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**Statement by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Ambassador Mauricio Cortes-Costa, Executive Secretary for Integral Development
Cletus Springer, Director of the OAS Department of Sustainable Development
Excellencies,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is an honour to be invited to address you today, joining a line of distinguished political and economic thought-leaders. Typically, this lecture series focuses on the areas of democracy, social development, human rights and multidimensional security.

It occurred to me that this range of topics reflects the lethal nature of climate change— as it threatens all of the above. In one long lifetime, and unevenly, climate change will shake most developing countries, particularly those with fragile governments facing migration issues and overcrowding of cities.

Climate change will hamper the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals, as mentioned before by the ambassador, or begin to erode their progress, directly impacting on development. It will cause agricultural patterns to change and increase water stress in many arid regions. Indeed, climate change has been recognized by the United States Department of Defence as a security threat. But beyond all this and most importantly, climate change will change our conception of what constitutes human rights.

The OAS brings together almost all states of the Americas, from the top to the bottom of the continent. And from top to bottom, the Americas also face the entire breadth of climate change impacts and vulnerabilities. Individually, of course, each country has to face its own adaptive challenges.

The latest research rates the Caribbean's, Central and South America's vulnerability to climate change as "high", and certainly as "severe and acute" by 2030, whilst the vulnerability of North America's economy and habitat loss to climate change impacts will also be high and acute, respectively.

But each of the countries in the continent has a number of key opportunities for addressing climate by promoting sustainable development, from both an adaptation and a mitigation perspective. It is important that these opportunities are fully capitalized upon. And there is currently no better way to capitalize on these opportunities than the implementation of the Cancun Agreements.

The Cancun Agreements were reached under the steady guidance and outstanding leadership of Minister Patricia Espinosa of Mexico in December last year. The agreements, which enjoy near universal support, signified what was a solid step forward for the community of nations, but a meagre step forward for the planet.

They are a big step because of three major achievements:

1. The agreements form the foundation for the most far reaching collective effort the world has ever seen to reduce carbon emissions, and to build a system which makes all countries accountable to one another for those emission reductions.

Building on emission reduction targets that had been put forward informally in 2010, under the Cancun Agreements all industrialized nations have made official their reduction pledges, and have committed themselves to develop low-carbon development plans or strategies.

In addition, 48 developing countries have made official their nationally appropriate mitigation actions, referred to as NAMAs, which seek a deviation from business-as-usual emissions by 2020, and are encouraged to develop low carbon growth strategies.

2. The Cancun Agreements provide the strongest signal countries have ever given to the private sector that we are moving toward low-carbon economies, by committing to a maximum temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius, and a consideration of a maximum of 1.5 degrees in the near future.
3. The Cancun Agreements include the most comprehensive package ever agreed by governments to help developing nations deal with climate change, including new institutions to boost technology cooperation, financing and adaptation. These include:

An Adaptation Committee to promote the implementation of stronger action on adaptation

A technology mechanism, which is intended to be fully operational in 2012 and which will support the innovation, development and spread of new technologies

And finally, a Green Climate Fund, to provide long-term financing to projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing countries via thematic funding windows. The Transitional Committee tasked with designing the fund, which includes nine distinguished representatives from the Americas, has recently begun its work.

At the next UN climate change conference in Durban, South Africa, much of the focus will be on finalizing and adopting the institution-building arrangements launched in Cancun, as well as the elements to provide the rigour and transparency necessary as the backbone of any effective and successful multilateral environmental agreement.

These achievements were undoubtedly a major step forward for governments, but at the same time they are only a small step for the planet.

This is first and foremost because the level of ambition currently on the table amounts to only 60 percent of what is needed to limit the temperature increase to the agreed 2 degrees. Furthermore, a 2 degree increase is in fact no guarantee of the survival of small island states, as some of you here are probably quite acutely aware.

Additionally, no agreement was reached in Cancun on the year in which global emissions need to peak, and the later they peak, the more difficult emission control becomes and the more expensive adaptation becomes. Science tells us that a global peaking is needed by 2015 as well as a 50 percent reduction compared to 2000 levels by 2050.

In Cancun, nations evidently chose to approach the challenge in a bottom-up manner through a compilation of best national efforts. It is hard to say whether this will suffice to keep the world on a 2 degree trajectory, or whether this would need to be complemented with a top-down international agreement, either through the extension of the Kyoto Protocol or/and in any other way that would increase the certainty and predictability of the international framework.

The Cancun Agreements are a small step for the planet, but they are nonetheless a beginning that can spark more action.

While it remains to be seen whether the bottom-up notion will close the current emission reduction gap, this very approach allows countries to play to their strengths, to pave their best sustainable paths. In the context of international incentives, Cancun can provide important impetus to national level policies that respond to the individual needs of countries - for both adaptation and mitigation.

In terms of adaptation, national policy efforts are still in their infancy, although they are urgently needed.

To date and in response to international efforts, many national initiatives have focused on identifying adaptation needs, but little real implementation has taken place. For the development of adaptation policies and their implementation, local initiatives can provide valuable input.

This includes partial reforestation with fruit trees like in El Salvador, the replanting of mangroves to protect coastlines like in Mexico, or the construction of elevated bamboo houses like in Ecuador. Parts of agricultural United States will have to rethink cropping patterns or crop feasibility. And *all* countries will have to figure out how to cushion their poorest members, in both urban and rural areas, from direct and indirect climate change impacts.

By assessing local adaptation initiatives and regarding them as input for policy-making, experience and knowledge from communities that have already had to adapt to specific climatic conditions can be shared and utilized to a country's advantage.

In terms of mitigation, all countries in the Americas need to capitalize on the

incentives provided by the Cancun Agreements to take climate change action to the next level.

The process of crafting low-carbon national policies that can work in tandem with international policy has already begun. In 2010, all G20 economies, and also others, have initiated or completed the development of economic growth plans that are strongly based on low-carbon growth.

This is encouraging because the 2 degree temperature limit and envisioned low-carbon growth in the Cancun Agreements will be impossible to achieve without significantly scaling up the use of renewable energies. And, in the Americas, there is a wealth of clean energy potential. But, at present, formidable challenges to this still remain, both here and in the world.

In the case of some Latin American countries - Brazil, Peru, Colombia - most electricity comes from hydropower, but the share of hydro has been falling in recent years as gas-powered and thermal generation have collectively provided a significant share of new generation.

In the United States, investment into clean energy attracts one of the highest proportions of venture capital in the world - but taking these clean energy industries seriously in order to bring them to scale means supportive policies must be in place for capital to flow beyond the initial investment stage. And the potential of energy efficiency is still severely overlooked in most countries of the world .

There are clear dangers inherent in ignoring mitigation opportunities in the energy sector. If opportunities for renewables are not explored and supported, developing countries in the Americas will increase the carbon intensity of their fossil-fuel based power generation capacity, as they rapidly build up infrastructure.

This would lock in a long-lived, high-carbon infrastructure - and waste your natural renewable energy endowments. This is detrimental to sustainable development within each of your countries and, for obvious reasons, to the world. Timing is everything. Investing in energy efficiency and low-cost, immediately-available low-carbon options now, subsidizes, and makes more economically-feasible, the more expensive options.

The use of renewable energy needs to be expanded and go much further through the appropriate policies, incentives and government support at the national level. The Cancun Agreements provide many incentives that can be utilized towards this.

The natural endowment of the continent is such that countries have huge potential for renewable energy generation - wind conditions are ideal in Mexico, Central America, Northern Colombia and Patagonia; large parts of Latin America receive high solar radiation levels; and geothermal resources are also significant in several volcanic areas. Biofuels already account for about 6 percent of energy consumed in the transport sector.

In North America, collectively, practically every renewable energy option is available in abundance, but states have to be supported and encouraged to develop on their strengths and advantages in low-carbon development.

Forests are another area in which the Americas can take climate change implementation to the next level through the Cancun Agreements.

The sustainable use of forests has multiple benefits, not only directly for forest-dependent peoples, but also for a range of critical issues including biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Cancun Agreements launched concrete action to preserve forests in developing nations, which will increase going forward. This is referred to as REDD+. The full financing options for the implementation of such mitigation actions in the forest area will be addressed during 2011.

This has opened an important door for Latin America. REDD+ is already being tested in some large-scale demonstration projects. For example, Norway's commitment of USD 1 billion to help protect the Amazon rain forest contributed to Brazil's pledge to reduce deforestation by 80 percent by 2020.

This is an encouraging example that merits duplication. American countries need to seize this opportunity and craft forest-related policies on the national level that go hand-in-hand with the Cancun Agreements so that the greatest benefits can be achieved.

These and other opportunities created by the Cancun Agreements provide an important beginning for accelerated action on global climate change that directly contributes to national well-being.

Each of your countries takes a different approach and has different perspectives on any number of global challenges. In climate change, however, as I would dare to suggest, there is a common interest that unites you rather than divides you. One cannot deny that the very nature of climate change makes it impossible to be tackled by any one individual country alone. It can only be tackled if all countries work together to solve this problem.

Whilst we all accept that there will always be differences of opinion and approach, we all nonetheless understand that hiding our heads in the sand will not make the problem go away. Optimal solutions are most often born of collaboration and common interest.

It is in this context that I wish to congratulate the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) for their efforts.

I trust that the governments of this region use the Cancun opportunity to keep moving towards sustainable, poverty-free economies in a secure, equitable, sustainable world.

Thank you.

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