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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT RAFAEL CORREA OF ECUADOR
DURING THE PLENARY OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

My dear heads of state and government of the Americas:

A fraternal greeting and sincere thanks to the President of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela, to his team, and to the people of this beautiful country at the center of our America, for the warm welcome they have extended to us.

I would like to greet the new Secretary General of the OAS, Luis Almagro, who was recently elected at the General Assembly session, held in Washington and who has a difficult but unavoidable challenge ahead of him: the radical transformation of this institution.

We express our solidarity to the people of Chile and to their President, Michelle Bachelet, who are courageously tackling the devastating effects of the recent floods in their country.

Our unwavering support goes to President Santos and his unshakeable political commitment for continuing along the road toward a definitive peace in Colombia.

But peace is not merely the absence of war. The insulting opulence of a few in Latin America, alongside the most intolerable poverty, also represents bullets fired daily against individual dignity. And so, I believe the slogan of the Summit, instead of “Prosperity with Equity,” should be “Equity for Prosperity.”

CUBA

Today we are witnessing an historical event. In an unrestricted triumph for dignity, sovereignty, and solidarity among peoples, we welcome our sister republic of Cuba as a full member of this forum from which it should never have been excluded.

Our joy, however, cannot be complete. The inhuman and illegal blockade of Cuba must still be eliminated. Also still pending is the restoration to Cuba of the occupied territory of Guantánamo.

VENEZUELA

My friends:

During the Cold War, this region was home to the bloodiest dictatorships, when no importance was given to press freedoms, human rights, or democracy itself. We recall, for example, that the OAS General Assembly of 1976, held in Santiago, Chile, was chaired by Augusto Pinochet's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The invasions and interference of those years were based on fighting communism. Nowadays, the argument is "the defense of human rights."

President Obama's Executive Order against Venezuela represents a flagrant violation of international law and, in particular, of Article 3.e of the OAS Charter.

The region's response has been resounding, rejecting the Executive Order and demanding that it be rescinded. No longer will our peoples accept domination, interference, or intervention. Their memories are scarred by the abuses and violence of the past. Panama is a good example of this, with the December 1989 invasion that led to thousands of deaths, to remove the bloody dictator that the invaders themselves had supported.

However, the illegal interventionism continues. A few weeks ago, officials from the U.S. Department of State asked Congress for funds for, and I quote, "support for freedom of the press, human rights, and democracy in the Hemisphere, including in Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua."

Are we really interested in those topics? Well then, let's address them at this forum.

Let's talk about human rights

According to ECLAC, over the period 2007 to 2013, Ecuador has been one of the three Latin American countries that have reduced inequality the most. During our government, of the historic 12.5-point reduction in poverty, only 5.4 points were due to the growth effect, and 7.1 were on account of redistribution.

In Ecuador we have no torture, death penalty, or extrajudicial executions. With the judicial reform approved by the citizens in a popular consultation in 2011, our judges are selected by merit-based public competitions organized by an autonomous agency of the executive branch.

Finally, Ecuador is one of only seven countries of the 35 in the Hemisphere that have signed absolutely **all** the inter-American human rights instruments. Many countries have not even ratified the American Convention on Human Rights, the Pact of San José.

Reforms

The fact is that we need not only a new human rights system, but a new inter-American system. We must understand that the Americas to the north and to the south of the Rio Grande are different, and we must communicate as blocs.

The Organization of American States, the OAS, has historically been the prisoner of North American interests and visions, and its accrued biases and atavisms make it inefficient and unreliable for the new times that Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing.

One example was the Malvinas War, during which the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, the TIAR, was torn up, which should be sufficient reason for the OAS to disappear. We extend our solidarity to the Argentine people and their struggle for the Malvinas, a brazen example of colonialism in the 21st century.

Another example is given by the decades when Cuba was absurdly excluded from the OAS, or the criminal blockade against Cuba itself.

CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, must be the forum for Latin American and Caribbean discussions, and the OAS must become a forum where, **as blocs**, CELAC and North America can deal with their common ground and their conflicts.

In the inter-American human rights system, a little coherence is needed: only the countries that have ratified the Inter-American Convention should be able to participate in its different agencies. For example, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has its headquarters in Washington, which has not ratified the Pact of San José, and, in addition, it is unnecessary. The Inter-American Court, based in San José, **can and must** be charged with promoting human rights and judging violations of them, as occurs in the European system, where there is no commission, only a court.

And since we understand that this would be difficult to achieve because of the interests that exist, it is probably time for us to have a **Latin American** human rights system. Everything is ready, because basically it is only the countries of Latin America that have ratified the Pact of San José and, consequently, we are the only ones that recognize and submit to the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court.

And let's talk about democracy

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States, was the main author of one of the most beautiful documents in human history: the Declaration of Independence, the second paragraph of which reads: "That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Wonderful words, but Jefferson himself was the owner of hundreds of slaves. At that time, even for those extraordinary men, it was unimaginable for black people to have rights. Almost a century had to pass following the Declaration of Independence for slavery to be abolished, and exactly another century for an end to be brought to end racial segregation.

Today, the elites of Latin America are still incapable of understanding that fundamental rights are for everyone.

When those elites claim that their human rights have been violated, it is because for the first time they are in equal conditions under the rule of law. When they complain about dictatorships and

authoritarianism, it is because they can no longer submit our governments to their whims and interests.

And let's talk about freedom of the press

When Latin America's elites say that there is no freedom of the press, it is because their media outlets no longer have the impunity to manipulate the truth, or because we dare to answer them, to challenge their hegemony, to unmask their lies.

We could ask whether a society can be called truly free when the right to information and social communication is in the hands of profit-oriented private businesses. And although this is a global problem, in Latin America – given its media monopolies, their family ownership, their serious ethical and professional shortcomings, and their shameless involvement in politics – the problem is much more serious.

I believe we all agree that a good press sector is vital for true democracy, but we must also agree that a bad press sector is lethal to democracy... **and the Latin American press is bad, very bad!**

DIVISION

And now we are accused of dividing our countries. Look: what a coincidence. They said the same about Abraham Lincoln, who is considered the best U.S. president in history. They called him “a tyrant,” “a despot,” “a fanatic,” and “a madman” for his noble efforts to abolish slavery. He caused a civil war which, had it been lost, would have led to the division of his country and Lincoln would probably have gone down in history as a criminal. Read what the pro-slavery media said back then. **Let us learn something from history.**

My friends:

With the discovery of the new world, North America and Latin America practically began at the same moment in history. Have you ever wondered why Latin America is not the United States, the most powerful country on the planet, and vice-versa? That is one of the great enigmas of development. The answers are numerous and complex, but without a doubt **one** of the answers is the kind of elites that dominated and still dominate our America.

I wish, President Obama, that it were understood that in defending your interests or because of misinformation, **you are sustaining those elites that have caused us so much harm.**

“That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

In Ecuador and throughout Latin America, we also uphold those principles and we will make them a reality at any cost, and not only for the elites or at some moment in the future, but now... and for everyone!

Prosperity with equity? I would rather say: equity for prosperity, but also sovereignty and dignity. The time has come for the second and definitive independence of our America.