

Joint Statement

34th Portugal-U.S. Standing Bilateral Commission

December 11, 2015 – Angra do Heroísmo, Azores

1. The Portugal-U.S. Standing Bilateral Commission (SBC) held its 34th Session on December 11, in Angra do Heroísmo, Azores, to take stock of the recent developments in bilateral relations and to explore further opportunities for cooperation. The holding of this meeting in the Azores, following the invitation of the Regional Government, reflects the importance both Parties attach to the role and contribution of this region to the overall bilateral relationship.
2. Portugal and the United States share a close political, economic and strategic alliance, grounded in centuries of friendship between our people and governments. We cooperate to contribute to peace and security worldwide, to address our common threats and challenges, to strengthen human rights and the rule of law, to expand development of science and technology, and to improve our economies through trade and investment.
3. The Commission discussed a wide range of topics of mutual interest and ongoing cooperation between Portugal and the United States, including the state of play of political, defense, economic, trade and investment, justice and home affairs, and science and technology relations, and cooperation with the Azores. Both delegations concurred on the opportunity to expand and enhance bilateral cooperation in all of these areas.
4. A comprehensive exchange of views on the international agenda took place. Portugal and the United States reaffirmed their commitment, as members of the international coalition to counter ISIL, to confront common challenges in Syria, Iraq and Libya, fight terrorism, counter violent extremism, and work together to address the refugee crisis. The Commission took positive note of ongoing cooperation to promote global security and stability, including through contributions to missions in Iraq, Kosovo and Africa. The Commission also discussed the need to remain united in countering Russia's violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity and supporting full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties.
5. Portugal and the United States jointly recognize that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and that reaching a new agreement in Paris would be an historic step. They reaffirm their determination to secure an ambitious, effective and durable regime that applies to all countries and is fair.
6. The Commission took note of the work developed by the existing subsidiary bodies, created in 2011, and acknowledged their contribution as platforms for

increased cooperation. It welcomed, in particular, the new impetus given to the Azores Committee and the intention to hold the next meeting of the Trade and Investment Committee in January 2016.

7. The Commission highlighted the excellent cooperation in the area of Defense and was briefed on the results of the last meeting of the Defense Committee that took place by teleconference on December 7.
8. On the Azores, Portugal and the United States had discussions on future cooperation for the benefit of the region's economy, both to address the economic and social impact of the downsizing at Lajes Air Base, and to contribute to the region's economic development. Portugal and the United States reiterated their desire to continue studying and implementing economic initiatives of benefit to the Azores. The Commission took good note of the presentation by the Regional Government of Azores of new proposals at the meeting of the Azores Committee held November 30, 2015. The Azores Committee is an essential subsidiary body to follow-up on such initiatives.
9. The Commission discussed progress achieved since the extraordinary meeting held in Washington last June, regarding the transition to the new situation after the streamlining process of the United States Air Force (USAF) presence at Lajes Air Base. Portugal and the United States remain committed to the strategic use of Lajes Air Base for their mutual benefit in line with the shared goal of contributing to global security.
10. Pending the implementation of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2016, both delegations took due note of the language that calls for consideration of alternative uses for Lajes Air Base.
11. Recognizing the importance of the airfield at Lajes, the United States intends to ensure support to the airfield by continuing to provide high-frequency communications capacity; air operations, including specific 24-hour full support to contingency operations of the Portuguese Air Force for search and rescue and medical evacuation missions; and 100 percent of the dedicated 24-hour emergency firefighting, crash, and rescue support to all air missions, including Portuguese military and civilian use of Air Base 4 at Lajes.
12. The Commission considered that the reduction of the Portuguese employees under contract by the 65th Air Base Group is progressing, in general, according to the arrangements agreed at the extraordinary meeting of the SBC in June 2015. It noted the expected completion of separation by mutual agreement by September 2016. The United States reiterated its intention to avoid, to the maximum extent possible, involuntary separations of Portuguese employees. USAF intends to optimize opportunities for Portuguese employees whose positions the streamlining eliminates, but who will transition into other positions on the Base, and plans to provide a retraining package for those employees. USAF also intends to externally recruit for vacancies after

considering affected Portuguese employees. USAF intends to complete the reduction of U.S. personnel by Summer 2016. Both parties agreed to maintain close cooperation and monitoring of the process during political-diplomatic consultations. Issues regarding particular complaints already presented by the Portuguese employees should be dealt with at the lowest appropriate command echelon in the spirit of good cooperation, respect for the Portuguese staff and bearing in mind the arrangements agreed at the June extraordinary SBC held in Washington.

13. On infrastructure, until the Department of Defense makes its determination in accordance with the NDAA requirements, the United States intends to continue to maintain and secure the facilities at Terceira Island it no longer requires for future operations. Portugal will carry on its assessment of the list of facilities it will want to use for its own purposes. A common register and map containing the granted facilities, within and outside Lajes Air Base, will be prepared by the Commanders of both Forces (as provided in Article II of Annex A of the Technical Agreement).
14. With regard to the cottages built by former U.S. airmen that are not on the U.S. property register, Portugal and the United States agreed to continue to work to jointly address this situation.
15. Portugal and the United States continued discussions on shared environmental concerns on Terceira Island, arising from U.S. facilities or operations at Lajes Air Base. With a view to reaching a common understanding of the current environmental state of Lajes Air Base and sites on Terceira Island affected by U.S. operations and on appropriate remediation measures, the Commission noted that the Technical Committee has already appointed a group of environmental experts from both Portugal and the United States. The Commission urged all those involved to redouble their efforts to ensure transparency and efficiency.
16. The Commission was briefed on the state of play of trade and investment relations and discussed the prospective positive impact of the conclusion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP). An ambitious T-TIP agreement will bring important economic benefits to all of our citizens and build on our past record of success so that together we are ready to meet 21st century challenges. The Trade and Investment Committee will next meet in January 2016.
17. The Commission highlighted the valuable existing cooperation in science and technology, environment and energy and endorsed the STEE Committee Action Plan for 2016/17. The Commission recognized significant ongoing cooperation and discussed possible future joint initiatives in the area of health sciences, namely on scientific research and joint initiatives at the multilateral level. The Commission also praised the important contribution that both the Luso-American Development Foundation and the Fulbright Commission have given to bilateral cooperation in this area.

18. The Commission reiterated that justice and home affairs remains one of the cornerstones of the bilateral cooperation between Portugal and the United States. The Commission reviewed progress in this area since the last SBC meeting and welcomed the expanding dialogue on cyber matters. The meeting also served as an opportunity to discuss the Portuguese policy with regard to the fight against drug trafficking and prevention of drug use. A meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee will be held in January 2016.
19. On the shared objective of fighting tax evasion and fraud, the Commission welcomed the conclusion and signature last August of the bilateral agreement to improve international tax compliance and to implement the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act.
20. The Commission agreed to hold its next meeting in Spring 2016 in the United States.