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ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
HIS EXCELLENCY JOSÉ MIGUEL INSULZA

(Delivered at the inaugural ceremony on March 17, 2010)

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Welcome to OAS headquarters, the “House of the Americas.” We are indeed grateful for your participation in this tenth regular session, because your presence here today reaffirms the hemispheric commitment of your countries and institutions to defend life, peace, freedom, and democracy, cooperating multilaterally to face our nations’ diverse security threats.

Acts of terrorism are a frontal attack against the essential values that this Organization defends, which I have mentioned. Instead of defending life, terrorism brings death. Instead of peace and democratic tolerance, it offers violence and intolerance. It destroys the underpinnings of our democratic societies in order to obtain financing. It associates with international criminal groups to multiply its resources and effects, and it radicalizes the behavior of some of our youth, thereby depriving them of their future. In short, it seeks to undermine the rule of law, our peaceful and democratic way of life, diversity of opinion, tolerance, and individual freedoms.

Unfortunately we know this phenomenon at first hand, and it is part of our reality. I should like to recall that on a day like today, March 17, 1992, a terrorist attack against the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires left a tragic toll of 29 persons killed and 242 wounded. After that dramatic episode, the Hemisphere began to pay much closer attention to these phenomena, which proliferated two years later, in 1994, when the same city was the scene of the attack against the AMIA that killed 85 persons. The inter-American system responded to it in the First Summit of the Americas, in December 1994, and then in the specialized conference on terrorism, held in Lima in 1996, and a second one in Mar del Plata in 1998, which ended with adoption of the “Commitment of Mar del Plata” calling for establishment of an Inter-American Committee against Terrorism in this Organization of American States. The commitment has been reiterated and reaffirmed on many occasions and the work you are doing is based on this whole collection of our system’s resolutions that regrettably date from the decade before the horrendous acts that shook this country in September 2001.

Since the Committee’s establishment, our work in this field has been consonant with our values: full respect for the rule of law, international law, international human rights law, and international refugee law. Compliance with binding resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, such as resolution 1373 of 2001, ratification of the universal and regional legal instruments, and adoption of international standards surrounding this body of law, are transcendental measures that the international community and especially our states have adopted to combat this threat effectively. In 2002, our Inter-American Commission on Human Rights—whose meetings we have inaugurated this week—said that it must be remembered—and we do remember—that respect for law, protection of human rights, and the fight against terrorism are complementary and mutually re-enforcing responsibilities.

This tenth regular session of CICTE reminds us that although we have had major gains in development of cooperation over the past decade, the threat of terrorism is ever with us. Yet it is also a time to reflect and note with satisfaction all that we have done to carry out measures to prevent and combat it, and programs for training and technical skills that this committee has carried out. On this tenth anniversary of CICTE it is indeed heartening that—as evident in the draft declaration for this session and the principles and statute of this committee and its work plan—multilateral and international cooperation at various levels clearly demonstrates our resolute will to persevere joining forces against terrorism.

However, the achievements should not cause us to let down our guard or distract us. On the contrary, they should inspire us to redouble our efforts to prevent terrorist acts.

I am pleased that the topic this tenth regular session will consider is public-private cooperation in the fight against terrorism. This underscores the constructive and proactive spirit inherent in the concept of international cooperation.

Actually, although the state is essentially responsible for the war on terrorism, the private sector cooperates effectively with our countries' institutions in areas such as port and airport security, protection of critical infrastructure—energy, tourism, and informatics, for example—the fight against financing of terrorism, and the prevention and mitigation of the effects of a crisis generated by a terrorist act. In all these areas, public-private cooperation offers opportunities that should be explored.

This is also a reflection of the multilateral security approach that the OAS has applied and championed pursuant to the resolutions of the Mexico Conference of 2003. We understand very clearly that we must address various criminal activities comprehensively in order to obtain results that ultimately ensure protection of our citizens.

We must recognize that upgrading of our countries' security brings stability, which in turn leads to more investment, more economic prosperity, and a better quality of life for all.

The relationship between security and development is well illustrated in the area of tourism security, one of CICTE's programs. For some countries of our Hemisphere, a terrorist attack on the tourist sector would trigger an economic crisis of unimaginable proportions. This is evident from what actually happened in other regions, such as the attacks in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002, which had tragic consequences for the local economy, and even after the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States, in which it was found that the economies hit the hardest after the United States and Afghanistan were those of the Caribbean subregion.

Therefore, if we wish to design effective prevention policies to combat terrorism, we must explore the possibility of incorporating in our strategies all actors that could play a relevant role at both the national and international levels, considering the situation of each of our countries. Possible new international actors could be technical agencies from other countries, and subregional, regional, and international organizations.

With respect to the OAS and CICTE, we have been working for many years to include the private sector and civil society in our anti-terrorism activities. We currently have strategic partnerships with more than 40 internationally renowned institutions and organizations, thus reinforcing the message of unity required by this activity and ensuring the highest quality in the imitation of projects and the most efficient use of resources.

In the regional and international spheres, I should like to highlight the cooperation practiced with various entities of the United Nations, especially the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council and its Executive Directorate, the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.

We should also note the partnership that CICTE's Maritime Security Program has had since 2007 with Transport Canada, the U.S. Coast Guard and State Department, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, and the Inter-American Committee on Ports. In addition there are promising recent partnerships, such as the Program to Fight Financing of Terrorism with Immigration and Customs Agencies of the Member States, and CICAD's Anti-money Laundering Unit.

These are but a few examples of cooperation at various levels by CICTE in accordance with the concept of dynamic, efficient, and results-centered international cooperation. Clearly none of it would be possible without the support of some member states and observer countries who have been our principal donors—Canada, the United States, and Spain—to whom I wish to express our warmest gratitude, and also the commitment of member states who contribute directly with human resources that are costly for these countries, and of course the CICTE Secretariat. I am referring here to The Bahamas, Brazil, the United States, Mexico, and Uruguay. The Organization is deeply indebted to all these countries for their significant and decisive contribution toward achievement of CICTE's objectives, and for all this represents with respect to the promotion of the multilateral approach that the OAS foment and exemplifies.

For all of these reasons I am confident that the tenth regular session of CICTE will give new and more profound meaning to the concept of international cooperation, and that it will renew and strengthen the member states' commitment to fight any form of terrorism and will enlist new public and private partners for the achievement of our goals.

In closing, I should like to express my appreciation to CICTE's chair from Mexico and vice-chair from The Bahamas for their outstanding leadership throughout the past year, to the member states and permanent observers for their support and active participation in the committee's work, and to the committee secretariat for its dedicated labor.

Thank you.