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Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF ST KITTS & NEVIS
THE RT HON DR DENZIL L DOUGLAS

VI SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
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Dispersed as we are across this vast hemisphere, this Sixth Summit of the Americas presents an special opportunity for our region to move beyond mere rhetoric, and to confront, as one, the crucial issues we face as a region. Most importantly it calls upon us to summon new energies and resources to **improve the lives of our peoples**. This, in essence, is how we can best connect the Americas - in a spirit of partnership, in our shared quest for prosperity. This, Esteemed Colleagues, is why we are here. And so, whatever our disparate national interests, this is the fundamental point on which we must focus at this Summit so graciously hosted by the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Chair, the hospitality, cordiality, and warmth of todos los Colombianos is deeply appreciated, and my delegation wishes to thank the collective generosity of the Government and people of Colombia for the warmth of their welcome, as well as to highlight, for special mention, the bounteous spirit of the people of Cartagena de Indias. We have truly been made to feel at home.

Mr. Chair, if we are to give real impetus to the theme of this Summit, it is imperative that we, as a region, both seek and demonstrate greater cohesion. For it is only through this singularity of purpose that our hemisphere will be able to maximize - and indeed, optimize – resources, through the sharing of best practices in education...healthcare...poverty alleviation...increased trade...socio-cultural interaction...the promotion and fostering of peace. Indeed, greater cooperation and collaboration is essential, Esteemed Colleagues, if we are to dramatically reduce – and hopefully halt - the wastage of resources that results when individual concepts are formulated, not in relation to the hemispheric whole, but in a vacuum. As Heads of State and Government, then, let us move beyond the talk and symbolism of ‘connecting the Americas’ to undertake the hard work that is required. Hundreds of millions living throughout our hemisphere deserve and await the connections across both technologies and space that our efforts can produce, and this we must deliver.

As states and civil society, Mr. Chair, as national and regional agencies, as public and private sectors, and as youth and social actors, we must be partners all in our people’s quest for true and lasting prosperity. And effective cooperation will have to be a key element of any hemispheric thrust to achieve this objective. Indeed, in this regard, the leadership of the United States over the past four years, reflecting the fidelity of President Obama to keeping commitments made at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in Trinidad & Tobago, is both instructive and inspiring. As a result, in the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, we see the spirit of true US/Caribbean partnership at last receiving the depth

of commitment that it has long deserved. Dialogue that has been institutionalized. Capacity-building mechanisms are now key features of this partnership. And Caribbean states have been imbued with a confidence that augurs well for our region, and undergirds our determination to continue building on this critical foundation, launched when last we met, indeed, in the precursor to this forum..

Mr. Chair, St Kitts & Nevis ensures the security of all of its citizens by faithfully adhering to all the regional and international conventions to which it subscribes, and by cooperating with our neighbors, throughout the Americas, in upholding hemispheric ideals. Indeed, small states such as ours, surrounded as we are by open maritime borders, invest significant percentages of our national budgets to this end. Addressing the challenges of firearms and drug-trafficking, gang culture, and other forms of crime is key to ensuring the safety and freedom of our citizens. Indeed, simply put, it is a crucial investment in the very survival of our state. Our commitment to Security is therefore unshakable given our awareness that with the enhanced security of each state, our respective national borders become safer; our people are less exposed to routine insecurities and, in the process, this all redounds to the overall benefit of our hemisphere.

The relevance of the core theme of Natural Disasters cannot be overemphasized where St. Kitts-Nevis is concerned. My Government has meticulously and thoroughly legislated standardized norms for disaster management through risk reduction, preparation, and post-disaster recovery. Even our most extraordinary legislative and other efforts, however, are no match for Mother Nature. In addition, our geography and size render us particularly vulnerable. And so, St. Kitts-Nevis works diligently with sub-regional and regional agencies to strengthen our capacity to face these horrific challenges. And in this regard, we remain committed to giving active consideration to advancing those legal frameworks that would facilitate a more seamless acceptance of international humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters.

For us in St. Kitts-Nevis, this is far from an abstraction. We are keenly aware of both the potential and the real-world effects of climate change on our vulnerable economy: our agricultural productivity and our food security...our tourism, other key sectors, and therefore our economic sustainability.....Indeed, we are aware of the implications of climate change for the very livelihood of our people, and their capacity to be self- sufficient. That is why, Mr. Chair, my country joins the call for a hemispheric unity of purpose in addressing this issue with utmost urgency, and for movement on the global front to better position countries such as mine to mitigate the effects of climate change. Viewed in the context of the devastation caused by the natural disasters to which we are susceptible, and the implications for loss of lives and livelihoods, St Kitts-Nevis understands only too well the inextricable link between the Summit issues of Security, Natural Disasters and Poverty elimination.

Mr. Chair, my Federation applauds the hemispheric thrust to confront poverty and inequality. We particularly applaud the insightful emphasis on education...skills transfer...social programs... health-care...and broader access to employment opportunities as the means to this end. Indeed, we in St. Kitts-Nevis have long ensured universal access to both a primary and a secondary education for every member of our society and, despite our scarce resources, continue to establish ever-expanding ways of making education ever more applicable in today's highly technological and challenging world. In addition, both as Head of Government, and certainly as a medical doctor, I am keenly aware of the direct linkages between Poverty and Health. This is why, in my country, throughout the region, and around the world, whenever the opportunity arises, I make a point of stressing the devastating impact of non-communicable diseases on education, productivity, and national budgets due to spiraling health care costs. And for small states, in particular, the prevention and treatment of

these non-communicable diseases, so directly attributable to poverty and lifestyle, must continue to be an utmost priority.

Mr. Chair, the Federation of St Kitts & Nevis intends to play a pivotal role in “connecting the Americas” and driving, along with our neighbours, the momentum towards greater interaction amongst our peoples at all levels. In this regard, accessing and using information technologies will continue to be a crucial part of the overall formula, since this opens channels for a first level of exchange, affords possibilities for the dissemination of ideas, and facilitates both training and education, as well as the delivery of healthcare, among other benefits. The innovative use of ICTs to achieve national and hemispheric goals is energetically endorsed by St Kitts & Nevis [where broadband access is now universal], and students have been sensitized to the value of computer literacy through the recently implemented ‘student lap-top programme’. With their newly acquired skillsets, the new and exciting hemisphere - and world - are now at their fingertips, just waiting to be explored, and improved.

Mr. Chair, St Kitts & Nevis values this opportunity to underscore our commitment to this hemisphere and to confront, with our neighbours, the issues that we all face as a region. Our citizens hold their collective breath when we meet as Heads and decision makers, expectant and optimistic that Summits such as this will be a catalyst for direct, impactful and positive change – not in the abstract, but in their individual lives. We owe it to our citizens to ensure that the decisions arrived at these Summits be translated into action, and that such action be timely. Our deliberations on all the issues before us, then, however intense, ought ultimately to provide a space for **all component states of this hemisphere** to be heard - reflecting the full spectrum of our hemisphere’s concerns, our shared commitment to addressing them, and our collective goals. This region deserve no less.

I thank you, Mr. Chair. And I thank my colleagues for their attention.