

## ON A VISIT TO PARAGUAY AS VICE-PRESIDENT OF CICA



**L**ast week I was visiting Asunción, Paraguay. It was my first participation as vice-president of CICA (Confederation of International Contractors' Association) in its General Assembly, as well as in that of FIIC (Inter-American Federation of the Construction Industry). And I have to say that it was a truly amazing experience.

On this occasion, the event was organized by the Paraguayan Chamber of Construction (CAPACO), which played a great role as host. It should be noted **that CAPACO is known for being very well organized** and capable of defending its interests against the government.

Paraguay has just elected a new president, who accompanied us to the inauguration of the General Assembly and gave me a very good impression. His name is Santiago Peña, he is 44 years old and was Minister of Economy when he was only 35 years old. Among his plans is to **stimulate the economy through private investment.**

Stimulating infrastructure and public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Paraguay is new, and the story here is very important. In the 19th century Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina declared war on the country, ending with **the loss of 60% of its territory and the death of 90% of its male population.** In the face of that trauma, the country became what they call "an island surrounded by land," with no roads or bridges linking it to its neighbors. However, in recent decades, Paraguay has decided to open up to the world, joining the



Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), along with Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, in addition to building infrastructure that communicates with the outside world.

For this reason, they took us to visit a project that is about to be finished: the Héroes del Chaco Bridge. This crosses the Paraguay River, and its purpose is to connect Asunción with the eastern region of the country. In addition, **there is an ambitious plan among various South American countries** to connect the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific through various infrastructure works, which will pass precisely through Paraguay.

If there was a constant concern among the Latin American construction chambers, it was the presence of China in the region. They comment that **Chinese companies monopolize the works**, do not include local construction companies and, on many occasions, even bring their own workers. Mexico does not seem to have that issue, since the North Americans have pressured us not to let Chinese capital into large infrastructure projects.

A lot of work and many visits still await me as vice-president of CICA. As always, it is very gratifying to represent the top organization of the construction industry in the world, an area to which I have passionately dedicated my life. And I continue to do so.