

**Statement by the Most Honourable Portia Simpson, Prime Minister of Jamaica to the 2nd
Summit of Heads of Government and State of the Community of Latin American and
Caribbean States (CELAC)
Havana, Cuba
28th – 29th January 2014**

Thank you Mr. President.

It is an honour for me to address the Second Summit of Heads of Government and State of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Let me express my profound appreciation to you, President Castro and to the Government and people of Cuba for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful and historic city of Havana. Thank you for facilitating arrangements for Jamaica's participation in this meeting.

It is fitting that this Summit is hosted by the Government of Cuba, a founding member of CELAC; a Caribbean nation and a long standing, strong advocate of regional solidarity and integration.

Excellencies, the Caribbean has played a central role in articulating the vision of an integrated regional space for our growth and development. The political vision for the unity of Latin America and the Caribbean was first articulated in Kingston in 1815 by Simon Bolivar in his 'Jamaica Letter'. From Simon Bolivar's philosophical underpinnings in 1815 to having a CELAC Summit in Havana today, we have now come full circle.

Cuba has, perhaps more than any other country, served as a bridge between the Caribbean and Latin America. In Jamaica, we are proud to have contributed to advancing liberation in Cuba, Haiti and several of our Latin American neighbours, by welcoming to our shores such

great titans as Jose Marti, the anniversary of whose birth we mark today; Simon Bolivar and Antonio Maceo.

I convey to you, Mr. President, my heartiest congratulations on Cuba's sterling leadership of CELAC over the past year; and our heartfelt appreciation for your active promotion of the priority issues and concerns faced by member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to foster greater understanding.

I have no doubt that Cuba will continue to assist in ensuring the viability and strength of CELAC in the years ahead and will place emphasis on the needs and vital interests of the Caribbean region.

Mr. President,

This Summit has been convened under a most relevant theme, *"The Struggle against Hunger, Poverty and the Inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean"*. Our region continues to grapple with the enduring and interconnected problems of poverty and hunger. Jamaica's National Hero Marcus Mosiah Garvey aptly described the challenges and distress caused by poverty when he said:

"Poverty is a hellish state to be in, it is no virtue, it is a crime...."

Poverty results in despair. As leaders, we see the anguish. It is that which spurs us onwards every day. We seek to respond to the needs of the mother in pain because her child is hungry; to the father who feels like less of a man because he is unable to sustain his family. We are duty-bound to work to alleviate the darkness of poverty and inequality in our urban centres and deep rural communities.

Removing the scourge of poverty and inequality from our peoples is what, primarily, the revolutions in our region were fought for. It is what our fore mothers and fathers have struggled for. Poverty reduction is at the core of our liberation struggles. It was at the centre of our struggles against colonialism in the past and the postcolonial struggle of the present. In the names of those fore-mothers and fathers we must strive onwards to do what is right by our peoples.

High levels of public debt, growing unemployment, deterioration of physical infrastructure and challenges with the delivery of social services, such as health, education and the justice system, have contributed to the persistence of poverty in our region. Recurring fiscal and financial crises add to the frustratingly high levels of poverty and persistent inequality that hinder our development process. The recent ECLAC study points to slow GDP growth in our region and even slower growth in the Caribbean.

Despite this, our region has made some progress in reducing hunger by almost 25% over the decade ending in 2012. Poverty, hunger and inequality are all symptoms. They are stark painful manifestations of weak economies that refuse to grow at a rate that is sufficient to lift people out of the abyss of poverty. We must tackle the structural challenges in our economies and address the vulnerabilities which constrain our prospects for growth.

One vulnerability which we all face is the devastating effect of climate change. Climate change is not a scientific theory which may occur in the future. Climate change is here and we face it now. It poses a clear and present danger to our continued development and threatens to erode our hard won socio-economic gains.

As recently as Christmas Day, 2013 our brothers and sisters in Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines faced torrential rains, floods and landslides which caused loss of life and severe damage to homes and other infrastructure. They spent the yuletide season focusing on recovery and rehabilitation. Their governments had to place on hold other

priorities in order to divert scarce resources to deal with humanitarian aid and emergency works.

Climate Change is not a problem for tomorrow. It requires immediate attention based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

Jamaica took the initiative in 2012 and established a Ministry of Climate Change to elaborate and oversee policies and programmes to alleviate the damaging effects of this phenomenon. The Ministry is also focused on developing adaptation and mitigation strategies for our vulnerable areas. We must never underestimate the potentially irreversible damage which a natural disaster can wreak on a small economy even after pursuing sustained and responsible economic management policies. Fellow CELAC members, let us give the utmost priority to the development of a regional strategy for enhanced engagement in the international dialogue on climate change.

Mr. President,

The long term socio-economic growth of our region requires closer links and cooperation among our countries, as well as the strengthening of our collective resolve to achieve sustainable development.

The vision of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, a champion for the welfare of the poor, through various initiatives including PetroCaribe, is an excellent example of how collective will and partnership can help us to unlock the potential in our region to fight poverty and attain our development goals. We thank President Maduro for continuing on this path.

Mr. President,

Jamaica's approach to address poverty eradication and social inequality places focus on the protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups. We have made steady progress in certain areas, including access to health care, education, sports, culture, housing and social welfare.

We have ongoing programmes for rural electrification and micro-finance as well as a Social Investment Fund that has greatly assisted communities through the provision of early childhood institutions, water and sanitation projects, rural feeder roads and inner-city infrastructure.

Jamaica has also implemented a Social Safety Net Reform Programme and established a conditional cash transfer Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH). There is still more that needs to be done in order to lift our poor out of poverty. We are moving to place greater focus on fighting poverty through targeted interventions in rural communities.

Excellencies,

Engagement with International Development Partners (IDPs) continues to be relevant to the development of our region. However, we must encourage reform of their approaches and policies to reflect greater sensitivity to the need to 'balance the books while balancing peoples lives'.

We must also continue to resist the policies of "graduation" from Official Development Assistance due to our designation as Middle Income Countries. The fight against hunger and poverty requires an integrated, transformational approach, encompassing areas such as:

- technology exchange,**
- research expertise,**

- improved regional air and sea connectivity,
- development of infrastructure integration among CELAC members, energy and....
- information sharing.

Developing countries can benefit from lessons learnt and from the exchange of experiences with other countries where beneficial schemes have been implemented to empower the poor.

There are many lessons that we can learn from each other, from the vast experience gained since the 2000 Millennium Declaration was articulated. We have the collective wisdom and strength to overcome poverty, hunger and inequality!

We should not underestimate the full potential of our region. CELAC represents a market of 600 Million people. We have a combined GDP of almost US\$6 trillion which offers opportunities for each of our countries in trade, investment and other areas. We must grasp the opportunities within our own region to make our economies more secure and increase our resilience to external shocks.

Excellencies,

Let us not be daunted by the many challenges facing our region. CELAC is a tangible demonstration of our growing maturity and confidence. Let us work even more closely together for the advancement of our peoples.

Mr. President, I reiterate my congratulations to you for your stewardship of CELAC over this past year and congratulate and extend my very best wishes to Costa Rica as they prepare to assume the Presidency.

President Chinchilla Miranda, I have no doubt that Costa Rica will advance the work already in progress to make CELAC even stronger and more visible.

I close with the compelling words of the dearly departed Nelson Mandela, which I paraphrase.

"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity; it is an act of justice.

Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural.

It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great.

We can be that great generation. Let our greatness blossom."

Thank you.

