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PLENARY SESSION OF THE NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, LUIS ABINADER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has cost the Dominican Republic much effort and sacrifice to achieve the freedom it enjoys today and that guarantees its citizens full enjoyment of their rights, equality of all before the law, and the ability to demand transparency and accountability from their government.

In areas traditionally discussed at these summits such as combating corruption and drug trafficking and the defense of democracy, I can safely and proudly say that, in less than two years, our government has made considerable progress.

Impunity no longer exists in the Dominican Republic. We have appointed an independent Public Prosecutors' Office and have promoted the appointment of autonomous professionals in key institutions, such as: the Court of Accounts, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Higher Electoral Tribunal, and the Ombudsman's Office. The controls we have put in place have led to a significant reduction in the various forms of corruption in a society such as ours in which there used to be a "generalized culture of corruption."

In addition, we have voiced our firm support for proposals put forward in the National Congress to enable that constitutional branch of government to adopt a law known as Extinction of Dominion, with which we hope to provide adequate protection for the public property of all Dominicans.

Our commitment to democracy is also reflected in external steps taken by the Dominican government, which has enthusiastically espoused our participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP), whose next meeting we will be hosting.

It is hard to believe that in just 22 months of government we have seized the same quantity of illicit drugs as in the 16 years prior to my administration.

That whole effort on behalf of transparency, to combat corruption and drug-trafficking, and to strengthen the justice system and legal security have made us a country that is attractive for investors, but above all it has created a State mindful of the needs and demands of its population.

We are fighting for an inclusive State, bent on achieving progress with equal opportunities for all men and women.

That was the spirit that guided us through the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dominican Republic was one of the first Latin American countries to restore economic activity thanks to one of the most extensive and swift recovery rates in the world. Our handling of the pandemic was exemplary, as was recently recognized by the World Health Organization.

We applied more than 15 million doses of vaccination, thereby contributing to an average death rate of only 0.7%, one of the lowest in the region.

To mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, access to credit was increased for productive activities; social programs, including labor policies, for the most vulnerable were expanded; and support was provided for transportation and food security for the population.

All that made it possible for GDP to grow by 12.3% in 2021, compared to 2020. The recovery of our productive sectors has positioned us in 2022 as one of the three fastest growing and most resilient economies in Latin America, according to the International Monetary Fund, Forbes, and Moody's.

In a globalized world and as an island economy, we opted to pursue international partnerships as a way to make the most of our competitive advantages as a country and as a region. Thus, along with the governments of Costa Rica and Panama, we supported the Partnership for Development in Democracy in order to foster our economic recovery within a framework that defends democratic values, open societies, human rights, and multilateralism.

Nevertheless, three pressing matters pose a threat to our growth and well-being.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a greater impact on our country and other countries in the Caribbean than elsewhere in the region as we lack hydrocarbons and are a very open economy, dependent upon imported raw materials. This is the first time that our government lacks a friendly nation to help it mitigate the oil shock. In the 1980s, thanks to the agreement of San José, Mexico and Venezuela, and then Petrocaribe in Venezuela until 2014, helped us with financing and special prices to mitigate increases in petroleum prices at the time. Today we are making a huge fiscal sacrifice to subsidize fuel, fertilizers, and food.

We are therefore forced now to seek ways to guarantee our energy and food security. There is a pressing need for supply measures acknowledging that we are in a "wartime economy," easing restrictions and seeking concessionary financing terms that will allow medium income countries like ours to deal with what is the direst crisis of the last hundred years and one that is wreaking havoc in the region.

There is an urgent need for new and creative mechanisms for granting soft or concessionary loans, because if we fail to handle this crisis well, growing social discontent and the conflicts that go with it could seriously impair our democracies.

Yesterday, we held a very sincere and productive meeting with President Biden and Vice President Harris, fellow members of CARICOM and we ourselves as representatives of the Dominican Republic. At that meeting, in which President Biden and Vice President Harris were very receptive and demonstrated their empathy for the region, it was agreed to establish joint commissions to work urgently on formulating recommendations that can be applied immediately.

A second issue is security. The extraordinary blows dealt to drug trafficking during our government have triggered reactions by other criminals in our country. Collaboration in fighting drug trafficking must be geared not only to stopping the flow of drugs to the north but also to boosting citizen security in our nations that are affected by the criminal organizations that use our country as bridges.

Thirdly, and no less importantly, I need and have a duty to refer, as on previous occasions, to the imperative need for the international community, especially the countries of the Americas, to act promptly to address the dire situation that Haiti is going through.

Haiti -- a country that historically has paid a high price to repay its debts to developed countries -- is crying out for, clamoring for, concerted efforts to bring peace to the country: the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. It strikes me and our government as unthinkable that this community of nations allows a State, in the midst of the Americas, to have much of its territory controlled by criminal gangs. The people of Haiti are bearing the brunt of the instability and insecurity generated by those bands, which are forcing citizens to seek alternative ways to survive, thereby significantly upping migratory pressure above all on the Dominican Republic and, to a lesser extent, on other countries in the region.

The Dominican Republic cannot shoulder the burden of Haiti's problems on its own. Indeed, it is already doing too much, much more than what it can withstand. The situation in our neighboring country is now much more than a migration issue; for Dominicans it represents a national security issue, so that, like any sovereign country facing a similar threat, we will do what it takes to secure our border.

It is up to the international community to engage in a definitive commitment to do more for the people of Haiti, to become more involved, and, as a matter of urgency, help with its pacification and definitive recovery.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now is the time for countries in the Americas to work together to find solutions to our problems and time for the United States to turn toward the region and, once again, demonstrate its commitment to leading the social and economic development of our continent. If we do this in a joint endeavor, we will not only emerge from today's difficulties and crisis. We will also show the world that we are the continent of the future.

Thank you very much and may God bless our countries!