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**Regional Social Security Summit for the Americas
Opening address of Ms Corazon de la Paz-Bernardo
President of the International Social Security Association
Brasilia, 27 May 2010**

Distinguished Minister,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this first Social Security Summit for the Americas. These last few days have been exceptionally vivid, and this morning we reach the highlight of the Regional Social Security Forum.

Our starting point this week was to say that social security is recognized as essential for social and economic development, and this is true for the Americas as well as the rest of the world. Without social security, sustainable and more equitable economic growth would indeed not be possible. If evidence of this achievement is needed, I would ask you to imagine what our societies would be like if we could not all rely on social protection at some point in our lives – regardless of whether this be through mechanisms of formal social security or alternative community arrangements or family support. And this, particularly as financial, economic as well as other crises hit our societies.

But if our confidence in social security is to be maintained – indeed strengthened – then there is a need to honour commitments to society.

Firstly, social security institutions must deliver according to their mandates. This means for most countries in the Americas that they must improve to assure more adequate benefits and extend benefits to those who should be covered. Equally, government must respond to the voiced expectations of all their populations. Governments must act to ensure a sustainable framework for improving social security. Last but not least, the ISSA also has an obligation – to lead the indispensable debate to promote and guide the development of social security, and to do this with other international organizations active in the region.

Following this obligation, the goal of this Summit is to provide an arena to debate how social security can be a positive force in the Americas. It is to identify how it should evolve so as to respond to the many expectations that the uncovered population – still a majority in many countries, as we have heard this week – can hope for and to address the new challenges brought from an unprecedented economic crisis and to some major changes in the region.

Indeed, the Americas have experimented with diverse and often ground-breaking social security reforms over the last decades. From the introduction of defined-contribution individual pension accounts in Chile in the early 1980s towards the introduction of conditional cash transfer programmes on a large scale, like in our host country, Brazil, as well as in a dozen other countries in the region, there is a wide range of reforms that have not only shaped the region's social security schemes, but influenced many other countries in the world.

This underlines that significant efforts were done in the Americas at improving social security. Despite this, we need to recognize that a major common challenge for the region remains one of

improving and maintaining coverage level. On one hand, there is a wide gap between countries in the level of coverage – from 11 per cent in a country like Bolivia to full coverage for countries in the North of America. But this is not the whole story, as we need to recognize that across Latin America, coverage has decreased and is not much higher than 40 per cent of all employees.

Extending social security must therefore be recognized as one of the main priorities for the Americas, both in the formal and the informal sectors. In view of the huge tasks, priorities need to be set. The new ISSA strategy on extension of coverage suggests that social security administrations could have a crucial role in bringing social protection to the uncovered. The questions that could be asked are: What are the most efficient means of extending social security coverage? Is it by increasing compliance, or by introducing universal non-contributory schemes? Finally, what is the role of social security administrations in extending coverage?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This reminds us as well that poverty reduction is still a major priority for the Americas today. Let's not forget that in many countries of the region, poverty has actually increased these last years. Some countries of the region have shown good progress on poverty in recent years, like our host Brazil. But the Americas still has many, too many, of the extremely poor.

Our proposal here, and I would like to hear the views of international organizations on this, is to say that extending social security holds a vastly under-utilized potential to help realize the poverty reduction that we are so desperately seeking. Sure, social security is just one of many necessary actors, but its role is a crucial one. In global terms, the evidence of the last fifty years bears witness to this.

To set the stage for this Summit, I wish to briefly remind us all of some of the major challenges in the Americas today. Some of them were suggested in the slide show that was presented to you. I would like to ask you all to think deeply about the implications of these challenges for social security – and for a brighter future for the people living in the Americas.

Social security must be accessible and sustainable. It must also make a proactive contribution to better achieving socially inclusive and economically productive societies. These elements lie at the heart of the ISSA's Dynamic Social Security conceptual framework.

Firstly, social security systems in the Americas are increasingly regarded as integral to the social, economic, and political management of countries. As a result, the role of the state in social security financing, management, and supervision is expected to increase. For all countries, a remaining matter is how to source and appropriately allocate the available resources to accomplish this role. More generally, promoting social dialogue – involving the state, the social partners, and the civil society – constitutes a necessary driver for sustainable reforms.

Secondly, the effective reform of social security systems must be complemented by broader public-policy reforms. Such broader reform is challenging, but the innovative experiences of developments in social security may help show the way forward. For example, an expanding role for tax-financed social security benefits should be aligned with reforms in public-service delivery systems and with measures to develop a more sustainable fiscal base.

Thirdly, political will and strong governance and management are essential elements to the development of high-performing and sustainable social security administrations. While social security organizations can actively contribute to improving their own performance, only executive-

level authority can guarantee the necessary political will. These are observations that also hold for the healthy operation of all legitimate social protection actors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finally, I believe that social security represents the very foundation of social cohesion and political stability. Of all the messages I have presented, this is possibly the strongest message I want to bring to you this morning. On Tuesday, during the Developments and Trends session, much emphasis was put on “rights”. It is indeed always worth repeating that the 1948 declaration of human rights defines social security as a fundamental human right. It is paramount to understand that social “security” is an essential ingredient for social progress, that it is a fundamental condition for economic growth, national stability, and sustainable peace.

The goal of this Summit is to look at the broader picture; and to look forward. I firmly believe that social security should generate opportunities for all. I look forward to the debate in the hope of learning how we can better ensure that all can have access to the opportunities that they require to contribute to society in an active and dignified manner.

We have the great privilege to have on this Summit two sister regional organizations, the CISS and the OISS. Together with two other international organizations active in the region – the ILO and the World Bank, this should provide us the opportunity to discuss on how we could improve regional cooperation in social security. The ISSA is most happy to contribute actively in this respect, and to foster international cooperation in the Americas for improving social security, possibly including inter-regional cooperation. The “Santiago de Chile Declaration” and the “Guatemala Declaration” already mentioned this week are testimonies of such collaboration, and we are looking forward to such initiatives in the future as well.

We have mentioned several times this week that the ISSA supports Dynamic Social Security, I would appeal this morning for a dynamic debate as well, and I am confident that with the distinguished panellists here today, we can expect no less than that!

Thank you for your attention.