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PRESENTATION ON THE ROUNDTABLE “THE ROAD TO CARTAGENA: HEMISPHERIC COOPERATION TO COMBAT NATURAL DISASTERS” AND ON THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE VIRTUAL CONSULTATION ON THE THEME OF NATURAL DISASTERS

(Presented by Sherry Tross, Executive Secretary of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat)

Thank you, Chairman.

I am pleased to address this regular meeting of the SIRG with respect to the activities for civil society and social actor participation and contributions into the preparatory process for the Sixth Summit.

As indicated in previous meetings, the Summit Secretariat has been seeking innovative ways to broaden and deepen direct engagement with social actors in the Summits process. Preparatory activities have been designed with the aim of being inclusive, providing both virtual and face-to-face opportunities for policy dialogue and for generation of substantive recommendations that can be channeled to Member States for consideration.

As of now, we have three different options to provide opportunities for direct engagement of social actors in order to facilitate their sharing of recommendations and ideas on the thematic issues being addressed in preparation for the Sixth Summit.

- **Summit Talk** is a series of on-line virtual consultations linked to the thematic areas of the Sixth Summit. Online consultations are hosted on the Summit Virtual Community (SVC) and last for about a month to facilitate broad participation of social actors. The consultations are moderated by thematic experts, including specialists from the OAS and other partners of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG).
- The second mechanism is an **Experts Roundtables**, an open forum in which subject experts present their perspectives and analyses to Member States and the general public regarding individual Summit themes. Roundtable experts also field questions from both live and virtual audiences.
- Third, the broad input generated from Summit Talk and the Experts Roundtables are channeled into **Policy Consultation Sessions** which are full-day meetings of social actor

representatives to propose, debate and compile concrete recommendations on the specific Summit themes for presentation to Member States.

Given the abbreviated preparation time between the last meeting of the SIRG and today's session, the social actor consultations on natural disasters are still ongoing and will be fully presented at the next meeting. Today's report aims only to provide a brief, preliminary outcome of the Expert Policy Roundtable, "The Road to Cartagena: Hemispheric Cooperation to Combat Natural Disasters," which was hosted last Thursday by the Summits Secretariat in collaboration with the OAS Department of International Affairs.

The Roundtable was privileged to have the participation of Ambassador Luis Alfonso Hoyos on behalf of the Summit host country, and three senior experts representing different sectors and policy perspectives of the complex, cross-cutting topic of Natural Disasters. These views included: a governmental perspective on regional cooperation and humanitarian assistance from Minister Carlos Alberto Villalba of Argentina; an institutional perspective on disaster preparedness and response from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); and an NGO perspective that offered an analysis of the relationship between climate change and natural disasters.

Both onsite and online participants were able to join the discussion. These included representatives from OAS member states, international institutions, academia and civil society. The online tools have proven to be a useful and effective mechanism for engagement and for motivating broader participation. Individuals in 23 countries participated virtually in the roundtable. During the roundtable, comments and questions were received through the SVC from online participants in El Salvador, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, and the United States. In effect, the experts policy roundtable was able to reach people where they live.

The social actor dialogue has, thus far, yielded several preliminary recommendations, including the following:

- Member States should consider narrowing and focusing the broad theme of natural disasters to work toward two or three concrete initiatives for action that are implementable at the local level, and that are feasible, cost-effective, and visible.
- Member States should consider maintaining and strengthening regional mechanisms and protocols aimed at disaster prevention, mitigation and response, rather than creating new mechanisms.
- Member States should incorporate the issue of natural disasters and humanitarian assistance as part of national development plans.
- To facilitate disaster response effectiveness, countries should consider and recommend a common vocabulary among relief agencies and institutions to reduce miscommunication among agencies and the attendant loss of time and resources.
- Member States should consider developing or enhancing education and public information strategies in order to build awareness and prepare the citizenry to be partners in building a culture of disaster risk prevention.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that the on-line virtual consultation on natural disasters will continue on the Summit Virtual Community through November 4. A more detailed report on the final outcomes of the consultations will be presented during the SIRG meeting scheduled for November by a social actor representative in fulfillment of what has been presented by the Chair in the procedural guidelines for the SIRG in terms of social actor participation in the preparatory process.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, the Summits Secretariat is committed to ensuring civil society participation in the Summits Process and will continue to work to provide accessible spaces for engagement and inclusion of all stakeholders as we advance toward Cartagena 2012.

Thank you.