



SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
April 10 to 11, 2015
Panama City, Panama

OEA/Ser.E
CA-VII/INF.20/15
5 May 2015
Original: English

**STATEMENT BY MOST HONOURABLE
PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER, PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA
DURING THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Your Excellency, Juan Carlos Varela – President of the Republic of Panama
Colleague Heads of State and Heads of Government
Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mr. President,

I convey my heartiest congratulations on your country's exemplary stewardship of the Summit process, and for your commitment to its success.

I am grateful to you, President Varela and the Government and people of Panama, for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in beautiful Panama City. We feel very much at home given the long and colourful history which Jamaica shares with Panama. It is fitting that Panama is host to this important Summit given its historic role in the integration of the Americas.

I express my solidarity with my colleague and friend, President Michelle Bachelet of Chile, and convey my sympathy and best wishes to the people of Chile as they grapple with the devastating floods affecting the northern region of their country.

Mr. President,

I am inspired by the logo for this year's Summit which depicts flying doves in the shapes of North, Central and South America holding an olive branch, which symbolically takes the shape of the unique chain of Caribbean Islands. The dove, as we know, symbolizes peace, and in this instance, demonstrates a common goal of equitable progress for the people of the Americas.

This Summit represents a platform for historic breakthroughs in hemispheric diplomacy and provides us with the opportunity to heal wounds which have festered for too long.

The eyes of the world are on this Summit. Indeed, it is a significant moment in the history of our region when all thirty five (35) countries in this hemisphere gather as one family to discuss issues of critical importance and to chart a way forward in the best interest of our countries and our peoples.

I am extremely pleased that finally, our sister nation and closest neighbour, Cuba has taken its rightful place around this important table. This celebrated move is a victory for the people of the

Americas, and symbolises a clear consensus that Cuba's reintegration in the hemispheric system is a vital step towards development and progress for the region.

I commend President Barack Obama and President Raul Castro for their bold and visionary leadership. We look forward to other positive developments, including the lifting of the trade embargo against Cuba.

Mr. President,

It is obvious that careful thought has been given to the selection of the theme of this Summit, "Prosperity with Equity: the Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas".

The Latin American and Caribbean region recorded only modest GDP growth of 2.6% in 2013. In 2012, it was reported that as much as 28.2% of the population in the region was living in poverty, with 11.3% of our people living in extreme poverty or indigence.

These indicators must compel us to act with greater urgency.

The disparity in the distribution of wealth is evident in the number of persons living without access to basic necessities. Our region's potential for growth and development is negatively impacted by high levels of public debt, unemployment and crime and violence. We must redouble our international cooperation as a community of the Americas to attain shared prosperity with equity.

Jamaica is fully committed to addressing poverty. We have made steady progress in certain areas, including access to health, education, sports, culture, housing and social security.

While we pursue greater levels of economic growth, we have also been implementing a number of programmes to protect and empower the most vulnerable, enhance their productive capacities and improve their well-being.

Mr. President,

Climate change poses a clear and present danger to our continued development, while the high cost of energy for some countries limits our ability to be globally competitive.

Jamaica urgently seeks legally binding commitments at the upcoming Conference of Parties in Paris which will be held in December later this year. This is a matter of survival for small island developing states.

Jamaica is grateful for the cooperation of our partners as we seek to meet our socio-economic challenges. In this regard, the Petro Caribe arrangement offered by the Government of Venezuela, is one of the finest examples of South-South Cooperation and is consistent with our Summit theme "Prosperity with Equity". We wish to use this opportunity to again extend our appreciation to President Maduro for the continued support of Venezuela.

Mr. President,

We remain concerned over the designation of, and provisions for, Middle Income Countries without appreciating that each country has its distinct challenges and should be treated accordingly.

Per capita income alone does not paint an accurate picture of a country's vulnerabilities and development challenges.

Mr. President,

Distinguished colleagues,

Our people of the Americas have great expectations of us as leaders. We have an obligation to ensure that they are at the centre of our decisions and actions. We must balance the books while helping people balance their lives.

This Summit provides us with a platform for dialogue and collaboration at the highest political level in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

Mr. President,

Let us use the opportunity of this Summit to focus, not on what divides us, but rather on what unites us. Let us seek to build bridges rather than to construct walls. This message emerged clearly from the CARICOM/USA Summit which was held just two days ago in Kingston, Jamaica.

In working toward this objective, we look forward to constructive dialogue between our two longstanding friends – The United States of America and Venezuela in the best interest of peace and unity in our hemisphere.

It is from this position that we are best able to address the needs of the weakest, poorest and most vulnerable in our hemisphere and move towards ensuring that there is “Prosperity with Equity” in our region.

We must ensure that when the pages of the history of our time are written, we can be justly proud that we laid a solid foundation for generations to come, and we restored our strong hemispheric family of nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you.