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REMARKS BY REBECA GRYNSPAN, THE IBERO-AMERICAN SECRETARY GENERAL, DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 24TH IBERO-AMERICAN SUMMIT

Excellencies; Your Majesty; associate observers and consultant observers; special guests.

Ladies and gentlemen.

I would first like to extend particular thanks to the people of Mexico, and to President Enrique Peña Nieto, for this country's hospitality.

Mr. President.

I thank you, and all other Ibero-American Presidents, for the trust placed in me as the new Ibero-American Secretary General.

I am also grateful to the Government of Mexico for their excellent work, not only at this Summit, but throughout the year, and for their personal commitment to the strengthening of Ibero-America.

The region thanks you sincerely. And believe me, Mr. President, the love and appreciation for Mexico is sincere and strong.

This is a great nation with ancient traditions, whose culture is a symbol for all countries.

Your Majesty.

It is a pleasure to have you here at your first Ibero-American Summit as King of Spain. We are well aware of your special regard for Latin America.

You mentioned yesterday that you have been at all inaugurations since 1996. As I told you yesterday at the closing of the Business Forum, I had someone count them. They

are 69. You have been to our region 69 times, attending the inauguration of all the Presidents over these years. This is proof of what we already knew, your particular feeling for Latin America and the Ibero-American project.

Mr. Enrique Iglesias: Don Enrique. A special greeting to you with particular affection for bequeathing this institution, and for all that you built over the years and your fight for the Ibero-American space.

Thank you very much, you have our eternal gratitude.

The trust placed in me by all of you motivates me, drives me and strengthens my commitment. The roots of Ibero-America stretch back five centuries, nurtured by a history of migration, culture, languages and values shared on both sides of the Atlantic.

These deep roots have formed a healthy and strong identity, like a tree capable of carrying sap to all the branches of our cultural diversity, and whose fruits today are recognized throughout the world. It provides the basis for much of our vital foothold and our pride as a region. Ibero-America has an integrated sap, that is nonetheless plural, mixed and diverse. It brings together the Iberian components with the Caribbean, indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples, and each, in turn, has its own diversity and ancient, indigenous traditions.

The musical ensemble we have just heard is a faithful reflection of what has been said about the intermingling and plurality of cultures that came together in the common tree that is Ibero-America.

This is the wealth of this community of 22 countries that has decided to foster understanding, solidarity and mutual support to move forward down the path of equality, respect and growth with equity.

The world is not a place to travel alone. This world is meant to be experienced with others. As the African proverb says: “if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go with others”. Your Excellencies, I am sure that together Ibero-America will go far.

Since the first Ibero-American Summit in 1991 in Guadalajara, efforts have been made to build the institutional resources and cooperation platform that have led to practical achievements in culture and science, knowledge and economy, social cohesion and solidarity.

However, we decided to call this summit, the Summit of Renewal, with the aim of building on what we have already achieved.

Latin America is a very different region from what it was when it first participated in the Guadalajara Summit. Consequently, the means to meet our commitments must be reviewed and renewed in the light of changing times. That is the mandate we received from the Summit in Panama last year, based on the Lagos report. That was, Mr. President, the mandate I received from all of you in my journey through the region after taking office.

We must renew ourselves for two good reasons:

1. Latin America today has increased four-fold its GDP, and 60 million people have not only been lifted from poverty, but have seen inequality reduced, unlike what has happened in the rest of the world where poverty declined, but inequality did not. In fact, inequality grew in all other continents except Latin America, where both poverty and inequality fell simultaneously, and the middle-class grew in excess of 50% throughout the region.

This is, therefore, a different Latin America that seeks to build a more symmetrical, more horizontal relationship with the Iberian Peninsula. In 2005, the Ibero-American General Secretariat was established, and the Summit was transformed into a Conference. Today, we must transition from Conference to a Community of 22 countries that work together to develop a horizontal, more symmetrical, more supportive and more equal cooperation between all countries.

2. The other element that has changed since 1991 is the proliferation of integration initiatives between countries, many chaired by a president, as is the case of UNASUR and CELAC.

I would like to take this opportunity, President Correa, to congratulate you for the inauguration of the UNASUR building. I will visit it as soon as possible. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish CELAC every success. They will be holding their Summit soon in Costa Rica.

The emergence of other regional organizations compels us to seek complementarities and the comparative advantages of each institution. The main focus should be to add and not subtract, complement and not compete, unite and not divide.

This project does not aim to replace Latin American integration. This project seeks to complement Latin American integration.

When President Mujica kindly received me at his "chacra", or small rural cottage, even though he was ill, he told me that block-mentality was a problem, because blocks tend to confront each other; they do not coordinate with each other nor work together. He said that this globalized world needs more cooperation and less confrontation.

You were right, President Mujica, and that is why I affirm that the Ibero-American Community is not divided into two blocks; we are a community of 22 countries trying to do what is best for its peoples.

Our task is to build inclusive identities to build a better world. Exclusive identities only lead to confrontation and the world is full of bad examples. There is no room here for vertical or hegemonic projects.

While the Summit is a forum for political dialogue, the priority areas of the Secretary, and the Secretariat are the cultural space, the knowledge space and the social cohesion space. These are the priorities that have been vehemently proposed by all countries.

When referring to social cohesion, we aim to ensure that the economic and social dimensions coexist again as two sides of the same coin, promoting a more inclusive and equitable growth, while special attention should be given to structural gaps in the productive sector that affect MSMEs, the fight against socio-economic inequalities, and discrimination against indigenous and Afro-descendant people, women and youth, so that opportunities are provided to develop fully their potential. Lastly, you called for improved coordination and articulation of the Ibero-American institution. With the support of other general secretaries who have joined me here today, we have set up a Committee on Strategic Management of Ibero-American bodies to coordinate better, complement each other better and deliver more effective results.

The Ibero-American space should aim to build true Ibero-American citizenship, with concrete and tangible results. This is the proposal we present to this Summit. This is why the theme is Education, Culture and Innovation.

Simon Bolivar said, "Nations will march towards the apex of their greatness at the same pace as their education". José Martí also said, "To educate is to raise individuals to their own time".

I would like to concur with them that the nations that do not make education, knowledge, innovation and culture a priority are lost.

The Veracruz Summit is firmly committed to a knowledge-based development model. This is not a rhetorical whim; international indicators clearly support this.

Our countries can no longer and should not compete for low wages. We have to compete for talent, innovation, and our people's skills.

We have to compete to position ourselves differently in this globalized world. It is for this reason that the Summit has affirmed its commitment to early education, expressed in the magnificent letter outlining the 2021 goals agreed by the Ministers of Education of the region, within the framework of the OIS (Organization for Ibero-American States). We know that the divide between children coming from different socio economic status may be irreversible when they begin their schooling.

We are also committed to higher education. We support the 70 % of Ibero-American boys and girls who are the first generation in their family to pursue higher education. This is proof of the upward social mobility that has occurred during the past twenty years in the region.

However, we will fail them if we do not improve the quality of the education provided, and the quality gap in education is mirrored in the intergenerational transmission of inequality.

Therefore, we have opted for a broad partnership for academic mobility. Those boys and girls, that 70 percent of students, as well as teachers and researchers, may not supplement the learning experience in another country, despite the efforts made by their families.

Indeed, when we talk with and ask the employers what skills they need in their companies, they tell us that a major skill they need is the ability to work in a team and in a diverse and multicultural environment.

Therefore, the possibility of having a learning experience in another Ibero-American country, which may be a key factor to a good education, is important not only for them, but also for moving towards a more equitable society.

The European Erasmus has proven that the boys and girls who have participated in the scheme have had better job opportunities than others.

Together with the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture, we are proposing the Paulo Freire Program to improve the opportunities and training of teachers.

Indeed, the Ministers of Science and Technology are committed to providing a mobility platform for researchers, and promoting collaboration in research projects. We have also proposed, to complement this, a program to provide work placement activities at Ibero-American companies in order to boost young people's participation in the labor market.

As for the Cultural Space, you told me, President Bachelet, that we should approach culture as a means to build society, that we should not talk about culture as a luxury product.

Yes, Mrs. President. That is what we want to do; we want to talk about culture as the cement that provides social cohesion. Indeed, culture plays a fundamental role as the cement that holds society together, a fabric articulated around a sense of rooting and belonging, solidarity and values.

This culture, enriched by our two languages, is central to everything we do in Ibero-America. We want to acknowledge not only its intrinsic value, but also its contribution to each country's gross domestic product and its economy.

Consequently, we have promoted satellite accounts in culture and realized that culture contributes between 3 and 5 percent to gross domestic product, more than many sectors on which we usually focus, yet we do not talk about the cultural sector. We therefore seek to enrich this cultural platform that has been part of our Ibero-America.

I would like to conclude, Presidents, noting that even though we have made great progress in the region in reducing poverty and inequality; our region still faces major challenges.

Inequality remains very high, and we must make every effort to ensure that the achievements in poverty and inequality reduction in the region do not unravel due to the slowdown. We need to continue on the path of inclusive development, more equitable development, greater equity between groups and more socioeconomic equity in our region.

Andrés Bello, the great Venezuelan thinker, once said that "only the unity of the people and the solidarity of its leaders guarantee the greatness of nations".

This is also true today of our great region. We are here to renew our commitments and our partnerships. This means revitalizing exchanges of experiences, knowledge, support and solidarity with all our peoples.

I would like to thank once again the participation of the Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Foreign Ministers who are here with us today, as well as the Ministers and the delegations that represent all the countries in the region.

I know that the joint endeavor of all stakeholders will enable us to reach basic agreements for strengthening the life of our community and this platform, which recognizes the plural nature of the Ibero-American project, and the diversity of its actors who wish to learn, coordinate, encourage and serve the countries and their important projects. Consequently, the task of serving, catalyzing and articulating becomes a meaningful mission that benefits each and every country represented here when we draw on the outcome of multiple forums of dialogue and representation. Once again, I would like to thank the Government of Mexico, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their teams and, in particular, the Governor of Veracruz, who has welcomed us so warmly to this city.

I would like to conclude, President Peña Nieto, with the same phrase I used when you allowed me to take the baton of SEGIB from Mr. Enrique Iglesias.

Eduardo Galeano reflected on utopia, saying that whenever we move towards utopia, utopia moves away from us. If we move ten steps closer to it, it moves ten steps back.

He asked himself: What is the point of utopia? And he responded: It helps us keep moving forward to reach it.

Thank you very much.