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**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, DANILO MEDINA,
AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Mr. Juan Carlos Varela, President of the Republic of Panama;
Distinguished Heads of State and Government;
Esteemed Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS);
Representatives of international organizations;
Ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to begin my remarks by congratulating Mr. Luis Almagro on his election to serve as Secretary General of the Organization of American States and by wishing him the best of luck in discharging his new responsibilities.

Particularly at a time when the OAS as a whole is seeking to redefine itself and to find a new path that will enable it to continue to be the tool for the social and democratic progress of our peoples that it has been to date.

That redefinition has clearly taken a vitally important step forward in the right direction by undoing an injustice that had been in place for more than five decades. With the presence of the Cuban delegation at this Summit, we can finally say, quite correctly, that Panama is today the capital of the Americas as a whole.

To the satisfaction of all those present, the warming of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba offers us the historic opportunity to overcome, once and for all, the mistrust inherited from the Cold War.

Mistrust that, for two generations, has meant pain for many and a terrible distraction from our real priority task, which is to ensure the well-being of our people.

Indeed, if the encouraging peace process in Colombia is a success, as we all wish, we will be offered the opportunity for a Hemisphere free of conflicts. A new era, one we have long awaited, in which we can dedicate ourselves body and soul to the tasks of integrating and developing our nations.

Of course, this will not be an undertaking free of obstacles: there are obstacles in place, and there will continue to be. For that reason it is particularly important that we avoid creating new problems by falling into the traps of the past.

We therefore believe that it is unlikely that tensions between the USA and Venezuela will contribute to the climate of dialogue necessary for any initiative of political depolarization that we might wish to pursue in our region.

We must not forget that, in national and international politics alike, dialogue is the only guarantee of attaining the consensus needed for continued progress.

We therefore urge those two countries to seek diplomatic solutions to any differences they may have and to work for peace in our Hemisphere.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The truth is that if we wish to construct safe and stable societies, in which the men and women of the Americas can live and grow in peace, the greatest challenge no longer comes from conflicts between states or ideologies, but from the deterioration of our institutions and from the proliferation of organized crime.

And, most particularly, that of drug trafficking, the common enemy that, regrettably, continues to escape our efforts to control it.

From South America to Mexico, through Central America, the Dominican Republic, and the entire Caribbean, the transportation of drugs to their consumers, who are mostly located in rich countries, is a constant challenge to the stability of our democracies and to our citizens' lives.

It is no coincidence that, in the space of a few years, Central America has become the world's most violent war-free region, with more than 30 deaths directly related to drug trafficking for each 100,000 inhabitants, according to the UN.

I want to stress that the Dominican Republic is determinedly engaged in the fight against drug trafficking and against organized crime. This can be seen in the constant seizures carried out by our security forces, and in the priority we invariably assign within our diplomatic relations to cooperation in this area.

However, nobody can be unaware that our states have other urgent priorities in such fields as education, health, energy, or even other areas of citizen security.

Thus, although year after year we make the sacrifice of dedicating vast amounts of public resources to the fight against drug trafficking, that investment pales in comparison with the volume of business moved by the drugs industry at the hemispheric level.

The fact is that the resources of the drug traffickers are several times greater than the GDP of many of our countries.

And that asymmetrical struggle between fragile states and well-funded criminal organizations creates and fuels a cycle of corruption, institutional weakness, and poverty.

This is, without a doubt, a key factor in the social disintegration being experienced by our countries, and its continuation is paid for with the deaths of thousands of people, most of them young.

This is a situation that threatens to become endemic in some countries, leading in turn to uncontrolled migratory movements, which are another of our main concerns, particularly in Central America.

Clearly, this is a cancer that is gaining increasing ground in our societies and taking with it lives, families, and entire territories and denying their inhabitants peace and tranquility.

Ladies and gentlemen:

We cannot allow this topic to remain the focus of our discussions, year after year, in the face of our peoples' growing skepticism and frustration, without daring to open new debates, without exploring new paths.

We therefore applaud the OAS Permanent Council's adoption last year of a document calling for antidrug efforts to be seen in terms of prevention, public health, rehabilitation, and the necessary systematic evaluation of results.

Going further still, nations such as Uruguay and some states of the USA have decided to experiment with legalizing certain substances in an attempt to minimize the influence of criminal organizations.

These are experiments whose results must be evaluated with the same rigor as those of other experiments, including their impact on public health and crime rates.

But the truth is that, in the short term, the time has come to stop demanding that those countries that are on the routes of these flows pay the highest price for this transnational problem. Expecting our institutions and our national budgets to bear the cost of this struggle is not only unfair, but also unrealistic.

If this struggle is to be taken seriously, its cost must be shared equally by all the countries involved, especially by those whose domestic demand is what triggers the vast drug trafficking machinery.

It is unacceptable that while our societies pay the highest prices in victims and violence, the business continues to grow in the destination countries, in the shadow of the vast revenues that this trade earns.

We would do well to remember that the total volume of "narcomoney" in our Hemisphere is divided approximately into 20% that is earned on the journey to the consumer countries and 80% that remains in the destination countries.

For all those reasons, let us understand that, just as we share the desire and urgency to see this topic resolved once and for all, it is necessary that all our countries participate with the same level of responsibility, and each in accordance with its possibilities.

Ladies and gentlemen:

In spite of the complex challenges that await us, I am convinced that we have many reasons for optimism.

Only three decades ago, the Cold War still fueled conflicts and wars, both between our nations and within them. Today, one of our greatest problems is how to combine the numerous initiatives for integration and cooperation that we have on our agenda. That is, of course, a very welcome change.

I am certain that we will be able to continue that process of change and to take it further. And that we will make use of it to launch productive initiatives that will provide our people with well-being and development.

Among those, as I did at our meeting with the private sector, I would like to make particular mention of the importance of working together, in coordination, to expand value chains in our region.

This is a key area for bolstering our Hemisphere's productivity on the global market and, accordingly, for responding to the millions of people who are awaiting a decent job and decent earnings.

It is necessary to make the Americas, as a region, a great factory for the world, building our own competitive and sustainable model of development.

In addition, we will continue working to forge new agreements in the area of human security, in its broadest sense. Agreements that will provide a response to our common challenges, which range from the threat of organized crime and the management of migratory flows to the challenges of climate change and natural disasters, which we are unable to tackle through individual solutions.

You may remain certain that the Dominican Republic will always be at your disposal, always willing to contribute to that effort. Let us combine our energies with those of the Americas represented here today, ever more complete and united, to respond to the needs of our peoples.

Thank you very much.