

**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing on the Ninth
Summit of the Americas**

May 26, 2022

National Summit Coordinator Kevin O'Reilly Opening Statement

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Rubio, and members of the subcommittee, I am honored to appear before you today. On June 8, President Biden will arrive in Los Angeles to host the Summit of the Americas, a first for us since the inaugural summit in 1994.

This event will bring together governments from across our hemisphere to address pressing challenges and create new opportunities for our citizens and citizens from across the Americas.

Voices from across the hemisphere will inform the Summit's work.

We see direct engagement between the people and their government leaders as a Summit priority, and we expect people from every country of the hemisphere to join us in Los Angeles – including from lands where authoritarians would silence their citizens – to focus on “Building an Equitable, Sustainable, and Resilient Future.”

Civil society, youth, and business will participate through the Civil Society Forum, Young Americas Forum, and CEO Summit. For the first time, representatives of these groups will engage directly with heads of state and government in roundtable discussions during the Summit.

Their conversations on topics ranging from “Accelerating Digital Transformation” and “Safe and Secure Communities” address U.S. priorities and exemplify the exchanges between citizens and elected officials that characterize the best in democratic dialogue.

We look to make substantial progress on urgent challenges facing the Americas.

The Department of State chairs a formal process known as the Summit Implementation Review Group, through which governments develop leader-level commitments to adopt and launch in Los Angeles.

We intend to establish a comprehensive action plan on strengthening the capacity of health systems, and their resilience; on working together better to prevent, prepare for, and respond to health crises and strengthen our health infrastructure and systems, including the health sector workforce; and in doing so create growth in our economies.

Our commitments for a green future and a clean energy transition aim to put the region at the forefront of sustainable growth while addressing climate challenges.

To bridge the digital divide and make sure all can benefit from the 21st century economy, we intend to create the first regional agenda, and common principles, on preparing our citizens and societies for the digital transformation reshaping our hemisphere and our world.

Finally, this Summit offers our region's democratic leaders an opportunity to affirm their commitment to democracy, and to the citizens from whom they derive authority, by adopting an action plan on building strong and inclusive democracies.

These commitments reflect both our priorities and topics of broad regional concern identified in consultation with governments, civil society, youth, and business from across the region, a process that we began shortly after we first assumed the chair of the summit process from Peru in July 2020.

These commitments and action plans, each in their own way, help address the root causes of irregular migration, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and now by rising global prices for food and agricultural and other commodities, a challenge made worse by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To drive the region's economic recovery, we must push for reforms and expand opportunities for financing from transparent sources such as the Inter-American Development Bank and its private sector window, IDB Invest.

The agenda that I've laid out here can help focus governments on these underlying issues by strengthening our democratic resilience, fighting corruption, building resilience in our health systems and increasing health security, supporting and strengthening independent media and civil society, promoting more equitable economic growth that reaches the people on the peripheries of our societies, and combating the climate crisis.

As a region, we must address these issues in an equitable and inclusive way, or we will only exacerbate our vulnerabilities to health emergencies, food insecurity, irregular migration, and other challenges.

Each Summit pillar in some way addresses the root causes of migration across our hemisphere, a major challenge for the United States, but not only the United States. It affects us all. Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and their neighbors host more than five million Venezuelans, victims of political repression and economic collapse. Costa Rica hosts 500,000 Nicaraguans who have fled Ortega's authoritarian rule. Mexico stands third among nations globally in the number of asylum claims received. This unprecedented challenge must spur us to work together.

President Biden and other heads of government and heads of state will also discuss responses to migration and forced displacement, including efforts to stabilize migrant populations, expand legal pathways, and improve humane migration management.

We will work with the Department of Homeland Security and governments in the region to ensure order at our southwest border. DHS will continue responding to irregular migration by strictly but fairly

enforcing our immigration laws, processing individuals in a safe, orderly, and humane manner. DHS efforts underway will help streamline immigration processing for noncitizens in custody, to minimize time spent in shared accommodation and strain on U.S. resources.

We will continue to support DHS efforts to quickly remove individuals who do not establish the legal grounds to remain in the United States, while remaining a global leader in providing protection for those who flee or fear persecution and torture in their home countries. We constantly coordinate with other countries to ease or streamline repatriation requirements.

We will work with members of this committee to make the Summit a success, working together with partners from across the hemisphere to meet shared challenges. We see clear value in building a regional consensus on such priorities wherever we can.