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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
HIS EXCELLENCY BAN-KI MOON**

**REMARKS AT INAUGURATION CEREMONY
OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

Panama City, Panama
Friday, April 10, 2015

Excelentísimo Señor Juan Carlos Varela, Presidente de Panamá,
Excelentísimo Señor José Miguel Insulza, Secretario General de la Organización de Estados Americanos,
Distinguidos Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno,
Excelencias,
Distinguidos invitados,
Damas y caballeros,

Es para mí un honor participar en esta histórica Cumbre de las Américas, y doy las gracias al Presidente Varela por su amable invitación y hospitalidad.

Las Naciones Unidas tienen un largo historial de estrecha colaboración con el pueblo y el Gobierno de Panamá, y yo valoro mucha esa relación.

Panama is known for being a bridge between two continents, and for providing passage between two great oceans.

It is therefore fitting that we meet here this year when United Nations Member States are preparing to build a bridge and provide passage to a sustainable future for all humankind,

The theme of this seventh Summit of the Americas -- prosperity with equity -- encapsulates our shared quest to build lives of dignity for all, not just the few.

Throughout the hemisphere we see a region that is ever more committed to peace... to democracy, human rights and inclusion ... and to sustainable development.

These themes represent the three key pillars of the United Nations, and are central to the concerns of this Summit.

First, the region is upholding its status as a zone of peace.

This is visible in your solidarity with countries in need and your growing engagement in UN peacekeeping activities.

The Americas are overcoming long-standing divisions in historic ways as we see in this very room.

This is the first time that all 35 Member States are participating in the Summit of the Americas.

I congratulate President Varela for this initiative.

The presence here today of President Raul Castro of Cuba embodies a goal long expressed by many in the region.

I would like to again commend the leadership of President Castro and President Obama for initiating a normalization of bilateral relations.

This is in line with the UN Charter's goal of promoting good neighbourly relations and with longstanding calls by a majority of UN Member States over many years.

I also commend President Santos and the people and Government of Colombia, and all parties to the peace talks taking place in Havana.

More broadly, I hope the region will continue relying on dialogue to address differences -- both between and within states.

This is essential to deepening not only peace, but democracy.

Excellencies,

That leads to my second point – the encouraging advance of democratic practice throughout the Americas.

Your region has been at the forefront in the adoption of regional instruments to protect and promote democracy and human rights.

I urge that this momentum continues, including though support for the Inter-American Human Rights System.

I welcome the advances you have made in women's participation in political leadership.

We cannot generate prosperity and equity for all people unless we involve all people.

In March I attended a very inspiring event on women in power and decision-making organized by President Michelle Bachelet of Chile.

The Americas has the highest number of women serving as heads of state or government and the highest percentage of women parliamentarians.

This progress, however, is only a start.

More advances are needed, especially to end violence against women, where we must match words with laws that are observed and enforced.

We must also do more to ensure the effective inclusion of groups that have been historically marginalized, such as indigenous peoples and communities of African descent.

This also means ensuring that indigenous peoples are adequately consulted about major infrastructure projects and investments that affect their territories or ways of life.

Let us also work harder to engage youth and empower them with opportunity and jobs.

I welcome the focus you have placed on youth at this Summit.

Sadly, youth are among the first and worst victims of the violence, insecurity and social conflict that still affect many areas.

Some countries of the region are being held at gunpoint by transnational organized crime, gang violence and drug trafficking.

Illicit flows between drug-producing and drug-consuming countries have bred criminality and brutality.

I have been impressed by the regional discussions you have established over recent years regarding the world drug problem in the Americas.

I encourage you to make the most of next year's worldwide discussions on drugs during the UN General Assembly Special Session on this issue in 2016.

Excellencies,

My third point relates to eradicating poverty, reducing inequality and promoting sustainable development.

Much of the Americas has made impressive progress in fighting poverty.

The challenge for this region -- and the world -- is pursuing prosperity with equity.

I urge you to continue pursuing poverty-reduction efforts and to use the same dedication you have shown in this task to reduce inequality.

I salute the strong contribution of the Americas in defining the post-2015 development agenda.

I invite you all to make a positive contribution at the highest level to the third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July.

I also invite all of you to participate in the events surrounding the next General Assembly session of the United Nations in New York.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the United Nations and on 25 to 27 September we will be holding a special Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, with a set of inspiring sustainable development goals.

One of the keys to successfully implementing that agenda will be our success in combatting climate change.

The Americas have been at the vanguard of discussions on key issues regarding climate change.

Caribbean nations, which are among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, have played a major role in placing this issue on the global agenda.

The region's work in crucial areas such as adaptation and mitigation sets an important example for the world.

This was evident again during the successful Conference of the Parties held in Lima, in Peru, last December.

As we draw nearer to the Paris Conference of Parties in December, all nations must play their part in forging a meaningful universal climate change agreement.

I count on your support.

Excellencies,
This is a year of passage.

Over the horizon is a brighter, more sustainable future – a future of prosperity with equity, where no-one is left behind.

A life of dignity for all.

Each country of the Americas is well-positioned to help us get there.

The United Nations is here to support and accompany you.

Thank you. Obrigado. Merci. Muchas Gracias.