

Building connections via people

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ISABEL DE SAINT MALO DE ALVARADO has over 20 years' experience in consulting, development and implementation of public policies, in both international organisations and the private sector. In her capacity as Vice-President, she leads the Social Cabinet, supports the National Consultation Council for Development and promotes topics regarding transparency, the fight against corruption and gender equality. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, she promotes a foreign policy that positions Panama as a country of dialogue, bridging divisions at the cutting edge of Global Development Agenda.

Home to more than 4 million people, Panama is a stunning melting pot of cultures, races, and traditions. At the birth of our republic in the early 1900s, there were more immigrants than Panamanians living on our isthmus. Today, we attribute much of our success to the talent, diversity of know-how, and investment that people from across the globe have brought into our country.

This legacy of connectivity and openness has made an indelible impact on our unique economic platform. A country with a diversified economy, with no single sector surpassing 20 per cent of our GDP, Panama has led Latin America and the Caribbean on economic growth and competitiveness in the last decade.

The Canal itself stands as a logistical wonder of the world, which for more than a century has represented the great coming together of people, places, products, and ideas. It has transformed our small, developing country at the margins of global trade into a thriving epicentre of global commerce. I like to argue that Panama was globalised even before the term "globalisation" existed. We seek to consolidate

Panama's position as the connection to Latin America and the Caribbean for Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

As the commercial and banking hub of Latin America, we strongly believe that Panama stands as a prime location for investment and development of ideas. This explains why people from across the world are flocking to Panama to take advantage of these tremendous opportunities. We are home to some of the world's largest multinational corporations. Additionally, Panama's innovation and knowledge centre (Ciudad del Saber) was chosen as headquarters of the United Nations Interagency Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean, the first interagency centre created by the UN in the world.

Our commitment to global connectivity goes well beyond our logistics platform, economy, finance and commerce. Before the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have vowed to devote our wealth, capabilities, and strategic geographical position to the service of people. We have demonstrated this with our dedication to transparency, equality, justice and the eradication of poverty, with the





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well-being of citizens, especially of the most vulnerable groups, as the core of our strategy.

To fully adopt, implement and monitor these 17 SDGs, we have aligned them with our government's strategic plan and the priorities of a multi-stakeholder National Development Agreement, called "*Panama 2030*" that, based on a state vision established strategic guideline complies with the 2030 Agenda. This agreement, with the participation of civil society, political parties, labour and the private sector, highlights one of Panama's strongest capacities, that of reaching consensus amongst diverse sectors of society.

Perhaps this ability of Panamanians, to sit around a negotiating table, have different opinions, argue and reach agreements, is the reason why we have not faced violent conflicts or war. We are a stable country, capable of finding solutions to our problems through dialogue.

Panama has learned that economic growth goes hand-in-hand with innovative solutions that foster equality. In recent years, our government has allocated resources for the implementation of social policies put forward by the United Nations, including the prevention of maternal and child mortality prevention, early childhood care, education, sanitation, and housing policies. Through these programmes, we continue to build a more integrated and equitable approach to protecting our diverse and vibrant society, including women, youth, and minority populations.

Under our administration, we have also spearheaded several initiatives to level the playing field for

developing countries in the international sphere. For instance, we have argued that transparency standards are necessary and fundamental to the development agenda. Our country has also taken a clear leadership role in the region in the implementation of policies aimed at reducing the gender gap and increasing the economic participation of women in the labour market, participating in initiatives such as the Equal Pay International Coalition or the Gender Parity Taskforce promoted by international organisations such as UN Women, World Economic Forum, Inter-American Development Bank, International Labour Organisation and others.

Further, we have sought to establish a diplomatic network beyond the region. Through an approach, which we have named "*Falcon Policy*", we have expanded our horizons to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, tightened our bilateral, multilateral, and commercial cooperation while also providing access to Latin American markets through our country. In Panama, we intend to continue bringing people together, that is why since the beginning of President Varela's administration, we have boosted our foreign policy by visiting these partners and others to present our unique institutional offer and to highlight our competitive advantages, and to continue expanding our people-centred development and economic growth agendas.

Because Panama's commitment is to people – both within our borders and across the globe. This is ultimately reflected in our enduring ethos: to be the world's greatest connection.

Opposite: Palms on the Pacific: Panama City
Above: The Albrook Mall in Panama City – the largest shopping centre in the city