

USAID/Quito
c/o American Embassy
Quito, Ecuador

Feb. 23, 1962

Mr. Manuel Avila, Jr.
Apartado Correos 287
Caracas, Venezuela

Dear Manuel:

It is almost a month since I received your letter in which you voiced your opinion as to the formation of a GI Forum in Latin-America. A number of things intervened which caused my delay in answer to your letter.

On the subject of major appointments to posts in Latin-America or in the Washington Department for this area it seems we have just about been eliminated from the picture.

I was surprised to see that you would not favor a GI Forum of Ecuador or of any Latin-American country, since it is quite obvious that it is the only way to have one outside the continental limits of the U.S. With reference to your first point I am well aware of the basic principles of the Forum and might even be so bold as to say that I helped to not only shape them but also to put them into practice. Secondly, our status as Americans is already well established and we need not belabor the issue or else we will become like the rest of the flag-waving organizations instead of a liberal, progressive, and action group. Thirdly, it is not necessary to hide behind the veteran status since we have passed the stage of a new organization and the era of suspicion towards a Spanish speaking organization. Fourthly, an organization cannot exist for long if it has to operate from a fear-ridden base. It must be cautious, alert, and its actions intelligent, but not fearful. Roosevelt was right when he said the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Finally, I must inform you that we do not qualify as a veterans organization under the laws of the United States, since we have a 25 per cent non-veteran clause and auxiliaries and Juniors that vote in convention. I am one of those that is not in favor of changing our constitution merely to qualify, but would rather increase the allowance of non-veterans as members, especially the Juniors and the Auxiliaries.

With reference to point number 2, I don't see that it has anything to do with an American GI Forum of Ecuador or Latin America. It goes without saying that we have a right to vote and voice our opinion as American citizens. Latin-Americans of most democratic countries have the same rights as citizens of their countries.

Reason number 3 has no basis as an objection since you assume that you and I would attempt to engage in politics. I don't even have the right to engage in politics in the U.S. since I am covered by the Hatch Act. It is not proper nor logical to assume something that does not exist. Obviously, a Latin-American GI Forum would have to be organized under the laws of the country where it is to be initiated by citizens of the same country. It would be organized the same way that the Quito Lions Club, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce, the Masons, and a host of other non-partisan, non-political groups are organized now. There are at least 10 organizations in Quito based on U.S. organizations and they carry the same name.

Reason number 4 is more of the same reasoning which is not logical. I am not interested in what our enemies have to say at this time because they have said a lot of things none of which were true and now it has back-fired on so many of them that in the eyes of everyone they are now considered a lot of jack-asses or they have meekly admitted they were wrong about the GI Forum. A Latin-American GI Forum would not interfere in the work of the US GI Forum except that it might enhance its prestige. Just last week, a group of business men visited the Junior Chamber of Commerce and made recommendations on the best way to work out an industrial program for Ecuador. No one accused them of politics. Instead the newspaper gave it a big play with pictures and all of the Americans, some of which could not speak Spanish. In fact it was considered a big thing for private initiative and enterprise.

Your statement in reason number 5 is true, that is that liberals in Ecuador are not ^{the same as} ~~not~~ liberals in the U.S. They are not the same only because the problems in Latin-American are so much more serious and numerous. However, since a GI Forum would not be based on any political party the objection is not valid. As to how Senators and Representatives would feel that remains to be seen. It's obvious that it depends on how well we do in setting up a Forum and so we should not drag skeletons out of the closet.

Actually, there are serious technical objections to a Latin-American GI Forum, but your reasons did not indicate them. Most of the objections revolve around financial difficulties in incorporation, organization, legal advise, and other similar problems. I have some good attorney friends now, but they have no time to give since they really have to stick to their practice to make a living. Secondly, there is the problem of a modus operandi as between two country Forums with equal status in the event of a conference. I will however keep you informed as I learn more about the laws of Ecuador on the subject of organizations, their rights, privileges, etc. Good luck and I hope we can meet as soon as I have some time off.

cc: Dr. Garcia, Alvarado, Salinas

Tu amigo,

Vicente Ximenes