News Release

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Education identified as priority for Latin America into the next decade

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Education is is "the number one issue," declared Oscar Arias Sánchez, the President of Costa Rica, at the World Economic Forum on Latin America.

Noting the low proportion of teenagers who go on to university Mr Sanchez added: “If we don’t educate people, it will be very difficult to have progress.”

In the closing session of the World Economic Forum on Latin America, business, government and civil society leaders identified the need to construct values and skills-driven education systems as the top priority for Latin America to achieve sustainable development and lay the foundation for a promising decade starting in 2010.

Added Mr Arias: “The quality and amount of education we have does not allow us to escape from the feudalism where a lot of Latin Americans still live.”

The Costa Rican President called on countries to lower or eliminate spending on weapons and armed forces and instead channel more funds to education, public health and the environment.

During the closing session, participants also highlighted the need for infrastructure investment, law and order, and economic growth and security as critical priorities. “If there is a lack of security, people don’t invest,” Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Velez explained.

Referring to the recent incursion by his country’s military into neighbouring Ecuador, Uribe said that the mission was intended to root terrorists.

“We have decided to get rid of terrorism, this scourge of 40 years – and we have to do it,” he declared to a standing ovation.

For his part, Felipe Calderón, the President of Mexico, acknowledged that the downturn in the US economy could hurt his country.

“Our correlation with the US economy can turn from being a great advantage to becoming a great disadvantage. When the US catches a cold, Mexico gets pneumonia. My role as president is to figure out what we will get when the US catches pneumonia.”

Later, Calderón told participants that to withstand the global economic slowdown and a recession in the US, “the key is for Latin America to decide how to speed up growth and to grow with harmony and fairness.”

He said that the World Economic Forum on Latin America has given the region “the opportunity to see how much we share and how it is possible to overcome our differences”. He concluded: “This meeting will help all of us make a much better Latin America and build a Latin America that looks to the future with optimism.”

Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, agreed, remarking that “the cautious optimism [in the region of participants at the meeting] shows the resilience which

has been achieved in Latin America’s economic, political and social development.”

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