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**REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA, STEPHEN HARPER
DURING THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Buenos días.
Good afternoon.
Hello.

At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to express our gratitude to you and to all Panamanian citizens for having welcomed us with such graciousness.

I know that I speak on behalf of all Canadians when I say that we look forward, Mr. President, and indeed all distinguished heads of state and government, to returning this hospitality and to welcoming people from all of your nations this summer in Toronto at the Pan Am and Parapan American Games.

Mr. President, Canada is proud to be a part of the family of nations that makes up the Americas.

In fact, this year Canada is celebrating...it's only our 25th anniversary of membership in the Organization of American States in 1990. That makes us a relatively new member.

Canada is situated at the summit of North America, at its northernmost point. There are more than 4,000 kilometres between Ottawa and Panama City. Our context is vastly different from yours. However, we are united by our common interests and our shared ideals.

Canadians understand that our security, prosperity, and well-being are intrinsically linked to the welfare of the hemisphere. We understand that the challenges we all face in the modern world require common approaches and collaboration.

That is why summits such as this are important. Summits bring all the countries of the hemisphere together to foster that collaboration and help reach our common goals.

I might mention in passing that we also are pleased that all the countries of the hemisphere are represented here, and also of Canada's role in facilitating the American-Cuban dialogue that has allowed this to happen.

Canada is committed to working with our friends and partners in continuing to build a hemisphere that is prosperous and secure, and that is rooted in core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. For without these, prosperity and security cannot truly take root and flourish.

We know that a prosperous hemisphere requires a transparent rules-based commercial and investment environment. Trade and economic agreements and open markets. An open and dynamic private sector, widespread economic and social inclusion, and universal access to education. We need all of these things to create conditions for sustainable growth and job creation.

We also know how to build a safe and secure hemisphere. By working to prevent violence and transnational organized crime, supporting and strengthening the capacity of institutions to eliminate corruption, and reinforcing the rule of law by fighting impunity.

Also by improving health systems to help our citizens, especially the most vulnerable, paying special attention to maternal, newborn, and child health, and addressing pandemics and climate change in a coordinated and effective way.

And finally, in today's increasingly dangerous world, we must work to ensure that our hemisphere embraces good governance and democratic rights and freedoms. The Quebec City Summit in 2001 and the subsequent adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter were decisive achievements in maintaining democratic principles and values in the hemisphere.

Fourteen years later, it remains a practical guide and a baseline that enables us to measure our success.

Mr. President, we can be proud of the great strides that have been taken in our hemisphere over the past 30 years to strengthen democracy.

Today, democracy is the norm in the hemisphere as never before.

A remarkable transformation over the past three decades.

So it is now our collective responsibility to build on the progress made thus far and to ensure that democracy and human rights cannot ever be taken for granted.

This includes free, fair, and regular elections, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly.

It also means strong autonomous institutions including the judiciary, political parties, and an independent media.

As countries of the Americas, we must continue our efforts to strengthen these norms.

So, Mr. President, with our words, let us all reaffirm the importance of dialogue and cooperation among all the countries of the Americas, and through action let us work to achieve these goals and work to build a prosperous, free, and secure people...future for our peoples, for our hemisphere, and for all of the world.

And Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted as the last speaker before our luncheon break to wrap up early. Thank you very much.