Official Statement

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at the

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presented by

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[on behalf of the Secretary General José Miguel Insulza]

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Mr. Chairman/ Madam Chair

Your excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is for me an honor and privilege to address this Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction on behalf of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, his Excellency Jose Miguel Insulza.

In the Americas, the trend of more disasters of greater magnitude observed in the last decade has doubled the number of affected people and economic losses, compared to the decade of the 90s. This trend has continued since we last gathered here 2 years ago for the Third Session of the Global Platform.

Notably, fewer people are killed during these events, suggesting that response and relief efforts are improving. However, the number of people affected and the economic losses from disasters are on the rise. In 2011 and 2012, disasters affected almost 14 million people, and resulted in economic losses of more than 150 billion US Dollars. These figures represent a third of the affected people in the 90s and almost the total economic losses recorded in that same decade.

Climate-related events, such as floods and droughts continue to dominate the statistics with immeasurable setbacks to development. And it is not surprising that most of the economic losses are registered in the most developed countries in the Americas, as more assets are exposed. At the same time, we are observing that recurrent events of lesser magnitude are affecting more and more people in less developed countries.

Hurricanes Irene in September of 2011 and Sandy in October of 2012 together cost about 7.3 and 50 billion US Dollars in damages, respectively, and affected hundreds of thousands people in the United States. More recently, floods in Buenos Aires, Argentina, left behind a trail of destruction and death, with about 350,000 people affected and about 50 dead. When we consider that the Americas is already the most urbanized region in the World, and that by 2050 estimations indicate that about 90% of our population will live in urban areas, we can only expect this situation to worsen if we do not act decisively.

We cannot afford to sit on the sidelines hoping the solutions will come to us out of the blue. We must reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. We must use cleaner energies and rationalize the use of our natural resources, preserving the goods and services provided by our precious ecosystems. But the simple fact remains that disaster risk will continue to rise if we do not address its underlying causes, many of which of are deeply rooted in our development processes. And addressing these issues will require political courage and a consensus-based vision for our societies.

While many OAS Member States have made significant progress in implementing institutional reforms for integrating disaster risk assessments in development plans, and in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction across all sectors of government, more work needs to be done on the many structural issues, such as land tenure policies that leave large segments of our population with no option but to settle in flood prone areas, or on steep-slopes prone to land- and mud-slides, or in dry regions susceptible to recurrent water scarcities. We must ensure continuity of quality education for boys and girls, decent health services for all, and strengthened democratic institutions so that all citizens can be active agents for change, accountable for their safety and the safety of those under their care.

These are all matters of Integral Development, one of the four pillars of the Organization of American States, which recognizes that risk is an inherent element of development and, therefore, disaster risk reduction must be integrated into development policies and plans.

Against this background, I am left to wonder if instead of considering a post-2015 HFA, we should not be talking about a single development agenda around the objectives and principles of sustainable development, where disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change are integral components and *imperatives*  for improving the well-being and prosperity of our people, measured in terms of access to health, education and employment; a healthy environment capable of meeting the needs of present and future generations; and strong democratic institutions.

These past two years have brought significant achievements in the Inter-American System. Last year, at the XLII ordinary meeting of the OAS General Assembly, member States endorsed a new *Inter-American Plan for Disaster Prevention and Response and the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance*. The Plan stresses the need for hemispheric cooperation and the strengthening of inter-institutional coordination among member institutions of the Inter-American System and sub-regional organizations, agencies of the UN System, and international organizations, all under the framework of the Regional Platform of the Americas. Member States understand that in a region where national economies are increasingly mutually-dependent and the impact of disasters spill over international borders well beyond neighboring countries, they must act as one hemisphere.

This new Inter-American Plan articulates a suite of hemispheric instruments and mechanisms that includes the *Inter-American Convention to Facilitate Disaster Assistance*, the only legally-binding regional instrument in the world in matters of humanitarian assistance, that this year earned a new ratification. The *Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation* and the *Inter-American Committee for Natural Disaster Reduction* complete this suite of instruments and mechanisms. Yet, the challenge of implementation remains. Scare financial and human resources continue to hamper the ability of the General Secretariat to adequately follow up on implementation of the decisions of the member States.

Mr. Chairman/ Madam Chair, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to reiterate the firm commitment of the General Secretariat of the OAS to its ongoing partnership with the secretariat of the UNISDR, in assisting our Member States, and the most vulnerable segments of their societies to meet the strategic objectives of the HFA. We further reaffirm our commitment to strengthen our collaboration with the sub-regional inter-governmental organizations for improving mutual assistance in the area of disaster preparedness and response, humanitarian assistance and recovery, as well as in disaster prevention and mitigation, and reconstruction and recuperation, within an integral risk management approach that is embedded in development policy and planning.

In closing, we urge our member States to fully utilize all the instruments and mechanisms available within the Inter-American System for the advance of the principles of the HFA, beyond 2015 and into a joint multilateral action, that pursues a single development agenda, upholds respect for democratic institutions and the observance of human rights, and promotes peace and security in the Americas.

Thank you all for your kind attention.