

Address by Secretary General of SICA, Ambassador Aníbal Quiñónez, on the occasion of the Meeting on Harmonisation and Alignment of Regional Cooperation

General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System SG-SICA.. Address by Secretary General of SICA, Ambassador Aníbal Quiñónez, on the occasion of the Meeting on Harmonisation and Alignment of Regional Cooperation. Just over two years ago, in May 2006, we met in the city of Vienna to discuss the process of harmonisation and alignment of external cooperation to our region, where we agreed to state that "the international agenda of cooperation is multifaceted and diverse, a mix of different instruments for different situations." And we added that "it is a matter of achieving reasonable overall balance among the peoples of the world, in order to establish a widespread climate of peace and greater access to the benefits by the big majorities." Over recent decades a set of principles about foreign cooperation has developed, both in regard to the beneficiaries and the contributors themselves. As regards the former, the general trend is that aid be routed to areas of greatest impact, the effects of which will result in alleviating poverty and achieving equity in development. It is therefore a question of strengthening the capacity of the countries receiving the cooperation, in order that they may fend for themselves in managing the resources and meeting their needs. To this end, increased emphasis is being placed on encouraging that the use of cooperation should be defined with the participation of the beneficiaries, since it has been shown that cooperation becomes more effective when it supports a development strategy conceived and led by the beneficiaries, in collaboration with other civil and social actors. The process of granting and utilisation of resources from abroad must be clear and transparent, with specific uses that radiate interaction towards the fundamental development issues in Central America. In addition, cooperation must be properly recorded, with transparency and accountability, evaluating the results in economic and social terms. There is consensus among the international community that external cooperation should be complementary to and not a substitute for domestic resources, and that contributors must also align their cooperation policy practices and management in harmony with the cooperation priorities of the recipient countries. Central America so far has been receiving cooperation from the international community to support the strengthening of the integration process and the sustainable development of the Region. Such support, combined with the political will of the States and the scarcity of resources in Central America, has allowed, however, that the Isthmus advance significantly in this process, achieving significant developments in policy, institutional, legal, economic-commercial, social and environmental areas. Despite the achievements, the SICA Member States are aware that the development of the System of Integration requires innovative initiatives to harmonize and align international cooperation to the region. For this reason, Central America has joined the recent agreements adopted at various international fora, such as the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, the Rome Forum on Harmonisation of Cooperation and the Paris Forum on Enhanced Aid Effectiveness, which has provided greater conceptual clarity and has allowed us to move forward with our goals of ownership, harmonisation and alignment of regional cooperation, to reflect greater relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. The international support we are now seeking is aimed essentially at the development of those areas or sectors that generate an added integration value and, to that end, we are working in the structuring of a strategic agenda or multi-year plan that could identify clearly the sectoral and thematic priorities that may be underpinned in a more efficient and predictable way through international cooperation. Dear ladies and gentlemen, our donor friends undoubtedly understand the importance and potential of our integration process, as well as the importance of greater cooperation towards the sustained realisation of the purposes and principles of the Tegucigalpa Protocol, and the Mandates of the Meetings of Presidents and Councils of Ministers of the Region. Of course, we are aware that the

integration effort belongs mainly to our Peoples and Governments, and that external cooperation has but a complementary character in achieving the objectives of the process, maintaining proportionality and alignment with the objective pursued by our Governments in the framework of national and regional plans. All of the above leads us to reinforce a trend leaning towards improving the quality of cooperation, directing it towards priorities agreed upon between the cooperating and the receiving countries through agile and versatile mechanisms and procedures, which is what we intend to identify in fora such as the one which brings us together today. Dear friends, our approach is geared towards finding concrete results, and seeks to advance the planning and monitoring of all the initiatives being developed within the process of integration and sustainable development in the region, defining first the expected impacts of the cooperation, identifying the technical and financial resources and the actions that will allow us to achieve our goals. Therefore, the planning of cooperation actions must be aligned with the priorities of the governments of the Central American region. Thus, joint management and follow-up actions with the different cooperation partners must be closely coordinated and harmonised, and should also result in their being evaluated in a systematic way. It is in this spirit and in that direction that last October the Meeting of Presidents approved the development of a strategic agenda of the integration process, including a Multi-Year Plan in all sectors and fields of endeavour of SICA. The adoption of a Multi-Year Plan has to be understood as a participatory and inter-sectoral process where both technical and political levels converge and cross one another, to obtain as a result a short-, medium- and long-term vision of our cooperation objectives and needs. The multi-year plan's terms shall be for the specific performance of member countries of SICA, its bodies and institutions. Among its major themes we will find, among others, actions aimed at deepening economic integration and the unification of customs procedures, strengthening political relations, trade and cooperation with foreign countries –such as the Association Agreement between Central America and the European Union–, the development of the security strategy between Central America and Mexico, the adoption of a roadmap for social development, the devising of a Strategy on Climate Change and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, the development of the Regional Agricultural and Fisheries policy, the adoption of a Single Funding Mechanism, the implementation of a Court of Accounts charged with conducting audits of system institutions, and implementing the recently approved energy strategy. We have advanced significantly in all these areas in recent months. Ladies and gentlemen, just as the adoption of a Multi-Year Plan should be understood as a participatory intersectoral process that requires an orderly and organic effort by the Member States of SICA who play the higher leading role, technically supported by regional institutions, the harmonisation process constitutes a key element in order for the Central American countries, regional bodies and the donor community to adequately contribute to the strengthening of regional integration. The achievement of concrete results in this and other meetings of the process of harmonisation and alignment will place SICA in line with current trends in international cooperation, establishing a partnership among the Central American governments, the General Secretariat, the regional institutions, and the countries and cooperation agencies for the implementation of a Strategic Agenda or Multi-Year Plan of the System. Therefore, we must work hard to make the exercise that we are now developing become a valuable experience for our purposes. In this context, it is important to recognize the valuable contribution that the European Union has been providing through the Support Programme for Central American Regional Integration (PAIRCA) in order to achieve the harmonisation and alignment of regional cooperation. In the same vein, the newly established Information System for Regional Cooperation of the General Secretariat (SICOR) will provide a necessary tool to know at all times the amount, purpose and use of the cooperation, and therefore, to measure the impacts and the effectiveness of it. Ladies and gentlemen, since the founding of the United Nations Organisation at the end of the

Second World War in the mid-twentieth century, international cooperation for development has grown in importance and quality. It seems that at last we have come to realize that underdevelopment in some parts of the world is a permanent source of conflict that goes beyond borders and therefore the need for cooperation becomes enormous to bridge the gap for the benefit of the entire international community. Central America has seen and experienced this new perception first hand. There is no doubt that cooperation helped to a great extent to overcome the conflict situation in the eighties, leading to new ways of integration and development. Much of our work in the System of Integration has as its key motive external cooperation, as it is, in fact, leading us at due pace to be ready to assume the costs of our own progress and wellbeing, never forgetting the ties of solidarity with other nations around the world. I invite the donors present at this meeting to continue to assist us with a new system of cooperation, harmonised and aligned according to the actual needs of our peoples afflicted by poverty and extreme poverty and who suffer from great deficiencies in some of the most important social sectors. I extend my deepest appreciation for all the help received so far and I reaffirm my hope for your continued support as we face the new and difficult challenges posed by the international community today.

Thank you very much.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Nov. 10, 2008.