**SIXTH MEETING OF MINISTERS AND HIGH AUTHORITIES** OEA/Ser.K/XVIII.6

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OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro

VI Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Science and Technology

December 7, 2021

Welcome Ministers and other authorities of Science and Technology of the Americas.

Our region has been deeply affected by the human, social and economic impact of COVID-19.

We believe that science, technology and innovation can accelerate solutions to the challenges we face and become a fundamental part of the post-COVID-19 recovery.

The last two years have changed the way we live and our ideas about how to build a better future.

While COVID has accelerated the digitalization process in all sectors of the economy, it has also worsened inequalities and widened existing gaps.

Many have been excluded from this process, with little or no access to connectivity and the skills needed to benefit from the digital economy.

COVID has also worsened the educational gap for students, particularly those in lower socioeconomic status.

We must connect education to the economy and build the necessary learning opportunities and skills in the labor force to take advantage of transformative technologies.

The Draft Declaration of Jamaica which you will consider during this meeting is an important first step. Two initiatives to be launched during this meeting are of great relevance to the future of our region.

**First**, we are looking forward to working with Member States to make the “Youth Academy on Transformative Science and Technologies” a cornerstone of COVID recovery.

We are confident that we will reach our initial target of training, certifying and expanding job opportunities for 10,000 young people in transformative technologies by 2024.

**Second**, the OAS Regional Network of Centers of Excellence in science and technologies is another concrete result of this meeting. These Centers will help map trends and capabilities, address strategic challenges, and find solutions to everyday problems through shared expertise and resources from multiple sources in our member states.

Today the need is higher than ever to leverage transformative technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Nanomaterials, Quantum Computing, Big Data, Augmented Reality, Blockchain, and Biotech.

These technologies represent potential engines to drive the social and economic development of our region and overcome its historical challenges: poverty, inequality, and low productivity. These new technologies are also a tool to help address climate change and global threats, including future pandemics.

We must promote reliance on the information and tools that science provides. Evidence-based decision-making must continue to inform our agendas and actions.

Ministers, we are at a pivotal moment in our development. Let’s embrace this opportunity to transform our societies and lift our communities. You have my best wishes for a productive meeting.

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