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**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF PERU,
OLLANTA HUMALA TASSO, AT THE FIRST PLENARY SESSION
OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Thank you very much, Mr. Juan Carlos Varela, President of the sister republic of Panama. First of all I would like to acknowledge and thank the warmth and affection with which all the delegations from Latin America and the Caribbean have been received, and to state that although today we are gathered here at the Seventh Summit of the Americas, the topic that has brought us here is that of equity and that we see it as a challenge. And if the process of equity or the quest for equality is indeed a challenge, we have not made the same progress that we have made with other principles, such as liberty. Today nobody questions the principle of liberty, but we do have to reach agreements for reducing levels of inequality.

Latin America is not the planet's poorest region and yet, in spite of the good years of economic growth, we remain the most unequal region. And it is important that we reflect on that topic because here, in Latin America, we must understand that the chief enemy is not one of us: the chief enemy is inequality, hunger, and poverty.

There is violence in the world, there are conflicts in the world. However, to cite just one figure, between 2004 and 2009 there were approximately 55,000 victims of violence, wars, and terrorism, but between 2010 and 2012 alone, according to figures from the FAO, a quarter of a million people died in Somalia as a result of drought and hunger. That shows us where our real enemies are, and it forces us to understand that we must work in cooperation, not only because it is a challenge but because it is a duty.

And so, after hearing all the different friends, my brothers and sisters who have spoken before me, and I have decided to speak a little about what must unite us instead of dividing us.

Across the rest of the planet there are other, more violent conflicts; here, we are discussing topics that should instead unite us. I believe that the peoples of the Americas are expecting their leaders, all of us, to use forums like this one to produce concrete suggestions and for us to break free from all these constraints of the past.

For that reason, I salute the reincorporation of Cuba into this forum: our historical Cuba, whose vast armies of physicians and teachers have spread across the entire Latin American region, bringing disinterested cooperation for the development of our peoples. And I also salute the struggles of each of our peoples in combating hunger, in combating inequality.

There are more challenges in the area of equality. Today, an environmental problem faces us. Recently, the World Climate Change Conference was held in Lima, and I believe this is a struggle that must not only be waged from one COP to the next, but rather that each World Conference must adopt measures.

Our brothers and sisters in Chile are suffering the onslaught of nature, as we are in Peru, and that is the result of climate change. These problems alter agricultural calendars, aggravate phenomena like El Niño and, while the countries of the first world discuss how much they will contribute to the Green Fund, countries like Chile and Peru are paying the price of that climate change, because the nations of Latin America are at the top of the list of those affected by climate change.

Another topic that I believe it is important to address in our fight against inequality and for equity are certain policies that we must strengthen. On occasions we are told that economic growth is the essential factor in escaping underdevelopment and reducing equality differentials. But, while it is important, it is not the whole story: what's more, according to figures from ECLAC, this year average growth in Latin America is not optimal.

What we must examine here are two factors that go hand-in-hand with economic growth: efficiency in spending, and the quality of investments. That is true today more than ever, when we see the effects, the externalities, the prospects of lower prices for minerals and for oil that affect us all, particularly those countries that are producers of raw materials. What we must improve is the prioritization of spending and investment and, in that, it is important to be clear on a number of policies that can make a difference and ensure the sustainability of each country's development process, and one example of this is education policy. Much has been said about education and I believe a consensus now exists. I applaud the fact that we now have it clear: probably, 30 or 40 years ago, that was not the case, because since independence we became accustomed to being exporters of raw materials and, consequently, instead of being an investment for people, education was an expense, because education was elitist. Today we have achieved mass education and we want to attain the same mass levels of quality in education.

Over this decade of buoyant economic growth in Latin America, we have reduced inequality and we have reduced poverty rates, and that sets us a new challenge: we have strengthened the growth processes of the middle class and that means we have a middle class that is demanding not only services, but also quality in those services, and that is another challenge facing our states and governments.

For that reason, Latin America must address the issue of equity through cooperation, and I believe that education policy is essential in that undertaking. Enabling quality education, the better incorporation of new generations of young people into the labor market, will enable another policy, which is the policy of productive diversification.

Latin America has to understand that we need to diversify our output. If we attempt to follow the traditional path of exporting raw materials, we will always be at the mercy of changing prices on the major markets. What we need now is to bet on the intelligence of our peoples, of our nations, and on their capacity, through innovation, science, and technology and, for that, cooperation on transfers of technology is necessary. Previously, in our transactions, the topic of technological transfers was taboo, it was not mentioned.

In today's Peru, our processes involve transfers of technology and, in many cases, these are processes that take place between governments, so that with each passing day, we can have a better trained working class.

The other policy that we must institutionalize in Latin America is social policy, which is not a policy of governments but of the state. Instead of merely involving a social program, it must also address the equality shortcomings that exist in places where the state has never had a presence. Generally, the states of Latin America have focused on their coastal areas, capital cities, and urban areas, but we have left pockets of inefficiency in rural areas, where we must also be represented.

Social policy builds social programs that are the way to deal with those areas where policy does not reach, where we have people living in poverty and extreme poverty; but we need to understand that a social program as such cannot resolve the problem of poverty: we need to construct second-generation social programs to enable our citizens to be incorporated and included in a productive way.

I also believe that in this search for equity, we must all work for peace among us, without confrontations. I repeat: we must understand that we are not the enemy: the enemy is poverty, in many cases ignorance, in many cases the constraints of the past.

For that reason, I believe this forum is important: here, the things that must be said should be said, and the problems that often separate one government from another should be resolved. In addition, with that same imperative of peace, I would like to note that Peru backs, supports, and is assisting in the peace process being pursued by our sister republic of Colombia. I am hopeful that with President Juan Manuel Santos, we will find a Colombia that is free of violence.

Finally, I want to point out that today, we also face new challenges. This is a competitive world, and our counterparts in Asia are competing with us on the world's different markets. We need to understand that if we do not come together, if we do not cooperate and collaborate, in Latin America this could be a lost decade. I therefore call on all of us to leave to one side, once and for all, the topics that have historically and traditionally separated us and for us to join hands to lift Latin America and the Caribbean out of inequality. That is what I hope for from the conclusions of this event and also, as a country, as we assume responsibility for the Eighth Summit of the Americas in 2018.

Thank you very much.