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**STATEMENT BY H.E. ALVARO COLOM CABALLEROS,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA DURING THE 66th SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS
(New York, 21 September 2011)**

Mister President,
Mister Secretary-General,
Esteemed colleagues,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I

At the outset, I would like to salute Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, of Qatar, our President for the present session. His long experience at the United Nations and his acknowledged ability bode well for the smooth carrying out of our work. I would also like to acknowledge the outstanding work of Doctor Joseph Deiss of Switzerland, our outgoing President. Our delegation to the United Nations worked closely with Doctor Deiss, and we can give testimony of his exceptional commitment to the United Nations and his tireless capacity of work.

I also salute Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. I reiterate our appreciation for his work, I congratulate him for his re-election to a second term of five years, and I thank him for the support that he has given to my country and my Government.

II

Mister President,

My participation during each of the general debates of the General Assembly during my presidency of four years is a testimony of our support to the United Nations. This occasion is quite unique for two reasons. First, because it permits me to inform this august Assembly on the achievements of my Administration during the last four years, as well as on some of the matters that were left pending. Second, because I can report that barely ten days ago the first round of the general elections were held in my country, in a climate of ample citizens' participation, and a calm and normal environment, thus consolidating our progress towards a democratic and participatory democracy.

III

Allow me, then, to begin with some words on the progress achieved in Guatemala, in spite of the exceptional obstacles that we had to face derived from the international financial crisis of 2008-2009, a political crisis in 2009 that was overcome in compliance with the rule of law and investigations that shed truth on the matter; and the impact of three major natural disasters, as well as the historical challenges that we face, now and in the future.

Where I to summarize the significance of my tenure in Government in a few words, I would have to say the following:

- First, my Administration gave priority to providing social services to the population living in poverty and in extreme poverty, obtaining tangible results, especially through our program of social cohesion, and in particular the conditioned transfers in cash;
- Second, space was recuperated for the State and for formulating public policy, in areas previously dominated by corporate and private interests;
- Third, progress was achieved in halting and even initially reverting an escalation of criminal violence originating in previous periods, through the cleaning up of the security forces and the promotion of policies that confronted – and did not coexist with – organized crime;
- Fourth, whole territories were recuperated that were previously dominated by narcotic traffickers, and the latter received serious blows through seizures of drugs and funds, and their capture, including important leaders of cartels, on a scale without precedent in Guatemala;
- Fifth, a series of wide-ranging policies were adopted to gain greater transparency, including the creation of the Transparency Secretariat, the adoption of the National Law to Public Information and the Observatory of Public Expenditures;
- Sixth, a renovation and adaptation of the energy matrix was developed to make it more compatible with environmental concerns and to counter the effects of the increased cost of hydrocarbons;
- Seventh, two important economic corridors which impacted positively on the standard of living of regions plagued by poverty, as the Northern transversal corridor and the Polochic valley, were developed;
- Eighth, a dynamic foreign policy was pursued which sought putting the Central American region on a new footing, and permitted a good understanding with our neighbours of Latin America and the Caribbean, a matter I will come back to presently;

- Ninth, far greater prominence was given to municipal power;
- Tenth, the independence of the different branches of the state were faithfully respected;
- Finally, all of this was achieved conserving and improving a stable and solid macroeconomic panorama.

Some fundamental themes require the participation of all the institutions of the State, and especially legislation on the part of the Legislative Branch and rulings on the part of the Judiciary. In that sense, I would like to highlight the crucial role played by the United Nations through the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which counts on the solid support not only of my Government but also of civil society. We are pleased that the mandate of said Commission has been extended until September of 2013, and we acknowledge the important advances achieved since its inception.

Among the main challenges that mark the pending matters, I would like to mention the following:

- First, in spite of the progress achieved in the social spheres, one must recognize how much remains to be done to eliminate poverty and elevate the level of wellbeing of the Guatemalan population, especially among the most vulnerable strata, such as children, single-woman households, and a disproportionate part of the indigenous population. I am convinced that the actions developed through the programs of social cohesion must be institutionalized, which in turn will require a substantial fiscal transformation to provide the State with the funds needed for this purpose. This, it should be acknowledged, is not possible without the participation of Congress, even in those cases, as was my own, where the Central Government promotes it. In economic matters, what is needed is to reactivate productive activities, in the framework of financial stability, as well as a fiscal reform that is compatible with the financing of development.
- Second, due to our geographical location, Guatemala has been transformed into an important transit point for illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs and human trafficking, each increasingly in the hands of organized transnational crime. We have made staunch efforts to face this phenomenon and address the popular demand for improved security for all citizens. In this, regional cooperation is indispensable, as is the case also for international cooperation. The member countries of the Central American Integration System have adopted a Strategy for the Security of Central America, which was jointly submitted, together with the Governments of Colombia and Mexico, to the international

community in an International Conference held in Guatemala on 22 and 23 of June past. The main point is that we have acted forcefully, but it is imperative to implement this effort through the twenty two projects which require financing.

- Third, it is difficult to promote development when repeatedly facing grave natural disasters; lately, at a rate of at least one major event every year. We attribute this, at least in part, to climate change, given the high vulnerability of the Central American Isthmus to the effects of this phenomenon. That is why we insist on the imperative that humanity close ranks to defend our common habitat: our planet. Up to now, the progress achieved has been minimal, and we call on the international community to redouble efforts to adopt tangible actions in the next Conference of the Parts of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Durban, South Africa, in December of this year.

IV

Mister President,

In my previous statements to this Assembly, I have concluded my remarks with some references to our foreign policy, especially as it impacts on or is impacted by the agenda of the United Nations.

My Government developed an active foreign policy, which pursued, among other aspects, the strengthening of the integration process, in the framework of the Central American Integration System.

As part of this active policy, we are confident that in some three weeks one of the main objectives in the multilateral sphere will have been met, through the election of Guatemala to a non-permanent post in the Security Council for the next biennium. This will renew our commitment with the United Nations, and at the same time will give greater strength to our own foreign policy, by exposing us to a wide and complex thematic agenda. We will carry out our work with responsibility, independence, and respect for the principles and values enshrined in the United Nations Charter. At the same time, I thank our regional group, the GRULAC, for having endorsed our candidature, and thank each and every member state in advance for the support which I trust will be given to us at the time of electing new members to the Security Council.

The central theme of our general debate is mediation, and I would like to reiterate our full commitment to strengthen preventive diplomacy and the instruments that the United Nations has in its arsenal to prevent conflicts. In this context, we can even accept sanctions regimes, subject to these emanating from collective decisions adopted by the Security Council. The other side of the coin is that we reject sanctions and coercive measures adopted unilaterally. In this regard, we call on the Government of the United States of America to abandon the economic embargo applied against the Republic of Cuba. We believe that such a step would result in many favourable consequences in both countries.

We are following with attention and hope the events that affect several countries in North Africa, which tend to give a greater voice to their respective peoples. Clearly, it is up to them to decide their own destiny. But in the midst of the present turbulent situation, what cannot be postponed is a solution to the secular conflict which has resulted in a confrontation of the State of Israel with its neighbours. We support the creation of a viable and prosperous Palestinian State, living in peace and harmony, behind secure and defensible borders, next to the State of Israel. We understand that the international community can accompany the process to give fruition to this vision, as indeed is happening through the so-called "quartet", made up of the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations, but its implementation is up to the two parties – Israel and Palestine – to be reached through negotiations to solve all the final status issues.

We reiterate our commitment for the re-launching of the regional integration process of the Central American Integration System (SICA), to seek even closer relations with our neighbours of the Caribbean and Latin America, and we enthusiastically support the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

On another crucial topic, an important step has been taken to reach a solution to our age-old territorial dispute with Belize through the signing of a Special Agreement which, upon completion of the internal juridical process, will permit both countries to seek a juridical solution through the International Court of Justice. I am pleased to inform that the Guatemalan Congress approved the Special Agreement by a unanimous vote, and the next step is to submit same to a national referendum.

V

Mister President,

In this, my last appearance before the General Assembly as President of Guatemala, I extend my best wishes for peace to reign in the world, that we can eliminate poverty from the face of the earth, and that we make a genuine effort to defend our common environmental heritage for future generations.

Thank you.