**LATIN AMERICA 2025, 8 February, Hamilton House, London
Speech by Ismara Vargas Walter in the first plenary:
Latin America after Trump’s re-election**

Distinguished colleagues and friends,

I am honoured to address you today at this important Latin American conference. We gather at a moment when our region faces both enduring challenges and unprecedented opportunities - a moment when history and current events intertwine, urging us to reflect on the legacy of external interference and to reaffirm our commitment to sovereignty, justice and unity.

For more than two centuries, the United States has invoked the Monroe Doctrine - originally intended to protect the Americas from European colonisation - as a pretext for intervention in our region. Instead of promoting mutual respect and cooperative development, this doctrine has too often been transformed into a justification for coercive policies. In the case of Cuba, it paved the way for a blockade that has isolated our people and stifled our potential for far too long.

This legacy of unilateralism is not a thing of the past. We have witnessed, with deep regret, actions that continue to undermine our collective agency.

Most recently, there was a brief moment - just a few days - when the Biden administration removed Cuba from the so-called State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Such a move, though belated, represented a hopeful step towards recalibrating US-Latin American relations. But that promise was almost immediately extinguished when, in the shadow of a reasserted unilateral policy, Cuba was once again relegated to a list that belies our long struggle for dignity and sovereignty. This episode is a stark reminder that words without sustained commitment do little to alleviate the structural injustices that have long plagued our region.

It is also impossible to overlook the role played by key figures in shaping these policies. At a time when the rhetoric and actions of US policymakers have deeply affected Latin America, current Secretary of State Marco Rubio has emerged as the mastermind behind many of the most repressive unilateral measures against Cuba during the first Trump administration. His policies and statements have not only isolated our country, but have also set a dangerous precedent. I recall with deep disappointment Rubio's comments branding Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua as 'enemies of humanity'. Such language is not only hyperbolic but also fundamentally misleading. In truth, the policies and interventions imposed by the United States have often been the most serious affronts to human dignity and freedom in our hemisphere.

In our view, the real challenge lies not in the sovereign choices of nations pursuing their own paths to social justice and national dignity, but in the aggressive, self-serving policies of a country that has too often sought to dictate the destiny of its neighbours. Cuba, as we have long maintained, is not an enemy of humanity, but rather a friend and staunch defender of the rights and well-being of all peoples. Our struggle has been one of resistance against a form of imperialism that, under various guises, continues to undermine the legitimate aspirations of Latin American nations.

But even in the face of such daunting challenges, our story is one of resilience, innovation and solidarity. In Cuba, decades of isolation have not led to defeat, but to a spirit of self-reliance and a commitment to building a society based on social justice, health, education and genuine independence. Our experience shows that even when external forces seek to divide and weaken, the bonds of regional solidarity can prevail. Today, I call on all the nations of Latin America to reject policies that place narrow interests above the common good, and to work together to build a future defined not by coercion and exclusion, but by mutual respect and cooperation.

This moment demands that we rethink our regional alliances and strengthen our economic and cultural exchanges. We must seek alternatives to an economic order built on the instability and injustice of external dictates. The long-standing partnerships with our friends in Europe, including here in the UK, offer a promising route to a more balanced and equitable international system. Together we can build development models that reflect our different realities and aspirations.

Our discussions today - with the invaluable contributions of speakers such as Kate Hudson, Felix Plasencia, Dr Irene Vélez-Torres and Vijay Prashad - reaffirm that the destiny of Latin America is not to be written by external forces, but by the collective will of its peoples. Each of our experiences contributes to a rich tapestry of perspectives that ultimately envisions a region united by its commitment to justice, sovereignty and the common good.

Let us also recognise that the challenges we face are not insurmountable. Even the most entrenched policies of coercion and isolation can be overcome by an unwavering commitment to dialogue and mutual support. In this spirit, Cuba stands ready to continue its long tradition of solidarity with its neighbours. We remain a friend to all those who stand up for humanity, for peace and for the right of every nation to determine its own course.

In conclusion, I reiterate Cuba's unwavering commitment to a future where external interference is replaced by cooperation, and where every nation in Latin America can flourish without the shackles of outdated doctrines and coercive policies. Let our gathering here today be a testament to our resolve - a signal that Latin America, united and determined, will continue to build a world where dignity, justice and peace prevail.

Thank you.