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PRESENTATION ON THE ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE PARTICIPATION
OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE
NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS PROCESS

(Ms. María Celina Conte, Director of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat)

Distinguished Mr. Kevin O'Reilly, United States National Summits Coordinator and Chair of the Summit Implementation Review Group,

Distinguished national summits coordinators and delegates,

Representatives of the institutions of the Joint Summit Working Group,

Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for this opportunity to present the efforts of the Summits Secretariat—in coordination with the Presidency and with the collaboration of strategic partners—to boost the participation of civil society organizations and social actors in the Ninth Summit of the Americas Process, especially during the current Summit follow-up and implementation stage. Those efforts include information sessions, consultations with civil society, capacity building, feedback mechanisms, and management and generation of knowledge and recommendations.

To start my presentation, I would like to emphasize that over the past few years the Summits Secretariat has taken note of the growing importance that civil society plays a more active role in the design of the mechanisms for their participation in the Summit Process. Accordingly, after the Ninth Summit of the Americas, the Secretariat developed several evaluation mechanisms to obtain feedback from civil society and social actors on their experience of participating in the preparatory phase and in the Summit activities, and to gather recommendations for improving their participation.

Those mechanisms included: (1) an online survey (August 2022), which garnered over a hundred responses; (2) virtual meetings (September 2022) with civil society representatives and social actors who had participated in the preparatory process; and (3) focus groups with representatives of indigenous peoples, women's organizations, persons of African descent, and organizations working to protect migrants' rights, among others.

Listening to a wide range of actors is key to ensuring diversity and inclusiveness in the Summit Process. Ever more organizations and social actors are participating in the Process, including workers, academics, indigenous peoples, women's organizations, persons of African descent, representatives of the private sector, and youth. Those mechanisms enabled us to hear and learn about specific problems with which those groups contend in their communities, as well as the challenges they encounter to participating in the Summit Process. Their inputs have informed the development of the plan for civil

society activities in the current follow-up and implementation phase of the Ninth Summit, taking into account their interests and priorities.

The main recommendations stemming from these feedback mechanisms include: (1) holding national, in-person dialogues with national summits coordinators; (2) keeping civil society informed of progress made on the implementation of mandates, and incorporating its suggestions; (3) increasing outreach to civil society, with a special emphasis on the countries of the Caribbean, and involving the OAS national offices; and (4) engaging in initiatives to strengthen civil society's capacity for influence.

In this context, we periodically hold information sessions to expand the knowledge of civil society and social actors about the Summit Process and participation mechanisms, and to attract new actors to the process. Similarly, to promote civil society advocacy in the follow-up phase of the Ninth Summit, we put out an announcement in late 2022 inviting new organizations and actors to join the 15 thematic subregional working groups formed in the preparatory phase. Including these organizations and actors in these groups makes it possible for them to exchange and develop recommendations on actions that will contribute to the implementation of the Summit mandates and raise awareness of their work. As a result, 182 new members were confirmed.

Meanwhile, we established a virtual community in February 2023 to expand exchanges of perspectives, experiences, and best practices. Civil society now participates in online consultations and training sessions through this platform. As a result of these virtual consultations, the working groups have prepared inputs to foster the implementation of the Ninth Summit mandates. These are being compiled in reports that will be made available to States.

In terms of capacity building, in order to provide tools to civil society to bolster their advocacy capacity, we have held training sessions with around 300 representatives of the sector on strategic communication (general, November 2022), closing the digital divide (women's organizations; November 2022), digital transformation (general; February 16-March 14, 2023), negotiation with a gender approach, strengthening leadership, advocacy in public policies, and strategic planning (women's organizations; July 2022, September 2022, February 2023, and March 2023).

I would also like to mention two publications: one compiles the contributions of civil society during the Ninth Summit process; the other—*Vital Viewpoints for Women*—was written in collaboration with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and includes recommendations to highlight the situation of women with respect to the core themes of the Ninth Summit and to advance the implementation of mandates from a gender perspective.

The Summits Secretariat, in collaboration with the OAS Art Museum of the Americas, is also holding a photography contest for amateur and professional photographers, to allow them to expose the true experiences of persons affected by the challenges associated with the Ninth Summit topics, and/or the solutions implemented to address them. The call for submissions was open from February 22 to March 31, 2023, during which time 226 applications were received.

Civil society and social actor participation has also been reflected in meetings of the SIRG ad hoc technical groups. Notably, specialized civil society representatives have participated in all technical group meetings, except for the meetings for negotiating the health document. At the meetings on "Our Green Future," the expert presentations focused on defending human rights, preserving coastal ecosystems, and reducing shipping emissions. At the Energy Group meeting, the private sector

discussed creating conditions for investments in the energy transition. Lastly, for the Group on Democratic Governance, specialized civil society representatives identified challenges and offered recommendations for strengthening democracy in the region. Their contributions were geared towards providing technical perspectives on the addressed issues and enriched the delegations' discussions.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the main results achieved under the "Strengthening the Participation of Women's Organizations in the Summit Process" project, implemented with the support of the Government of Canada, to which we are most grateful. The key role that women's organizations can and should play in the Summit Process was clearly demonstrated during the 19 months of implementation. First and foremost, efforts were made to increase the number and diversity of the region's women's organizations participating in the Summit Process, resulting in growth from 35 to over 250 organizations. In addition, to strengthen the participating organizations' capacities with a view to their empowerment and noteworthy participation in the Summit Process, the project held theoretical/practical training workshops on 10 key issues, such as negotiation, public speaking, leadership, strategic planning, advocacy, strategic communication, etc. Likewise, it facilitated consultations to develop recommendations on the Ninth Summit topics from a gender equality and women's rights perspective, which were submitted to the national summits coordinators during the preparatory phase as well as during the Ninth Summit itself and the follow-up phase. Lastly, the *Red Hemisférica Somos Líderesas* [We are Leaders Hemispheric Network] was established as a result of the notable, active participation of women's organizations in the Ninth Summit Process. This network is made up of women's organizations in the region committed to closely following up on the Ninth Summit mandates with a gender and women's rights perspective, among other agendas. The Summits Secretariat renews its commitment to women's civil society organizations and hopes to continue promoting spaces to ensure their continued participation in the Summit Process.

All of these efforts to boost civil society participation in the Ninth Summit process were made possible thanks to the interest and commitment of the civil society organizations and social actors actively participating in the process, as well as through the support and collaboration of a diverse, extensive network of strategic partners in the Summit Process, including Joint Summit Working Group entities, institutions in the inter-American system, the OAS and its various agencies, like the Section of Civil Society Relations, the National Offices, the Inter-American Commission of Women, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights rapporteurships; as well as other international and regional JSWG institutions, among others.

I appreciate your commitment to tackling the region's challenges and your active participation in this action-implementation phase. I would also like to invite you to continue to establish and promote venues for dialogue and collaboration with the civil society organizations and social actors of the Americas. Thank you.