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INTER-AMERICAN COMMITTEE AGAINST TERRORISM (CICTE)

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**REMARKS BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES,
HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR ALBERT. R. RAMDIN**

(Delivered at the Inaugural Ceremony held on February 20, 2014)

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Mr. Chair of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, Ambassador Andres González Diaz,

Mr. Vice Chair of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, Ambassador Allan Culham,

Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers and delegates,

Mr. Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee

Mr. Secretary for Multidimensional Security, Ambassador Adam Blackwell,

Mr. Secretary of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, Neil Klopfenstein,

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. It is indeed my pleasure to take part in this inaugural ceremony of the Fourteenth Regular Session of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism and to welcome you to the headquarters of the Organization of American States, Your attendance at this annual meeting represents the clear willingness and commitment of the CICTE member states to combat, prevent, and eliminate terrorism.

I am absolutely convinced that one of the greatest tests of leadership in the 21st century will be our ability to work collectively to produce regional policies which address today's multidimensional security challenges; - to align our shared priorities with resources that will facilitate cooperation, action and results in our pursuit of a more prosperous, peaceful and safer hemisphere.

Democracy, development and security are inter-related and need to be addressed in an integrated manner. The leaders of our member states have made it clear by word and deed that in security, including the treats of terrorism undermines the principals that this hemispheric organization defends and promotes. They have responded by reaffirming the primacy of the rule of law, democratic freedoms, and tolerance, and by strengthening multilateral cooperation to confront the various forms of this threat to our countries' peace and security. In successive declarations and resolutions, the states have reiterated their commitment to peace and security, through the adoption of policies concerning the financing of terrorism and money laundering; cyber security; regional cooperation; public-private cooperation to protect critical infrastructure; and strengthening of border controls, among other matters.

Our region has suffered from terrorism, which we resolutely condemn regardless of its origin. Over the years we have experienced devastating attacks: from the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1991 to the attacks on aircrafts in Panama, Colombia, and Barbados, all of which have claimed the lives of hundreds of our brothers and sisters. However, on September 11, 2001, the democracies of the Americas suffered the most brutal terrorist attack ever in our region.

Ladies and gentlemen, security challenges do not exist in isolation. We recognize that domestic security challenges are inextricably linked to the global security environment. From drug trafficking to homicides, common crime, kidnapping and even money laundering, security issues in this hemisphere are often linked. In many cases these links exist because of the void or vacuum in our regulatory, political, and economic and governance frameworks and systems.

At the same time, security threats are also continuing to evolve. By their very nature Governments have to move in a balanced and considered manner, while criminal elements have access to technology and methods that allow them to adapt much more quickly.

To compensate, we need more targeted training of law enforcement personnel in many of our countries. It also means moving with determination to strengthen the judiciary by updating legislation; and improving domestic, sub-regional and international mechanisms for exchange of information, interdiction, extradition and where possible, joint action.

On a political level, our governments need to prioritize investments and budgetary allocations in social and economic development programs, education, job creation, affordable housing, and healthcare. These realities make the fight against terrorism more difficult and complicated.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, in CICTE, the member states have created a permanent mechanism for hemispheric coordination against terrorism and its related factors. CICTE has been strengthened to face these challenges to help disrupt terrorists' financing systems; block their logistical support; prevent false documents and strengthen border security; expand mutual legal assistance; and strengthen legal and judicial cooperation.

Through CICTE, the OAS has implemented effective measures to prevent terrorist groups from operating in our territories; to pursue, arrest, try, and punish the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of terrorist acts; to strengthen cooperation and timely exchange of information; and to enhance cooperation in regional and international plans. We have also insisted that the fight against terrorism cannot be waged at the expense of human rights and personal freedom, which is a central element of the OAS Charter.

Fifteen years after its establishment, CICTE has shown a remarkable capacity for change, offering member states extensive training programs based on international cooperation to satisfy and respond to their needs. These programs enhance the domestic initiatives aimed at combating terrorism and any type of organized international criminal activity that seeks to undermine democratic stability and peace.

Over the next few days, member states will have an opportunity to discuss, among other topics, how to combat possible criminal activities of terrorist groups, and how to strengthen the response of the criminal justice system to terrorism. The objective is to understand more fully how terrorist organizations support their activities through the commission of other crimes, such as drug trafficking, money laundering, the use of illegal migration networks, and trafficking in firearms. These discussions will enable the member states to explore ways in which they can deal more effectively with terrorist groups by strengthening their criminal justice systems and focusing on criminal activities that facilitate, finance, or support terrorist activity. It is critically important to continue working and seeking consensus on all of these issues, adapting to the emerging new challenges collectively and with a common approach.

During this meeting member states will also have the opportunity to explore a strategic vision for CICTE beyond 2014, including an indispensable dialogue on how to achieve greater financial sustainability for CICTE. As the delegation of Canada reminded us when proposing these topics for the agenda, “there is growing recognition that CICTE’s donor base must be broadened to ensure that the financing of CICTE reflects the changing economic panorama of the Americas and the collective responsibility to address cross-border threats.”

The work of CICTE would not be possible without the help of all of our member states and without voluntary contributions, whether they be in cash as from Canada and the United States and Spain, or in kind as Mexico and Brazil, I would like to express our sincere appreciation.

There is no doubt that much needs to be done and that there is important work ahead for CICTE which requires adequate resources and strategic partnerships with both donors and member states. It is clear that CICTE’s role must be that of a guide, facilitator, and coordinator of the tasks in the struggle against terrorism. The policies drafted must be broad enough to be adapted to the needs of each member country.

Ladies and gentlemen, terrorism seeks to immobilize our societies with fear with a macabre image of death, and restrict our capacity to apply the rule of law. Our response must therefore be vigorous, constantly adapting to the changing global reality. We have a permanent obligation to adopt measures to strengthen cooperation mechanisms among the countries of the Hemisphere.

We must not forget the essential work being done with our international, regional, and national partners to ensure that our collaborative efforts in the prevention of and combat against terrorism yield maximum benefit for our member states. Partnerships with such agencies as the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council and its Executive Directorate, the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Financial Action Task Force against Money Laundering in South America (GAFISUD) have proven to be extremely valuable to our multilateral cooperation against terrorism and other security threats.

Finally, distinguished delegates, I once again urge the member states that have not yet done so to sign, ratify, or adhere to the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism, as applicable, and implement it effectively.

I wish to express my appreciation to the CICTE Chair of Colombia and Vice Chair of Canada for their outstanding leadership throughout the past year, to the member states and permanent observers for their support of and active participation in the Committee's endeavor, and to the Committee's Secretariat for its dedicated work.

I thank you.