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PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE SIXTH YOUNG AMERICAS FORUM

(Luis A. Viguria, CEO, Young Americas Business Trust)

Good morning, everyone.

We very much appreciate the opportunity Young Americas Business Trust has been given to deliver this progress report on the Sixth Young Americas Forum.

Let me start by thanking the more than 20,000 young people who have been part of the process from 2019 to 2022, via its three components, namely: citizen participation, entrepreneurship in action, and informed decisions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend and thank the government entities, the private sector, and civil society entities that have assisted us throughout the process. Special recognition and gratitude to the Government of the United States, the United States Department of State, the Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the Organization of American States, the City of Los Angeles, the Inter-American Foundation, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), PepsiCo Latin America, and Shopify. They have given tremendous support for the Young Americas Forum process and for the participation of the young people.

We would also like to thank the Governments of the Dominican Republic, Canada, Colombia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for their interest in joining forces with YABT to support the Young Americas Forum process and young people's participation in the Ninth Summit of the Americas.

These governments are joined by: CARICOM, the Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA), the World Bank's Latin America and the Caribbean Gender Innovation Lab, UNESCO, the Inclusive Business Network of Uruguay, Google, YouTube, Platzi, ProDominicana, and Luminare, among other public and private institutions.

In terms of the Forum details and since we are just 5 weeks away from the Ninth Summit of the Americas, I will now report on the following areas in particular: the process, accreditations, logistics, the agenda, and the recommendations.

1. The Process:

Consultation Process and Participation

The Young Americas Forum involves an ongoing process and interaction with young people from OAS member states, activities monitoring, and defining important priorities for youth.

Mindful of the last Summit of the Americas and the commitments made by the young people gathered there, and understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a rethinking of priorities in society, YABT embarked on the process towards the Sixth Young Americas Forum and the Ninth Summit of the Americas, with a combination of follow-up discussions and prioritization through a consultative process.

This led to the establishment of what YABT calls the 5Cs of Youth Development, that is: Climate Change, COVID-19, Collaborating with Youth, Combating Corruption, and Connectivity and Digital Transformation.

Based on these priorities that the young people themselves established, YABT launched a consultation process involving both face-to-face and virtual formats, where the young people gave recommendations and observations about the need for action, development, policies that are updated and implemented, or submission of proposals framed in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Once the host country introduced the proposed theme for the Ninth Summit and its political commitments, YABT moved ahead with the process of transition and connection to these commitments and their crosscutting priorities.

In order to ensure that youth participation was inclusive and representative, we continued to work with young people and local, international, and governmental organizations, resulting in 152 dialogues involving more than 8,700 young people. We continue to help young people engage in local and national dialogues taking place.

YABT simultaneously launched a virtual consultation for young people to share their recommendations concerning the thematic areas of the Young Americas Forum. We take this opportunity to renew our request for our member states' assistance in publicizing this consultation, to ensure that as many young people as possible have access to it.

Meanwhile, in preparation for the activities in Los Angeles, on May 16 we will hold a Hemispheric Dialogue, at which young people and organizations that held local and national dialogues, as well as those that have been part of the process, will be able to work on the definition of the Declaration of Commitment on Youth and its Plan of Action for presentation during the Summit of the Americas.

Entrepreneurship in Action

YABT, through its Talent and Innovation Competition of the Americas (TIC Americas) Program and its six special categories developed since the previous Summit: The InnovAction Challenge – developed in conjunction with the Inter-American Foundation, the Eco-Challenge developed with PepsiCo Latin America, and the Caribbean Innovation Competition – has attracted a total of 14,173 entrepreneurs from the 34 OAS member states.

Its projects are currently being showcased on the Young Americas Forum website under the “Entrepreneurship in Action” section, and will be directly introduced at the Innovation Expo during the Sixth Young Americas Forum in Los Angeles.

2. Accreditation

YABT announced on March 21 that applications were being accepted. Beginning May 1, we will be starting the accreditation process, notifying young applicants that they have been accepted to participate in the activities in June. Registration will be open until May 20, so we invite member states to share this information with young people in their countries for them to apply and participate in the activities.

We do understand that being able to participate in on-site activities is not an easy question – for reasons ranging from the cost of airfares, access to visas, vaccination requirements, and the ongoing situation we are still experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A hybrid format will therefore be used for the VI Young Americas Forum to ensure an inclusive, diverse, and safe participation by our young people. We will have delegates attending in person and virtually.

On average, 500 delegates are being considered for the in-person activities, with a similar number of virtual delegates, who will be able to participate in the discussion sessions privately and participate in public sessions involving real-time interaction and content. In that connection, we are most grateful to the State Department, which is helping us get the necessary logistics and technology in place to meet this goal.

Likewise, we are coordinating with local organizations, universities, community centers, and OAS National Offices – as protocols allow – to receive the young people and thus avoid complications with connectivity issues.

Understanding the context and the reality that the city of Los Angeles offers us, it has been very important for us to coordinate with the Office of the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles, with special focus on having young migrants to take part in the process, especially representatives from Caribbean and Latin American diaspora groups. I would again emphasize the word “process” and not just the June activity.

3. Logistics

The Sixth Young Americas Forum is scheduled to take place June 8 and 9, at the MagicBox Convention Center, located in The Reef building in Los Angeles.

The MagicBox will facilitate proper execution of the Sixth Young Americas Forum, complying with not only the safety protocols for the general audience, but furthermore because of the size of the space, we will be able to put into practice biosecurity measures according to the CDC recommendations for COVID-19 protection and transmission.

At the MagicBox Convention Center, we will host the following activities:

Accreditations – Starting June 7.

Inaugural and Closing Plenary Sessions for up to 500 delegates

Parallel sessions and cultural displays in side rooms for 200-250 people

Innovation Expo featuring over 50 entrepreneurial ventures from all across the Americas, reflecting the priorities of the Summit and the Young Americas Forum.

4. The Agenda

A preliminary version of the agenda will be available on the Young Americas Forum website, starting Wednesday of this week.

The following topics will be discussed at the sessions on content:

- Our Green Future Climate Change, the Circular Economy
- Economic Recovery
- Digital Transformation
- Education and Entrepreneurship
- Human Rights and Democracy
- Education and Human Development
- Gender Equity
- Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity
- Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean

The Forum's outcomes, specifically the Declaration of Commitment on Youth and the Post Summit Plan of Action, will be delivered to the member states during: i- the Dialogue of Social Actors with the Heads of Delegation – coordinated by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat, ii- during the Young Americas Forum, when the youth participating in the Forum as a whole deliver the Recommendations, Declaration of Commitment, and Plan of Action to Leaders of the Hemisphere, iii- during the plenary of the Summit of the Americas, in the event that social actors are invited to present their outcomes to the Heads of State and Government – as was the case with the previous Summit.

We are still trying to identify donors and partners to provide scholarships for delegates to the Sixth Young Americas Forum. Let me take this opportunity to solicit the support of those member states that wish to assist young delegates from their countries, either directly or by identifying donors, to cover their transportation and living expenses.

5. The Recommendations

As explained at the outset, after 38 months of consultations involving more than 20,000 young people through dialogues, campaigns, virtual consultations, policy workshops, and invitations for innovation and entrepreneurship applications, I would like to share with you a few of the specific recommendations made by young people.

Clean energy and our green future

- Governments are called upon to amend and adapt the regulatory framework for better water management.
- To address the core theme of Our Green Future, two main issues are highlighted: (i) Business commitment to the environment, and (ii), state responsibility to create laws and public policies to safeguard the ecosystem.
- A crosscutting environmental approach to education is therefore being advocated.
- These underscore the need for governments to promote awareness about plastic waste collection and promote strategic partnerships with recycling companies, following the guidelines of the circular economy.

Democratic Governance:

- Forums must be created and institutionalized for citizen participation, where young people are included and are key players; decentralizing spaces for debate and action builds capacity for young people.
- Young people understand multilateralism as a tool for cooperation aimed at narrowing inequality gaps through political and economic partnerships with the countries of the Americas. On that basis, the young people suggest the creation of youth policy hubs and cross-border gatherings to discuss issues of current interest, such as migration, innovation, and trade.
- Young people identify ensuring survival of migrants, guaranteeing their right to education, providing alternatives towards getting them legal status, security, and access to basic rights among the biggest challenges we face.

Digital Transformation

- Access to technology – governments must ensure access to high-tech in our region and across all socio-economic strata. This includes digital education for indigenous and vulnerable populations.
- Telework policies should be promoted, established, and monitored, and human capital strengthened.
- Partnerships should be solidified with leading or key global private sector companies to enable entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized businesses to go digital with their operations in order to access international markets. The pandemic provided a clear example of resilience of the SME sector and the need to adapt to digital channels. Our e-commerce policies and regulations therefore need to be adapted.

Vulnerable Populations:

- From a gender perspective, there is a need for more awareness about the pandemic's impact, including how confinement, school dropout rates, lack of access to health services, the cultural burden of domestic and caregiver duties have placed women, young women, and girls at greater risk of violence.

- Social protection measures and welfare conditions need to be strengthened for people in human mobility circumstances; job placement measures need to be proposed; and the skills to be found among the migrant population and the impact on competitiveness need to be leveraged.

Economic Recovery

- The youth unemployment situation calls for policies to support productive activities, decent work, entrepreneurship, innovation, and the formal economy.
- In response to the pandemic's impact on the most vulnerable population groups, we propose that programs be created to promote inclusive economic models focused on collaborative industries, with a gender perspective.
- Raising the visibility of small and medium-sized enterprises, promoting fair and sustainable trade, through inclusive, cooperative, and decentralized public policies.

Comprehensive Health and Vital Information

- We need to increase the allocation of funds to the health sector and safeguard the lives of health personnel.
- There has been a lack of public awareness about the pandemic-driven mental illness among young people, which itself will have a long-term impact on their families and on society.
- Young people have a decisive role to play in terms of access to information to deal with the pandemic. Because of their control over and understanding of digital technologies, they could help cut down on misinformation, which adversely affects society and the economy alike.

These are just a few of the young people's contributions, through which we formally engage with you all and we will keep working on them. Thank you for your attention and for your support in offering our young people a role in this process and in seeing them as partners for prosperity.

Thank you very much!