the past behind. What would your advice to us entrepreneurs, most of us, that would like to leave the mistakes -- learn from them, step up, and leave what's the past in the past? Thank you, President.

President Obama: Well, you know, I don't -- you shouldn't ignore the past. You should learn from it. And you should learn from history, and learn from experience.



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The truth is that I was -- right before I came to Peru, I was in Europe, and I started my trip in Athens. And I went to the Parthenon, the birthplace of democracy. And you look at all these buildings from ancient Greece, and you try to imagine all the things that were happening in that time, and it seems very long ago. But the fact of the matter is, is that humanity keeps on making the same mistakes, and we oftentimes find ourselves dealing with the same problems and the same issues. So studying our past, studying our history, is very, very important.

But the main thing I tell you and I tell my own daughters is, you can't be trapped by the past. There's a difference between understanding your past. You need to know the history of Peru. If you live in the United States, you need to know how America came about -- and that includes both the amazing and wonderful things, but also the bad things. If you want to understand America today, then you have to understand slavery, and you have to understand the history of immigration, and how the debates we're having today about immigration aren't that different from when the Irish or the Italians came and people were saying, we can't have any more Italians and we can't have any more Irish. If you don't know that then you aren't going to understand the patterns that we are having today.

But the point is, is that we have the power to make our own history. We don't have to repeat the same mistakes. We don't have to just be confined to what has happened before or what is going on today. We can think differently, and imagine differently, and do things differently.

The one thing that we should remember, though, is that even as we try to do things that are new, we should remember that change generally doesn't happen overnight. It happens over time. So I say that to young people because sometimes they get impatient. In the United States, sometimes people say to me, oh, why haven't we eliminated racial discrimination in the United States? And I say, well, we've made a lot of progress since I was born. In terms of human history, if you think on the scale of hundreds of years or thousands of years -- in 50 years, the changes that have taken place have been amazing.

So you have to understand that even though we can think differently, societies don't move immediately. It requires hard work, and you have to persuade people. And sometimes you take two steps forward and then you take one step back. And you shouldn't be discouraged when that happens, because history doesn't just move in a smooth, straight line.



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The good news is that we have more access to information than we've ever had before. Young people are in a position to change the world faster than ever before. And I am confident that if you are respectful of people and you look for what you have in common with humanity, if you stay true to the values of kindness, and respect, and reason, and trying to live together in peace, that the world will keep getting better. And I'll be looking forward to seeing all the amazing things that you do in the years to come.

Okay? Thank you very much, everybody.

Thank you.