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ADDRESS BY THE CHAIR OF CICTE,
AMBASSADOR CAMILO OSPINA,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF COLOMBIA TO THE OAS
AT THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY

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I am both pleased and honored, in my capacity as Chair of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism, to be able to share with you a series of reflections at this inaugural ceremony of the seventh regular session of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism.

As a Colombian, I would like to thank the Government of Panama for the warm welcome they have extended. Panama was the site of an historic event that, with the passage of time, became a landmark in the creation of the Organization of American States. It was here in Panama City, in 1826, that the Amphictyonic Congress was held at the initiative of the Liberator Simón Bolívar, which set the first foundations of principles that would become fundamental in inter-American relations.

Also in Panama we can see an astounding piece of infrastructure that has substantially facilitated global maritime navigation, trade flows, and, consequently, the development of our peoples: the Panama Canal.

Aware of the global demands of development, a few brief months ago, in an exemplary democratic exercise, the people of Panama gave their authorities a resounding mandate for the Canal's expansion. That will be a new and invaluable endowment to humankind from the Republic of Panama.

The threat that terrorism poses to the Canal is a threat that affects us all. The Canal is an essential link in hemispheric and global communications. We all benefit from it, and the consequences of any attack against it would be unimaginable. For that reason, contributing to its preservation is a duty of the Hemisphere.

This meeting of CICTE provides us with an ideal forum for reiterating our repudiation of terrorism and for stating once again that it is a scourge that threatens institutions, democratic freedoms, human rights, peace, and security.

The experience of my country, which has been engaged in an open struggle against terrorism for years, leads me to conclude that this is a daily task that brooks no weakening. Danger may be found in any place, at any time. We must therefore remain constantly alert and, above all, secure the greatest possible amount of information to help us prevent any attack. In that regard, international cooperation and exchanges of information and experiences are becoming increasingly necessary.

We are facing an asymmetric struggle, one that also threatens our citizens. To the extent that we can prevent and thwart terrorist actions, we will be protecting our citizens' lives and ensuring their tranquility.

If societies can live in peace and tranquility, we will be encouraging their development. When a businessman sees that his business is not threatened, he will feel safe to invest and create jobs, and investors will have greater confidence in our countries. The assets of our societies will be protected against destruction. My country's experience in this regard is visible and positive. With

increased security, confidence has risen, the productive sector has been reactivated, and the Colombian economy has once again grown at a significant rate.

We, the states of the Hemisphere, have agreed to work together to prevent, combat, and eliminate all aspects of terrorism.

And it is under the multilateral framework and through cooperation that we are able to respond to the threat of terrorism, in conjunction with other criminal activities.

We therefore believe that CICTE, as the natural forum for dealing with the question of terrorism, must continue contributing to our goal of creating a hemisphere that is increasingly safe, increasingly democratic, and increasingly respectful of human rights.

Terrorism is not an isolated phenomenon. It is globalized. Terrorists have forged networks that enable them to coordinate their attacks. They use advances in information technologies and communications. They have ties to organized crossborder crime. If we act individually and not in concert, they will win.

Telecommunications must be an instrument of support in counterterrorism efforts; we must use the resources they offer to secure a safer world. We must unite our efforts and understand that since international terrorism knows no borders, our struggle against that scourge must have none either, and, in that, communications and technological progress are tools with the swiftness and effectiveness to overcome territorial limitations.

By observing our international commitments and enforcing the cooperation mechanisms available for fighting terrorism, we will prevent terrorists from continuing to cause death and destruction, and we will take a key step forward in eliminating that evil.

CICTE is the appropriate political forum for proposing combined responses to reduce our vulnerability to this scourge in our Hemisphere.

Colombia believes that CICTE has done sterling work in defining general counterterrorism policies. The member states now have significant political and legal resources for tackling this threat. The time has now come to take an additional step. It is time to define specific areas for cooperation and to carry out concrete programs in those areas. We thus agree with Panama's proposal to focus the dialogue of CICTE VII on a specific topic of great current relevance.

The agenda we have before us offers opportunities for reflection and it promises a productive and constructive debate; its results will necessarily be of benefit to all our states and will serve to strengthen our capacity to confront terrorism.

Mr. Vice-President and Minister for Foreign Affairs: as Chair of CICTE I would like to express our satisfaction at holding this seventh meeting here in a nation with which we share ties of friendship and fraternal bonds, and one that has contributed so much to the Hemisphere. Here we are, eager to continue working to identify forms of cooperation that will bring about a better and safer life for the citizens of the Hemisphere.

I am certain that our discussions will help our states in enhancing their ability to protect their infrastructures from the indiscriminate barbarism and cowardice of terrorism. Thank you very much.