

TITLE OF PAPER: Remarks by the Deputy Prime Minister of Belize and Minister of Natural Resources And Environment / Pro-tem President of The Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD)

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**REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF BELIZE AND MINISTER OF
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT –
PRO-TEM PRESIDENT OF THE CCAD**

I have the privilege as the Protem President of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) to make this presentation on behalf of the Ministers of Environment of Central America.

The Central American Commission on Environment and Development see this Earth Observation Summit as a very important initiative in monitoring the health of our region and the planet as a whole.

For Belize this is a very important event, in particular when one considers that we are the custodians of the largest barrier reef and three of the four largest atolls in the hemisphere and where 42% of our national territory is under some protected status; and where accessibility and availability of real time information are critical to the management of these resources.

In late 1998 the CCAD signed with NASA a memorandum of understanding for capacity building and organization of the regional institutions, with the purpose of monitoring the rational use of natural resources and preserving the environment of the region. Likewise with the support of several donor organizations, in particular the World Bank, the CCAD has achieved the consolidation of this process over the last 5 years.

In December 2002, the CCAD signed an agreement with the World Bank and NASA to support the idea of a system of regional monitoring and observation, with the purpose of providing strategic environmental information on the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (CBM), which is an initiative between the 7 countries of Central America and Mexico. This information will allow the decision makers to convert the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor into a real platform of sustainable development. The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is one of the most ambitious and visionary initiatives that unite eight countries of the region, towards

the primary objective of the conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources of the area.

With the support of the World Bank, the CCAD now has an inter-institutional coordination team for the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, which is lead by the ministers of environment and natural resources of the eight countries, assisted by the national geographic institutions of each country.

These regional initiatives have lead to substantial achievements in the harmonization, prioritization and use of common standards for the geographical information systems (GIS), from Southern Mexico to Panamá.

As a result of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative Meeting in Paris on December 2002, other organizations and agencies have joined this initiative. Among them the USAID/GCAP has played an important role in the monitoring and provision of information on climate change. This initiative also has as an objective of the strengthening of the participation of universities and regional investigation centers, to establish a monitoring system of weather change related subjects.

There have also been several advances in the development of a model for monitoring the Selva Maya. This has involved the lead participation of Conservation International (CI), and through this program, our countries are expected to be working in matters such as wetlands of global importance (Under the RAMSAR Convention), coastal areas and watersheds with World Conservation Union (IUCN) as a major partner.

Bearing in mind these important international and regional cooperation mechanisms, the Central American community hopes that their initiatives serves the global community as a small but significant example of how to forge its own model of cooperation involving wide cooperation at all levels of society, involving not only environment ministries, but also

geographical institutions, investigation centers, universities, public and private learning institutions, civil society, and the public sector. We believe that this system can be used in other regions of the world, with similar organization schemes and where databases could be shared to make it possible to integrate a global observation system for the Earth, with roots in each country. This would allow us to produce more reliable and updated information to make decisions at a local, national, regional, hemispheric and global level.

Through our participation at this very important and momentous international fora, We want to express our sincere interest in participating in a direct and active way in the intergovernmental ad-hoc working group (IAHWG)), to prepare the conceptual plan and the implementation plan, for the first ten years of the Integrated Earth Observation System.

We come prepared to share our accomplishments and experiences with everyone gathered here today. We are also here to learn from the experiences of others and look forward to an implementation that will also further strengthen our capacities in Central America to be able to take full advantage of the new available and emerging information technologies. We believe that only through these global partnerships can we really hope to monitor the health of Mother Earth and begin to heal her wounds. The Ministers Of Environment of Central America fully support this important and innovative initiative to create an Integrated Earth Observation System. We owe this to mother earth. We owe it to our children.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the US government for the invitation extended to my delegation to participate in this most memorable event and to the organizers of the event for making this day a reality.