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PLENARY SESSION OF THE IX SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF BELIZE, JOHN BRICEÑO

His Excellency Joseph Biden – President of the United States of America

Heads of State and Government

Distinguished Representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have gathered in the City of Angels. The American city that most reflects the best and worst of the Americas. A city that is home to millions of citizens from every country in the western hemisphere. A melting pot. A melange. *Un crisol de culturas*. A city in which too many have too much, and too many have too little. A mirror of the Americas in 2022.

Los Angeles — a beautiful city endowed with abundant riches, where ambition coupled with hard work makes real the promise of the American dream – that a decent living is possible for the majority.

My friends we have come to this blessed place to refresh our collective will to do good, and to once again recommit ourselves to building a socially just Americas. From Barrow, Alaska in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south, the peoples of the Americas await the outcome of this 9th Summit of the Americas. Their needs are many. Their hopes expectant. While our philosophies and approaches are divergent, our vision is the same: to build an Americas that works for all of us.

But, we are at a tipping point. The Americas and the world face existential threats. As leaders, we are called to make consequential choices which will irreversibly shape our collective future.

Excellencies, will we continue to postpone the urgent action needed to reduce emissions, finance adaptation and mitigation and protect the most vulnerable countries and populations from the impact of climate change? We cannot.

Will we implement practical and innovative measures to alleviate the crushing debt crisis? We must.

Will we ensure that the socioeconomic devastation including the sharp rise in poverty, hunger and education loss caused by the pandemic do not result in a lost decade for the Americas with more irregular migration and insecurity? We can.

Will we allow ourselves to be divided by failed cold war paradigms or will we meet the profound challenges united and with common purpose? We will.

These are the questions which underpin the theme of this Ninth Summit of the Americas: “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future”. How we respond to these questions will design our destiny.

As we seek solutions we know that money is not the problem. For example, in less than three months two countries in this hemisphere committed over \$55 billion to Ukraine. The question is: how much will be pledged to finance the ambitious agendas we agree at this Summit?

The future of the Western Hemisphere is a responsibility of all the countries of this hemisphere. Irrespective of our size, or GDP, or our system of governance, we all have a shared interest in a sustainable, resilient and equitable future.

The power of the Summit of the Americas is the space it provides for all the countries of the Americas to dialogue and agree on joint actions. The Summit belongs to all of the Americas.

It is therefore inexcusable that all countries of the Americas are not here, and the power of the Summit diminished by their absence. It is incomprehensible that we would isolate countries of the Americas which have provided strong leadership and contributed to the hemisphere on the critical issues of our time.

Cuba has provided consistent, unmatched cooperation in health to almost two-thirds of the countries in this hemisphere including Belize. Cuban healthcare experts of the Henry Reeve Brigade were on the frontline in the very early and uncertain days of Belize’s COVID-19 response. Many Belizean doctors and healthcare professionals are trained in Cuba. The illegal blockade against Cuba is an affront to humanity. It continues to cause untold suffering. It is inconsistent with our values. In fact, it is unamerican.

The time has come, Mr. President, to lift the blockade and to build bonds of friendship with the people of Cuba. Similarly, Venezuela has done so much toward energy security for the Caribbean region through its innovative financing programmes. Venezuela’s absence is unforgivable.

Excellencies, at this most critical juncture when the future of our hemisphere is at stake, we stand divided. And that is why this Summit of the Americas should have been inclusive. Belize rejects the unilateral right of any country to impose exclusions. We assert, unequivocally, that the principle of inclusivity must be the touchstone of all future summits. Geography, not politics, defines the Americas.

The Belizean people, like people across Latin America and the Caribbean, are weathering successive and simultaneous crises. Caribbean economies are in a precarious place because of our inherent vulnerabilities to external shocks, including exposure to climate change and devastating storms. But the pandemic and now the effects because of the war in Ukraine have further battered our economies.

Notwithstanding the 6% recovery in global growth in 2021, CARICOM Member States, except for Guyana, recorded an average growth rate of 1 percent. A few Member States experienced even further GDP losses ranging from -1% to -6.3%. Member States were expected to record a stronger growth performance in 2022. But the effects of the war, rising inflation, rising oil costs and further supply chain disruptions have led the IMF to downgrade growth projection for the region. We cannot continue on this path.

This regression was not of our making. We are ready to join our partners in the Americas to design measures that will provide urgent and targeted responses to arrest this decline. We have come to Los Angeles to agree specific deliverables on climate change, debt relief, access to concessionary financing, energy and food security. With firm commitments we can move forward.

Now is the time for actions that are focused on achieving a sustainable, resilient and equitable future for the hemisphere. Action must include equitable access to vaccines and treatment for COVID-19 to end the acute phase of the pandemic and a strengthened and sustainably financed global health architecture. Action must include the Paris 2030 delivery agenda. We demand firm plans from developed countries for emissions reduction targets in line with the 1.5 degree centigrade Paris temperature goal, a plan to scale up climate finance beyond the floor of the US100 billion dollars annually through to 2025, and doubling of adaptation finance.

Action must include finalization and use of a multidimensional vulnerability index to determine access to grants and concessional development finance, so that countries like ours can affordably finance our recovery and build resiliently. Action must include debt relief.

Action must include a coordinated, multilateral response to the deepening food and energy crises including financing and technology transfer to support the acceleration to renewable energy.

Action must include finding peace in the Ukraine.

Today Belize affirms the integral role of democratic governance. Let there be no doubt about our unshakeable commitment thereto. The confluence of crises of our times requires all the countries of the hemisphere to work together in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. As we work at this Ninth Summit of the Americas, let us call to mind the words of El Libertador, Simon Bolivar: *“En la unidad de nuestras naciones descansa el glorioso futuro de nuestros pueblos”*

“In the unity of our nations rests the glorious future of our peoples.”

Thank you.