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PLENARY SESSION OF THE NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GUATEMALA,
MARIO BÚCARO FLORES

Your Excellency, Mr. Joseph Biden Jr., President of the United States of America;

Your Excellency Mr. Luis Almagro Lemes, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS);

Mr. Secretary for Hemispheric Affairs of the OAS, Ambassador James Lambert

Ladies and gentlemen, Heads of State and Government of the Americas;

Heads of Delegation;

Observers and Special Guests.

Friends all:

It is an honor to convey fraternal greetings on behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of Guatemala. I am grateful for the invitation extended by the President of the United States of America and especially to the citizens of Los Angeles for welcoming us to their important city.

After 28 years, we meet again in the United States of America, where we initiated this process of engaging in dialogue and reorganizing inter-American relations in response to the changing political, economic, and social conditions in the world and in our region.

We celebrate the fact that the main purpose of this Ninth Summit of the Americas is to promote "building a sustainable, resilient, and equitable future for the Hemisphere" and that the focus of our deliberations is on forging a region with solid, inclusive, and sustainable foundations for all the countries in it. Guatemala reaffirms its commitment to continue working with the entire region to achieve economic prosperity, security, human rights, and dignity for all peoples.

Mr. President,

A little more than two years after the beginning of the pandemic, our countries have had the opportunity to reflect, share experiences, and work on action plans in the face of changing circumstances that require deliberations geared to constructing a unified region with solid foundations.

My country has spoken out in every multilateral forum proclaiming the need to renew the commitment to move towards true and sustainable development in the Americas. Therefore, allow me to comment on some of the priority issues at this Summit, such as economic recovery, vulnerability to climate change, the fight against drug trafficking, and international security.

Mr. President,

After the historic 7.7% drop in regional GDP announced by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the steepest decline in 120 years, we have found ourselves forced to work on economic reconstruction and reactivation. This reality has demanded the strengthening of ties and partnerships with the private sector and other relevant actors in order to counteract the negative impact of the economy and move towards creative and competitive development.

My country, with a population of approximately 17 million people and a GDP of US\$78 billion, is one of the largest and most resilient economies in Central America. The pandemic affected our country's economy, as it did around the world, but by taking appropriate measures, Guatemala experienced one of the least severe contractions in GDP, thanks to the Government's rapid fiscal stimulus response in 2020 and its focus on protecting its most vulnerable population.

Within the framework of public-private cooperation efforts, Guatemala is implementing the GUATEMALA NO SE DETIENE [GUATEMALA KEEPS GOING] PLAN, with a direct impact on recovery, reconstruction, security, and development. The Plan was consolidated in 2021 and has exceeded expectations. GDP growth was 8.0%, according to the World Bank. That was the highest growth rate of the past 40 years.

In 2021, Guatemala also recorded the highest tax revenue in its history, Q77,625.8 million, 21.3% higher than the tax collection target. At the same time, we recorded a fiscal deficit of 1.2 % of GDP, inflation was less than 3.5% in 2021, and we reduced the external and internal debt, all of the above as a result of the successful policies implemented by the Government of President Alejandro Giammattei, as acknowledged by the International Monetary Fund and by the risk rating agencies.

In short, our macroeconomic indicators continue to be quite favorable for the country's economic stability and its ability to attract investment. Guatemala is a reliable partner! Last year alone, we tripled our foreign direct investment goal, exceeding US\$3 billion, which translates into more than 40,000 new, high-quality formal sector jobs.

The country's economic growth is also a result of the tireless work of Guatemalan migrants, thanks to the capital injections made possible by family remittances. Our migrants' remittances totaled nearly US\$15.3 billion (US\$15,295.7 million), an increase of 35% over the figure for 2020.

Mr. President,

It is unthinkable for me to be today in Los Angeles, home to the largest community of Guatemalan migrants, and not speak out on the immigration issue.

At the same time, it is also impossible to think that we can solve this issue across the entire region, without taking into account the specific realities of each country. Migration is not solved by imposing unilateral agendas. We must not forget that the benefit will be felt on both sides of the border.

We are open to dialogue and willing to listen, but we also need to be heard!

We cannot break agreements already reached in the region, nor can we negotiate on unequal terms. My country has reiterated on several occasions the need to access Temporary Protected Status (TPS), so that our migrants can work legally, a facility that has been provided to other countries. Together we need to build other initiatives that favor safe, orderly, regular, circular, and optional migration.

In Guatemala, the main cause of migration is the lack of economic opportunities. For that reason, all initiatives aimed at fostering economic development, generating employment, and curbing irregular migration are among our priorities in the medium and long term. That is why the government of Guatemala is investing US\$3 billion in addressing the structural causes of irregular migration. In the short term, the government attaches the greatest importance to combating the trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

Migration is currently a complex issue, as we are a country of origin, transit, destination, and return. However, our principles have always been focused on full respect for the human rights of migrants.

Jointly addressing the multidimensional causes of migration and generating settlement opportunities for that population under a shared responsibility approach is the right way to go; emphasis should be placed on building walls of prosperity that discourage migration for economic reasons.

We share the interest in carrying out actions in the short and long term to generate development in our communities, particularly in the most vulnerable sectors.

Therefore, I reaffirm that, for the Government of the President of the Republic of Guatemala, Dr. Alejandro Giammattei, a comprehensive approach to migration is not only necessary, but a priority of our foreign policy.

Mr. President,

It is necessary to highlight the implications of the effects of climate change and natural disasters. We must keep in mind that our Hemisphere remains in a constant state of reconstruction and recovery, as it faces multiple concurrent and simultaneous risks.

Guatemala is recognized globally as one of the 10 most vulnerable countries, even though the Central American sub-region only generates 0.35% of greenhouse gas emissions. For this reason, it is important to highlight the fact that Central America is one of the regions most vulnerable and threatened by climate change, which has had serious consequences and impacts on development.

However, in this matter, we cannot think only of ourselves. I would like to highlight the serious situation faced by small, low-lying island states. The impact of this deterioration on our Caribbean

neighbors has also been devastating. For this reason, we are willing to work together with our brothers, in order to protect the Greater Caribbean.

Mr. President,

Guatemala is committed to the role of continuing to contribute to development processes in the region and is proud to foster South-South cooperation by sharing its catalog of offers of international cooperation, consisting of a portfolio of successful practices linked to the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Through this catalog, we contribute our willingness to adhere to a type of cooperation based on multilateralism and the symmetrical participation of all countries in new cooperation schemes for development. The sectoral offer that Guatemala makes available to the region is based on the principles of horizontality, consensus, and equity.

Mr. President,

The Government of Guatemala attaches particular importance to the fight against drug trafficking. As a result, security and control measures have been strengthened on land, at sea and in the air throughout the country, increasing the number of drug seizures and identifying air routes, their origins and destinations. In 2022 alone, thanks to various institutional operations, 1,213.13 kilos of cocaine, 3,164.77 pounds of marijuana, and 8,667,350 poppy plants have been eradicated, among other achievements.

In addition, the number of persons extraditable for their involvement in drug trafficking has increased. From 2020 to the date on which we took office, 82 people have been extradited for drug trafficking and 21 people for other crimes, a historic figure for the country.

Drug trafficking is the biggest source of corruption, and we are attacking it head on with historic results! However, as regards security, I cannot fail to mention international security. Since the beginning of the illegal, unjustified, and unprovoked invasion of the Republic of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February of this year, Guatemala has strongly condemned in all forums the continued violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We have insisted that the community of the Americas cannot remain a spectator in the face of this terrible aggression. This position is in line with the spirit of the OAS Charter, which safeguards the desire for peaceful coexistence, American solidarity, the defense of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of the States.

Mr. President,

The opportunity for dialogue afforded by the Summit of the Americas is more timely than ever, in a spirit of solidarity that allows us to move forward in the consolidation of new forms of regional relations and the commitment to turn challenges and hurdles into opportunities for development through new, innovative, and well-coordinated strategies.

However, I cannot conclude these remarks without mentioning that respect for the integrity, self-determination of peoples, democracy, and the strengthening of institutions are fundamental international principles that we must always heed. We cannot allow different policies, different ways

of thinking, or trends that we do not share to maliciously weaken our own principles and values and try to impose on us agendas that violate those principles and values.

The alliances and mutual cooperation that will result from this important meeting, in addition to enabling us to meet as fellow nations, provide an opportunity to interact with international organizations, the private sector, and civil society in the hope that we will make the most of this Summit to enhance the quality of life of our citizens, whom we are called upon to serve.

I conclude by reiterating that Guatemala's foremost concern is to emphasize that we are a country with a vocation for peace, a promoter of democracy, respectful of the rule of law and constitutional principles, as well as the defense of sovereignty.

I call for the strengthening of the unity and brotherhood of the countries of the Americas, so that we may be a single voice for the world and an example of fraternity, solidarity, and respect for one another.

Thank you very much.