

Dr. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría
Former President of Costa Rica

Dr. Miguel Angel Rodríguez, former President of Costa Rica, has had a prominent and successful career as political leader, economist, and businessman.

Dr. Rodríguez earned a degree in economics from the University of Costa Rica in 1962 and a law degree in 1963. He attended Graduate School at the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. in economics in 1966.

Dr. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría is a distinguished Costa Rican national, proud to be considered a Central American citizen with a broad hemispheric vision. He possesses a solid academic and professional background both, as a lawyer and as an economist. Always a man of thought and prolific author, he has published eleven books and numerous articles in academic journals and newspapers on economics issues, politics and social philosophy.

Dr. Rodríguez enjoys world recognition as a senior statesman. Throughout his public service career, he has held high level political posts such as: Head of the Ministry of Planning and Political Economy, Congressman and President of the Legislative Assembly, and President of the Republic of Costa Rica from 1998 to 2002. In this capacity, he vigorously promoted the approval of the Inter American Democratic Charter and its implementation in order to uphold the rule of law and constitutional regimes in Member States, advocating that the people of the Americas have the right to democratic ruling.

In the international arena he was a Board member of the Christian Democratic International; a founding member of the Fundación Popular Iberoamericana; and President of the Christian Democratic Organization of the Americas.

During his tenure as Elected President of his country, Dr. Rodríguez worked relentlessly in developing the country's agenda for the XXI century, which called for the strengthening of human capital and the improvement of the country's infrastructure. He raised Costa Rica's educational standards by more than 25% at the high school level, and implemented notable improvements in the national health system increasing life expectancy of Costa Ricans to the highest level in the Americas. Similarly, the infant mortality rate was reduced to one of the lowest in the hemisphere.

To improve the infrastructure, from highways to airports and seaports, his strategy promoted open door policies to allow the private sector to invest, operate and manage major infrastructure projects. A similar approach enhanced the social security system and the national savings systems by creating privately owned and managed retirement accounts to complement the then existing Public Sector-operated system. Under his leadership Costa Rica signed an agreement with U.S Navy for the joint patrolling of the Costa Rican seas and successfully fought international drug cartels. This initiative became later the basis for the negotiation of a multilateral agreement to patrol the Caribbean Sea, which was signed by various countries of the region.

Direct foreign investment became a priority of President Rodríguez's government and during his term in office high technology products became the main export of Costa Rica. It is worth noting that tourism became the second most important source of foreign income during this period.

Consistent with his entrepreneurial and economic background, as President, Mr. Rodríguez championed the concept of Free Trade as a key element to improve human development throughout the region south of US border. During the 1998-2002 period, Costa Rica signed Free Trade Agreements with Canada, Chile, and Trinidad and Tobago and concluded one with Dominican Republic.

The FTAs signed with Trinidad and Tobago were used subsequently as the basis for a FTA signed with the CARICOM. The FTA with Mexico was revised and improved, and a similar process was started with Panama in 2001.

President Rodríguez leadership was particularly relevant in broadening and asserting the Caribbean Basin Initiative. He coordinated the efforts of the Central American and Caribbean member-countries of the CBI, and engaged in intense negotiations on their behalf with the U.S. Government and key Members of the US Congress. His numerous visits to the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, were decisive in achieving a successful outcome for the negotiated trade agreements reached with the Central American region countries and the Caribbean States He also launched, collectively with the other Central American Heads of State, the idea of promoting an FTA between Central America and the United States (CAFTA) which is being negotiated presently.

In the international arena he lead the efforts to reinforce the role of the Organization of American States (OAS) in the areas of human rights and the promotion of democracy. In this regard, Costa Rica proposed the enactment of the following: a) the Inter-American human rights system; b) compliance with judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and follow-up of the recommendations of the Commission of Human Rights, c) facilitation of access for individuals to the Inter-American human rights system and, d) a substantial increase in the budget assigned to the Court and the Commission so that these entities could better deal with their growing activities and responsibilities on a permanent basis.

Costa Rica hosted the XXXI General Assembly of the OAS in 2001, where the resolution to adopt an Inter-American Democratic Charter, "the San Jose Resolution", was approved. During this Assembly, Costa Rica promoted the inclusion of the Democratic Clause within the Democratic Charter, an initiative launched at the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec. Costa Rica also played a crucial role in the process of reestablishing democracy in Peru during the XXX General Assembly of the OAS in Windsor, Canada in 2000.

President Rodríguez holds a distinguished academic background. He has been a professor of economics and law at the University of Costa Rica since 1963, and at the Autonomous University of Central America since 1978. He also returned to the Institute for

International Studies at the University of California at Berkeley as a visiting professor of economics in 1969. He has published 11 books and numerous articles on economics, politics and social philosophy in prestigious academic journals, as well as in the press. Some of his book titles include, among others: "The Juridical Order of Liberty" (1967), "From Ideas to Action" (1988), "Toward Progress through Liberty" (1989), "Liberty and Solidarity: A Social Policy for Human Development" (1992), "A Moral Revolution: Democracy, Market and Common Well-being" (1992).

He just authored a book: "The Costa Rican Solution" (2003), in which he discusses his government experience and analyzes the essential requirements to invigorate the modernization processes in key areas for development, such as education, health, infrastructure, technology and the fight against poverty.

He also examines the mechanisms needed to create and maintain the institutional structures that will facilitate a sustainable economic growth process in less developed countries. This book has become an important contribution in the field of human development in small and developing economies.

Before becoming a public official, Dr. Rodríguez was a successful entrepreneur. He was the founder and former Chief Executive Officer of a group of companies doing business in cattle, beef, sausages, meat canning, leather tanning, industrialized dairy products and modern agricultural production in Central America. His companies successfully exported its products to the USA and established subsidiaries in Honduras and Nicaragua as well as a meaningful commercial presence in Bolivia. He was also a Director of the Agro-Industrial and Export Bank, SA., a Public Sector development bank.

After his Presidency, Dr. Rodríguez turned to the task of educating others about his experiences as a political leader. He joined the George Washington University Faculty as J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Professor at the Elliot School of International Affairs. He has also lectured as a visiting professor in the Charles III University in Madrid, Spain.

As a scholar, he has analyzed in depth the economic and social model that he successfully designed and implemented and has proved to be a stable model and a generator of economic growth in a world undergoing a global economic crisis, even for the largest economic powers. He has also studied and advocated for the advancement of humanitarian and economic policy changes in Latin America. He is most passionate about development and trade and for the defense of basic human rights in an international context, especially those of women and children.

Dr. Rodríguez has also joined the Washington firm of Manatt Jones Global Strategies as Chairman of its Global Advisory Group and is a member of the Advisory Group of the Initiative for Policy Dialogue chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize laureate in Economics. Recently he co-chaired an electoral observation mission to Jamaica with Jimmy Carter, former US President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. He also chaired a similar task in Paraguay. Dr. Rodríguez is a frequent guest speaker in many European and Latin American countries.