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## PLENARY SESSION OF THE IX SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

### REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA, MOHAMED IRFAAN ALI

Chair, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in addressing the theme of the conference, “Building a Sustainable, Resilient and Equitable Future”, we must examine the important pillars for us to achieve these noble objectives, issues of democracy, equity, good governance, fairness, justice, race relations, security and partnership. In addressing these issues, we must have a realistic analysis of the current state of affairs in the Americas. In achieving sustainability, resilience and equity, I wish to examine the following indicators.

#### **Food Security**

In 2019, 7.4% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean lived in hunger. This is 47.7m people. This situation continues to deteriorate. By 2030, it is estimated that 67m people in the region will be affected by hunger, a figure that does not include the repercussions of COVID-19. In 2019, almost a third of the population, 191m people, were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity. All of this is occurring whilst in this region, in the upper tier, we have countries that are considered food secure.

In climate change, extreme events and changes in climatic patterns are expected to cost the region hundreds of billions of US dollars annually. Between 2015 and 2019 crop duration between sowing and harvest for soy shortened by 4.7% in Central America, 3.1% in northwest South America, 2.7% in southeast South America whilst growth duration for maize in the same period declined by 5% in Central America, 5.2% in southwest South America. These changes will continue to disrupt established cycles and yields. The number of extreme weather events in Central America has increased 3% annually in the last 20 years.

The Amazon, the world's largest reservoir of biodiversity and carbon is described as highly vulnerable to drought. Exposure to drought increased from 8% between 2004 to 2005, to 16% in 2015 to 2018. This has led to increased tree mortality and declining productivity in the forests.

In North America over the last few decades, and what is projected between 2021 and 2050, is that average temperatures are expected to rise by about 2.5 degrees Celsius in the United States. Floods, droughts, wildfires and hurricanes will be made worse by climate change. It is expected that this will cost the US Federal Budget about US\$2tn each year, a 7.1% loss in annual revenue.

In 2020, 59.7m people suffered from hunger, a 13.8m increase from 2019. There has been an increase of almost 79% in the number of people suffering from hunger between 2014 and 2020. In North America, more than 38m Americans including 11.7m children struggle with food insecurity. In

Latin America and the Caribbean, over 100m lack access to sanitation. Only 65% of the population has access to safely managed water services.

Some 51.2% of children and adolescents in Latin American cities are affected by some form of housing deprivation. Among three and four years old, living in deprived livelihoods, 51% do not receive any formal education. Latin American and Caribbean GDP per capita declined by 17.14% from 2019. The most recent survey indicates that the lowest income, 20% of households, receive an average of 5% of total income whilst the quintile going to the richest is between 35-50%.

Inequality increased on average by 2% since 2019, twice the annual average growth that marked the decade of growing inequalities in the 1990s. Thirty per cent of the region lives beneath the poverty line, one in five individuals lives in slums, and 60% of Latin America is employed in the informal sector.

Public investments represented only 1.6% of GDP in the region in 2017. The region today faces greater threats to democracy than any other time in its history. The latest edition of The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index demonstrates this fact, and we cannot divorce democracy and the rule of law from sustainability and prosperity. In this context, I want to publicly thank the OAS for its role in securing democracy in my own country. It is only our collective voice and action that will ensure the prosperity we seek is built on good governance, democracy and the rule of law.

The top 10% income categories in the region are responsible for 21.1% of the regional total carbon energy footprint and their per capita energy and carbon footprints were 12.2 and 7.5 times above the lowest 10 earners in Latin America and the Caribbean. Investments in renewable energy sources across the region jumped 65% in 2017 to 7.2bn, outpacing the global average of 3%.

Data shows that in North America, 35% of the nation's energy originates from petroleum, 10% from coal, 34% from natural gas. Proven reserves of crude oil decreased by nine billion barrels in 2020, a decline of 19% and proven reserves of natural gas decreased by 22tn cubic feet, a decline of 4%. Whilst we confront this decline, there lies opportunity. Trinidad and Tobago has an opportunity with proven reserves of natural gas of 10tn cubic feet and an estimated potential of 23tn cubic feet.

They must be part of the equation in finding a solution to this problem. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed 4.7m people out of the middle class; about 65% of the household of the bottom 20% of income distribution have experienced at least one job loss among family members. Within the top 20%, the percentage of job loss was about 22%.

The education gap mirrors the income gap between rich and poor levels of inequality in Latin America, which are some of the highest in the world. 51% of children in Latin America and the Caribbean could not read or understand this simple text by the age of 10. The global average is 48%. Data shows remote learning was particularly challenging for children living in most disadvantaged areas. By March 2021, about 121 million of the region's school-aged children lost or were at risk of losing an entire academic year of in-person education. This is the reality. This is the reality of the region we live in today.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, only 77% of 15-year-old students have internet access. Connectivity is even worse among low-income students at only 45%. In North America, the internet penetration rate stood at 92% of the total population.

These statistics and figures were derived from various reports of the World Bank, IMF, IDB, EIU, World Energy Investment, White House reports, USDA and ECLAC reports. We are living among these challenges in a region that has the potential to be fully energy secure, bring prosperity to every home, have the greatest access to natural resources, abundant land and access to water resources to ensure food security, enough rain forests and technology to make a meaningful contribution to climate change, enough access to finances to bridge the inequality and support sustainable development for all. The question is why have we not achieved this? Why have we not achieved this?

It points to systemic issues, and we must be able to have a frank conversation on resolving these systemic problems, not a political and ideological conversation, but a fact-based conversation aimed at uplifting the people of this region to a position of prosperity. In this context, I was happy to be part of a meeting yesterday with President Biden and Vice President Harris and we are convinced that the leadership is ready for this frank, fact-based conversation and we're encouraged by the immediate action as my friend, the president of the Dominican Republic would have said; we are encouraged by the immediate action to set up joint committees to look at the important issue of food security, climate change, energy security and financing.

This should be expanded to the Americas in finding solutions based on a time frame. Let us say to the people of this region that as political leaders, we are ready to tie ourselves to time-bound initiatives in delivering to them the prosperity we all speak of. We need as a region to have these tough conversations that are necessary to make the best possible decisions for the people of this region.

In my own country, we have seen and have been affected by all I spoke of; democracy was threatened. One flood wiped out 59% of our GDP but still, we are among the best in managing our forests. Our deforestation rate is 0.05%, one of the best in the world. Whilst all of this is occurring we have a standing forest the size of England, storing 19.5 gigatons of carbon. We have 11bn barrels of proven oil reserves as I speak, and an assessment of gas reserves is on the way.

However, as our economy is projected to double in size in two years, and as we are projected to be the fastest-growing economy, we understand that we are not alone in this world and this region, and the prosperity that we seek to achieve cannot be done alone. We belong to the family of humanity and we are ready to make our contribution to that family of humanity. We cannot be reckless and we will not be irresponsible in managing these resources in the interests of the world and in the interests of this region. This, coupled with the potential of Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and possibilities through investment and exploration with gas in Barbados, can make this region energy secure.

Let us get together and have a conversation that defines a pathway to energy security for this region. We have the potential and we must use every available tool, all the assets that are available to us to reach that potential, and we can do it if we commit ourselves to doing that.

The people of the hemisphere, before I go there, this conference must also define a pathway for integration of infrastructure, people and economy. It is important that we have that conversation on how we're going to integrate our people, our economy and our infrastructure.

In Guyana, in the last three years alone, we have welcomed migrants from Venezuela, 5% the size of our total population. We are taking our responsibility seriously being part of the family of humanity. The people of the hemisphere expect this conference to point to solutions and an action-

oriented agenda at addressing all these issues that will give them a better future—that would give them an equitable stake in the sustainable social, political and economic environment. I close by asking a few questions.

Can we achieve sustainability without democracy? Can we achieve prosperity with growing inequality? Can we achieve resilience with negligence? Can we achieve climate security without income and economic security? Can we achieve energy security without the exploration of our natural assets? Can we achieve and maintain this hemisphere as a zone of peace without dialogue and conversation?

If the answer to these questions consciously is no, then we have a broken system that needs to be fixed and I ask my colleagues for us to take collective responsibility in fixing the system, collective responsibility wherever we are in the hemisphere, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela. Let us take collective responsibility at this conference to fix the problem and fix the system in the interests of the people of this hemisphere.

Let us forge ahead to unite the Americas, and strengthen our relationship forged in respect and good governance so that when we reach again, we do so as a singular whole and create a winning formula and culture for all.

I thank you, and God bless you.