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**STATEMENT BY THE MOST HONOURABLE PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA
VI SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Cartagena de Indias, Colombia – 14th April 2012

Salutations:

Your Excellency, Juan Manuel Santos - President of the Republic of the Colombia
His Excellency, Jose Miguel Insulza - OAS Secretary General
Colleague Heads of Government and Heads of State
Distinguished Representatives All

Allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, President Santos and the Government and people of Colombia, for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in this historic city of Cartagena.

This is my first visit to your beautiful country and it certainly is a wonderful feeling to experience the warmth and friendliness of the Colombian people.

May I use this opportunity, Mr. President, to convey my heartiest congratulations on your country's stewardship of the Summit process and for your commitment to hosting a successful meeting.

You may not know it, Mr President, but the emblem you have chosen for the Cartagena Summit, the hummingbird, is the Jamaican national bird.

The hummingbird is significant as its wings beat as fast as the energies we as leaders seek to unleash on this region - energies of cooperation, equity and justice.

This energy is found in the heartbeats of our people and the rhythms of our music. This energy is found in the robustness of the region's trade and is required to make the growth, development and prosperity we seek, a reality.

Should we, as leaders garner the collective energies of our respective peoples, THIS IS a region that can and will be an indomitable force.

Mr. President,

This Summit has been convened at a time when our rapidly changing world is faced with varied and complex challenges.

The continuing impact of globalization, trade liberalization and a rapidly changing international political and economic environment threaten to marginalize particularly small, vulnerable states.

There is, now more than ever, the need for closer links among the countries of the Caribbean Basin and within the hemisphere.

We occupy a unique space. We also have unique challenges. There are still countries among us that are highly indebted and extremely vulnerable to external shocks. These shocks include high oil and food prices.

The high cost of energy for some countries within the region limits our ability to be globally competitive and constrains our growth prospects. We must address these fundamental constraints.

The theme of this Summit, “**Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity**” is, therefore, not only timely but extremely relevant. The objectives of unity, regional integration and cooperation are of critical importance to the Caribbean Community and Jamaica.

The issues being discussed here, including citizen security and trans-national organised crime, poverty and inequality, natural disasters and access to technology are of critical importance to us in the Caribbean sub-region.

1. Jamaica is committed to the eradication of poverty in all its forms.

I believe we all agree, that it is now critical that together we must seek to develop meaningful programmes to actively address poverty and social inequity.

It is time to get beyond discussions regarding the definitions of “inequity” and “inequality”. It is time to find ways and means of ensuring both cease to exist in our societies.

We must address this, not as an idealistic, romantic notion, but move our talks towards finding tangible, actionable solutions to eliminate both.

2. Mr President, Jamaica also fully supports the attention given to issues of development and social protection, particularly as it relates to women, children and vulnerable groups.

That we have five female heads amongst us today is noteworthy and significant. I hail my sisters from Argentina, Costa Rica, Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago.

We are still far away from gender equity, or even equality, but this is indeed a positive step.

It is one which I hope will also result in an increased emphasis on critical issues to do with women and children which affect our region.

3. It is important, Mr. President, Colleagues, that we renew our commitment to promoting and strengthening **bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and international** cooperation.

Forging an effective and comprehensive approach in these priority areas in order to achieve sustainable development and equitable economic growth is a critical element of our deliberations.

Mr. President, I turn briefly now to Jamaica's Focus:

This year, on the 6th of August, Jamaica will commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of our Independence.

For us it is a time for reflection. We will celebrate the significant strides we have made in building our nation, but also contemplate the strides we need to take to satisfy the hopes, dreams and aspirations of our people... for us, the journey continues.

In our fiftieth year and beyond, we will persist in our mission to realise equity, equality, and prosperity for small and vulnerable nations and economies such as ours.

I know all too well that the people of Jamaica expect real opportunities and tangible solutions for overall growth and development – as do all the societies we represent.

As such, we have crafted National Development Plans which are consistent with the various Summit mandates.

Conclusion

Mr. President,
Distinguished colleagues,

We should never under-estimate the power and potential of our hemisphere. We must capitalize on our strengths and assets, and remain true to our aspirations.

We must affirm that the region's greatest resource is its people. We must bolster that resource. We must ensure that our people are placed at the centre of the development of our hemisphere.

We should create linkages that enhance our prospects for growth and development. We must rethink our strategies, create synergies, forge and build alliances.

We must strengthen our resolve to create a broader and stronger platform of cooperation to benefit our region and hemisphere.

You can be assured, Mr. President that Jamaica will continue to place very high priority on strengthening and deepening the process of regional integration at varying levels.

Jamaica remains committed to the Summit of the Americas process.

We believe that this Summit is a most appropriate forum to discuss issues that confront our region and are important to the development of our people, at the highest political level.

It is for this reason that we are convinced that all countries of the region should have a seat at the hemispheric table if dialogue is to be rich and fruitful.

All views must contend.

Jamaica, therefore, looks forward to welcoming our closest neighbor in the hemispheric family, Cuba, to the next Summit of the Americas.

It is our desire to truly fulfill the aspiration of connecting ALL the peoples of the Americas in the partnership for prosperity.

May the rhythmic beat of the hummingbird's wings, which, in Jamaica, we call the Doctor Bird, be the pulse of this Summit – steady, sure and strong.

I thank you.