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## PLENARY SESSION OF THE NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

### REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF PARAGUAY, MARIO ABDO BENÍTEZ

Mr. President of the United States of America, Joe Biden;

My fellow presidents, heads of State, ministers, delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

I welcome the opportunity for us to meet at this Summit, a vitally important forum for strengthening democracy, the only acceptable form of government that is also capable of bringing progress to our nations.

I am referring to shaping a moral awareness of the supreme value of democracy; an awareness that once deeply rooted, will serve as the strongest, most durable shield against the actions of its opponents.

Accordingly, our primary duty as leaders is to make sure our societies see constitutional democracy as the indisputable form of political coexistence.

Paraguay has been taking sure steps forward towards consolidating its democracy. With multiple political parties, fair electoral competition, separation of powers, and respect for individual liberties, we have made elections the only mechanisms for allocating political power, ensuring absolute, undeniable respect for the popular will of the majority.

I believe this forum is a valuable space for sharing our experiences and reaffirming our republican convictions, while reconsidering the threats that could endanger the permanence of the democratic system.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The pandemic, in addition to threatening our most established customs, exposed our societies' needs like never before. We can say that the struggle against inequality continues to be one of the greatest unfinished tasks of our region.

Covid-19 taught us significant lessons about how to address the most difficult challenges. Our States aligned their efforts to focus above all on the most vulnerable groups, to ensure their situation did not worsen further in the context of social isolation.

If the pandemic served to help us sort out our priorities and experiment with new methods for managing them, this period after it calls for us to share the strategies we deployed as a response, and

to elevate them to the regional plane, as well as to promote, from a multilateral perspective, the unshakeable ideal of generating prosperity. To paraphrase the great Paraguayan thinker Natalicio González, I would say that we have the moral imperative to make sure that the American States serve free men.

But in addition to the old challenges, the times we live in pose new ones, such as organized crime. Criminal organizations have ceased to operate on the sidelines of society, and they increasingly permeate politics and the market. Republican institutions are not exempt, as evidenced by the level of infiltration we see in the public administration, the justice system, and political organizations, among many other spheres.

Given this situation, attacking criminal organizations' finances, their logistical system, and their links to formal power is the most effective, powerful way to arrest their progress.

This crime problem, which undermines democracy and severely corrodes the culture of legality, can only be defeated with mass citizen involvement and when its existence ceases to be normalized.

A few weeks ago, our region went into mourning due to the assassination of the Paraguayan prosecutor Marcelo Pecci in Colombia at the hands of criminal groups. This act was despicable and horrifying for everyone, but most of all for our brave law-enforcement officers, and it leads us to an unquestionable premise: if organized crime is transnational, our response must be as well.

We need joint solutions for this scourge that knows no borders and is our common enemy. As a demonstration of this, recently the successful cooperation between Paraguay and Colombia led to immediate operations that identified the parties potentially responsible for prosecutor Pecci's death. I would like to reiterate my thanks to President Duque's government for its commitment to justice.

This is the path that Paraguay would like to follow, in the hopes that it will be broadly shared by the countries here today.

I would like to call upon this forum to defend the rule of law and to not yield to organized crime, which intends to take over the spaces that should only belong to representatives of the people's will.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The climate crisis is another major shared challenge that we must face together. Although greenhouse gas emissions in Paraguay are low, in the past few years we have suffered the effects, with droughts, floods, and fires. For a country with no coastline like Paraguay, the impact is even greater. The lowering of the levels of our rivers has caused major issues with foreign trade, as well as with the generation of energy, since our electricity system is fully supplied by clean, renewable energy generated by hydropower plants.

Therefore, efforts must be geared towards mitigating the effects of climate change on our societies, through specific commitments, above all from the countries that bear the most responsibility.

Lastly, I would like to thank President Biden and the United States for their hospitality in this beautiful city of Los Angeles, which is home to the largest Hispanic community in the country and whose cultural diversity quite faithfully reflects the characteristics of our region.

With democracy in one hand and the rule of law in the other, we are excited to participate in this extraordinary meeting, together with our beloved sister countries that we see as allies in planning, on a foundation of consensus despite our genuine differences, the sustainable, resilient, and equitable future to which we all aspire.

I will conclude by quoting Pope Francis, who on account of the pandemic reminded us that we are all in the same boat and that we are called to row together, because no one can save themselves alone. This applies to all of the challenges that we share.

May God bless us all. Thank you very much.