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PLENARY SESSION OF THE IX SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FINANCE OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS, PHILIP DAVIS

President Biden,

Colleague Prime Ministers and Presidents,

Delegates and Representatives,

Citizens of The Bahamas and the wider Americas:

Colleagues, I have come to Los Angeles, California, the City of Angels, inspired by the words of the father of my nation, who once said he searched for the heart and soul of the Americas. Today, the Americas are challenged by crisis. Climate, COVID and Conflict have undermined our safety and our security. Have we done enough here, at this gathering, to relieve suffering? To promote peace? To fight for the economic dignity of our people? All the work and all the fine words do not count for much unless we can tell our people -- whether they live in Old Bight, Cat Island in The Bahamas, in Bridgetown, Barbados, or in Santiago, Chile – that we laid a true foundation for their progress.

Of course, the real test will come when we all go our separate ways.

Will the work we carried out here continue, once the spotlight and the world's attention have moved on?

Given that it's almost impossible to overstate what's at stake, we must hope that the answer is yes.

As we are aware, "Change is certain, but progress is not."

It should be sobering for us all that the issues we're confronting at this Summit of the Americas are more dire and more urgent than those discussed at the first such Summit, three decades ago.

That is evidence that the good intentions and optimism of that gathering did not translate into enduring advancement.

Indeed, some countries in our hemisphere have become more unequal and more violent.

Across the Americas, the scourges of racism and discrimination appear to be on the rise.

Emerging moral and technological challenges to our democratic norms threaten our capacity to deliver free and fair elections, and effective governance.

And all these challenges are eclipsed by the existential threat of climate change.

What each of these challenges have in common is that they cannot be solved by any one nation alone.

For that reason we offer President Biden, and Vice-President Harris, and the people of the United States, our warmest thanks for their hospitality and their promotion of dialogue and cooperation.

Multilateral engagement at the highest levels happens too infrequently – certainly when it comes to issues which are important to the Caribbean.

But if the work of this Summit continues, if the will to cooperate endures, if words turn into action –change can lead to progress, and we can move forward.

Friends:

June 1st marked the beginning of hurricane season.

It is hard to describe what it's like to live in -- and lead -- a country that is several storms, or maybe even just one more Category 5 storm, away from destruction.

Even now, we are locked in a vicious cycle of devastation and recovery: In the last twenty years, at least 11 major storms have made landfall in The Bahamas.

More than half of my country's debt can be linked to hurricanes.

That means that the world's failure to slow carbon emissions constrains the decisions we make in The Bahamas every day. As hurricanes become more frequent and more intense, the waters rise, and so do our debts.

Yet we need resources to make our infrastructure and our homes more resilient.

That is why my country has advocated for the creation of dedicated, accessible, and affordable climate-financing.

Our seagrasses and mangroves are playing – and with conservation and restoration, can continue to play -- a critical role in acting as a carbon sink. These “blue” marine ecosystems capture up to dozens of times the amount of carbon as tropical rainforests.

Carbon markets are an important bridge to a net-zero future, and we will be the first country in the world to develop and trade blue carbon credits.

Friends,

At this Summit, we have spoken much about the threats that cross borders – from viruses to carbon emissions to inflationary pressures to trafficking.

Another such plague, surely, is disinformation. For all the promise and progress of technology, much of humanity now carries with them a personal device that can misinform, deceive and divide as easily as it can educate, enlighten and connect. Conspiracy theories are not harmless entertainment – they can undermine confidence in institutions, unduly influence democratic outcomes, and set one group of people against another. Does anyone doubt, after the last few years, that conspiracy theories can kill?

Here again is a challenge no one country can solve alone, and those of us who cherish democratic freedoms of expression have a particular responsibility to cooperate in fighting for truth and transparency.

Friends,

COVID has ravaged our economies. Too many countries in the hemisphere have been neglected. We are grateful for the millions of doses of vaccines, but we must be mindful that the migration of healthcare professionals from the Caribbean to developed countries has been devastating to our healthcare systems. The Caribbean has lost health care professionals to the United States and Canada amid the worst pandemic of our life, making it harder to care for our own people. I join the Prime Minister of Belize in gratitude to the Cubans, who came to our rescue in providing much needed personnel.

Friends:

The dialogue and agreements which will emerge from this gathering are necessary precursors to much-needed action.

Major conflicts around the world are made worse by the erosion of democracy in many corners.

How we engage with countries where democratic values are declining is a major challenge for our times.

It is easy to talk with those with whom we agree.

But we must also be able to talk with those with whom we disagree.

In fact, sometimes those are the conversations that are most urgently needed.

All the countries in our hemisphere face overlapping developmental, security and democratic challenges.

Collaboration and collective action can only be of mutual benefit.

The absence of the Republic of Cuba has made these deliberations less complete.

We strongly affirm the need to always lead with consultation and diplomatic engagement, which is why we support efforts to breathe new life into the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

The embargo against our Cuban neighbours – the longest such embargo in modern history -- directly contributes to a rise in irregular migration which heavily impacts my country.

The easing of restrictions in 2016 led to a dramatic fall in irregular migration – a very welcome development for The Bahamas.

We deeply regret its rescission, and the corresponding rise in irregular migration which accompanied it.

We also believe that more can be done to provide support for our brothers and sisters in Haiti.

That said, we also believe that this engagement must be led by the Government and People of Haiti.

For too long the approach in the region has been ‘about us, without us’.

We must commit to new tools and more focused engagement.

Over the long term, we must also be mindful of the unintended consequences of isolation and separation.

When we push away those with whom we disagree, they often take comfort in one another, and deepen their alliances in the face of our hostility.

A former American National Security Advisor described this as an ‘Alliance of the Aggrieved’.

And such Alliances can challenge our peace and security and disrupt other relationships.

Friends:

Apart from the irregular movement of people which I mentioned a few moments ago, The Bahamas is also being hard-hit by illegal trans-shipment of guns.

We do not manufacture guns.

Not a single gun is made in The Bahamas. we have witnessed an explosion in gun-related crimes, crimes that far too often end major injury or murder.

I strongly urge those states in the region which manufacture guns, to continue to work closely with us to contain them within their own borders, and to do what you can to prevent such harmful proliferation. Surely the right to bear arms cannot be interpreted as the right to traffic arms.

Friends in conclusion:

We need to keep talking.

We all need to keep talking.

And we also need to keep ‘doing’: upholding our commitments and taking the action necessary for our collective survival.

Often, it is when the talking stops that the fighting starts.

And it is only when the talking starts, that the fighting stops.

If the institutions within our Inter-American system are no longer ‘fit for purpose’ then let’s re-think or re-calibrate to whatever degree necessary, in order that they might fulfil their potential.

The Bahamas believes that the OAS, in particular, requires both a structural and cultural adjustment.

Membership in any organization bestows privileges.

But membership also confers responsibilities.

And a basic expectation must be that members make good faith efforts to meet resourcing commitments to the Organization.

For almost a decade staffing, projects and programming at the Organization have deteriorated.

The OAS is, in many areas, a shell of its former self.

My country’s Mission to the OAS has been charged with focusing on necessary OAS reform.

We hope that other countries will join our efforts.

Let this gathering fulfill its mission to drive change in the region, for the better of us all.

Thank you.