STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES (GRULAC), BY MR. ROLANDO CASTRO, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF COSTA RICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO PAY TRIBUTE TO HIS EXCELLENCY MR. BAN KI MOON, SECRETARY GENERAL

Mr. President

It is an honor to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, GRULAC, on this special session to homage Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

At the outset we would like to acknowledge Mr. Ban for leading the Organization wisely, with determination, coherence and integrity.

Ten years ago, during his oath ceremony, placing his left hand on the UN Charter, Mr. Ban promised to strengthen the three pillars of the United Nations to help build a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.

Mr. Secretary General, you have delivered!

Mr. President

Mr. Ban’s legacy is very wide and diverse: it ranges from setting up the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, to renewed efforts in the fight against terrorism, from the promotion of the Rule of Law at the national and international levels to mobilizing the international community towards overcoming the refugee crisis, just to name a few.

In the field of peace and security, we reiterate our appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary-General regarding the review processes on peacekeeping operations, on the peacebuilding architecture and on the role of women in the promotion of international peace and security, including his efforts to appropriately address allegations or confirmed acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, within the framework of the implementation and reinforcement of the UN zero-tolerance policy in this context. All his reports converged on the emphasis attributed to prevention, both by the General Assembly and by the Security Council, with the enhancement of Sustaining Peace as a step to foster a durable and sustainable peace, and underlined the primacy of politics and diplomacy. The message was clear: military action should always be a measure of last resort, and carried out in full compliance with UN Charter provisions.
It is only fair to stress the value of Mr. Ban's endeavors to elevate the disarmament issues in the political agenda of the UN with his Five Point Plan for Nuclear disarmament. We have made ours Mr. Ban's accurate appraisal regarding that there are not right hands for the wrong weapons, and express our thankfulness for his support that the Secretariat has given to the Humanitarian Initiative and the process to negotiate a legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons. Mr. Ban also stressed the lack of resources devoted to peace and disarmament, stating that the world is over armed, while peace is underfunded, and has supported our efforts to achieve a more secure world, on the basis of international law and cooperation, not on weapons.

Our group would like to highlight his heritage on sustainable development, which is quite impressive. Not only did the Secretary General build political will and mobilized global action for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, but he was one of the main actors of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, which will guide global development for the next 15 years.

Furthermore, our sustainable development goals have become the axis of the operational activities of the United Nations Development System, and have added as well, a powerful transformative energy to the revitalization of the United Nations Governing bodies, in a renewed process.

As an example of his endurance, he brought to the attention of the international community the issue of Climate Change, working tirelessly to overcome the setback of Copenhagen to achieve the adoption of the Paris Agreement, a milestone in securing guarantees to reduce global emissions. We remember his words: “we do not have any ‘plan b’ because we do not have ‘planet b’”.

Mr. President

It is probably in the Human Rights pillar where Mr. Ban has left his most lasting mark.

It is essential to start by recognizing his crucial contribution to gender equality through his advocacy for women’s rights. After pushing for the creation of UN Women as a separate agency in 2011, he promoted several campaigns and initiatives to address violence against women.

GRULAC would like to highlight the “He for She” campaign, an initiative that men are invited to join, committing themselves to "take action against all forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls".

More recently, Mr. Ban established the High Level Panel on Women Economic Empowerment, a global campaign to fully mobilize the untapped
economic potential of half the world’s population. The panel aims to address structural barriers to women’s economic empowerment and full inclusion in economic activities.

He further spearheaded Every Women Every Child, an unprecedented global movement that mobilizes and intensifies international and national action by governments and other stakeholders to address the major health challenges facing women, children and adolescents.

The Secretary General will also be remembered for his efforts to bring new generations closer to the organization, and provide them with the energy and drive that can lead to change. He established the Office of the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and called the ECOSOC Youth Forum, an annual meeting point where youth from every corner of the world can exchange ideas.

Mr. Ban has been, without a doubt, a huge defender of vulnerable groups, championing the protection of the human rights of everyone, everywhere, like he did by delivering his famous speech to the Human Rights Council entitled: “The Time has come”.

Another of his signature initiatives, Human Rights Upfront, has improved early UN engagement with national authorities, as well as support from the UN for national led solutions for the promotion and protection of human rights.

It is important to highlight Mr. Ban’s commitment in the protection of human rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, particularly those in vulnerable situation, like women and children. We were pleased with the Secretary-General’s efforts in mobilizing the response of the international community around these issues, without losing sight of their root causes.

Even after his tireless efforts in strengthening all three pillars of the UN, there remain challenges for his successor, including making the Organization more fit for purpose to face the pressing demands of our times.

Mr. President

Ten years ago Mr. Ban promised to be a bridge builder.

For GRULAC, every time he reached out to our region, or opened his door to any of us, he built those bridges.

Every time he helped Latin America and the Caribbean overcome our challenges or celebrated with us our achievements, he was keeping that promise.

When he expressed his regrets over the cholera epidemic in Haiti, apologizing for the UN’s moral responsibility, he built a final bridge with our region that will stand the test of time.
Mr. Ban, every time you made an effort to speak to us in Spanish or French, we felt appreciated.

It is our turn now to say: Kamsam nidá!

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General, for your commitment and for your legacy. We also wish to express our recognition to Mrs. Ban for working side by side with the Secretary General throughout this decade.