

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

**Remarks During a Meeting With Central American Integration System
Leaders in Panama City, Panama**

April 10, 2015

Well, thank you, President Molina. Let me, first of all, thank our friend, the President of Panama and the people of Panama, Vice President of Panama, for the incredible hospitality and the outstanding arrangements for this summit.

It is good to see all of you again. The last time we met was in Costa Rica, and we, I thought, had a very productive discussion. And rather than just talk, I think our goal was to make sure that we had concrete actions that we could take that would improve our economies, the opportunities for our people, security in the region.

And this is very important to the United States, not just because of proximity, not just because our neighbors who are represented here are very close by, but because we have incredible bonds as people. There are Americans who make enormous contributions to our society every single day who come from Nicaragua and El Salvador and Belize and all the countries that are represented here today.

And so we have ties of family. We have ties of commerce. We share incredible heritage and incredible history. And so it is very important for us to make sure that the United States stands in solidarity and has a partnership with each of the countries that are represented around this table.

I will not be long. As President Molina indicated, since the last time we've met, it has been the determination of my administration that we find ways that we can more concretely assist many of the countries in Central America so that people in those countries feel that they have opportunity and development. That is in our interests, and that is in your interests as well.

We know, for example, that criminal elements and narcotrafficking thrives where people feel that they have no other pathways to success. If we can make sure that they feel that their efforts are rewarded in their own countries, then we're going to be much more successful with the security arrangements and coordination that we are involved with.

We know that the issue of migration does not just affect the United States, it also affects the countries in the region themselves. And the more that people, where they live, feel that they can find opportunity and raise families and be successful, the less disruptions there are and the less tensions there are at our borders.

As a consequence, in my budget, I've requested \$1 billion to support U.S. engagement across Central America. Some of these dollars would be designed to strengthen regional cooperation on security, but some of it, as President Varela and I spoke about during our earlier bilateral, is really focused on human development: education, providing young people pathways to success, focusing on what's happening at the community level. And we are very excited to work with you to find what you think will be most effective in your countries, and then to have a coordinated process moving forward in order for us to succeed.

We do believe that regional integration on issues like energy, electricity, improving trade flows all can be incredibly valuable for the region as a whole and ultimately will be valuable for the United States as well.

We continue to believe that part of that regional agenda should focus on governance issues and transparency. And we're in a city right now and a country that I think has done an excellent job on many of those fronts and, as a consequence, the high growth rates in Panama, I think, should serve as a useful model for so many countries not just in this region, but around the world that business will be attracted where there are skilled workers and where there's rules that people understand and can follow and there's accountability and transparency.

So the bottom line is, I think we have a strong, common agenda. This is something that we do because what's good for this region will ultimately good—be good for the United States, as well.

Before I came in, I signed—me and President Varela witnessed the signing of a deal between Boeing and Copa Airlines. It is going to create 12,000 jobs in the United States and 6,000 in Panama. And that's an example of what happens when we work together. So we want to seize this opportunity.

I'm very grateful for the opportunities to dialogue with you. I want to spend most of my time listening and not just talking. And we are very, very grateful to all of you for the cooperation and partnership that we already have. We think we can make it even stronger and even better.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. at the Hotel Riu Plaza Panama. In his remarks, he referred to President Otto Fernando Pérez Molina of Guatemala; and President Juan Carlos Varela and Vice President Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado of Panama.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Central American Integration System leaders.

Locations: Panama City, Panama.

Names: Pérez Molina, Otto Fernando; Saint Malo de Alvarado, Isabel de; Varela, Juan Carlos.

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