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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR,
MR. GUILLERMO LASSO MENDOZA

Thank you, Secretary Mayorkas (Alejandro, Secretary of the United States Department of Homeland Security); dear heads of state and government of the countries of the Americas; esteemed Secretary Almagro (Luis, Secretary General of the OAS); colleagues, and friends:

We are brought together by common goals, and all of us here today share the values of peace and coexistence, because we believe in and practice democracy. Democracy allows us to reach agreements, to dialogue, to listen to each other. We are here because we want to improve the lives of our peoples. We are here because we want to listen and we want to make proposals; we want to dialogue.

And today I am going to speak about migration, which is a problem for the United States, as well as a problem for all of our countries, and it will not be solved until together we make a concerted, creative effort to improve employment, healthy living, and educational opportunities in our own countries.

That is the only way to give our young people worthwhile, attractive options for living in their places of origin. Behind every migrant there is a human being who deserves respect, attention, and opportunities.

Globally, we must achieve safe, orderly migration. Ecuador, in addition to being a country whose citizens emigrate, is also a host country. For 40 years we have been receiving thousands of Colombians displaced by the border conflict, and over the last decade, we have received hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans.

In order to serve them, and to exercise public policy over them, I made the decision to regularize over 500,000 Venezuelan citizens based in my country, to provide them with safety and stability and to make it possible for them to participate in the economic development process.

And that is why I reiterate the importance of building a more dynamic regional economic framework, with clearer, more consistent cooperation, like what we are discussing here at this Summit. This is crucial if we want to discuss migration.

Because, my dear presidents, as several of you have already pointed out, any solution necessarily entails creating more opportunities in our own countries, and that is linked to the orderly management of the economy.

We are not entities floating in space like celestial bodies in different orbits. Rather, we belong to a single continent and for centuries we have been bound by many ties. Therefore, to tackle current and future challenges, we must come closer together in true regional-hemispheric integration. Only a large economic bloc will allow each of our countries to prosper, building up our economies and allowing them to grow.

President Biden (Joe, of the United States), over these past few days you have said that we need a framework for economic integration from south to north and from the center to the edges.

We also must fight together for a green, sustainable future, and we are dedicated to doing so. That is why we have created a new marine reserve, with Panama, Costa Rica, and Colombia: the Hermandad Reserve, which in Ecuador now has an additional surface area of 60,000 square kilometers, located in the open seas of the Exclusive Economic Zone of our Galapagos Islands. This is one of the measures through which we are helping to fight climate change and protect species, soils, water, and the atmosphere.

Health is also vital, and the pandemic showed us that when we cooperate as a hemisphere, we can achieve better results.

I would like to once again thank the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Chile for their solidarity in donating vaccines to Ecuador.

The most important achievement of the first year of my administration has been the Covid-19 vaccination process. We were able to save lives and to save the economy.

One year ago, barely 5% of Ecuadorians had received one dose of the vaccine, and the population was very concerned about catching the virus and dying. Twelve months later, we have managed to vaccinate over 85% of the population with two doses and 35% with three, and we are already administering the fourth dose. This has allowed for a faster economic recovery than was expected.

Experts had predicted that in 2021 Ecuador's GDP would grow by 2.8%. However, seven months into our administration and with the success of this effective, mass vaccination campaign, our GDP has grown 4.2%.

We have lifted 750,000 people out of poverty and have created 350,000 decent jobs.

Notably, we received a country with a fiscal deficit equivalent to 7% of GDP, which we brought down to 4% by the end of 2021, and we will bring it down to 2% or even lower this year.

Any democratic government does have natural legitimacy, but it must still gain legitimacy in the exercise of its position. And one does not know what one will face upon coming into the government.

What we have had to face in Ecuador is relevant to this Summit—as my Paraguayan colleague said—because it is a transnational fight: the fight against transnational criminal structures.

Powerful cartels are trying to establish their drug trafficking routes in Ecuador. And they are competing with each other, vying for land and trying to subjugate the population, creating drug dependency and other addictions in children and young people. They are also reaching their tentacles into other areas, like the trafficking of persons and illegal mining. And this is not happening only in our country. We see it practically throughout the region.

That is why we are making a valiant, sustained effort to ensure security, for which we need solidarity and support. Our countries are doing their parts, but they need decisive regional support to win the battle against these criminal organizations, which are dimming the dreams of children and young people throughout the Hemisphere.

All of this brings me back to the need to form a solid economic bloc.

I say to you all, dear presidents: the time has come to do this. Russia's perverse attack on Ukraine is changing the world's geopolitics and geoeconomics.

The countries we lead are the ideal providers for the supply chains that will be broken for the next 10 to 20 years. Now is when we need to come together in our efforts towards internal security, food security, production, and free trade. This, esteemed presidents, must be our mission.

Despite any passing differences, we must unite in this Hemisphere to face today's difficult global situation, following the pandemic and in the middle of a war.

Dear friends: before I conclude I would like to thank President Joe Biden and the American people for inviting us to this necessary Summit, to dialogue, to meet, to look into each others' eyes and talk sincerely about the problems affecting the region. I would also like to warmly salute President Iván Duque Márquez of Colombia, who left this Summit today, since his term will end shortly. His work in these past four years has made him a leader and guide in the defense of democracy, in security, and in Latin American prosperity.

Thank you very much.