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FYI

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Subject: Mexico-Caricom Summit calls for Haiti rebirth

Mexico-Caricom Summit calls for Haiti rebirth

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, Mexico, Feb. 21 (Xinhua) -- Heads of state or government from the Caribbean region on Sunday called for the earthquake disaster in Haiti to be a spur for the rebirth of the nation, during the opening session of the first Mexico-Caricom Summit in Playa del Carmen, a resort city on Mexico's Caribbean coast.

"First on our agenda is Haiti," said Roosevelt Skerrit, the prime minister of Dominica and leader of the Caricom (the Caribbean Community) until July. "We want to ensure reconstruction goes beyond immediate efforts. We have an opportunity to bring about the renaissance of Haiti, not just to return to where we were before the disaster struck."

On Jan. 12, Haiti was struck by an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale, which killed at least 200,000 people and destroyed numerous homes, workplaces, infrastructure and government buildings.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon, who formally opened the summit on Sunday afternoon, said Haiti would be a top priority, adding that the summit would also discuss boosting trade and growth across the Caribbean region, protecting and developing tourism, boosting regional security, and tackling climate change. He said that Mexico was committed to the region.

"Mexico is a nation that is Caribbean nation, powerfully Caribbean," Calderon said. "As such Mexico takes on its responsibility of participating actively in the region's development."

During his speech, Haitian President Rene Preval said that as many as 300,000 people may have died in the devastating quake last month.

"More than 200,000 bodies have been recovered from the streets, (and) with those under the rubble that figure could reach 300,000," he said. Preval also thanked the host Mexico for all the aid it had provided for Haiti's earthquake victims.

"Haiti's friends realize that Haiti's true development cannot be built on aid, but must be based on investment," Preval said, adding that the nation needs "not rebuilding but refounding."

"We need a more just nation that is not focused on Port-au-Prince where the political and economic elite live," he stressed.

He also urged all those present to help the 1.5 million Haitians who he estimated were sleeping in the streets because their homes were wrecked on Jan. 12. "The first rains that have begun to fall have already made all dignified living impossible," he said, also warning that worse is to come when Haiti's rainy season begins in April.

The Mexico-Caricom Summit held on Sunday will be followed on Monday by a two-day Group of Rio Summit. Haiti is both a Rio and Caricom member. During the Rio meeting, Mexico is set to propose that the Group be expanded into a broader organization that brings together the 24-nation Group of Rio and 15-nation Caricom. Six of Caricom's members are also Group of Rio members.

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