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**Cartagena, Colombia  
Sunday, April 15, 2012**

Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,  
Your Excellencies, Ministers of Foreign Affairs,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Other Distinguished Representatives,  
Distinguished Guests,

Good Afternoon.

Mr. President,

As we gather here today, for the Sixth Summit of the Americas, challenged by our Theme: **“Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity”**, we further solidify the re-birth of a process. This process had its genesis in the 1889 - 1890 First International Conference of American States, but was re-started in 1994. Thus, the Organisation of American States, inheritor and shepherd of this process, is the world’s oldest regional Organisation.

This is a most proud legacy. Despite challenges, domestic and regional, the Organisation of American States is fulfilling, in broad measure, Article 1 of its Charter “...to achieve an order of peace and justice, to promote...solidarity, to strengthen...collaboration, and to defend sovereignty..., territorial integrity, and...independence.”

Economically and politically, the Americas have fared relatively well in comparison with other Regions of the world. The greatest challenge remains the social rights of citizens for security, safety, and, equal access to a sustainable quality of life. This particular challenge of social rights, which is both the foundation and culmination for all others, has been acknowledged, and runs like an unbroken thread from 1994 to the present. Empowerment is a major thrust underlying our stated Theme, pointing to the importance of harnessing our collective will and strengths. The benchmark, however, was set from 1985, in the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias, which eloquently and definitively stated:

**“The historic mission of America is to offer to man a land of liberty and a favourable environment for the development of his personality and the realisation of his just aspirations”.**

I, therefore, pay tribute to this illustrious City honoured as “*The door of the Americas*”. It is also fitting that the “*door*” of Cartagena might finally facilitate the connection which will cause our deliberations to bring into reality these “just aspirations”. The five thematic areas underpinning our Theme, are worthy catalysts. Consequently, while The Bahamas is in general agreement with the policies and objectives in the draft negotiated texts before us, our observations on these thematic areas will focus on what are the elements for partnership that will produce the desired qualitative changes.

### **Poverty and Equality**

Poverty is a multi-faceted issue, and despite each Member Country’s best efforts, it is a scourge that persists in the Hemisphere. While absolute poverty levels are relatively low in The Bahamas, there still remain untenable disparities in far-flung Islands of the Archipelago.

The Bahamas strongly believes that to address poverty in the Hemisphere effectively, a comprehensive approach is required which prioritises the following elements: Education, a key input for training which facilitates employment; Food Security; and, Culture. Culture is critical because, at one end of the spectrum, it involves ‘social saboteurs’ such as high rates of teen pregnancy and related deficient parenting skills, and, at the other end, speaks to the important role values, moral responsiveness, and changed mindsets can contribute to poverty eradication.

Exacerbated poverty and inequality are also lingering relics of the most recent global Economic Recession on the Hemisphere. One area where there was particular, devastating impact was on our Youth. As we are all aware youth unemployment is of historic, and current, high proportion across our Hemisphere.

The Bahamas moved aggressively to mitigate the worst effects of the global economic downturn with the launch, in September 2010, of a National Prescription Drug Plan; with provision of Unemployment Insurance for those unable to find work; with implementation of Work Placement and Employment Exposure; a National Job Readiness and Training Programme; and a Start-up Capital Programme. These Programmes helped thousands of Bahamians to get back to work. The Bahamas also spares no effort to ensure that every child can go to school, despite poverty. No child in The Bahamas needs to be at home during the day, because, apart from other family maintenance support where needed, food and uniforms are provided for all students that require them.

Like many Member States, The Bahamas, however, continues to grapple with the issue of inequality. We are attempting to diminish and eliminate this scourge through entrepreneurship facilitation, and, investment in Bahamian Youth. Initiatives include the provision of ‘start-up’ capital for promoting business ideas; enhanced academic scholarships; and, the Youth Self Starter Programme. The Bahamas is also convinced that equality and democracy are inextricably linked. Improved equality throughout the Hemisphere will, undoubtedly, result in true freedom, prosperity and happiness for the Americas.

### **Citizen Security and Transnational Organised Crime**

Trade over the high seas continues to be the lifeblood of the global economy, as roughly 90% of global trade passes over the high seas. Acts of piracy and terrorism threaten the safety of Member

Countries, its citizens, and, the stability and growth of the global community. Maintaining a secure, international environment is thus essential as a foundation for sustainable growth and resilience for our Member Countries, and for the broader international Community.

As an Archipelagic Nation with one of the largest Ship Registries in the World, aspects of piracy are direct threats to The Bahamas. So too are: armed robbery on the high seas; small arms and light weapons trafficking; human trafficking; drug trafficking; poaching; and, terrorism.

The Bahamas, therefore, encourages the development of hemispheric mechanisms for intensified cooperation which could extend to dedicated naval peacekeeping troops targeting piracy; and, heightened intelligence collaboration to increase national capabilities and strengthen counter terrorism efforts. The Bahamas also renews her resolve, along with all Member States, to combat the evils of trafficking in persons, drugs and weapons.

### **Access to and Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Health Care/Education Needs of Rural Populations**

Access to, and use of, information communication technology (ICT) is the pathway to remaining competitive, internationally, and, to continuing progress for development. The Bahamas Government has placed a premium on modern ICT infrastructure through the recent introduction of E-Government to all Government Ministries along with administrative reform producing a centralized Department of Information Technology (DIT), to support and oversee E- Government.

Access to, and use, of information communication technology can also help overcome the governance and policy coordination challenges that naturally plague an Archipelago such as The Bahamas, particularly in critical areas of development such as the provision of health care and education. The Bahamas has begun the use of telemedicine to enable access to expertise that may be centralized in the Capital, or that resides abroad, to be available to all the Islands of the Archipelago. For The Bahamas, technology is therefore, additionally, a means to counter inequalities in development, and access, that naturally come with the geography of a chain of Islands.

The Bahamas also sees many areas of potential cooperation with respect to Information and Communication Technology. We look forward to collaboration with hemispheric Member States in areas such as the enhancement of rural connectivity and the effective use of Information and Communication Technology, particularly in the provision of education and health care, and, to achieve sustainable quality-of-service protocols.

### **Disaster Risk Reduction and Management**

We believe that disaster risk management and preparedness is a fundamental pillar for abating poverty and inequality in our Hemisphere. For so many of our citizens, places of abode are the main source of wealth and security.

The Bahamas is both in a place of opportunity and challenge with respect to Disaster Risk Management. Situated in the Atlantic Ocean, The Bahamas is in the path of many strong Hurricane systems. The impact of climate change is also multiplying other disaster and development threats such as 'fish-kills', tornados and invasive species. However, the infrastructure and programmes that

currently exist, or are being pursued in The Bahamas, provide opportunities to overcome these challenges and, can serve as best practice models for the Hemisphere.

Based on our experience and practice, the following can contribute to the development of a framework for strengthening natural disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction across the Americas:

- training opportunities to harmonise responses in the wake of regional disasters;
- a commitment to funding recovery assistance and insurance for small farmers devastated by natural disasters;
- the development of an hemispheric building code certification to institutionalise a standard of durable infrastructure across the Hemisphere, thereby also reversing high premiums which compensate for claims arising from weak building code areas, but which are levied on all;
- a Regional Emergency Communication Mechanism to eliminate the current difficulty of communication with regional neighbours prior to and in the wake of disasters;
- an hemispheric framework, or financial support mechanism, to ease the burden on States of the delivery costs for transmitting aid in times of crisis. Sometimes these costs are either prohibitive or not cost efficient, despite the heartfelt desire to assist.

### **Physical Integration of the Americas**

History is already proving that enhanced and equitable integration of Countries into global trade and information networks have positive effects on transnational flows of skills, information, goods, and produces synergies for development.

As a Nation with an economic bedrock of tourism and financial services, and one that depends heavily on imports, strengthening hemispheric integration is a priority for The Bahamas.

It is indisputable that increasing direct air and sea transportation, with backward and forward linkages throughout the Hemisphere, will decrease the costs of shipping, and therefore, import costs for Member States and consumers; as well as the costs of doing business transactions for all citizens of the Americas. Re-prioritising of physical integration across the Hemisphere is, therefore, a must. Experience also dictates that past approaches are not viable.

### **Conclusion**

This brings me, Mr. President, by way of conclusion, to the crux of my intervention, and to the hope that this Summit will produce catalytic and qualitative changes, whose impact our citizens can experience long before the National Report on this Summit is due. To date, our National Implementation Reports have essentially been a collection of individual, parallel initiatives, more by default from the benefit of normal governance, than value-added from hemispheric focus, maximising the pooling of resources. Can we not reverse this, as our Theme bids us? Can we not rally around a 'flag-ship' strategy under each of our thematic areas, propelled by best practice, technical assistance, partnership, resolve, and, joint implementation? As suggestions to this end, I highlight:

- **Under Poverty and Equality:** a **comprehensive** approach, linking especially education, food security, cultural values, and, inter-generational collaboration.

- **Under Citizen Security and Transnational Organised Crime:** a zero tolerance approach; hemispheric naval collaboration against piracy; and, based on existing INTERPOL mechanisms, an intensified response to those who threaten the freedom of the high seas and citizen security and well-being.
- **Under Access to and the Use of ICT for Health Care/Education Needs of Rural Populations:** enhanced rural connectivity; ICT as a core subject for all students, taught by teachers with ICT certification; and, sustainable ICT quality-of-service protocols.
- **Under Disaster Risk Reduction and Management:** closure of disaster preparedness and management gaps, such as uneven, weak building codes; and, an hemispheric policy consensus for responsive and fair disaster insurance products.
- **Under Physical Integration of The Americas:** re-prioritisation of direct transportation within the Hemisphere, through Private Sector incentives, for intra- and inter-regional airlines; and, through a joint approach to advertisement of the Hemisphere, which show-cases its diversity, to ‘grow’ the tourism product, for mutual benefit of all Member States of the Hemisphere, beyond traditional competition.
- Finally, with respect to the **war on drugs:** firstly, in partnership with civil society, to weigh the health, moral, crime – inducing and legislative reform implications of de-criminalisation of drugs, in order to reaffirm the fundamental objective of the War on Drugs, namely the value, dignity and health of the human person as the ultimate investment for, and beneficiary of, quality of life. Secondly, recognition of, and recourse for, the increasing new scourge of addiction to prescription drugs in our Hemisphere.

I end by recalling to your memory the quote at the beginning of my Remarks from the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias. I wish to add: The greatest partnership begins and ends with an individual, who can give, as much as he receives.

I thank you.