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Fourth Special Meeting of High Authorities
on the Impact of COVID-19 in the Americas

**Addressing Corruption, Integrity and Democratic Governance Risks
associated with COVID-19ⁱ**

Joint Declaration

We, the High Authorities of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG), having met on three previous occasions in 2020 to address the response of the inter-American multilateral system to the extraordinary challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, recommit ourselves to the common purpose and collaborative intent set out in our interagency Memorandum of Understanding (September 4, 2018 – [link](#))

These meetings, co-convened on April 3 and 29 and June 12 by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, as JSWG Chair, and by the Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Dr. Carissa Etienne, in the early stages of the pandemic, have provided the High Authorities with the opportunity to ensure the highest level of information-sharing, including as a unique forum to avoid duplication of efforts and to build synergies and cooperation in our common undertakings.

Previous meetings of High Authorities have taken place under the guidance of Peru as the outgoing Chair of the Summits process. Reports and documentation of institutional responses to the evolving COVID crisis are available here ([link](#)).

Our fourth meeting, and first in support of the United States as incoming Chair of the Summits of the Americas process, has focused on our common concern regarding emergent risks to democratic governance accompanying the pandemic. The inter-American system, through the Summits of the Americas process, has long been grappling with the hugely negative consequences of corruption on the economies, healthcare systems, and social well-being of our Hemisphere.¹ By depleting scarce resources available for growth and development, corruption undermines economic well-being and impedes critical investment. The diversion of public resources from their intended beneficiaries further debilitates marginalized and vulnerable populations. Most important, it weakens public trust in governments and the capacity of officials at all levels to develop and deliver public

¹ The First Summit of the Americas gave rise to the world's first international anticorruption legal instrument (the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, 1996) and the Quebec Summit in 2001 initiated negotiation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which makes clear the corrosive effects of systemic corruption on democratic practice. The Eighth Summit of the Americas, held in April 2018, was entirely devoted to democratic governance and gave rise to 57 mandates for preventing and combatting corruption ([link](#)).

goods. Corruption threatens economic stability and growth by undermining fair competition, taxing research and innovation, and preventing equal market access.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates these risks and presents new challenges that must be recognized and addressed. We are particularly concerned that progress made in addressing the scourge of corruption risks being compromised as national and subnational authorities in the region rush to implement new policy responses and emergency measures, including the rapid disbursement of large amounts of public resources and new lines of credit, sometimes without the necessary anti-corruption and accountability safeguards.

The rapid development of national emergency responses, including the fast-tracking of normal public contracting processes, is a reality that must be addressed. Our institutions are heavily engaged with governments throughout the region to assist them to do so. However, the arbitrary elimination of adequate oversight evident in multiple jurisdictions, either through restricted access to public data and limitations on accountability measures, or by shrinking opportunities for civil society to ensure transparency, risks debilitating democratic norms and the efficacy of regional governance.

As multilateral organizations, we serve the countries of the region and recommit ourselves to a rapid and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also underline our commitment as members of the JSWG to assist countries in the region to fulfill the mandates set out by the leaders of the Americas in the Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Lima Commitment to forcefully address corruption, support transparency, and implement best practices in democratic governance.

In the context of the specific challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we underline our determination, both as a group and as individual agencies, to:

1. Articulate and demonstrate our commitment to assist the efforts of partners in the region (countries, subnational governments, private sector, civil society, and journalists) to defend the best practices in terms of democratic governance and integrity, as well as to promote full implementation of international instruments to combat corruption and money laundering in the region. The above is particularly so in relation to the requirement to monitor the use of emergency resources.
2. Ensure that our own programs of lending and/or technical assistance recognize and apply in practice standard safeguards on transparency in contracting and on public-data availability throughout project cycles, including comprehensive audits by internal authorities and third parties, among them civil society.
3. Promote and facilitate cooperation among national law enforcement authorities in the region to ensure that suspected corruption in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency response and recovery measures is effectively detected, investigated, and punished.
4. Report transparently and in a timely manner on our own activities/programs to support democratic governance and combat corruption carried out in countries and entities, including on the online platform of the Mechanism for Follow-up and Implementation of the Lima Commitment, established to track compliance with the Lima Commitment.

5. Replicate our JSWG information-sharing system at the national level, among ourselves, and with civil society and the private sector, particularly within donor coordination groups to leverage multilateral support for democratic norms and standards of open government and freedom of expression consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter.
6. Continually strive to bolster, in accordance with mandate 19 of the Lima Commitment, the accountability mechanisms established within individual JSWG organizations, and to work jointly and individually to ensure full public access to our own activities as well as broader engagement with civil society.
7. Support the example of member countries that are applying digital technologies to enhance transparency and integrity, especially in the use of resources for COVID-19 spending.

The multilateral institutions of the Americas have played a critical role in the regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic and stand ready to assist the Summit host and participating countries through the upcoming Ninth Summit of the Americas in 2021.

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- i. Although this Joint Declaration is not a binding document, it reflects the will and intentions of the participants.