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**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, JUAN CARLOS VARELA
RODRÍGUEZ,
AT THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE SEVENTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
Panama City, Panama, April 11, 2015**

It has been an honor for Panama to host the Seventh Summit of the Americas, which has just concluded.

Before anything else, I would like to thank the Panamanian people, who have followed the Summit closely and have been most understanding about the inconveniences caused by the traffic and security measures that had to be adopted to ensure its success.

My thanks to the Heads of State and Government and the delegates of the Hemisphere's 35 countries for coming to our country, to this gathering which, I am sure, will usher in a new period of respectful dialogue and cooperation in our region.

We are grateful to His Holiness, Pope Francis, for his message of peace, social justice, and solidarity with those most in need, which he transmitted to us through the Secretary of State of the Vatican, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the thousands of civil servants, security agency officials, and volunteers in charge of all the various technical, administrative, security, and logistical matters, for the diligence and efficiency with which they performed their tasks.

I also wish to thank all the media organizations that covered this Summit of the Americas.

The eyes of the world have been on our nation for the past several days and I feel certain that international public opinion has been confirmed in its view of the kind of country that we are: a country of pleasant, hospitable people; a diverse and pluralistic country that has welcomed the diversity and political plurality that exists both among and within our nations.

A country with great logistical capacity and infrastructure able to welcome thousands upon thousands of visitors at once; an economically prosperous country of immense commercial and financial capabilities.

A peaceful nation steadfastly moving forward in consolidating its legal and its democratic political institutions. A country of which we Panamanians can feel proud. Thank you, Panama.

Amid the diversity and political plurality that exists among and within our nations, we set the stage for a frank and respectful dialogue of the Heads of State and Government of our Hemisphere.

We have not sought unanimities, which are nothing if not impossible in plurality; rather, we have attempted to help build bridges in the midst of our differences and to spell out what unites us and what divides us.

The Summit has been both a wonderful multilateral occasion and, at the same time, an opportunity for bilateral meetings among different leaders.

The forums that came before the Summit, including the numerous activities that were not officially part of the process, have been prime opportunities for personal encounters and discussions of ideas and proposals, which have strengthened the region's democratic culture and will doubtless gradually materialize in decisions and policies.

We must congratulate the citizens of the Americas who have freely expressed themselves, acknowledging diversity and respecting differences at the various hemispheric meetings held in the framework of this Summit, including the Forum of Civil Society and Social Actors, the CEO Forum, the First Forum of University Rectors, and the Youth Forum of the Americas.

The theme of the Summit, "Prosperity with Equity," has been at the forefront of the agenda and our discussions. We proposed the theme based on our experience and that of all the countries of the Americas. We have grown strongly, but not all the population has benefitted sufficiently from that growth.

As the host country we proposed a document setting out Mandates for Action that would address the various core areas that underpin Prosperity with Equity: health, education, energy, the environment, migration, security, citizen participation, and democratic governance.

After nearly four months of intense work, meetings in Panama and at OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C., and a great deal of bilateral consultation, agreement was reached on 90% of the mandates put forward (42 out of 48); the rest were left *ad referendum* of a small number of countries.

There was, however, complete agreement in recognizing that the right to education without discrimination and equitable access to a quality education are essential to the effort to achieve integral development, eradicating poverty and inequality.

We have therefore proposed increasing the coverage of our education systems and strengthening higher technical education, together with creating programs and new employment opportunities, in collaboration with the private sector, for the at-risk youth of our hemisphere.

In the area of higher education, we have proposed closer ties between universities and the public sector, so that our places of learning can provide the scientific, technical, and social analyses, inspections, feasibility studies, and proposals for the public infrastructure projects that communities need.

In addition, we applaud the proposal made at this Summit for the creation of an Inter-American Education System to improve the quality of education in our hemisphere.

Similarly, we supported efforts to ensure universal access to health as a basic human right.

Energy is a central pillar of sustainable development, and in that area we agreed on actions that will guarantee access to energy from a range of sources that are environmentally friendly, economically affordable, and reliable.

In that context, and underscoring our shared concern regarding climate change, we agreed on mandates for the protection, conservation, restoration, and correct stewardship of the environment.

Recognizing the relationship that exists between migration and development, and the contribution that migrants make to their countries of origin, transit, and destination, we agreed on actions to bolster cooperation among our states and to protect the human rights of migrants.

During the discussion of the document proposed by Panama, we spoke about concerns regarding terrorism, organized crime, and other threats to our citizens' security, and about the need to combine our efforts to combat them, by strengthening cooperation among our countries and adopting measures to prevent crime and violence.

Finally, and recognizing that democracy is essential for the social, political, and economic development of our peoples, we agreed on a series of mandates to strengthen the rule of law, the separation of powers and the independence of branches of government, and respect for human rights, and thus we agreed on actions to promote and guarantee citizen participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies, together with citizen empowerment free of all discrimination on grounds of gender or race.

Panama believes that the vast number of mandates on which agreement was reached can and must be overseen by the institutions of the inter-American system and other international agencies.

Our government will be conveying the mandates agreed on to the directors of the IDB, the World Bank, CAF, and other multilateral financial institutions, so funding and technical assistance can be provided. And the same steps must also be taken with other multilateral organizations, such as the OAS, ECLAC, and PAHO.

We also want to emphasize that in addition to the mandates agreed on, Panama proposed – and received the full backing of the countries for – substantial improvements, between now and the year 2025, in the population's access to drinking water and basic sanitation and in the coverage of broadband and of secondary and technical education. Similarly, and in accordance with each country's particular situation, substantial increases must be made in investments in infrastructure and in their effectiveness.

Accordingly, we applaud the proposal made at the private meeting of the heads of state and government for the creation of an Infrastructure Development Center to support the region's countries in those endeavors.

We call on the multilateral organizations and the multilateral banks to step up their efforts aimed at supporting our governments in the identification of projects, technical studies, and conceptual designs of the public infrastructure needed to improve services for the population and to attain our goals as states.

We wish to thank President Ollanta Humala of Peru for offering to host the Eighth Summit of the Americas in his country, and in so doing we offer him our cooperation based on the experience that we have earned.

The Americas are today a hemisphere at peace. We have overcome the obstacles to peaceful coexistence among sister nations. Consequently, and to close the final chapter of armed conflict in the Americas, we applaud the major progress made in the peace talks in Havana, Cuba, between the government of the Republic of Colombia and the FARC.

We recognize the great effort that the Republic of Cuba has made, as the host, in support of those talks.

Never before have we been so close to bringing an end to this long conflict and to attaining peace in Colombia, which also represents peace throughout our hemisphere.

We therefore hope that the government of Colombia and the FARC can swiftly reach an agreement this year, so we can all contribute to that which is of the greatest importance to us: the implementation and consolidation of peace.

For a number of reasons, this has been an historic Summit. The invitations were extended to the Americas in their entirety.

The decision announced by the Presidents of Cuba and the United States to make progress toward a new approach in the relations between their countries created a legitimate expectation for the resolution of situations, both age-old and recent, that have heightened tensions in hemispheric relations.

This Summit has served to build bridges in that direction.

For Panama and for my government, it was a great honor to serve as its host.